Tourism as a livelihood diversification strategy among Sámi indigenous people in northern Sweden

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ABSTRACT

Tourism entrepreneurship is frequently promoted as a livelihood strategy for Sámi indigenous people living in northern Sweden. At the same time, tourism’s ability to fully take over struggling primary sectors has been brought into question, due perhaps to a mismatch of skills or to tourism’s seasonality and low pay. In spite of that, the role of tourism development might relate less to financial autonomy but could best be characterized as being supplementary and complementary to other occupations. Additionally, the motivations behind tourism involvement among Sámi tourist entrepreneurs remain largely unknown. This interview-based study therefore aims to uncover why Sámi indigenous tourist entrepreneurs living in northern Sweden get involved in tourism and to what extent tourism is part of a livelihood diversification strategy. The findings show that a combination of factors such as lifestyle choices, existing touristic demand and readily available forms of capital lead people to become tourist entrepreneurs. At the same time, for some respondents, tourism is part of a livelihood diversification strategy where its development is not sought for replacing a struggling traditional occupation, namely reindeer herding, but for complementing it.

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Introduction

Tourism entrepreneurship is frequently promoted as a livelihood strategy for indigenous peoples living in areas with limited other economic opportunities (Notzke 1999; Karlsdottir et al. 2017). In northern Sweden, due to structural changes in the primary sector, jobs which were historically dominant such as mining, forestry and, for Sámi indigenous people, reindeer herding, no longer employ as many individuals as they did half a century ago or longer (Johansson and Lundgren 1998; Müller 2013). Given the tourism industry’s success at creating employment opportunities in other parts of the world (Jenkins, Hall, and Troughton 1998), it is expected to be a way to move forward by curbing outmigration of young people and helping maintain services to the otherwise struggling sparsely populated areas in northern Sweden as well. When it comes to Sámi
indigenous people living in such areas very little is actually known regarding tourism entrepreneurship. While recent evidence shows that among Sámi with a reindeer herder background, tourism jobs were more prevalent than geographically matched people with a farmer (i.e. non-indigenous) background (Leu and Müller 2016), the reasons for tourism entrepreneurship remain speculative. Particularly unexplored is the industry’s role in relieving employment gaps resulting from declines in other primary sectors.

Tourism’s positive impact on employment in northern Sweden has been addressed in previous studies. For example, the relative importance of tourism employment for the labour market has been shown to be greater in the Swedish north than in the south (Müller and Ulrich 2007), with tourism-centred mountain localities being most successful at attracting in-migrants (Lundmark 2006a). At the same time, numerous studies looking at tourism development in the region have pointed towards tourism’s inability to fully take over struggling primary sectors, due perhaps to a mismatch of skills. For example, a decline in male dominated mining and forestry jobs cannot easily be offset by an increase in service-oriented tourism jobs, as that likely does not involve the same individuals (Müller 2013), or due to tourism’s seasonality and low-pay (Lundmark 2006b). This leads to questioning the role of tourism development in the north, at least when looking at full-time employment potential.

Most existing approaches to tourism entrepreneurship in the Swedish north look at tourism through a rural restructuring lens where tourism is investigated through its ability to provide steady full-time employment and take over declining sectors. Investigations into economic benefits which might relate less to financial autonomy but would best be characterized as supplementary and complementary to other occupations are lacking. Such concepts do not fit well in the traditional view of economic development in which sectors are unique, easily separated from each other and the transition between them is easily observed as one gives way to another (Ellis 1998). As such, it is unclear to what extent tourism should be looked at in isolation, separately from, or regarded as replacing other economic activities. In reality, people living in rural areas, including indigenous peoples, often rely on more than one source of income for their livelihoods (Tao 2006; Wall and Mathieson 2006). Stated as far back as 1993, Butler revealed the importance of taking into account the entire human and physical environment in which tourism takes place, including other activities and social relations. Only when all components are seen at the same time can we get a truer understanding of tourism as a livelihood strategy (Tao and Wall 2009a). Therefore, approaches that favour a closer investigation into the complementarity of tourism entrepreneurship are needed.

Currently in northern Sweden, studies on rural development in general, and on tourism in particular, seem to lack a framework that recognizes the occupational diversity necessary for successful livelihoods. The sustainable rural livelihood (SL) approach reveals how distinct conditions combined with available livelihood resources enable households living in rural areas to pursue specific livelihood strategies resulting in a variety of outcomes (Scoones 1998, 2009; Wu and Pearce 2014). From this approach, different hypotheses arise related to possible motivations behind tourism as a livelihood strategy, among which is tourism as a livelihood diversification strategy. This study aims to investigate such premises, namely to uncover the motivations behind tourism entrepreneurship among Sámi indigenous people living in northern Sweden. The specific research questions
addressed are why do Sámi entrepreneurs get involved in tourism? And to what extent is tourism part of a livelihood diversification strategy among Sámi tourist entrepreneurs living in northern Sweden? These questions are answered through semi-structured interviews with Sámi tourist entrepreneurs in the three northernmost counties of Sweden: Jämtland, Västerbotten and Norrbotten. The people interviewed are indigenous Sámi tourist entrepreneurs living in northern Sweden where, compared to the rest of Sweden, the connection to reindeer herding remains strongest, even among Sámi who are not directly involved in it.

There are many ways of conceptualizing indigenous tourism (Lemelin, Koster, and Youroukos 2015) and different problems require different approaches (Scoones 2009). The SL approach was chosen here due to its inclusion of different livelihood strategies, including strategies that go beyond single sector approaches of rural restructuring, which dominate discourse in Sweden. Additionally, the SL approach is a capitals-based approach (Bennett et al. 2012) where livelihood strategies are explicitly linked to existing forms of capital that enable or prohibit the pursuit of different strategies. The explicit connection to available forms of capital and tourism entrepreneurship is unique and previously unexplored in a Sámi indigenous context.

