“We Ourselves Must Shape Our Culture”*

The Sámi Museum as Facilitator of Cultural Encounters and Decolonizing Processes

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*”Vi må selv forme vår kultur” Ivar Jåks

Abstract

The thesis at hand investigates the role and position the Sámi Museum in Karasjok occupies in the creation of cultural identity. In that regard, the museum is regarded as an active participant in a cultural encounter in which meanings about culture and identity are created, interpreted and discussed. A theoretical framework is provided by Stuart Hall and James Clifford in regard to their respective concepts and understandings of ‘culture’, ‘identity’, ‘representation’ and ‘contact zones’.
Taking her departure from a social constructivist and interpretivist stance, the author first establishes the tools multimodal discourse analysis will provide as her weapons of choice. This approach allows her to read the exhibitions itself as a text, which employs a multitude of different forms of meaning making. These modes can be analyzed in isolation and in their positioning to each other, but for the issue at hand, their relation to each other is foregrounded.
In the first part of the analysis it is established that the museum merely through its architecture and artistic choices facilitates several forms of cultural encounters. It is further illustrated that Sámi ontology is implemented in the exhibition space and needs to be taken into account for the second part of the analyses, which is devoted to the individual displays. A multimodal analysis of the exhibits proofs to be necessary, because many meanings and overarching discourses have to be inferred by positioning them to other displays or modes of display. Without this active interpretation work, they remain silent: They can be seen and extracted, but only if the visitor has sufficient cultural codes available.
While the Sámi Museum in Karasjok facilitates cultural encounters, it does not facilitate them to the same degree for everyone. Since objects and displays are often left to speak for themselves, the museum employs a strategy of ‘displayed withholding’, to remind non-Sámi visitors their place as outsider. Displayed withholding is in this regard a decolonizing museum practice.
The final conclusion the author arrives at, is that while the Sámi Museum in Karasjok partakes very actively and successfully in the process of decolonizing museums strategies, it also perpetuates certain stereotypes about Sámi. It does so, because its main purpose lies in the promotion of a positive vision of Sámi identity: To that end, it emphasizes discourses of a unified variety within the Sámi community. This leads to the situation, that some Sámi are not included in this vision, as they live far away from Sápmi and do not have the opportunities to acquire the cultural capital necessary to engage meaningfully with the museums exhibits.

Table of Contents

Table of Figures

1 Introduction

The official recognition of the Sámi's right to engage with their own culture, speak in their own languages, and to develop and cultivate their own cultural identity in Norway is as young as 1990, when the Norwegian State ratified ILO-169, the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization. Since then, the discourse on cultural rights has evolved immensely, especially in regard to Indigenous cultural heritage and cultural self-determination. In order to understand the significance of the Sámi's cultural self-determination, it is necessary to bring their long and traumatic history of cultural suppression to mind: Centuries of forced assimilation and colonization have marginalized Sámi culture to a great degree and much of their material and immaterial culture was lost. What was not lost or destroyed in the course of extensive Norwegianization processes often made traveled far away from Sápmi, the Sámi homeland that stretches from the Northern parts of Norway, Finland, and Sweden all the way to the Kola peninsula in Russia, and made its way to Western cultural epicenters: Ethnographic and National museums as well as private collectors have been driving forces behind the dispossession and displacement of countless Sámi objects and artifacts. For many years, these Sámi objects and, at times, even Sámi people themselves have been exhibited by Western museums in order to strengthen their own national identities by contrasting them with the 'primitive' people from the Arctic. In these instances, Sámi culture was represented by Scandinavian colonizers as an 'other' and, more importantly, inferior.

In the light of ongoing debates on decolonization strategies and the implementation of truth and reconciliation commissions worldwide, which seek to acknowledge historic wrongdoings and find a way forward, new, more inclusive practices within museum exhibitions have emerged. The same is true for Indigenous museums, in which communities that were predominantly represented by a more powerful majority are now provided with the opportunity to re-identify themselves and to preserve and to develop their culture on their own terms.

Recently, the calls for the repatriation of displaced Sámi artifacts have become louder: The return of objects that have been lost to the Sámi community for decades and in many cases centuries would provide them with the opportunity to revive forgotten parts of their cultural heritage and help them to reclaim their past. In 2012, those calls were answered and the Bååstede Repatriation Project was signed, under which about 1600 objects that were collected from all over Sápmi are supposed to be returned to the Sámi community. One of the main recipients of these objects is the Sámi Museum in

Karasjok. This was not only the first one but also the only of its kind for many years. As such, it acted in many ways as a pathfinder for cultural self-representation within the Sámi community.

Museums are still an institution of cultural authority and because they are held to a high level of scrutiny and authenticity, they are generally trusted to convey objective truths. However, museums can and have been a vehicle for Colonialism, so it is interesting to take a look at how a museum run by the Sámi themselves chooses to represent them(selves).

The museum becomes a kind of arena where Sámi can practice self determination and present a positive image of themselves. This entails that the museum has to engage with historic source material that might not necessarily be their own but that was used to mobilize against Sámi: Photographs taken by early ethnologists, reports written by missionaries and explorers. They have to decide if they want to use those materials to recount a history of colonization or if they want to (re)claim their own version of the past.

In this regard, museums are much more than simply places to preserve and exhibit culture, they are places of knowledge creation, discussion, and communication: They provide the scene for cultural encounters. It is therefore both crucial and useful to apprehend museums as contact zones, a concept coined by Mary Louise Pratt and adapted for museums by James Clifford. Using this concept is a useful tool, as it will become evident. At the same time, museums arguably do not merely reflect discourses but shape them, a stance brought forth most prominently by Stuart Hall.

In order to investigate the position of the Sámi Museum in Karasjok occupies in regard to discourses on cultural identity, I ask the following questions:

> How does the Sámi Museum in Karasjok facilitate cultural encounters?
>
> How is cultural identity conceptualized, expressed and communicated in its permanent exhibitions?
>
> How does it contribute to the discourse on Sámi culture and identity?

2 Literature Review

The literature review presented here first aims at providing a concise overview of the current state and trends of research concerned with Sámi museums and Sámi exhibitions in Scandinavia. The intention is to demonstrate from which perspectives the representation of Sámi in museums has been approached so far. This preliminary and rather descriptive step is important because the research conducted explicitly on the Sámi Museum in Karasjok is sparse and to some some degree also outdated. After the scene is set, the currently available literature on the Sámi Museum in Karasjok will be discussed in detail. Research debates and positions will be juxtaposed, contrasted, and discussed critically to an extent which this project demands.

Even though Sámi museums are relatively new to the scene – the first was established in 1972, but a scene of Sámi museums did not really emerge until the late 1990s – they are at the center of attention for a fast growing number of publications. Both Sámi administered museums as well as Sámi exhibitions in other museums have been of interest to scholars from different fields, shining a light on different topics and approaching the issues from miscellaneous angles. The increasing importance of this topic is reflected both in the rising numbers of published articles and books and in the diversity of the academic fields involved.

The most recent comprehensive studies about Sámi museums have been conducted by Helen Kelly-Holmes and Sari Pietikäinen, who examine the linguistic landscape of the Siida Museum, the Finnish Sámi Museum in Inari. They look at this topic from a socio-linguistic perspective and examine the uses and functions of language in regard to their implication for tourism.[1] Nika Potinkara investigates the intersection of ethnic and cultural identity as presented in the Sámi museums in Finland and Sweden, the main focus being the category of ethnicity itself. She takes her departure from the current controversy "over what it means to be a Sámi and who is entitled to such an identity"[2] and provides one of the newest contributions to the debate, which was initiated on an academic level in 2000 by Lina Gaski with a study on discourses about Sámi ethnicity and feelings of inferiority.[3] Matthew Magnani, Anni Guttorm, and Natalia Magnani take an interest in the accessibility of cultural heritage and consider the possibilities of modern technology for three-dimensional heritage management in the context of repatriation processes of objects given to the

1 Helen Kelly-Holmes & Sari Pietikäinen: Language: A Challenging Resource in a Museum of Sámi Culture. In: Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism, vol. 16, no. 1, Jan. 2016, pp. 24–41.

2 Nika Potinkara: Categories and boundaries in Sámi exhibitions, Ethnic and Racial Studies, 43:12. 2020. Pp. 2140–2157. P. 2141.

3 Lina Gaski: "Hundre prosent lapp?" Lokale diskurser om etnisitet i markebygdene i Evenes og Skånland. 2000.

Siida Museum. Their article is also a substantial contribution to the overarching discourse on ownership and accessibility of Indigenous Cultural heritage in general.[4]

Other notable contributions to the study of Sámi exhibitions in non-Sámi museums include publications by Silje Opdahl Mathisen, Eva Silvén, Vidar Fagerheim Kalsås, Cathrine Baglo as well as Rosella Ragazzi and Giacomo Nerici.

They cover topics such as Sámi Art and visual storytelling in an exhibition context,[67] individual artifacts and the implications of their cultural heritage in regard to exhibition,[8] as well as the intersections between museology, ethnopolitics and (post)colonialism.[910]

In respect to comprehensive research that is explicitly concerned with the Sámi Museum in Karasjok, the field is much smaller with only a couple of publications by a handful of scholars. One of the first and for a long time leading analysis solely focusing on the museum's exhibition is a fairly short review provided by the archeologist Bjørnar Olsen.[11] In his view, the exhibition mostly mirrors older ethnographic exhibitions seen in the larger Scandinavian museums. Drawing almost solely on the exhibition texts, he ascertains that the individual exhibits create a romanticized, timeless picture of what Sámi culture was before influences from outside forced the Sámi to change for the worse. Consequently, authentic Sámi culture and identity can, according to Olsen's reading of the exhibits, only be found in the past. Olsen further asserts that there are very few traces of modernity and that the artwork created by Iver Jåks, which frames the exhibition, only adds to its stagnant positioning in a premodern past. He concludes that the main purpose of the museum is to preserve the memory of a lost heritage, and by doing that, it creates a timeless and static projection of Sámi culture that perpetuates stereotypes. His reading of the exhibition is for the most part corroborated by Sharon Webb, who conducted a thorough comparison of five Sámi museums and

4 M. Magnani, et al., Three-dimensional, community-based heritage management of indigenous museum collections: Archaeological ethnography, revitalization and repatriation at the Sámi Museum Siida, Journal of Cultural Heritage (2017), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.culher.2017.12.001

6 Rossella Ragazzi & Giacomo Nerici: Discourses, practices and performances in Sámi museology at Tromsø University Museum. In: Nordic Museology 3. 2019. Pp. 134–151.

7 Silje Opdahl Mathisen: Northern Borderlands and the Aesthetics of Ethnicity: Intervisuality and the Representations of the Sami in Early Exhibitions at National Cultural Museums in Norway and Sweden. In: ARV Nordic Yearbook of Folklore 67. 2012. 57–72.

8 Silvén, Eva. "Contested Sami heritage: drums and sieidis on the move." National Museums and the Negotiation of Difficult Pasts: Conference Proceedings from EuNaMus; European National Museums: Identity Politics; the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen; Brussels 26-27 January 2012: EuNaMus Report No 8. No. 082. 2012.

9 Cathrine Baglo: Reconstruction as trope of cultural display – Rethinking the role of "living exhibitions In: Nordisk Museologi 2. 2015. Pp.49–68.

10 Vidar Fagerheim Kalsås: Minority History in Museums: Between Ethnopolitics and Museology. In: Nordisk Museologi 2. 2015. Pp.33–48.

11 Bjørnar Olsen: Bilder fra Fortida? Representasjoner av Samisk Kultur i Samiske Museer. Nordisk Museologi 2. Pp. 13–30.

the way in which the past of the Sámi is represented in them in 2006.[12] In regard to the Sámi museum in Karasjok, she follows most of Olsen's opinions. She agrees that narratives about the past are more often than not presented in a romanticized and idealized way, especially in relation to nature. In departure from Olsen though, she attributes these tendencies to the political climate of the time during which the museum was first conceived. In her opinion, the promotion of an essentialist and stereotypical image of 'Sáminess' was central to the political mobilization of the Sámi.

The two most recent in-depth studies focusing solely on the Sámi Museum in Karasjok were both published in the course of 2012 by the same authors, Sigrid Lien and Hilde Wallem Nielssen. In both studies, they engage with the museum on a conceptional and curatorial level and pay special attention to the decolonization of museal practices and the processes of reclaiming cultural heritage. One of their studies is focused primarily on the use, or in this case the conscious relinquishment, of photographs in the main exhibition on cultural history and on the implications of this decision for the curatorial practices employed at the museum.[13] During the time of their fieldwork, the temporary art exhibit "Gierdu" was housed by the museum and has greatly influenced the main thrust of their research.

Lien and Nielssen's other study employs a broader approach to the museum's exhibition practices and can be seen as a direct response targeted at the interpretation offered by Olsen and, in extension, by Webb. By engaging in more current debates about museums in non-Western spaces and Indigenous curatorial practices, they argue that previous readings of the exhibitions are problematic, because "they neglect to discuss the fundamental question of how meanings are produced in the museum space"[14]. In their opinion, by relying almost exclusively on the texts the exhibition provides, Olsen misses most of the meanings actually offered by the museum. Instead, they argue that the exhibition must be interpreted as a whole, including its permanent exhibit on contemporary art as well as the interplay between the aesthetics and the politics of the displays. An important role in this regard plays Iver Jåks' art, which Olsen has dismissed completely as romanticizing and eternalizing framing. Lien and Nielssen disagree with him and suggest that Jåks creates a mythological landscape within the museum, thereby implementing a Sámi conception of time and space into the exhibition: "As a result, an image of Sáminess emerges as something that

12 Sharon Webb: Making Museums, Making People: The Representation of the Sámi through Material Culture. In: Public Archaeology 5. Pp. 167–83.

13 Sigrid Lien & Hilde Wallem Nielssen: Absence and Presence: The Work of Photographs in the Sámi Museum, RiddoDuottarMuseat-Sámiid Vuorká-Dávvirat (RDM-SVD) in Karasjok, Norway. Photography and Culture. 5. 2012a. Pp. 295-310.

14 Sigrid Lien & Hilde Wallem Nielssen: Conventional Ethnographic Display or Subversive Aesthetics? Historical Narratives of the Sami Museum, RiddoDuottarMuseat- Sámiid Vuorká-Dávvirat (RDM-SVD) in Karasjok, Norway. In: Great Narratives of the Past. Traditions and Revisions in National Museums. 2012b. Pp. 599–615.

transgresses the limits of time and space."[15] Finally, Lien and Nielssen stress that the contemporary art exhibit is linked to the exhibit on cultural history and should not be isolated from it and vice versa. By contextualizing the exhibits with each other, reflections on change, the relationship between traditional and modern Sámi life, and critical issues of identity politics, which are completely absent according to Olsen and mostly absent according to Webb, come to light.

While Lien and Nielssen provide compelling arguments for an alternative reading, the majority of them are based on the specific art installations displayed at the time of their inquiry. This is somewhat problematic, as the installations are changing all the time. For instance, Lien and Nielssen draw on their own interpretations of the photographs displayed in the art installations in their line of reasoning. In the contemporary art display in 2021, however, there is not a single photograph to be found. This makes observations like "Walking through this art exhibition, one cannot help noticing that photography appears to have gained something near to a dominant position"[16] not only invalid but calls into question to what degree arguments based on observations like these are generally applicable to the museum as a whole.

This necessarily concise review of the literature concerning the exhibition of the Sámi Museum in Karasjok has illustrated that there is still much to be done in this field. The existing research is mainly focused on the general conception of the museum, including only brief mentions of some of the individual displays. Although Lien and Hanssen have provided some analysis of artistic aspects, namely photographic displays, and have investigated the concept of the museum as whole, they have neither examined the conceptual framework of the museum and the exhibits at length nor compared them to each other. Some comparative work has been done by Webb and by Mathisen[17], who mentions single displays from the Sámi museum's cultural historical exhibition in her dissertation, but the focus was rather on how the displays of the different Sámi museums relate to each other and not on how they relate to their respective museums. This is exactly what the project at hand wants to do: To examine both the conceptual meaning of the museum and the meanings provided in the single displays and, finally, to relate them to each other, in order to ascertain how the museum contributes to the current discourses on Sámi culture and identity. By doing so, this study not only intends to add to the emerging field of research on Sámi museums, it also hopes to provide some much needed groundwork about the Sámi Museum in Karasjok so that others might build on it.

15 Ibid., p. 613.
16 Ibid., p. 610.
17 Silje Opdahl Mathisen: Etnisitetens estetikk: Visuelle fortellinger og forhandlinger isamiske museumutstillinger. 2014.

3 Theory

Any research on ubiquitous topics like culture and identity raises issues of definition. Before engaging with the various concepts and theoretical implications that inform the methodology and analysis of this thesis, I want to provide a brief clarification of the terminology used when talking about the Sámi. In this project, the Sámi are identified primarily as a diverse ethnic group that nevertheless is grouped together as Sámi. This is commonplace, both within Norwegian and Sámi portrayals. That is to say that Sámi identify themselves as an ethnic group decidedly distinct from other ethnic groups and are in turn identified by others as such. Yet the Sámi also serve as a prime example for the intersectionality of cultural identity and ethnicity, two concepts that often but not always coincide: While they are Sámi, they are at all times Norwegian as well. They have Norwegian passports, are subject to Norwegian law and are surrounded by and integrated into a predominantly Norwegian society. Depending on specific situations and contexts they might identify as Norwegian rather than as Sámi or as Norwegian Sámi, particularly if they are of mixed heritage. This suggests that ethnicity, much like identity, is relational and constantly fluctuating. At the same time they are classified as the Indigenous people of Norway. The Norwegian government's website states "that the Sámi population of Norway, including the Southern Sámi areas, is qualified beyond doubt for status as an indigenous people under Article 1b of ILO Convention 169 /89."[18] In the course of this project will I also refer to them in terms of their Indigeneity. This serves a dual purpose: For one thing it clearly distinguishes them from other minorities in Norway like the Kven, who are officially recognized as a national minority. For another thing the general term 'Indigenous' activates a broader frame of reference. Sámi issues can and often are to be seen in the context of global Indigenous peoples; their specific affairs are local varieties of the same overarching global concepts.

This paper is predominantly concerned with Sámi self-representation in a self-administered museal context and its implications for their cultural identity, especially in the light of ongoing decolonization-processes. To provide a sound theoretical scaffolding for the following analysis, it is necessary to take a closer look at the underlying concepts and the approaches to them chosen in this project. To this end Stuart Hall's reflections on culture, identity, representation, and meaning making provide a good point of departure, allowing to address interdependent concepts like

18 Norwegian Government: What Defines an Indigenous People? 22/03/2019. https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/indigenous-peoples-and-minorities/Sami-people/midtspalte/What-Defines-an-Indigenous-People/id451320/. Accessed 03.08.2021.

colonization/decolonization and historiography along the way. While Hall is mostly concerned with the Black diaspora and the colonial experience of Black people, the underlying ideas are compelling and generally applicable to the Sámi as it will be demonstrated. These defining preliminary considerations on cultural identity and representation are followed up by a discussion and adaption of James Clifford's concept of comprehending museums as 'contact zones'. Applying this model to the study at hand will help to investigate museums as sites that affect meaning making and hence the construction of cultural identity.

3.1 Stuart Hall: Culture

For a start, 'culture' is an incredibly versatile concept that has many definitions, both broad and narrow, from distinguishing between 'high' and 'popular' culture, with all its evaluative implications, to understanding culture as everything that makes a certain way of life different to another. According to Hall,

"Culture […] is not so much a set of *things* – novels and paintings or TV programmes and comics – as a process, a set of *practices*. Primarily, culture is concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings – the 'giving and taking of meaning' – between the members of a society or group. To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world, in ways which will be understood by each other. Thus culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and 'making sense' of the world, in broadly similar ways."[19]

As a result, culture is also not something that is fixed or definite, but rather constantly produced, modified and reproduced. To complicate the issue further, this production and modification of meanings always takes place as a dialogue, an exchange of positions. On the one hand, this means that it is crucial to use a mode of communication that allows the participants to interpret the information in a meaningful and successful way. On the other hand, it is also implied that there is an infinite pool of possible interpretations that dialogue partners can employ to make out the meaning of what is being communicated. This is to say that while they share a conceptual map, i.e. use the

19 Stuart Hall: Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices. 1997a. P. 2. He further elaborates on this in his 'Circuit of Culture'.

same cultural code to decipher information, their individual ways of meaning making are unique and not entirely retraceable for the other. Finally, it is important to keep in mind that the speaker and "and the subject who is spoken of, are never identical, never exactly in the same place."[20] This is because the process of speaking about something already makes it a mediated event as it transfers a person's unspeakable inner thoughts into a speakable and receivable language. The speech act constitutes the mediated representation of a feeling or an experience that one person relates to another person.

3.2 Stuart Hall: Representation

Comprehending culture as a set of practices and conventions, as a concept that is socially constructed, goes hand in hand with the realization that culture is not a tangible entity that can be collected and displayed in a museum: The objects on display are selective representatives of a culture. But displaying a representation of culture is, according to Hall, not to be equated with creating a mere reflection, but rather to be understood as engaging in the (re)construction of culture. He likens this process to an act of ideological (re)creation that serves specific interests, usually of those responsible for the production of this representation.[21]

As previously mentioned, language operates as a representational system that mediates feelings, ideas and concepts and allows people to relay them to others. Language is the "privileged medium in which we 'make sense' of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged"[22]At the same time, language is an important constituent of how meaning is appointed: Objects, people, and events are imbued with meaning by the frameworks of interpretation brought to them; things are given meaning by the way they are used or integrated into everyday life. But that is not all: "In part, we give things meaning by how we represent them – the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them, the values we place on them."[23]

In this regard it is vital to be aware that language does not only encompass the linguistic ability to communicate but comprises many language-like means of imparting information and creating meaning, like the use of symbols, pictures, crafts, and music. This is especially important in regard

20 Stuart Hall: Cultural Identity and Diaspora. In: Undoing Place? A Geographical Reader, by Linda McDowell, 1997b. Pp. 222–37. P. 222.
21 See Hall 1997a, pp. 5f.
22 Ibid., p. 1.
23 Ibid., p. 3.

to representation in a museal context: An “[e]xhibition or display in a museum or gallery can also be thought of as 'like a language', since it uses objects on display to produce certain meanings about the subject-matter of the exhibition.”[24] In other words, as long as an object, map or picture represents more than itself, it can be read as a sign. In this regard, an exhibition in its entirety as well as singular displays can and should be read as multimodal texts consisting of various signs that create meaning in various ways.

In his considerations on the very nature of representation and meaning making, Hall considers three main approaches to the working mechanisms of representation, namely the reflective, the intentional, and the constructionist approach. While the reflective approach is concerned with the assumption that language merely reflects what is already out there in world, the intentional approach assumes that language only conveys personally intended meaning. While both of those approaches offer some valuable insights, they are ultimately flawed, as “neither things in themselves nor the individual users of language can fix meaning in language”.[25] Hall’s main focus therefore lies on the constructionist approach, which assumes that meaning is constructed in and through language and language-like means by “social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others”[26]. Successful creation of meaning is only possible if social actors use the same cultural code, which governs the relationship between a sign and a concept.[27] It further allows for the disentanglement of attached connotations and deciphering of hidden meanings. When confronted with a culture one does not know much about, that is to say if one does not command the cultural code necessary to decode the meaning, help by an insider is needed to make up for the lack of cultural knowledge and enable a meaningful interpretation. In a museum the decoding process is often assisted by explanatory texts or captions accompanying the displays.

24 Ibid., p. 5.
25 Ibid., p. 25.
26 Ibid.
27 Stuart Hall: The Work of Representation. In: Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices 2. 1997c. Pp. 13–74. P. 27.

3.3 Stuart Hall: Cultural Identity

Sharing a conceptual map implies having a mutual history and common cultural codes, which would presumably result in a similarly shared cultural identity with “stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning”[28] that apply to all members of a community. Under this assumption, cultural identity is defined “in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common.”[29] This approach underlines the unifying function of collective memory. But this proclaimed ‘Oneness’ is challenged on different levels: Firstly, every individual person experiences the world in a singular way that can never completely be understood by another person. Therefore every manifestation of cultural expression and identity is unique. Secondly, ethnic communities are diverse and their subgroups have different experiences and therefore slightly different histories. The very subjects of this paper can serve to illustrate this point: Even though the Sámi identify as one ethnic community, there are significant cultural, linguistic, and historic differences between single Sámi sub-communities that greatly impact the shape of their cultural identity. The local variations of traditional clothing and livelihoods are quite distinct. Moreover, different Sámi languages, previously misleadingly referred to as dialects, are often not mutually intelligible. However, all Sámi share a certain common history of being suppressed and assimilated, though at times to greatly varying degrees. The Skólt Sámi for example were displaced when the Iron Curtain was drawn between Russia and Finland. Those who resettled in Finland did so in territories designated by the Finnish government but already occupied by Inari Sámi. The Skólt Sámi’s rights to those lands were later protected and guaranteed in the Skólt Act, yet the Inari Sámi still have to buy or rent access to their own homeland. This led to tensions within the Sámi community, whose consequences are visible to this day: While “the Skolt Sámi have learned to feel inferior to other Sámi” and “to be rootless”[30], “Inari Sámi in particular feel discriminated against in relation to the Skolt Sámi.”[31] Although these two subgroups are suffering from forms of discrimination shared by all Sámi people as an overarching group, their individual hardships often take a different shape, at times even in direct opposition to the other subgroup.This example also shows that historical context is key in order to determine who (dis-)placed whom in

28 Hall 1997b, p. 223.
29 Ibid.
30 Prime Ministers’ Office: Truth and reconciliation process concerning Sámi issues – Report on hearings. 2018. https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/161203/15_18_Saamelaisten%20asioita%20koskeva%20sovintoprosessi_EN.pdf. Accessed 03.09.2021. P. 47.
31 Ibid., p. 44.

the past, to what end, and with which ramifications. Frantz Fanon, whose work greatly influenced Hall, draws special attention to the underlying mechanisms of colonialism and the subsequent targeting of Indigenous historiography: “Colonisation is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.”[32] No matter in which form Indigenous histories are brought forth, as a personal account, artistic realization or as an exhibit in a museum, the assumption that this process is the rediscovery of a suppressed cultural identity lends itself naturally. Hall, however, argues that the engagement with such hidden histories constitutes “not the rediscovery but the *production* of identity. Not an identity grounded in the archaeology, but in the *re-telling* of the past.”[33] This argument is bolstered by the fact that such revelation of ‘hidden histories’ is also at the center of the most important social movements of recent time that have a substantial impact of the formation of cultural identity, like feminism, anti-racism, and anti-colonialism.[34]

“Cultural identity […] is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. […] Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.”[35]

3.4 James Clifford: Contact Zones

For a long time it has been acknowledged that museums are not only places of leisure and entertainment, but also centers of knowledge. They wield significant epistemological power: They create and frame the knowledge that is consumed by visitors and thereby directly influence how the world is known. In short, they make meaning. At the same time, museums are also places where people and cultures meet and where the former often go to learn more about the latter.

Taking his departure from an exchange he witnessed at the Portland Art Museum between staff and Native American elders, Clifford argues that museums should be understood as ‘contact zones’, as spaces where different cultures come into contact and often also into conflict and therefore as a

32 Frantz Fanon: On National Culture. In: The Wretched of the Earth. 1963. P. l70.
33 Hall 1997b, p. 224
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.

place where intercultural and interactive communication takes place. His main impetus is to challenge the conception of museums as sites of one-sided imperialist appropriation. In order to do so, he adapts and expands on a term that was originally coined by Mary Louise Pratt, a renowned researcher within the field of literary and colonialism studies: According to her definition, a contact zone is

"the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict. […] By using the term 'contact' I aim to foreground the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. A 'contact' perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. [It stresses] copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power"[36].

Clifford, however, applies this term specifically to museums, ascertaining that "their organizing structure as a collection becomes an ongoing historical, political, moral relationship – a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull"[37]. As a consequence, museums transcend their existence as spaces of conservation and evolve into a space of encounters, exchange, and interactions: They become "sites of identity-making and transculturation".[38] This becomes particularly apparent in situations where a normative point of view is challenged, as is increasingly the case in museums that partake in decolonization-processes by putting Indigenous perspectives center stage. By doing so, museums participate in meaning-creating processes that go beyond the reproduction of culturally dominant discourses. What is referred to as 'contact' actually covers complicated and continuous processes of self-situating and positioning of others, both on the side of the museum as wells as on the side of the visitors.

So far the main focus has been assigned to the museum's and the source community's concerns. But an equally important role is assumed by the visitors, the audience, both intended and actual. They are ultimately the ones who decide if the meaning-making undertaken by the museum was successful or not, if the established contact resulted in (self)reflection and mutual recognition or misapprehension. It is therefore necessary to bear in mind that visitors do not enter the museum in a vacuum. Their previous knowledge and personal background informs their experience. Depending on those personal preconditions, visitors relate differently to the histories they are presented with by

36 In: James Clifford: Routes: Travel and translation in the late twentieth century. 1997. P. 192.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid. 219.

and in the museum. As Pratt put it, confrontation with counter-histories can lead to “rage, incomprehension, and pain,” but also to “exhilarating moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding, and new wisdom”[39]. While a museum generally aims for the latter, it also needs to anticipate the former responses.

Both Pratt’s original conception and Clifford’s adaptation of the contact zone depart from very asymmetrical starting points and skewed power dynamics: Both assume a dominant, majority culture, which provides the stage – and sets the terms and conditions – for cultural exchange, transactions, and negotiations.[40] This is also where most of the critique of this model is directed at: The concept of the ‘contact zone’ still preserves the hegemony of Western (and imperialist) museum models and is prone to perpetuate existing power dynamics. One of the most outspoken critics is Robin Boast, who argues “that contact zones are not really sites of reciprocity. They are […] asymmetric spaces of appropriation”[41] and in the end only mask “far more fundamental asymmetries, appropriations, and biases”[42].

In this specific case, however, the museum’s staff, director and curator are part of the source community. They themselves are both members of the Indigenous community “whose art, culture, and history [are] at stake”[43] and the ones in the position of power, who decide on how their art, culture, and history is exhibited. The main challenge for the Sámi Museum in Karasjok lies therefore not in negotiating collaboration terms between a relatively powerless minority that is being exhibited and a culturally dominant majority steering the exhibition. Instead they have to navigate the expectations of a diverse set of stakeholders[44] while also finding their own way around the Western concept of the ‘museum’. The result is most likely to serve those stakeholders’ interests to varying degrees and to “reflect indigenous as well as Western forms of accumulation, memory, and display”[45].

39 Mary Louise Pratt: Arts of the contact zone. In: Profession. 1991. Pp. 33-40. P. 39.

40 Clifford’s adaptation of the contact zone has been reworked by other museology scholars most recently by Bryony Onciul, who derived an ‘engagement zone’ model from it: Bryony Onciul: Museums, heritage and Indigenous voice: Decolonizing engagement. 2015.

41 Robin Boast: Neocolonial collaboration: Museum as contact zone revisited. Museum Anthropology 34.1. 2011. Pp. 56–70. P. 63.

42 Ibid.

43 Clifford 1997, p. 191.

44 Among those stakeholders are first and foremost the members of the Sámi community, both in the role of visitors as well as in the role of source community. While the focal point is on the Norwegian Sámi community, it is important to keep in mind that the Sámi community in its entirety is a transnational one. Other stakeholders include the local community in Karasjok, which in turn consists of Sámi, Kven, Norwegians and Finns and national and international visitors.

45 Clifford 1997, p. 216.

What ties Hall and Clifford together is the overarching assumption that museums are not mere keepers of culture but active contributors in a two-sided negotiation process that impacts and shapes cultural identity. Cultural identity as such is not a fixed and achievable entity but “a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation”[46] Museums play an important role within a society as they often serve as a cultural reference point and archive. They act as arenas where representations are legitimized and normalized. However, they offer only one way of making meaning which is in turn highly dependent on how exhibitions are curated and by whom. Because of their significant epistemological influence on cultural discourses, museums are ‘contested spaces’ in which controversial and difficult questions about power and authority are raised: “Every choice – to show this rather than that, to show this in relation to that, to say this about that – is a choice about how to represent 'other cultures'; and each choice has consequences both for *what* meanings are produced and for *how* meaning is produced”[47].

46 Hall 1997b, p. 222.
47 Hall 1997a, p. 8.

4 Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Ontological and Epistemological Stance

As it has become apparent in the theoretical foundations outlined in the previous chapter, this project is firmly grounded in a social constructionist view of the world: In the first instance, culture and identity are understood as construction processes that take place in a social context. Then, the museum itself is seen as an active and authoritative participant in this knowledge-shaping construction processes. Adding to these fundamental assumptions is the notion that the processes involved in the construction of cultural identity are perpetually ongoing and never complete. Maintaining that cultural identity is both about being as well as becoming, it stands to reason that it is subjected to change. Hence, an equally continuous interpretation of the expression or, to use a term central to this study, representation of these construction processes is required. Since these representations are invariably mediated in one way or another, they not only demand constant interpretation but they are also highly dependent on successful decoding, which is in turn determined by conceptual maps – cultural codes – that are individual and unique. On an ontological scale this implies that there is not one pre-existing, singularly true and objective reality posited 'out there' but varying and personal and therefore subjective interpretations of reality, which influence how knowledge about the world is acquired.

These ontological and epistemological stances have a decisive impact on both the research design in terms of its approach and data collection as well as on the methods of data analysis chosen. For a start, the research presented here is at its core qualitative, seeking to contribute to the understanding of cultural identity and its formation. Since it focuses on how the Sámi museum in Karasjok specifically contributes to the general emergence of Sámi identity, it can further be classified as a qualitative case study. Besides that the research design combines both problem-driven and theory-driven approaches: On the one hand, it draws on existing theories about cultural identity and museums as contact zones to determine the Sámi Museum's role and function. On the other, hand it also analyses the compiled data in order to advance hypotheses that are relevant for the broader discourse on Sámi identity, thereby moving from specific observations to generalized propositions.

4.2 Data

4.2.1 Choosing The Sámi Museum in Karasjok

RiddoDuottarMuseat – Sámiid Vuorká-Dávvirat, in English The Sámi Museum in Karasjok, often shortened to 'the Sámi Museum' in the following, is governed under the umbrella of RiddoDuottarMuseat (RDM), a Sámi museum association in Norway that consists of four Sámi museums and The Sámi Art Collection in Karasjok. The Sámi Museum in Karasjok was chosen over the other four because it provides a good overview over Sámi culture as a whole, while the other museums are considerably smaller and locally specialized. That fact that the Sámi Museum offers a relatively broad and inclusive perspective on Sámi culture mostly results from its founding premise: "In 1972, the Sámi Museum in Karasjok received its own museum building, which was financed by the state on the condition that this should not be a local museum but cover all of Sápmi."[48]

Beyond that, the Sámi Museum in Karasjok is not only the biggest Sámi museum in Norway, it also harbors the most extensive collection of Sámi cultural historical objects in all of Sápmi.[49] Finally, it is also the very first Sámi museum in general. As such it has high symbolic value, for both Sámi in Norway and Sámi in general. These reasons are particularly decisive because this research project is interested in the way representation from a Sámi perspective contributes to the broader discourse on Sámi culture and identity. Other, secondary reasons for choosing the Sámi Museum in Karasjok include its positioning in the epicenter of Sámi culture in Norway and the fact that the author is fluent in Norwegian but not in Finnish or Swedish, and therefore would not be able to access most of the information provided in the other two larger Sámi museums.

The Sámi Museum in Karasjok consists of a single-story museum building and an extensive outside area with 11 historic buildings and constructions all together as well as an an ancient pitfall system that was used to catch wild reindeer. The museum building houses six exhibits, four of which are permanent and two temporary. The focus of this thesis is are the permanent exhibitions as the primary source of data for two main reasons. Firstly, one of the current temporary exhibitions is not curated by RDM but by the Norwegian Defense Museum, and since this thesis is interested in cultural (self-)representation from a Sámi perspective, this exhibition does not meet its the requirements. The other temporary exhibition space is reserved for art exhibitions. While the exhibition space for art exhibits itself is rightfully to be considered permanent, the temporarity of its

48 Statsbygg: Mulighetsstudie for RidduDouttarMuseat (RDM). 2019. In the following referenced as 'Mulighetsstudie'. Here: P. 11. Orig.: "I 1972 fikk SVD eget museumsbygg som var statlig finansiert under forutsetning om at dette ikke skulle være et lokalt museum, men dekke hele Sapmi."

49 See ibid., p. 17.

special exhibits disqualifies it for this study: As has been pointed out in the literature review, its messages, content, and design are subject to considerable and ongoing chance and its inclusion is likely to lead to conclusions that are only meaningful as long as the specific art exhibition is in place. It will still be taken into account in its conceptual function but not analyzed in detail. Secondly and more importantly, it is the permanent exhibitions that contribute not only the most to the discourse about Sámi culture and identity but they also do so continuously: They are a fix point of reference that can be revisited again and again. As such they significantly contribute to determining what can be considered part of Sámi history, culture, and identity and what not, over a long period of time.

4.2.2 Data Collection

The primary source of data for this research project and the subject of its analysis are the permanent exhibits at the Sámi Museum in Karasjok and the data compiled for this undertaking consists first and foremost of self-generated data in form of pictures and field notes that the author took herself during a field trip to Karasjok this summer. The museum and its exhibits were visited numerous times over the course of one week and with permission of the museum staff, pictures were taken of all displays and texts that accompany them. The author further kept a field diary and had informal conversation with staff members and fellow visitors of the museum.

Secondary data in form of official statements made by the Norwegian state, the Sámi Parliament in Norway and RDM that reflect contemporary issues and intentions are used to contextualize the exhibition. Last but not least, field notes and material in form of flyers and guidebooks collected in related museum and gallery visits in Northern Norway in July 2021 and Northern Finland in November 2019 provide additional background information about the analyzed exhibitions and their cultural context.

4.3 Methods of data analysis: Multimodal Discourse Analysis

The choice of method is predicated on several assumptions established so far in the previous chapters: Firstly, that meanings are created by their positioning and contexts. Secondly, the museum is recognized as an active participant in the construction of cultural knowledge and the negotiation of cultural identity. This entails that its exhibits and displays also fuction as as active agents in these processes. Thirdly, the meaning of something can never be completely known and any sort of communication requires interpretation.

In order to do the complex and multilayered character of a museum display justice, a broad, interdisciplinary approach is required.[50] Discourse analysis lends itself to this end as it allows for the combination of multiple tools that are native to different disciplines. Generally speaking, discourse analysis is often employed in order to identify the functions and use of language and to investigate the workings of meaning making in different contexts; depending on the purpose and the approach, there are many different ways to conduct discourse analysis. Nevertheless, they all sharefour basic assumptions that coincide with the ones just named:

1. Language is ambiguous.
2. Language is always 'in the world'.
3. The way we use language is inseparable from who we are and the different social groups to which we belong.
4. Language is never used all by itself.[51]

Another reason why discourse analysis suits this study well lies in its aptitude for shining a light on power relations and power dynamics. The purpose of discourse analysis is to investigate how language – and language-like expressions, signs, and symbols – is used by certain actors in differing positions not only to create discourses about the issues at hand but also to consolidate and perpetuate certain narratives and boundaries. The more powerful the actor, the more likely it is that the discourse they create becomes the dominant discourse and enters the domain of common knowledge. In a research project focusing on a historically misrepresented minority that is acting from a position of authority, this is a key feature.

Following Hall, it has been established in the previous chapter that language does not only comprise linguistic components and speech acts but any form of expression which can be read as language-like. For the analysis at hand this means that all constituting components of the exhibition will be taken into account as potentially meaning making. Generally speaking, exhibitions consist of several units that can be read as language-like and that all create meaning. Because "everything that is meaningful in a particular situation"[52] can be considered a text, this approach ultimately renders the exhibition a text that employs several different ways of creating meaning. Since "[a]ny system of signs that are used in a consistent and systematic way to make meaning can be considered a mode"[53], the exhibition becomes a multimodal text. A text does not merely represent reality but is

50 See Stephanie Moser: The Devil is in the Detail: Museum Displays and the Creation of Knowledge. 2010. P. 23.
51 Jones 2012, p. 2.
52 Ibid., p. 6.
53 Ibid., p. 36.

involved in its construction because a text is comprised of words that were chosen in lieu of other words and arranged in a certain manner. Reading the exhibition as a text entails recognizing that choices were made about every single detail it consists of, from the contents of its displays to the layout of its rooms. Therefore, the exhibition is a cultural product that is consciously and deliberately positioned and should be treated as such.

So far it has been established that the exhibition can be read as a multimodal text. Those multiple 'modes' of the exhibition are the various intertwining elements which are made up of and also contribute to the construction of meaning in different ways, both in isolation as well as in combination with one another. They include the exhibition space itself, the positioning of the exhibits and displays within it, lighting, artefacts, pictures, texts, installations, and sounds, but also the process of walking through the exhibition area, which links the various elements of the exhibition together.[54] Those are very diverse modes to create and convey meaning, and the methods used to analyse them should be equipped to reflect that. Multimodal discourse analysis acknowledges that discourses involve multiple modes that often have to be seen in relation to each other and even more so that they "always interact with other modes in texts and interaction."[55]

The aim is to investigate the positioning of the Sámi Museum in Karasjok in relation to broader discourses on Sámi identity on a macro-level and its positioning and involvement within these discourses on a micro-level, that is to say within the individual exhibitions' displays.

In practice, multimodal discourse analysis allows to take several modes of meaning making into account at the same time and examine their reciprocal effects, for example, how an accompanying display text relates to the artifact at hand and how the background of the display influences the object's impact.

Stephanie Moser provides a comprehensive overview of different categories that are involved in the process of creating meaning within a museum, and while the scope of this thesis does not allow for the implementation of all them – investigating the responses of visitors to the museum alone would allow for a project on its own – the followingpropositions of her will be used as categories of meaning making, i. e. as modes of communication, to guide the analysis:

- Architecture, Location and Setting
- Space and Layout
- Design, Color and Light
- Subject, Message and Text
- Display Types[56]

54 See Mieke Bal: Exposing the public. A companion to museum studies. 2006. Pp. 525-542. P. 526–529.
55 Rodney H. Jones: Discourse Analysis. 2012. P. 39.
56 Moser 2010, p. 24–28.

Since the exhibition in question is created for an international and multilingual audience, attention will be payed to how information availability differs in different languages where applicable.

4.4 Reflections on Positioning and Limitations

There are also many different ways to approach and interpret the exhibitions' structure and the displays: The way they were conceptualized originally and the way the artifacts were on display when the author visited, the way they are encountered on their own, the way they are presented by a guide. For this analysis the author decided to present them the way they were encountered on their own when she visited the museum in July 2021 for several reasons. For one thing, this is how most visitors experience the museum: As it is the day they visit and more often than not on their own without a guide.[57] For another thing, this project is interested in how discourses on cultural identity manifest themselves today. This is not to say that historical contexts and developments will be disregarded entirely.

In regard of topical limitations of this project, it is helpful to consider the approach to the exhibition taken by the curators: According to the sociologist Mats Börjesson there are three different kinds of approaches. For one thing, the focus can be put on authenticity and faithfulness of the representation. For another thing, the exhibition can be studied as a display of the past that is reflective of contemporary issues. A third point of departure is analyzing the exhibition on the level of discourse to investigate what it is the exhibition does.[58] This project adopts the third position, granting the center stage to the meanings produced by the exhibitions themselves. It follows that processes of creating and curating the museum displays as well as questions of authenticity of the exhibits fall outside of this study's scope. It is not the objective nor the author's faculty to pass judgment on the truthfulness of the displays. The intent is not to work out the 'ultimate' meaning of the exhibition, simply because there are as many answers to that question as there are visitors and the interpretivistic stance taken suggests that a final answer does not exist in the first place. Finally, the analysis does not lay claim to completeness or closure: Within the frame of this thesis it is not possible to examine every single display of the exhibition exhaustively. Instead, the author

57 While the Sámi Museum in Karasjok offers guided tours and the staff is very attentive and willing to answer any questions the visitors might have, their website suggests that guided tours are mostly available for groups outside of the museum's regular opening hours. This is probably owed to the severe lack of manpower and resources (see report, include quotation).

58 Mats Börjesson: Vad gör en museiutställning? Om social kategorisering, historiens framsteg och museernas nya roll. RIG – Kulturhistorisk tidskrift 88 (4). 2005. Pp. 193–209

evaluated the significance and meaning making potential of the individual displays and subsequently made choices to illustrate different aspects that are relevant to the research's objectives.

On this note it is necessary to address the authors own position in regard to this subject: I am not Sámi. I am also not Norwegian. I find myself in the position of an outsider, who has lived in Norway and is fluent in Norwegian but who has only visited Sápmi and cannot converse in any of the Sámi languages. Even though I have read a lot about and engaged in many different ways with Sámi history, culture, and politics, I still remain an outsider who might and probably will not be capable of recognizing and decoding every meaning inherent in the exhibitions. I have never experienced belonging to an ethnic minority. My views and interpretations are informed by my position as an outsider and shaped by my education as a researcher trained in literary and cultural studies. While approaching the issues at hand from the outside is naturally limiting, it also provides me with a certain emotional distance to the topic which can be an advantage: I do not have any direct personal stakes in this project other than my keen interest in the topic. This means, for example, that I am not likely to be emotiionaly affected to a detrimental degree when dealing with displays that address painful and traumatic events like colonization and persecution.

5 Analysis

Research Questions:

How does the Sámi Museum in Karasjok facilitate cultural encounters?

How is cultural identity conceptualized, expressed, and communicated in its permanent exhibitions?

How does it contribute to the discourse on Sámi culture and identity?

The analysis at hand is organized into two parts that influence and build on each other. The Sámi Museum provides the situational context, the macro-level necessary to make convincing statements on the discourses established on the microlevel, that is the individual displays themselves. The first focus will therefore be the organization and the design of the Sámi Museum and the exhibition space as a whole. This will also allow for the exploration of the museum's societal and institutional role and the its resulting positioning within the broader socio-cultural context of discourses on Sámi culture and identity, both in the past and nowadays. The first part of the analysis aims at the first part of the research questions that guide this project, which means that it intends to determine how the Sámi Museum facilitates cultural encounters and which role it occupies in the broader socio-cultural dimension of the construction of Sámi culture and identity. While this role is to a certain degree predetermined by a historically dominant Western understanding of museology that continues to influence contemporary museum practices, critical takes on traditional approaches, like Clifford's appeal to conceive museums as contact zones, show that such issues are being addressed. In order to acknowledge these aspects of shifting discourses in regard to meaning making in the Sámi Museum in Karasjok, it is necessary to move beyond the immediately recognizable. This requires not only a closer reading of the exhibition and the individual exhibits, but also a more thorough discussion of how meanings are produced in the museum as well as by and for whom. It has been established in the previous chapters that meaning, especially in regard to culture and identity, is made by positioning and that certain ways of representation create carriers of meaning and that it at heart is a contextual concept.

The second part of the analysis provides an in-depth examination of the positioning carried out in the individual displays of the permanent exhibition and the cultural markers created in the process of representation. Special attention will be devoted to the manner the meanings created in the exhibits are communicated to the visitors and to the previous knowledge or cultural codes required to decipher those meanings. A thorough discussion of the results and will bring the analysis to a close.

5.1 Sámiid Vuorká-Dávvirat: The Sámi Museum in Karasjok

5.1.1 Architectural Design and Choice of Materials

The first thing the visitor sees when approaching the museum site is not the museum building but the outdoor area of the museum, which features several historic buildings, a lavvú[59], and fireplace as well as a forest area with a system of ancient pitfalls used to catch wild reindeer. Only after rounding a corner and passing some of the historic buildings does one get a glimpse of the museum building. While it does not necessarily blend with its surroundings, it fits well into the landscape: It is quite low – most of the surrounding trees being considerably taller than it – and the materials used for its outer walls, weathered concrete, and dark painted pine wood, underline its unobtrusive character. The naked concrete bears visible structures of the wooden moulds which, in combination with the wood panelling, subtly attunes it to its surroundings.[60] Another architectural choice that creates interfaces between the building and its surrounding landscape, between nature and culture so to speak, is the use of several large window displays that serve to open up the concrete cubes that define the overall shape of the building. These transparent glass interfaces work in two directions: Viewed from the outside they act as showcases for the objects displayed in them. Seen from the inside, they not only let in a lot of daylight, they also draw in the landscape. In her study about the architecture of several Sámi buildings, Elin Haugdal states in regard to the Sámi Musuem in Karasjok: “Glass is presented here as place-anchoring material: the transparent surfaces link outside and inside, architecture and landscape.”[61] Since the surrounding landscape consists both of forest and buildings and constructions traditionally used by Sámi, these window displays contextualize the exhibited artifacts both geographically and culturally. This can be

Figure 1: Window display with traditional Sámi tools and a traditional Sámi turf hut in the background (own picture)

59 Lavvú: A Sámi tent.

60 See also Elin Haugdal: “Det skal råtne” Materialbruk i nyere samisk arkitektur. In: Kuns og Kultur 1. 2013. Pp. 36–51. P. 40f.

61 Ibid., p. 46. Own transl., orig.: “Glass presenteres her som et stedsforankrende materiale: de transparente flatene knytter sammen inne og ute, arkitektur og landskap.” All translations in following are made by me.

illustrated by the window display that houses several tools traditionally used by Sámi (Fig. 1): To begin with, the scattered pine trees locate those former everyday tools a scenery typical for the area they stem from. In addition, the traditional Sámi turf hut visible just in front of the tree line links them unequivocally to the culture and the specific place they were used in. Haugdal further points out that the material choices and the reasons behind them – 'honest', local materials that do not distract and anchor the building in a place – are typical for late modern architecture, even though they align to a certain degree with the Sámi tradition of using available natural resources, especially in regard to the use of wood.[62] On the whole it can be established that the museum's exterior is more representative of its time than of Sámi culture.[63]

However, this is not to say that there are no nods to Sámi culture in the interior architectural design, quite the contrary. Although the theme of the external material use is repeated throughout the entire permanent exhibition – large proportions of the walls and pillars are made of naked concrete that shows the wood grain of its molds, while a substantial amount of the remaining walls and almost the entire ceiling is clad in wood paneling – its effect being decidedly different and more evocative of Sámi culture. This is illustrated best by the use of natural and artificial light: First of all, there is a lot of natural light in the exhibition through the aforementioned window displays and wood paneled skylights that arch the corridors between the exhibits. The fact that the natural light falling through the ceiling is filtered through the wooden paneling is very important because the effect is very similar to the way light falls through the wooden poles at the opening on top of a lavvú or bealljegoahti[64] and how it is filtered through the material used as its walls. This impression is reinforced through the segment-like provision of artificial light, which is provided in form of tube lights that are embedded in the wood paneling in the ceiling and resemble the way light in Sámi tents is segmented by the wooden polls that serve as its scaffolding. At the same time, the tube lights paired with the wood panels are also reminiscent of the way light falls through ventilation cracks in wooden walls of traditional buildings and turf huts, before the turf is put on the wooden frame.

But pine wood is not only used as wall covering but also for the displays. Most of their frames are made of rough-hewn plain pine, designed by Sámi artist Iver Jåks and crafted by Sámi artisan Jon Ole Andersen.[65] In addition, a lot of natural or nature-based material is used both as a backdrop in

62 Ibid., p. 40f.

63 The contrary is the case for the Sámi Parliament building just a few hundred meters down the road: There the very shape of the plenary meeting hall is reminiscent of a lávvu and its entire architectural conception is supposed to reflect Sámi culture. See Elin Haugdal and Ingebjørg Hage: "Sametinget (Sámi Parliament Building)", Arkitekturguide Nord-Norge og Svalbard, 28.12.2004.

64 Bealljegoahti: Another form of Sámi tent, similar to a lavvú.

65 See Nielssen 2012b, p. 607.

some of the display cases – in form of wooden planks for the lifestyle-displays and in form of reindeer skin or woven cloth for the handicraft displays – as well as in the numbering and labeling of the individual objects presented in the showcases: The numbers are burnt into little wooden discs, cut from differently sized branches. The emphasis on the implementation of natural materials wherever possible is even extended to some of the informative texts and reference tables that are hung in some of the displays: They are framed and suspended on leather strings. All those impressions, lighting, wall- and ceiling paneling as well as the varied use of natural materials within the displays and as their background, put together provide a general sense of space that is reminiscent of the two most prominent Sámi dwellings, the tent and the turf house.

Figure 2: Example of Display Design (own picture)

The exhibition space itself is thematically organized and roughly separated into five individual exhibits: Contemporary art, lifestyle, duodji[66], traditional costumes, and a room for temporary exhibits, which, was, in July 2021, housing a traveling exhibition about the German Occupation of Northern Norway during World War II curated by the Norwegian Defense Museum. While both the temporary and costume exhibitions are clearly and physically separated from each other and the three remaining exhibitions, the boundaries between the other three exhibits, which are basically located in the same room, are more blurred. There is no physical separation between the exhibits about lifestyle and duodji, and although the wall between the area housing the art exhibit and the area housing displays relating to lifestyle is retractable and was opened sufficiently at the time of visit to provide a passageway between the exhibits, they are still visibly and physically separated. This simplified blueprint should make it easier to follow and picture these and following descriptions and deliberations on spatial impacts and implications:

66 Duodji: Sámi handicraft.

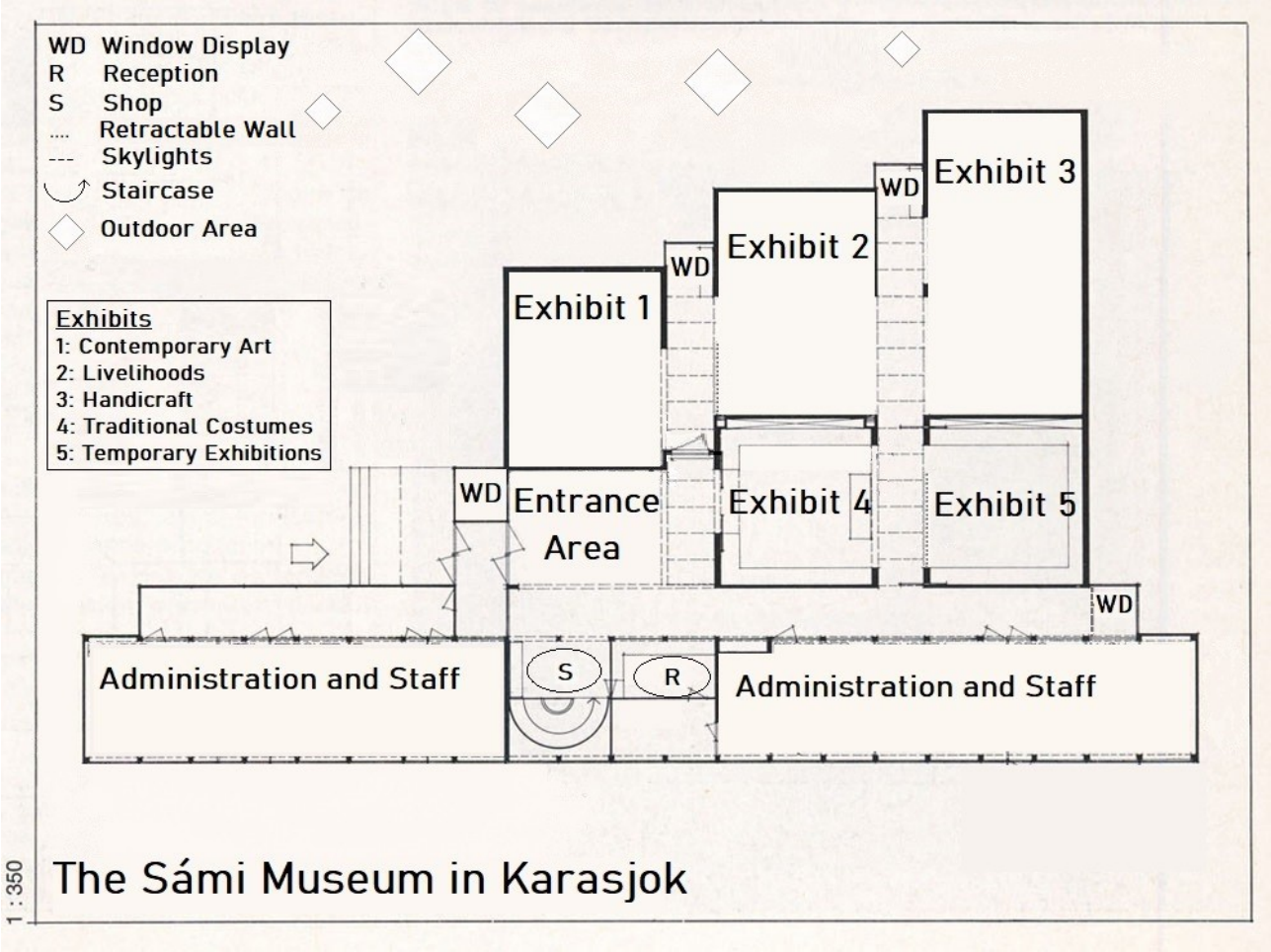

Figure 3: Adapted and modified blueprint of the Sámi Museum in Karasjok (own editing, original in App. 1)

Between the lifestyle and duodji exhibits, on the other hand, there is no physical barrier except for a corridor spanned by a paneled skylight and marked by a differently colored carpet. This separation, however. is immediately broken up by several display cases that physically protrude into the corridor as depicted in Figure 3. The layout of both the room and the displays effectively brings lifestyle and duodji into contact and signposts the interconnectedness of the two. This corresponds directly to the meaning behind the concept of ’duodji’, which is often translated as ’Sámi handicraft’. This translation, however, does not cover what ‘duodji’ actually entails, as “Sámi people have traditionally focused on aesthetics in all of life’s activities.”[67] Consequently, handicraft and lifestyle are not separable but interdependent: Art historian Irene Snarby summarizes the meaning behind duodji as follows: “In actual fact, it encompasses the Sámi worldview, spirituality, Sámi knowledge, conceptions of nature, and the making of objects in relation to life.”[68] To what degree the concept of duodji translates into the duodji exhibit itself will be addressed in more detail in the second part of the analysis.

67 Irene Snarby: “Duodji as Indigenous Contemporary Art Practice”, 23.04.2019, https://www.norwegiancrafts.no/articles/duodji-as-indigenous-contemporary-art-practice. Accessed 22.07.2021.
68 Ibid.

Figure 4: View from the lifestyle exhibit to the duodji exhibit (own photograph)

Another prominent character trait of the exhibition is not only the relative openness of the exhibition space but of the display mode itself: There are several displays that are separated from the visitor only by a wooden frame and some rope or even imaginary boundaries like the in some cases unwritten museum rule “Don’t touch”. In the lifestyle exhibit, there are two of those open display cases: The one shown above, which is housing two mannequins wearing traditional Sámi costumes and one featuring the prominent display of a Sámi drum suspended in mid-air. Not putting them behind glass not only reduces the distance between the visitor and the artifacts, it also lets the artifacts breath. This notion of accessibility is taken a step further in the duodji exhibit: While the [insert noun] are still marked by a framework crafted from rope and wood, the duodji exhibit features two completely freestanding exhibition pieces, one large weaving chair with a halfway finished blanket or carpet and a life-sized bealljegoahti (see Fig. 3). Through the lack of explicit prohibition of physical interaction with the artifacts, while such a ban is visibly imposed for a display in close proximity – see the sign attached to rope barrier in front of the reindeer in Fig. 3 – the visitors are almost encouraged to make direct contact with Sámi culture and crawl into the tent to take a closer look at the interior and to find out how materials used in duodji feel before they are handled by touching the raw wool in the basket next to the weaving chair. This makes parts of the exhibition quite literally accessible and provides for tangible points of cultural contact, which at

least in the case of the open bealljegoahti appears to be intended. The tent's interior is outfitted with reindeer furs, a stocked fireplace, miscellaneous cooking equipment, and two dresses hung over a wooden pole, thereby acting as a display within a display and rendering the bealljegoahti both exhibited object and display case.

So far, the analysis provided an outside view on how the physical conceptualization of the museum facilitates cultural encounters has been applied, investigating the physical properties and their functions. The following chapter will shed some light on the more immaterial ideological concepts that define and characterize the museum and its place in society.

5.1.2 Sámi Ontology and Artistic Choices

In the podcast series created by the Museum Association RiddoDuottarMuseat (RDM) about the museums under its administration, RDM's director Anne May Olli states that one of the key tasks of Sámi museums in general is the conservation of their cultural roots for current and future generations:

> "We have an obligation to take care that those who haven't even been born yet have the same opportunities or even greater opportunities than we have even today. So we have to think about those that are not even conceived yet, the next upcoming generation, and we must take care so that they can have the same pride in who they are both as fellow human beings as well as part of the Sámi culture and the Sámi community."[69]

Her statement echoes the objectives RDM names in its strategy paper for 2017–2022: "RiddoDuottarMuseat has as its goal to actively contribute so that Sámi identity, language and cultural traditions are protected, made visible and developed".[70]

The Sámi Museum is envisaged by its administration as a place where knowledge about the Sámi community is produced by making their history and culture visible based on their own sources and understanding; its main objective is to preserve existing cultural knowledge and provide future generations with at least equal opportunities to connect in a positive and reaffirming way with their cultural roots and community. Calling Clifford's and Hall's theoretical considerations to mind, the

69 Transcribed and translated from "8. Hva er "konservering" på museum?" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwFSDz0BTgE, 14:55, accessed 01.07,2021).

70 RiddoDuottarMuseat: Strategiplan 2017–2022. 2017. P. 4. In the following referenced as Strategiplan.

conceptual overlap is striking: RDM positions itself as an "active" participant (orig.: "aktivt bidra") in an ongoing negotiation process of cultural identity. That they consider it their responsibility to not only reflect the status quo – "make visible" (orig.: "synliggjøres") – but also to continue the construction of Sámi culture and identity in the future becomes very clear in Anne May Olli's repeated reference to the generations to come: "those who haven't even been born yet" ("de som enda ikke er født") and "those that are not even conceived yet" (orig.: "dem som ikke en gang er påtenkt"). Interestingly, she stresses how far into the future this obligation reaches while it is also immediate. First, she extends the time frame from those who are not born yet but who are possibly expected to those generations that are not even planned for yet. Finally, she draws the attention to those who are to come "next" (orig.: "den neste generasjon"). This is complemented by the choice of words used in the strategy paper, which emphasizes the dynamic nature of culture and identity by employing the term "develop" (orig.: "utvikles").

As means of reaching this objective, RDM names, among other things, "[conveying] and [informing] on Sámi art, history, traditions and culture, including production of knowledge".[71] This last part, "Sámi production of knowledge" (orig.: "samisk kunnskapsproduksjon"), paired with the first verb "to convey" (orig.: "å formidle") opens up a different venue for cultural encounter: the negotiation of implementing Indigenous forms of memory and display in a traditionally Western context of knowledge making. As pointed out before, joining the deeply Western institution of a museum with Indigenous ways of preserving and imparting knowledge poses a complex challenge. For the Sámi community, this challenge already takes its departure with the issue of Sámi historiography: Until quite recently Sámi did not have their own written language. Instead, oral tradition and duodji served as the main means of cultural education.[72] During times of forced assimilation and Norwegianization, a process that began in the 17th century and lasted until the 1960s, Sámi were not only forced to speak Norwegian and shamed for using their mother tongues, they were also stripped of their traditional costumes and other cultural emblems. Therefore, a lot of the historic source material that has survived has been created by others, most prominently by mapmakers, clerics, and other colonizers. It stands to reason that their accounts are subjected to their own agenda and perspectives. Thus, the history reflected in those sources involves both Sámi and non-Sámi and often takes a non-Sámi view point. This applies quite literally to historic photographs. The museum is aware of that and consequently does not use many photographs in its displays and display designs. Informal conversations with the staff at the Sámi Museum in Karasjok revealed this omission to be a deliberate choice: By not employing photographs that were more

71 Strategiplan, p. 4.

72 See Ketil Zachariassen: Isak Saba, Anders Larsen Og Matti Aikio – Ein Komparasjon Av Dei Samiske Skjønnlitterære Pionerane i Norge." Nordlit, vol. 16, no. 1, 2012. Pp. 1–13. P. 2.

often than not taken by outsiders and thereby epitomizing the colonialist's gaze, the exhibition refuses to integrate cultural constructions by outsiders into their own representation of Sámi culture.[7374] Instead, in order to 'convey Sámi knowledge production', the museum integrates means of Sámi knowledge production into the exhibition space itself, namely in form of contributions made by the aforementioned Sámi artist Iver Jåks. He was not only involved in the design of the display cases, he also provided several pieces of art that frame the entire exhibition and greatly impact its positioning in regard to conventional Western museums.

Before entering the museum building, visitors are greeted by one of the aforementioned window displays, which accommodates a set of wooden sculptures made by Jåks. They portray stylized human figures that appear to be dancing. The brass door handle of the entrance door is also designed by him, so the visitor is literally in contact with Sámi culture upon entering the museum, whether they know it or not. An important aspect of Jåks' door handle design is the fact that it is modeled after a symbol depicted on a shaman drum that is a central part of the Sámi Museum's collection. His use of a symbol from a Shaman drum in such a prominent location is meaningful in various ways: First of all, the historic collection of Sámi drums, often accompanied by their destruction or exhibition in ethnographic museums, is one of the most prominent examples of the cultural dispossession of the Sámi. Shaman drums were a popular target because they served as a vital instrument, literally and figuratively, to both pass on and preserve cultural knowledge. Taking them away from the Sámi community not only interrupted the transfer of cultural knowledge, it also helped missionaries to eradicate heathen rites and practices that were connected to Sámi shamanism.[75] Employing it in this way is both an act of repossession and transformation of its area of application: Traditionally, the use of Sámi drums and shaman symbols was mostly reserved for the noaidi, the Sámi shaman. In this case, however, every single visitor gets to interact with it admitted by it to a place dedicated to the transfer of cultural knowledge. The museum takes on the traditional role of the Shaman as keeper and mediator of knowledge. In addition, Shaman symbols occupy a place between oral tradition and written history

Figure 5: Brass Door Handle Designed by Iver Jåks (own picture)

73 Sigrid Lien and Hilde Nielssen addressed the issue at length and come to a similar conclusion (see Lien and Nielssen 2012a.

74 This critical approach to the use of photographs is not self-evident: The Siida Museum in Inari, the biggest Sámi museum in Finland, for example, uses photographs both as displays, display backgrounds, and to break up some of the exhibition texts. This observation is based on a visit of the Museum in relation to a project on Sámi tourism I conducted in 2019.

75 See Francis Joy: The disappearance of the sacred Swedish Sámi drum and the protection of Sámi cultural heritage. Polar Record, 54(4). 2018.

and thereby represent a specifically Sámi mode to ‘convey and inform on Sámi art, history, traditions and culture, including production of knowledge’. The symbol itself represents the sun, the central force in Sámi religion and, according to art historian Caroline Serck-Hanssen, can and usually is read as a fertility symbol.[76] The Sámi people for example describe themselves as ‘Children of the Sun’.[77] Jåks’ artworks that are part of the exhibits’ design utilize several more symbols from different Sámi drums. Their use and effect in relation to and combination with the individual displays will be revisited in more detail in the second part of the analysis.

Stepping inside the building, the artistic exposition in form of the wooden sculptures and the brass door handle is followed by large wall relief in wood and concrete, titled ‘The Dance of the Gods’, which adorns the entrance area and picks up the dance-like movement of the sculptures.

Figure 6: "The Dance of the Gods" by Iver Jåks, 1972 (own photograph)

As the title suggests though, the stylized figures now represent the Sámi gods, which corresponds with the invocation of the mythological plane initiated by the design of the door handle. This connection is reinforced by the prominent depiction of the drum hammer on the right-hand side and the overall dominance of the sun and its rays. Lien and Nielssen offer the following interpretation of the sun’s role in the relief, which also ties in with the repetition of the fertility theme:

“In Sámi cosmology the sun was an ancient cosmic being which carried the other gods on its rays. The artwork represents five cosmological figures: the god of the winds, the father of origin flanked by his wife and son, and the spring goddess. There is as strong erotic element in this: the work of creation obtains its energy and growth-potential from the cosmic life-giving forces embodied by the gods.”[78]

76 Caroline Serck-Hansen: ‘Iver Jåk’s kunstnerskap – et riss’ in Offelas: Iver Jåks veiviseren. 2002. p. 43.

77 See Mikkel Berg-Nordlie & Harald Gaski: “Sameflagget” in: Store norske leksikon på snl.no. https://snl.no/Sameflagget. Accessed 05.08.2021.

78 Lien & Nielssen 2012a, p. 607.

Juxtaposed with this mythological artwork is a big screen mounted to the opposite wall, on which different films documenting Sámi lifestyle are run, effectively confronting the visitors with real life members of the Sámi community. This interplay turns the entire museum site into a mythological, otherworldly space[79] as well as a place for earthly knowledge. This side-by-side arrangement of the mythological and the earthly is already hinted at outside the museum, in form of a small flowerbed that not only imitates the shape of the sun symbol but also adds the Sámi colors to it, next to an equal-sized laid out patch of reindeer moss. This little inconspicuous spot of landscaping symbolizes several of the overarching themes: The connection of Sámi mythology and nature, the dependence on natural resources like reindeer moss in terms of traditional livelihoods and the interconnection between nature and culture.

Figure 7: Patch of Reindeer Moss and Flower Bed in the Shape of the Sun Symbol (own picture)

So far the analysis of the Sámi museum on an institutional level has shown that it facilitates various forms of cultural encounters and offers different points of contact for its visitors, covering historical, artistic, and cultural areas. For the sake of completeness it should be pointed out that the RDM operates as part of a network that consists not only of several museums in the region but also provides space for temporary exhibitions curated by other, non-Sámi museums. It thereby frequently features a side-by-side arrangement of Sámi- and non-Sámi-curated exhibits. In this context, the museum's contact work takes on local, regional, and national dimensions.

To sum up the findings of this first part of the analysis: The museum's architecture and the artistic and material design of the exhibition space show that it purposefully partakes in the discourse on

79 This mode of reading the exhibition space is also promoted by Lien and Nielssen 2012a.

how Indigenous culture can be implemented and represented in a mostly Western institutional context. On an architectural level, this is achieved by not completely separating the individual thematically organized exhibits from each other but letting them flow into one another. In regard to material use and artistic design, the impact of Iver Jåks' contributions, both in regard to display design and artistic framing, cannot be overstated, because "Sámi art is a natural constituent of Sámi cultural mediation."[80] As a result of this integrating approach, Sámi ontology[81] has found its way into the overarching museal frame, aesthetically as well as conceptually. This observation, however, requires a fair amount of interpretation and it remains questionable if and to what degree the museum invites visitors that are not Sámi or lack knowledge of Sámi cultural codes and do not recognize certain callbacks to Sámi culture to those encounters with Sámi culture. To those who are able to identify such invocations, for example the use of a Sámi mythological fertility symbol as door handle for the main entrance,[82] the permanent exhibition in its entirety is both an expression of Sámi culture as well as an act of decolonizing the museum as such: It promotes Sámi worldviews by omitting Western historic accounts in the form of photographs and by breaking up the conventional Western museum space through artistic and architectural framing that implements Sámi culture into the exhibition space itself. To those who do not or cannot take the mentioned allusions to Sámi ontology into account, the exhibition mostly reproduces and perpetuates ethnographic stereotypes.[83] As internal documents and public statements made by the director of the museum's governing body show, the museum is aware of its social responsibility, even obligation, first and foremost towards the Sámi community, to actively contribute to a proud self-perception and sense of cultural continuation.

Having established the Sámi Museum as an active contact zone that, at least theoretically, allows for diverse cultural encounters and their promotion, we now move on to the discourses created in the exhibits themselves by focusing on how cultural identity is established and reinforced specifically. Consequently, the following chapters are concerned both with the question of what is being said and how it is said in the individual displays.

80 Mulighetsstudie, p. 13. Orig.: "Samiske kunst er en naturlig del av den samiske kulturformidlingen".
81 Here understood in the basic, literal sense as a discourse on that which is.
82 That Jåks' door handle can be considered iconic within certain Sámi circles is illustrated by the homage paid to it by Geir Tore Holms who designed the door handle for the Eastern Sámi Museum (see Haugdal 2013, p. 48).
83 See Olsen 2000 and Webb 2006.

5.2 Locating Sámi in the Exhibition

When buying their tickets at the reception, visitors are informed by the staff about the different displays and while no clear directive is given as to where to begin, it is implied that the exhibit on the traditional Sámi costumes is a good place to start the tour. Since its display cases are already visible from the entrance area through the exhibit's wide entrance arch, one is naturally inclined to do so.[84] Another obvious starting point is the exhibition on contemporary art, since it is also directly accessible from the entrance area. Beginning the tour through the exhibition here instead of the costume exhibit changes the order of display encounter significantly and possible implications for the process of interpretation and meaning making on the part of the visitors are taken into account where relevant. Similar to an actual visit to the museum, this part of the analysis will investigate the individual displays sequentially, that is to say in respect to their location in the exhibition and in an order they are likely to be encountered in.

5.2.1 Traditional Sámi Costumes

Figure 8: Traditional Costumes Exhibit: Wedding Display and Lecterns (own picture)

The room itself is well lit, clearly structured and open at both ends. Entering from the entrance area, the visitor is greeted by a luxuriously decked out pair of mannequins in a freestanding display case. Other display cases are embedded into the walls on the sides and all of them are accompanied by wooden stands that hold folders of written texts in Sámi, Norwegian, and English that accompany the displayed objects and clothes. In order to prevent distraction from the clothes, the background is a neutral white wall and all of the mannequins are kept faceless, not adding any personal note to the displays. At a first glance, the room creates a sober environment focused on imparting knowledge in a straightforward, lecture-like way. This impression is reinforced by the fact that the

84 In fact, during the three visits I made to the museum I have not encountered a single visitor who started the tour in the contemporary art exhibit.

texts that accompany the exhibit are presented as rather thick folders of laminated A4-pages, each of them counting 10–14 pages per language, that are placed on lecterns specially built for this purpose. The fact that the process of learning about the traditional Sámi costumes is not as straight forward as it seems, becomes clear upon closer investigation of the displays: There are no labels or numbering plates to be found, they are entirely left to speak for themselves. Instead, the information is put into four different lecterns spread throughout the room, which means that the visitor often has to physically go back and forth between the text and the display. Although there are photographs of the displays in their entirety and their individual components integrated into the texts for the purpose of making it easier to match information and object, single figures have changed position since those pictures were taken, requiring a very close read of text and display. The challenge of connecting the correct description with the right object is increased for parts of the Norwegian texts, because some pages have been misplaced into the wrong folders and are far away from the costumes they refer to.

The displays embedded into the walls house costumes from all over Sápmi and the lecterns accompanying them provide a lot of general background information about Sámi culture and geography as well as details about the individual costumes and materials used for them. The mannequins, devoid of distinct facial features, are clearly intended to represent types, not characters, even though some of them are arranged in more lifelike groupings, like a toddler crawling on the floor as can be seen in the background of Fig. 5.[85] This intention is made clear in the text and each costume is located both geographically, sometimes culturally in regard to the respective Sámi subgroup it represents, and temporally, followed by a description of its individual components and explanations on how and when it is worn and how it has changed over time. These changes are framed in a very positive way, ascertaining that they are part of the Sámi costume culture: “The different Sámi *gákti* [costumes] are in a process of constant change, in the intersecting point between old traditions and new innovations. […] Without a certain pressure for change, the *gákti* would not develop.”[86] Equal amounts of attention are paid to each costume and while the stories told about them are detailed and exhaustive, they are not personalized but generally representative.

What distinguishes the freestanding display from the embedded displays is the fact that it houses two sets of wedding costumes from two different areas: These figures are not mere representatives of male and female versions of locally distinctive costumes, they also represent a complex socio-cultural event, i.e. Sámi wedding culture. This departure into a more social context that is as much

85 A picture solely of the displayed ‘family’ is provided in App. 2.
86 App. 3.

about the costumes as it is about the cultural event they are used in is enhanced by the placement of a small box of gifts traditionally given to the bride during courting. which is used in the lectern to explain Sámi wedding customs. This is picked up in the text as well, as it provides general information about each of the costumes' origin, components and possible modern variations as well as detailed descriptions of traditional courtship and wedding rituals and their modernized adaptions. At the same time it is stressed that some Sámi might engage only partially in those rituals while other do not engage in them at all. The text further takes care to make it unmistakably clear that these cultural customs are not applicable to everyone and that many Sámi choose to get married in a dark suit and white dress. This serves as a reminder that while traditional costumes are a very important part of Sámi culture and self-expression, they are not equally important to every Sámi in every situation.

But this is not the only thing the accompanying texts are used for. They also position the museum in regard to both its visitors and its exhibits. While most of the descriptions are expressed in a very descriptive and impersonal way, using passive constructions and generalizing terms , there are some instances in which the level of personal deixis is introduced and a 'we' that is making choices about the exhibit at hand emerges: "We have endowed"[87] and "What we show here"[88] are the terms used and because they are never used in relation to descriptions of Sámi culture – there is never talk of 'our' culture – the speakers position themselves in this instance both outside of the group that is subject of the exhibit and outside of the group of visitors, as they are the ones showing something to the visitors. Moreover, the speakers also make clear that they are in a position of power and cultural authority as they are the ones deciding what to show, how to show it, and how it should be conceived: "Even though we have exhibited Sámi costumes from different areas in Sápmi, most Sámi wear Western clothes in their everyday lives. We hope You keep that in mind when You proceed further into the exhibition."[89] So far, the speakers have positioned themselves as apart from both the visitors as well as from the Sámi they (re)present. This, however changes during the description of the traditional costumes from Lovozero in Russia. The text reads "Especially the woman's costume stands out to us from the western parts as Russian inspired from the time before 1917, with a long skirt and blouse." The important phrasing is 'to us from the western parts' – 'for oss fra vest' – which allows for a mixed group identity, i.e. both 'we Sámi from the western parts' as well as 'we Westerners', which is nevertheless distinct from those in the East, both Sámi and

87 App. 4, orig.: "Vi har utstyrt".
88 App. 5, orig.: "Det vi viser her".
89 App. 6, orig.: "Selv om vi har utstilt samiske drakter fra forskjellige områder i Sápmi, så går de fleste samer kledd i vestilge klær til hverdags. Vi håper du har dette i minnet når du fortsetter videre inn i salen."

Russian, ultimately implying that the speakers – speaking for the museum and therefore from a Sámi perspective – are closer to western non-Sámi than to Russian Sámi. It is remarkable and telling that the traditional costumes from Russian Sápmi are singled out compared to Scandinavian Sámi costumes as 'standing out' and obviously 'Russian inspired', when an apparently specifically Russian influence is hard to pinpoint when seeing the costume next to others, at least for this author:

Figure 9: Sámi Costume from Rorøs and Dalarna/Idre (Southern Sámi) (own picture)

Figure 10: Sámi Costumes from Lovozero (own picture)

Figure 11: Sámi Costume from Inari (Inari Sámi) (own picture)

This lack of recognition might be due to the fact that I lack intrinsic cultural knowledge about Sámi costume traditions, and attribute the long skirt rather to the substantially colder temperatures in Lovozero than to being specifically Russian. A more obvious difference is the collar of the blouse, but since the man's tunique has not been singled out as distinctively different or 'Russian', it remains unclear if that is what the speaker mean. The text accompanying the exhibit does not provide any further explanation on this Russian influence but proceeds to describe the many commonalities with other costumes worn by Eastern Sámi in Scandinavian Sápmi. While pointing out such common traits as the use of pearl embroidery reduces the distance established before to a certain degree, this whole positioning nevertheless calls the mutual connectedness of the Sámi into question and creates an outsider-group distinct from other Sámi subgroups.

5.2.2 A Map of Sápmi (?)

There is only one map used in the permanent exhibition, although it is used repeatedly in different contexts and with different geographical highlights. Depending on where the visitor started the tour through the exhibition space, they either encounter it here in two of the four lecterns under the title ‘Sápmi’ or halfway into the lifestyle exhibit in form of a medium-sized wall installation titled ‘Sámi Languages’. Figure 6 shows the map as it is hung in the exhibit, the only difference between this version and the one depicted in the lecterns being that the latter does not include a map legend of any kind and features place names of the origins of the different costumes written roughly over their geographic locations.[90]

Figure 12: Map of Sápmi as Shown in the Exhibition (own picture)

The main function of maps is to provide orientation and demarcate territories by reproducing both claims of ownership and jurisdiction. They are meant to serve as ‘objective’, trustworthy, and abstracted versions of spatial reality. Nowadays there is a consent that maps are not neutral but reflective of the mapmaker’s cultural, political and economic background and agenda.[91] In other words: They construct spatial reality at least as much as they reflect it.

The map used in the exhibition bears no reference to its creator, even though it is hand-drawn, and only features Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia, effectively blocking out any other country that is not directly involved with the Sàmi. National borders are marked with bright red and language borders are drawn open-ended in green. Other than a legend containing information in regard to the demarcation of national borders, place names, and language borders, no

90 See App. 7.

91 See Jeremy Crampton & John Krygier: An Introduction to Critical Cartography. ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies. 4. 2006.

further explanation or contextualization is provided: There is no scale, no terrain markings, and no other geographic reference point like the Arctic Circle available.

While the national borders are drawn unambiguously, and the language borders are hinted at, the territory of Sápmi is not marked at all, which ultimately implies that all of Scandinavia and large parts of Russia are to be considered 'Sápmi'. One could argue that Sápmi is the 'Sámi homeland without borders' and the territories it entails do not have legally and politically fixed borders like nation states do. But neither do languages. Yet, their boundaries are at least rudimentary demarcated, even though their reach, especially of Northern Sámi in Northern Scandinavia remains unclear and the use of clearly drawn lines implies a more sharp and distinct separation between the individual language zones than is the case in reality. While the lack of demarcating Sápmi could be attributed to the fact, that this specific map is entitled 'Sámi Languages' and naturally has a focus on language boundaries and not on territory, all of the above also applies to the maps in the lecterns that are entitled 'Sápmi' and identical with the one in Fig. 5 except for the labeling of the language zones which is unique to the exhibited map. This is to say, that the map that according to its title shows Sápmi, actually shows the Scandinavian countries in their entirety, larger parts of Russia and no obvious let alone clear(er) demarcation of Sápmi.

Keeping in mind that all parts of an exhibition in a museum are conscious choices that are meant to produce meaning, the fact that this particular map was chosen implies that a more precise localization of Sápmi is not a priority or even intended. Given the fact that maps and place-making have for a long time been at the center of Sámi identity politics, both in regard to rights of land use and the reintroduction of Sámi place names in Sámi areas, it is somewhat unexpected that this map does not make the overlap of Sápmi and the four countries more visible and decidedly foregrounds the national borders, which have been a continuous bone of contention: Since 1986, Sámi in all three Scandinavian countries have worked in a continuing effort towards the implementation of a Nordic Sàmi Convention so that they "should be able to safeguard, exercise and develop their culture with the least possible obstacles posed by national borders."[92]

The use of this map in particular does not seem to contribute much to the museum's objective to provide a cultural overview for all of Sápmi. On the contrary, the lack of boundaries implies a certain notion of placelessness. Calling on what has been established in relation to the conceptualization of culture and identity, namely the importance of positioning, it is criticalfor something to be located somewhere so that this positioning in relation to the 'other' can take place

92 Norwegian Government: Nordisk samekonvensjon, 14.08.2018. (https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/urfolk-og-minoriteter/samepolitikk/nordisk-samisk-samarbeid/nordisk-samekonvensjon/id86937/) Orig.: "skal kunne bevare, utøve og utvikle sin kultur med minst mulig hinder av landegrensene."

and the process of culture and identity making can continue. This applies to geographical positioning too.

5.2.3 Lifestyle and Duodji Exhibits

Coming from the costume-exhibit, one enters the main exhibition room that houses both the lifestyle and duodji exhibit by going down the corridor which roughly separates the two exhibits. The exhibits' respective layouts make it unmistakably clear that the two are designed in correspondence with each other: Both feature a set of showcases mounted to the wall at the corners of the room. Those showcases are framed by strips of pinewood and hold multiple objects that respectively relate to lifestyle and duodji. In between the individual display cases, text panels, also framed with pinewood, are installed. Beyond that, there are several freestanding display cases placed in both sections of the room: Two open displays, one housing a Sámi drum and one a pair of mannequins in Sámi costumes, are located in the lifestyle section, although the one with the mannequins protrudes into the corridor separating the exhibits (see Fig. 3). The duodji exhibit also features two freestanding display cases, one with various tools needed to process wood and one showcasing various examples of the individual pieces of clothing that make up the traditional Sámi costume, from differently crafted hats to intricately patterned strings used as boot ties. In addition, there are two unframed objects in the duodji part of the room, a weaving chair and a Sámi tent, as has been pointed out in the previous chapter. Only two of the exhibition lecterns that pose such an important feature of the previous room are placed here, both in the lifestyle exhibit. Finally, entering the room from this way, the entrance is flanked by two dioramas:[93] A taxidermied reindeer pulling a sleigh with a mannequin clad in a traditional Sámi costume to the right and a man standing in a long boat, also dressed in a Sámi costume to the left. The analysis follows a clockwise moving pattern, starting with the riverboat diorama and concluding with the reindeer diorama.

93 I follow the broad definition of 'diorama' as "a multi-purpose label for a variety of simulated environments, either life-size or in miniature" applied by Silje Opdahl Mathisen in her research on dioramas in Sámi exhibitions; Silje Opdahl Mathisen: Still standing. On the use of dioramas and mannequins in Sámi exhibitions. In: Nordisk Museologi No. 1, 2017. Pp. 58–72.

5.2.4 “Aslak and His Riverboat”

On the left-hand side of the entrance and marking the beginning of the lifestyle exhibit, a large diorama of a riverboat and a male mannequin dressed in traditional costume takes up the entire length of the wall:

Figure 13: Riverboat Diorama and Mural of Ancient Rock Carvings by Iver Jåks (own picture)

What stands out immediately in comparison with the displays in the costume exhibit, is the fact that this mannequin has elaborate facial features and hands. In this regard the diorama not only shows the individual artifacts – the boat itself, the miscellaneous tools for trapping and fishing that are put inside the boat, the traditional costume – it puts them in a meaningful context and creates a scene that illustrates their use in a way that makes it easy for the visitor to visualize their use in real life. As the visitor learns from the exhibition lectern that accompanies the display, the boat was actually in use until 1963. It bears the incision “AJG 1940” and was made the traditional way in 1940 by a local who was named Aslak Johnsen Guttorm (1891–1972), married to Berit from Inari and who “did not want a motor”[94], preferring to pole the boat as depicted in the diorama while the majority of Sámi boats at that time already featured motors. The text further describes the traditional way of creating a river boat, from material collection to craftsmanship, as well as its commercial and personal use. By not only providing a name, biography, and personal details for both the figure and

94 App. 8.

the object on display, but choosing to portray an actual person rather than a type or character and explaining their personal connection to the object, it is made explicitly clear that the Sámi and their cultural traditions have a not so distant past, a cultural heritage and a historic connection to the area. This argument gains weight when the mural used as the background for the scene is taken into account. The mural, created by Iver Jåks, depicts motives taken from ancient rock carvings which were found in Alta[95] in the 1960s and 1970s and added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1985.[96] The motives Jåks has chosen for his mural include carvings from all time periods represented at the site in Alta, which is to say they cover the last 2000–7000 years.[97] The choice of motives further illustrate that Sámi livelihoods, especially fishing, reindeer trapping and hunting, have been tied to the area for a very long time. They thereby also imply a certain degree of cultural and historical continuity, as fishing and reindeer herding are still important Sámi livelihoods on the one hand, and that the personal life of the individual Sámi is integrated in a greater historical frame on the other.

Last but not least, these carvings present a way in which cultural history has been recorded and cultural knowledge was preserved and shared without using writing as mode of communication, which is very similar to the symbols used on Sámi drums, This observation seamlessly leads the analysis to the next display that is positioned just a few steps from the diorama: The one that holds the Sámi drum and sieidi.

5.2.5 “Sámi Drum and Sieidi”

At the center of the lifestyle section of the main exhibition room stands a single open display housing a replica[98] of one of the most valuable and culturally significant artifacts the Sámi Museum has in its collection, the Sámi drum that belonged to Anders Poulsen. It hangs suspended from thin ropes in mid-air over a sieidi and is accompanied by a text panel that is integrated into the open pinewood frame. The text panel is two-sided, providing some general information on the pre-Christian Sámi religion and specific details about Anders Poulsen on the side facing away from the drum and a reference table for the symbols depicted on the drum on its other side. Similar to the

95 Alta is about 180km northwest from Karasjok.
96 See https://www.altamuseum.no/.
97 I happened to visit the museum in Alta before I went to Karasjok and cross-referenced the scenes of the mural with the scenes in the guidebook I bought there.
98 A replica is used in order to protect and conserve the original.

boat from the neighboring diorama, the drum is also not an anonymous object. From the reference table and the text the visitor learns that it was confiscated in 1691 and that its owner, a noaidi[99] by the name of Anders Poulson, stood trial for witchcraft in Vadsø and was killed in 1692 by a "crazy person"[100]. What makes this specific drum special, is the fact that the reference table for the symbols depicted on it, is based on Anders Poulson's own explanations that he provided during his trial and that were recorded by a scribe. Since the situational context of a criminal trial that could end in execution likely influenced his statements about the symbols' meanings, to make them appear more Christian for example, those explanations should be treated with caution. Nevertheless, this is a unique situation: Sámi drums are carriers of both material – the craftsmanship and artistry of the drum – and immaterial – the meaning behind its symbols and the purposes of the practices it was used in – cultural knowledge. This immateriality is made tangible, at least to a certain degree, by supplementation with contemporary written records that provide a cultural code – be it fragmented and distorted – to decipher the meanings that imbue the drum.[101]

Figure 14: Sámi Drum and Sieidi

The central placement of the drum in the middle of the room symbolizes its central role and symbolic value for the formation and development of Sámi identity. First of all, it is an important carrier of material and immaterial cultural heritage. Second, it represents more than just the pre-Christian religion of the Sámi, it also symbolizes colonization, the persecution practitioners of non-Christian religion were subjected to and the resilience of its enduring existence in spite of that. In this case, the drum is meaningful on both a personal and a general level: Because its noaidi and his fate are known entities, the general event of persecution becomes a personal and 'real' life story. The drums' individual histories and biographies are not only closely connected to those of their owners, they are also mirror common Sámi experiences: From persecution and

99 Noaidi: Sámi shaman.

100 App. 9, orig.: "en forrykt person".

101 Liv Helene Willumsen provides a comprehensive treatise of the court records and the depiction of Anders Poulson in them: Anders Poulsen—Sámi Shaman Accused of Witchcraft, 1692, Folklore, 131:2. 2020. 135-158.

confiscation, subsequent destruction or exhibition to repatriation and resurgence. Although responses to this exhibit necessarily include feelings of loss and displacement, it also elicits notions of reconnection and continuity.

On contrast to this, the sieidi that is placed beneath the drum remains an anonymous object that is merely representative of the old Sámi religion. The only thing the text specifies in relation to it, is that "unusual natural formations like peculiar stones"[102] were used as sacrificial sites. A sieidi marks a specific site in nature and acts as a contact point where the otherworld is especially close. Its positioning in relation to its specific surroundings is therefore essential. Since there is no further information given about the sieidi, it remains unclear if it is replica, an imitation or a real one that has been stripped of its sacred properties by removing it from its original site and re-erecting it in the museum. This relocation into a display where it can not be interacted with as customary transforms the sieidi from a mediator between the earthly and the otherworldly plane, i. e. its active part of religious practice, into a mediator of knowledge about religious practice.

5.2.6 The Good Old Days: "Traditional Livelihoods"

Behind the open display with the drum and sieidi, the exhibit turns to the more this-worldly aspects of Sámi culture, namely livelihoods. There are all together 8 display cases mounted to the wall that concentrate exclusively on traditional Sámi livelihoods. They are organized thematically, and according to the titles of the text panels accompanying them they cover "Sámi Culture at the Coast", "Agriculture", "The Forest", "Freshwater Fishing", "Forest Sámi" and "Reindeer Herding."[103] The texts are available in Sámi and Norwegian and they contain both background information and reference tables for the objects presented in the respective display cases. Those references comprise only information about the type of the artifact. No information about their age, origin or owner is included. The artifacts on display, all of them simple everyday-life objects like milk buckets, fish hooks, and reindeer lassos, are at no point referenced in the texts themselves and serve mostly as material representations of the discussed livelihoods. Together with the texts, they paint a picture of a Sámi community that. before modernization processes took hold, lived in communion with nature and each other. It is further stated that many of those livelihoods have been part of Sámi culture "from time immemorial"[104] and that they are threatened by developments

102 App. 9, orig.: "Særegne naturformasjoner som merkelige steiner".
103 See App. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14.
104 App. 12, orig.: "fra gammelt av".

outside of their control. In regard to history and chronology, these traditional livelihoods are portrayed within a two-tiered past, comparing how they were practiced in a not clearly specified time "before"[105], when Sámi could pursue their livelihoods unperturbed and a time after when they had to change. This 'before' time is anchored by reference to the rock carvings in Alta in a mythological past: "Rock carvings, like those in Alta, were part of the hunting magic. Worship and sacrifices secured the hunting luck."[106] While it is not explicitly said, positioning traditional Sámi livelihoods in relation to the rock carvings also anchors them in recorded history and underlines their continued presence. The time after is defined as a time after influences from outside the Sámi community forced them to adapt their ways of life. This positioning comes along with the establishment of an ideal: original Sámi culture that was free of external influences and based on the diversified and "holistic utilization of the resources"[107] available to them. This ideal way of life in all its variations is threatened and transformed by influences from outside: Fishing opportunities are decisively reduced because there are "too many fishers from outside" and infrastructure related "river regulations have also destroyed many lakes and rivers."[108] These statements illustrate that those intrusions not only affect the Sámi community in a negative way but threaten and harm nature itself. Outside influences have not only affected livelihoods and associated customs, but by extension also other cultural traits: "There are a lot of cultural traits specific for Coastal Sámi, they have for example their own dialect and costume. Many of these have little by little disappeared because of pressure from outside and Norwegianization from the 18th century."[109] In addition, some traditional practices related to reindeer herding are now forbidden by law, which has led to protests by the Sámi "because they are of the opinion that such a law undermines the solidarity between Sámi."[110] But this not the only instance of disagreement on part of the Sámi with legal situations: The Norwegian state has "appropriated the right to use the forest."[111] Speaking about the state's right to the forests in terms of an 'appropriation' reveals the underlying perception that those rights belong to the Sámi, who have lived there and used the forest for centuries, if not for millennia as the mural with the ancient rock carvings on the opposite wall suggests. This argument is supported by the mention of a person named Schnitler, who is used as an authoritative source to verify that

105 App. 15, orig: "før".
106 App. 15, orig.: ""Helleristninger, some disse fra Alta, var en del av jaktmagien. Tilbedelser og offringer sikret jaktlykken."
107 App. 13, orig.: "allsidig utnytting av ressursene" as well as App. 1746.
108 App. 12, orig.: "I dag har det minsket med fisk både i vann og elver p.g.a. for mange fiskere utenfra. Vassdragsreguleringer har likeledes ødelagt mange vann og elver."
109 App. 16, orig.: "Det fins mange egne kulturtrekk I samekulturen ved kysten som f.eks. En egen dialekt og drakt. Mange av disse har etterhvert forsvunnet p.g.a. press utenfra og fornorskningen fra 1800-tallet."
110 App. 17, orig.: Fra samisk side har man protestert fordi man mener en slik lov undergraver samholdet mellom samer."
111 App. 18, orig.: "tilegnet seg retten til skogen".

around 1740 “both Eastern Sámi as well as nomadic Sámi sold forest products and floated timber”[112]. There is, however, no information provided on who Schnitler was and why he can be regarded as a reliable source. Research conducted at a later date revealed him to be a “central person from the Danish-Norwegian side, a major and lawyer”[113], involved in the process of securing the Finnmark area for Norway in border negotiations with Sweden. Mentioning Schnitler is intriguing, as the exhibition texts so far have not mentioned any other sources and, as has been discussed already, the museum in general avoids non-Sámi source material. Referencing an ‘outsider’ and former representative of the state – and a lawyer too – to verify the Sámi’s historic presence lends further weight to their case.

5.2.7 Natural and Enforced Diversity: “The Sámi Society”

In the open space between the lifestyle and the duodji exhibit, the corridor, there is another rather inconspicuous text panel identical with the ones used in relation to the livelihood displays mounted to one of walls. Upon closer inspection it is revealed not to refer to any of the displays specifically but to stand completely on its own – the only text in the entire exhibition that is not to be read in connection with a certain display. It is available in both Sámi and Norwegian and is titled “The Sámi Society”[114]. In it, the defining ideas of Sámi society that “emerge in their language, the old religion, duodji (art and handicraft), traditions, social systems and livelihood”[115] are designated as follows: “[T]he human is a part of nature. From this follows respect for nature. […] It should be used but not used up, and bigger intrusions into it must not be undertaken”[116] and “humans are equal and should work together instead of oppressing each other.”[117] Those sentiments clearly echo the way in which Sámi culture is constructed in the texts accompanying the livelihood displays. They further reaffirm the influence “surrounding majorities”[118] had on Sámi culture and assign the responsibility for the ways in which Sámi had to adapt in every aspect of their lives to them: “Different degrees of majority intervention and influence have gradually led to some inequality

112 App. 18, orig.: “Schnitler, ca. 1740, nevner at så vel østsamene som flyttsamene i Pasvik selger skogsprodukter og fløter tømmer.”
113 Steinar Pedersen: NOU 1994: 21, Bruk av land og vann i Finnmark i historisk perspektiv – Bakgrunnsmateriale for Samerettsutvalget, https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/nou-1994-21/id374516/sec3. Accessed: 30.07.2021.
114 App. 19, orig.: “Det samiske samfunn”.
115 App. 19, orig.: “kommer fram i språket, den gamle religionen, duodji (kunst og håndverk), tradisjoner, samfunnsformer og i næringslivet“.
116 App. 20, orig.: “En av grunntankene hart vært at mennesket er en del av naturen. Av dette følger respekt for naturen. [...] Den må brukes men ikke forbrukes, og større inngrep må ikke foretas.”
117 App. 20, orig.: “mennesker er likestilte og skal samarbeide istedenfor å undertrykke hverandre“.
118 App. 21, orig.: “omkringliggende majoritetsfolk”.

among the Sámi."[119] While most of the text does not add anything new to the discourse on Sámi culture established in the exhibition so far, there are two passages that focus on variety within the Sámi culture, both 'natural' and enforced: "Variation in lifestyle and livelihoods entails a certain variation in working methods, objects, words, and expressions, as well as certain values. This variety is often mistakenly made into a question of ethnicity, when in fact it is local characteristics we are dealing with."[120] Common cultural identity traits have persisted through the forced cultural adaptations Sámi were subjected to, even if they are not always obvious: "Certain common characteristics one is aware of oneself. Others again one does not see because they are not in the same way visible like language or the costume."[121] In this last passage that also concludes the text panel, attention is drawn to varieties within Sámi culture and their expressions and, more importantly, they are declared valid. Not only that, but the texts provide reassurances that something or someone can be Sámi even if they do not look or sound like something else that is more commonly known as Sámi because some commonalities are simply not visible. This admission in combination with the vague phrasing 'surrounding majorities' makes it clear that this applies not only to Sámi in Norway but also to Sámi from all over Sápmi, who share this history of colonization and assimilation and have been affected by it in unique ways.

Another observation worth pointing out is the shift of tense between individual passages and themes: Passages on fundamental values in Sámi culture are written in a historic present and present perfect, i. e. without any temporal reference points, which signposts their ubiquity. Passages that deal with aspects of Sámi culture that have changed due to influences and pressure from outside are written in the past tense, marking that these processes of transformation are concluded. Variety among Sámi on the other hand as well as common, culture defining ideas belong both to the past and to the present day and are written in the present tense: They are continuous and "still"[122] here.

5.2.8 Duodji

The duodji exhibit is introduced by a framed text panel mounted to the wall projection that marks the separation between the transitory space and the exhibit. It is the first text panel that is not

119 App. 21, orig: "Ulik grad av majoritetsinngrep og påvirkning har etterhvert medført en del ulikhet blant samer".

120 App. 22, orig.: "Variasjon i levemåte og næringer medfører en viss variasjon i arbeidsformer, gjenstander, ord og uttryk, samt visse verdsettinger. Denne variasjon gjøres ofte ved en feiltagelse til et spørsmål om etnisk tilhørighet, mens det faktisk er lokale særpreg vi har å gjøre med."

121 App. 23, orig.: "Visse fellestrekk er en oppmerksomme på selv. Andre ser en igjen ikke fordi de ikke er synlige på samme måten som språket og drakten."

122 App. 23, orig.: "fortsatt".

written on an old typewriter but printed out, and it is also the first one to be available in English as well as Sámi and Norwegian. The text provides a short overview, describing the interconnectedness of lifestyle, nature, and handicraft and illustrates the prowess for handicraft among Sámi by drawing on examples of praise recorded through the centuries: “Snorre, a historywriter [sic] praises the boats that the Samis built for Sigurd Slembe in the 12th century”,[123] “the priest and the poet Petter Dass [(1647–1707)] mentions the Samis’ skills of handicraft”, as does Thomas von Westen (1682–1727), a Lutheran priest[124] Those references are notably different from the mention of Schnitler in the context of the Forest Sámi, as these historical figures are not only well known in their respective fields but also mentioned in the context of their professions, which makes it easier for the visitor to pin them down and evaluate their significance. Consequently, the validating effect of referencing these sources is slightly different to the validation provided by the mention of Schnitler earlier: In this case it is validation from outside of Sámi culture and especially skill, not of their economic presence and importance. This is all the more remarkable if the visitor has heard of Petter Dass and Thomas von Westen before: They were two of the main driving forces behind the early Sámi mission.

Translating Duodji as ‘Sámi handicraft’ is a make-shift solution in lack of a better option. Duodji is not merely handicraft but

“a concept that covers deeper layers of meaning, representing also a comprehensive view of life and culture. […] [It] refers to a whole range of practical, social and spiritual activities, whereas the gathering, working and use of materials […] [is] part of the Sámi theory of knowledge and belief systems. In this regard, duodji is both the creation of the object and the object itself.”[125]

5.2.9 Variations of Duodji

These conceptions of duodji are reflected both in the open room design that allows livelihoods, religion, and lifestyle to overlap and the installation of two murals by Jåks that invoke the presence of the mythological plane by depicting various symbols found on Sámi drums as well as in the

123 The same incident is referenced in relation to display of wood working tools as well, but in that case, Snorre’s statement is validated by the museum in a rare instant of using a personal pronoun within a text: “We can undoubtedly consolidate Snorre’s assertion a little because it is probable that a hunting and trapping people like the Sámi soon depended on learning to built a vessel that was seaworthy.” (App. 24, orig.: “Snorres omtale […] kan vi utvilsomt feste litt fordi det er sannsynnlig at et jakt- og fangstfolk som samene, tidlig var nødt til å lære seg å lage en farkost som var sjødyktig.”).

124 App. 25.

125 Alta Museum: Time For Sculpture #1. 2021.

choice of the neighboring displays that foreground the tools necessary for the production of the duodji objects on display, like woodworking tools and a weaving chair.

Accordingly, the main group of duodji displays a total of 13 showcases, both mounted on wall and standing on the ground, comprises both duodji tools and duodji artifacts, which are organized by material. The individual display cases are interspersed with text panels that mirror the structure of those found in the livelihood display, i. e. they provide both background information and reference tables, with the distinction that the texts are also translated into English. The information imparted in the texts concerns for the most part knowledge about the different materials used, describing the properties of different kinds of wood and different parts of the reindeer antlers, explaining their different application areas and describing various methods of processing them.

Because no information beyond a basic description of their function is provided in the reference tables, many of the objects on display remain anonymous. This in mostly due to the fact that more information about them was simply not available to the curators on the first place – indeed in some cases the reference tables explicitly label the origin as ‘unknown’. Yet, these circumstances do not change the way the objects ultimately function: They serve mainly as representatives of cultural practices or as different expressions of the same culture, underlining the variety within duodji. Because there is much more information provided in the reference tables for some of the artifacts than for others, it becomes clear that many of them are chosen with the purpose of including cultural representations for the different parts of Sápmi, reasserting that these distinct groups are nevertheless part of Sámi culture, however varied they might be in their conception. This mirrors the choice of costumes displayed in the costume exhibit and echoes the proclamation of diversity within the common frame of Sámi culture made by the stand-alone text panels on Sámi society and duodji.

Having stressed the importance of the creative process and material choices within duodji, the inconsistency of situating the objects geographically within Sápmi is striking. Mounts 6 and 7 of this display group are very well suited to illustrate this point. They display knives from different Sámi areas and are accompanied by reference tables for the numbered plates attached to the knives, which label them as from “Sweden”, “Finland”, “Kautokeino”, “Soppero, Sweden”, “Karasjok”, “Tysfjord”, and “Lovozero, Russia” or as “Northern Sámi”, “Unknown” and “Southern Sámi” (see App 1916, 1925), mixing national, local, and geographical categories. According to the maps available to the visitor, however, the Sámi areas culturally most distinct are comprised of ‘Southern Sámi, ‘Lule Sámi, ‘Northern Sámi’ and ‘Eastern Sámi’, which in turn stretch over several national borders. This means that the category ‘Northern Sámi’, for example, includes the possibilities of being from Norway, Sweden or Finland, while ‘being from Finland’ potentially means Northern,

Eastern or Inari Sámi. For someone who does not know which traits are typical for knifes made by Inari, Northern, and Eastern Sámi respectively and who wants to learn more about them, labeling a knife as ‘from Finland’ is arguably almost on par with labeling it ‘unknown’, at least in regard to cultural positioning. While one could assume that this might be the only information available to the curators – after all, the visitor does not know how the object at hand found its way into the collection –, instants in which the duodjar, the person who created the knife, is known and even named prove that this is not the case for all the objects that were labeled in reference to their nationality: Knives made by Petteri Laiti for example are simply labeled ‘Finland’. The mixed use of geographic, cultural, and personal situating is likely confusing for some and contributes to the notion of placelessness already discussed.

Considering the importance of geographic data for the objects themselves, this is all the more attention grabbing: Their geographic origin is important for their history and meaning. Museums and especially the Sámi Museum, which covers a cultural area stretching over four different nation states, collect objects from many different areas; it is therefore self-evident that tracing their travel routes is meaningful to tell their stories. This is especially true for decolonization processes in regard to museum practices: A lot of Indigenous artifacts that were collected and exhibited as anonymous objects by Westerners for the purpose of showcasing exotic otherness and subsequently lost their history and meaning.

Figure 15: Mount 7 in the Duodji Exhibit: 8 knives from 3 potentially 4 national states and 4 areas.(own picture)

5.2.10 Sámi Equipage

The last display before the tour through the permanent exhibition comes full circle is one of the most popular and widespread representations of ‘Sámi’: A Sámi equipage in form of a taxidermied reindeer pulling a male mannequin in a sleigh. This mode of display puts the individual objects into a life-like context, showcasing not only Sámi winter clothing, a traditionally crafted sleigh, and a beautifully handcrafted reindeer tack, but also illustrating their use. It further reinforces the close connection of Sámi culture and nature that has been promoted by the previous displays and texts by illustrating the close collaboration between the two. A cultured, domesticated and highly respected form of nature is represented by the taxidermied reindeer that is working together with the Sámi and that is adorned with an intricate and colorful tack, while a wild, unbound and undomesticated representation of nature in form of a taxidermied eagle is flying freely above their heads.

Figure 16: Sámi equipage and mural by Iver Jåks, sieidi in the back corner (own picture)

Similar to the riverboat diorama, a large mural by Iver Jåks constitutes the background and context for the display. In distinction from the other big mural, this one does not depict rock carvings from Alta but drawings from various Sámi drums, thereby invoking once more the mythological landscape that the door handle and the relief in the entrance area established. It is further noteworthy that this mannequin is the only mannequin apart from the one in the riverboat diorama that is provided with distinct facial features: He is more than a characterless placeholder for Sámi clothing and a vehicle for the presentation of daily use of objects typical of Sámi culture. He is a character, if not a historical one still a real one. Pairing him with a mythological landscape establishes a connection between the ‘real’ world and the mythological world in a similar way in which this was achieved in the entrance area, where the mythological relief is juxtaposed with films of Sámi building techniques. Ultimately, Sámi ontology and the concurrence of the mythological

and the earthly as well as their close connection is promoted once more. This interpretation is supported by the placement of a sieidi in the corner behind the display, which in this case is left to stand on its own, without being confined to a display case. Theoretically, this allows the visitor to interact with it, to make a sacrifice and to establish contact with the otherworld.

All those inferences, the visitors have to make on their own because there is no text or explanation accompanying the diorama. There is, however, a slight hint provided by the placing of the sieidi: Another sieidi is grouped with the Sámi drum, inviting to make some connections between the scene at hand and Sámi mythology.

Another aspect of this portrayal of Sámi culture, i. e. as predominantly concerned with reindeer herding, is its familiarity, the impression of having seen it before. Displays of reindeer sleigh dioramas have a long and somewhat chequered history since they were even used as living exhibitions.[126] In ethnographic and National museums they often served to create and stress an 'exotic' difference between the visitor and the exhibited ethnicity. One of the most persisting stereotypes about Sámi involves and it is built upon the extensive use of the stereotype of Sámi as reindeer herders, rendering the reindeer an icon of Sámi culture. Consequently, even when used by the cultural in-group itself in order strengthen Sámi identity and to convey knowledge about Sámi culture, this representation not only plays into existing stereotypes but reinforces the assumption that being involved with reindeer is typically Sámi. However, as is pointed out at an earlier point in the exhibition in one of the lecterns in the Costume Exhibit, most Sámi today are not involved in reindeer herding at all.

To sum up the findings of this second part of the analysis: Generally speaking, in this exhibition, Sámi culture and identity is often conceptualized in terms of a variety of subgroups with large unifying overlaps, a close and respectful relationship with nature, and in clear distinction to Norwegians and other majorities. Prominent discourses involve romanticizing the past by employing negative imagery of majorities in general and Norwegians in particular and their negative transformative impact on Sámi lifestyle. The creation of an ideal past and the repeated mention of how the Sámi had to adapt their lifestyles in a negative way due to external circumstances leaves a faint impression of weariness in regard to cultural change, which is reinforced by the prominent display of Aslak poling his boat up the river in a time when the majority of Sámi boats is equipped with a motor. This impression is contrasted by statements made

126 See f.ex. Cathrine Baglo: Reconstruction as trope of cultural display – Rethinking the role of "living exhibitions". In: Nordisk Museologi 2. 2015.

in the costume exhibit, where it is made unmistakably clear that change is important for the development of Sámi culture.

The various displays employ different modes of meaning making to address different aspects of Sámi culture and identity, creating cultural reference points by positioning the exhibited objects in relation to different contexts – geographically, historically, contemporary, linguistically, ontologically – or using cultural reference points as symbols for overlying cultural experiences, as has been shown in relation with the Sámi drum.

In tune with the museum's overall conception, many of these cultural reference points and contexts are communicated non-verbally. Consequently, the visitor has to participate very actively in the meaning making process of the cultural encounter they find themselves in. Depending on the visitor’s personal background, those encounters progress in very different way: In order to successfully extract many of the meanings and allusions provided in the individual exhibits, they have to be equipped with a lot of previous cultural knowledge. Otherwise their understanding remains shallow, as has been illustrated at length in regard to Jåks’ artwork, both inside and outside of the exhibition. Since many of the cultural codes necessary for a deeper level of understanding are not substituted through the texts that accompany the exhibits and some of the objects are left to speak completely for themselves, like the Sámi Equipage or the sieidi, the question arises for whom the museum is actually intended. Since many of the meanings promoted in the exhibits are not always coherent and clearly reveal some gaps, which cannot be filled without extensive in-group knowledge, a critical discussion of the results gained form the analysis is necessary in order to to answer the fundamental question that emerged during the field work of this project: For whom does the museum facilitate cultural encounters?

5.3 Discussion: Displayed Withholding

While it has become clear that the museum generally facilitates cultural encounters, it has also come to light that not everyone is invited to them to the same degree. This applies especially to visitors who, for one reason or another, lack knowledge about Sámi culture. Many of the modes the museum employs in its exhibitions to create meaning speak exclusively to cultural insiders or those equipped with enough in-group knowledge to decipher these meanings. When cultural codes are missing, visitors usually turn to the texts that accompany the exhibitions for complementary information, be it in form of informative and detailed wall displays, titles or labels. Those texts are the main point of contact for visitors without sufficient command of the required cultural codes, and when they are not available, the meaning of the employed mode remains shrouded. Those culturally encrypted messages are shown to the visitor in form of objects or murals but not explained: The sieidi grouped with the reindeer for example is literally within the visitor's reach, but its meaning remains ultimately unattainable for those who do not already know what it signifies. This behavior has been termed 'displayed withholding' by Mary Lawlor,[127] a concept that Bryoni Onciul further identifies as a decolonizing strategy within Indigenous museum practices. In her view, it reminds non-Indigenous

"visitors of their 'place' within the exhibit. The community, despite being in an unequal power relationship with dominant society, publicly asserts their power to define themselves and their 'Others', using the displays to mark the boundaries between 'Us' and 'Them', reversing the colonial lens."[128]

Even though sieidis are not sites of worship anymore, knowledge about the location of still existing sieidi sites is often kept secret within the Sámi community. For some Sámi, sieidis are important parts of everyday-life because they comprise an integral part of landscape memory: For example, "[n]omadic reindeer herders navigate in the landscape by remembering the places, their names, events and stories linked to the places and by identifying the natural formations."[129] On the assumption that knowledge about sieidis is widespread within the Sámi community, because of the their continuing use , it appears that this is a conscious and deliberate choice of the museum to not to explain anything to the uninitiated about the sieidis: This knowledge is not meant for everybody. From this perspective, labeling the sieidi for the Sámi is unnecessary and labeling it for non-Sámi visitors is beside the point.

127 Mary Lawlor: Public Native America: Tribal Self-Representations in Casinos, Museums, and Powwows. 2006.
128 Onciul 2015, p. 190.
129 Klemetti Näkkäläjärvi and Pekka Kauppala: Sacred Sites of the Sámi – Linking Past, Present and Future.

Other, more subtle instances of withholding information include the Shaman symbols outside the museum and at its threshold. To the initiated, the door handle of the entrance door marks a passageway into a place that is at the same time mythological as well as this-worldly and promises to offer and mediate cultural knowledge from a Sámi perspective. Indicators that the visitor moves in this ambiguous space, at least while they are in the main exhibition room, pile up in form of the mythological reliefs in the entrance area and murals in the exhibition featuring shaman symbols, the strategic placement of a sieidi, and the conscious and pointed positioning of those otherworldly markers together with earthly, everyday-life objects.

At the same time, the mere inclusion of a sieidi – in case of the Sámi Museum even two – can also be seen as the perpetuation of Western display practices in regard to Sámi representation.[130] This notion is enhanced by the lack of information given about the sieidi: By keeping sacred cultural knowledge within the group, the museum also partakes in an anonymous exhibition practice that was so common for Western museums in regard to Indigenous heritage. In earlier ethnographic exhibitions, Indigenous objects were usually displayed without reference to their origin, effectively denying their respective cultures the capability to evolve.[131] For the sake of clarity, it should be pointed out although many of the other artifacts are carefully labeled, especially in the costume and duodji exhibits, where objects have a very personal connections to their makers and owners.

However, this strategy of displayed withholding or withholding certain cultural codes is somewhat questionable in the light of current debates on Sámi identity and affiliation, especially in regard of Sámi who do not live in Sápmi and do not have access to an active Sámi cultural scene: If they were to visit the museum, how are they supposed to built a positive Sámi identity if they do not understand and therefore cannot connect to the heritage on display? Like many other contemporary issues, Sámi who live outside of Sápmi are scarcely mentioned and not represented at all. While some group-internal quarreling is addressed in one of the costume lecterns, namely contentions about who is allowed to wear the Sámi dress and if language should be a qualifying requirement, the museum very carefully retains a neutral stance, merely pointing out that there are competing opinions. Instead, the museum draws the attention back to the costumes and their origins and histories to stress their common factor: All those costumes had to be reclaimed and remembered, providing a unifying experience despite its varied processes and results. The promotion of a unified variety in Sámi culture is an important focus for the museum in its quest to create a positive vision of Sámi identity. This is all the more challenging for the museum because it involves a set of clashing discourses: The museum wants to instill cultural pride in light of a harsh history of

130 See Eva Silvén: Contested Sami heritage: drums and sieidis on the move. 2012.

131 Bjørnar Olsen: Norwegian archaeology and the people without (pre-)history: or how to create a myth of a uniform past. In Critical concepts in heritage 2007. S. 15-17.

colonization and cultural shaming. If it tells stories about suppression and persecution, they can be interpreted in two ways, either as stories of victimization or as displays of strength and continuity. By stressing the resilience and continuity of Sámi presence repeatedly and in different ways, sometimes more explicitly, often rather subtle, the museum tries to make sure that the latter interpretation prevails.

None if this is to say that contemporary issues are not reflected in the exhibition, even if it not explicitly address them. As it has been shown, the very architecture of the museum makes it clear that the contemporary art exhibit is an integral component of the permanent exhibition. As a consequence, contemporary issues that are addressed in the art exhibit are also part of the discourse on Sámi identity the museum provides. Apart from that, contextualizing the displays with each other and paying attention to intertextual[132] references proofs to be the key to extracting other allusions to contemporary issues, like, for example, debates on land use: Putting the statements made in the texts in context with the rock carvings in Alta invokes the unspoken argument 'Sámi have been here for at least 6000 years and there is proof of it carved into the surface of the earth'. It is politically meaningful to ascertain that one's claim to the territory outdates the national states.

The permanent exhibitions of the Sámi Museum in Karasjok date mostly back to the 1980s and 1990s, a time when the main focus was the "development and strengthening of the Sámi's awareness of their own cultural foundation, their own identity".[133] In addition, the political and social landscape today is decidedly different from how it was when the museum was opened: "In 1972, the new building had, for the very first time, given people a feeling of freedom to speak their own language and exercise their own culture on their own terms, and that at a time when this was not a given."[134] Effectively this means that the exhibits were mainly conceived in a time when recognizing Sámi heritage as valuable and a source of pride was still an emerging notion and some parts of the exhibits are likely to address contemporary issues from the time of their conception. Who knows how those discourses would be approached today? But simply updating or extending on the exhibition is hard, if not impossible, for the Sámi museum, because of its severe lack of resources: First, it is sorely underfunded, a situation that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the fact that the Norwegian government repeatedly neglected the inclusion of the Sámi Museum in Karasjok (and other Sámi museums) into the Corona aid packages it distributed to

132 Intertextual means here in keeping with the methods used in the analysis not merely written texts, but other forms of cultural expression.

133 Astrid Andresen; Bjørg Evjen & Teemu Ryymin: Samenes Historie: Fra 1751 til 2010. 2021.Samenes Historie, p. 21. Orig.: "utbygging og forsterking av samenes bevisshet om sitt eget kulturgrunnlag, sin egen identitet".

134 Mulighetsrapport, p. 14. Orig.: "Nybygget i 1972 hadde for første gang gitt folk en følelse av frihet til å snakke sitt eget språk og utøve sin kultur på egne premisser i en tid da dette ikke var selvsagt."

museums in Norway.[135] This calls to mind that while the Sámi Museum in Karasjok is a Sámi curated and administered museum, it is still dependent on the Norwegian Government. Secondly, and in relation to this state of chronic underfunding, the building itself is no longer fully functional because it has not been properly renovated in a very long time: “The museum buildings of the Sámi Museum in Karasjok have substantial technical deficits, with the result that a former exhibition room in the basement had to be closed for visitors and there is a risk for artifacts to be damaged.”[136] The extent of those deficiencies is in fact so great that the Bååstede Repatriation Project had to stay the physical return of 750–1000 artifacts to the Sámi Museum “because the museum building in Karasjok does not meet the requirements for preservation.”[137]

While its extensive and diverse collection of Sámi heritage, its central position in Sápmi, and its self-administration put the Sámi Museum in Karasjok in a great position to make considerable contributions to critical discourses on Sámi culture and identity as well as Indigenous museum practices, much of its potential remains untapped due to its severe lack of resources. Revisiting its exhibitions at a time when it’s fully functional might significantly change some observations made during this study

135 https://www.nrk.no/sapmi/samiske-museer-nok-en-gang-utelatt-av-regjeringens-tilskudd_-_-vi-er-ikke-eksisterende-1.15492177
https://www.nrk.no/sapmi/regjeringen-glemte-a-gi-korona-penger-til-samiske-museer-1.15196918

136 Mulighetstudie, p. 9. Orig.: “Museumsbygningene for SVD har vesentlige tekniske mangler, slik at et tidligere utstillingsareal i kjelleren er nå stengt for publikum og det er risiko for at museumsgjenstander kan bli skadet.”

137 Mulighetsstudie, p. 12. Orig.: “fordi museumsbygget i Karasjok ikke tilfredsstiller kravene til bevaring.”

6 Conclusion

Beyond any doubt, Sámi museums play an important role in the (re)establishment and strengthening of the Sámi community. The Sámi Museum in Karasjok showcases Sámi history and culture from a Sámi perspective and employs multiple strategies to decolonize museum practices. It foregrounds a Sámi approach to knowledge dissemination by integrating Sámi ontology into the entire museum space. At the same time, it is crucial to keep in mind that the question of cultural identity it grapples with is a complex one and its resources are limited. In case of the Sámi Museum in Karasjok, they are indeed very limited, both in regard to manpower, exhibition space and depository possibilities. But even if it had more resources available, a museum can never lay claim to completeness for several reasons: Firstly, when regarding it as a contact zone, as a place that is in constant dialogue both with its visitors as wells as with its community, it has to be acknowledged that the process of negotiating meaning never comes to an end. Meanings change over time and discourses have to be adjusted. Secondly, it is simply not possible to provide an exhaustive (re)collection of everything Sámi, so choices have to be made. Those choices are determined by the purpose the museum has and they will necessarily influence who is included in the presented vision of Sámi identity and who is not. RDM's director Anne May Olli states that the purpose of the Sámi Museum in Karasjok is clearly the promotion of a positive self-perception of Sámi identity and pride in Sámi cultural heritage. Creating a coherent, smooth, and most of all recognizable vision of Sámi identity is an inevitable step in reaching that goal. Doing so, on the other hand, entails using highly visible cultural markers, like Sámi costumes and reindeer, which also play into existing stereotypes and possibly exclude Sámi who do not identify with either of those markers. Concentrating on the promotion of unified variety within the Sámi community, the Sámi Museum in Karasjok excludes many contemporary issues that would threaten this idea of unity. As Nina Potinkara aptly puts it:

"Discussing internal diversities and controversies, multi-ethnic identities or problems in self-identification would result in a less clear image of what it means to be a Sámi. However, by concentrating on unity museums may exclude experiences of some Sámi individuals and contribute to internal hierarchies and hegemonies within Sámi communities."[138]

The Sàmi Museum's collection of Sámi artifacts is already the most extensive compared to other Sámi institutions, and with the upcoming conclusion of the Bååstede Repatriation Project it is bound to become even bigger. This will entail more objects to chose from for new exhibitions and will provide the museum with the opportunity to rearrange its permanent exhibition to include the

138 Potinkara 2020, p. 2153.

repatriated artifacts. The choices the Sámi Museum makes in its future exhibition are all the more meaningful because of the scope of its influence: The museum does not only offer a vision of Sámi culture and identity to members of the Sámi community, but also to visitors with little or no previous knowledge about the Sámi, thereby actively and continuously determining how outsiders perceive Sámi culture and how they understand Sámi identity.

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