The sustainable rural livelihoods framework

According to Scoones (1998, 2009), the sustainable rural livelihoods concept is important in discussions related to rural development worldwide. A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base (Scoones 1998, 5).

The central components of the framework are as follows: the context and conditions that frame a livelihood; the livelihood resources available, such as social, human and natural capital; organizations and institutions, both formal and informal; and the final two components, livelihood strategies and livelihood outcomes. Livelihood strategies are the actions that are undertaken based on existing capitals or assets and influenced by the various institutions and organizations. According to Scoones (1998) these are agricultural intensification, migration and livelihood diversification. The final component of the framework is made up of the livelihood outcomes that emerge from the adoption of various livelihood strategies. The outcomes can be of economic significance, such as financial independence, as well as non-economic importance, such as social and cultural benefits. This paper focuses mainly on tourism as a livelihood diversification strategy and its economic component. For a complementary work focusing on the non-economic benefits of the same interview data see Leu, Eriksson, and Müller (2018).

Rural livelihood diversification as a livelihood strategy

Rural economies in western nations faced significant changes in the latter half of the twentieth century. Rationalization and the increased emphasis on efficiency and profit meant many rural households had to adopt certain strategies in order to survive. Such strategies often consisted of either abandoning the farm and migrating, or somehow adjusting to
the new economic reality (Woods 2011). Many did abandon the rural areas and large migration patterns to urban areas have been observed in all western nations (Woods 2011). For those households that remained in the primary sector, difficulties persisted in terms of making a living. As a result, a common response of households has been to intensify production (Scoones 1998). However, in addition to this, a separate strategy relates to the diversification of the rural household economy. Primary sector occupations suffer from certain reoccurring aspects related to income instability. It is highly variable and unpredictable both from year to year as well as within each year, and income failure is a constant risk among farmers, for example. Diversification of the rural income base can be expected to offset this variability and unpredictability by one or more family members working in non-farm jobs (Ellis 1998). Livelihood diversification has been recognized as a useful and realistic way rural households can advance their livelihoods (Lee 2008), while maintaining their rural identity (Brandth and Haugen 2011). Rural livelihood diversification strategies are often observed in developed countries (Benjamin 1994; Hearn, McNamara, and Gunter 1996; Kinsella et al. 2000; Brandth and Haugen 2011), including Sweden where more than half of all farmers are also engaged in off-farm jobs (Blåd 2014).

According to Ellis (1998, 4) “livelihood diversification is defined as the process by which rural families construct a diverse portfolio of activities and social support capabilities in their struggle for survival and in order to improve their standards of living”, without migration as an alternative strategy. The livelihood portfolio can be comprised of a narrow set of related activities or they can be quite distinct from one another (Scoones 1998). As explained by Scoones (1998), the level of relatedness of all activities is often dictated by the available resources or the risks households are willing to take. Livelihood diversification among rural households is common and its success can be assessed through the fact that it is both a voluntary strategy as well as long-term (Ellis 1998). However, it can vary locally and serves as a particularly important survival strategy for sparsely populated areas (Eikeland 1999).

In rural areas where households rely on a mix of available economic opportunities, tourism entrepreneurship can be part of the mix where it can complement instead of replace existing economic opportunities (Wall and Mathieson 2006; Wu and Pearce 2014); this includes remote ethnic minorities relying on traditional semi-nomadic livelihoods (Suntikul and Dorji 2016). The concept of tourism as a livelihood diversification strategy has been detailed by Tao (2006) and Tao and Wall (2009b). According to Tao (2006, 36), livelihood diversification has many benefits, and:

… tourism can become: (1) a means to enable accumulation (e.g. income) for consumption and investment; (2) a means to help spread risk; (3) an adaptive response to longer-term declines in income entitlements, due to serious economic or environmental changes beyond local control; and/or (4) a means to take pressure off fragile lands and increase household incomes for purchase of additional food or payment of school fees.

A profusion of research worldwide revealed various components of the sustainable livelihood framework as vital in tourism development for struggling communities. For example, institutional processes, especially informal ones, can be important particularly for the development of small tourism businesses. In a traditional fishing community in Hong Kong, access to property, to set up a stand for example, was best facilitated through kinship and friendship relations (Liu, Cheng, and Cheung 2017). Cavlek, Ladkin, and
Willis (2017) show the weight of historical context and existing available capital to present-day tourism entrepreneurial activity faced with changing economic conditions in Croatia. The authors discuss the importance of being multilingual, and especially pre-existing knowledge of English and German is important for the transition into tourism entrepreneurship. Additionally, the study shows reasons for people getting involved in tourism were often to continue a family tradition and love for their existing lifestyle, in this case revolving round seafaring (Cavlek, Ladkin, and Willis 2017). Among indigenous peoples, reasons for tourism entrepreneurship can be for basic survival, while for others it is to defend and maintain indigenous values (Pereiro 2016).

Outcomes of diversification of a rural economy into tourism can relate to identity as well. Masculinity (and its association with the rural) among Norwegian men working in forestry for example, was altered as logging was replaced with service-oriented entrepreneurial jobs (mostly associated with the feminine and urban) (Brandth and Haugen 2005). In different works, the same authors note that farm tourism has the potential to undo gendered work tasks (Brandth and Haugen 2010), but also that the farmer identity in general often endures the shift towards tourism hosting (Brandth and Haugen 2011). In terms of indigenous identity, through presenting Sámi culture to tourists, Sámi entrepreneurs keep their culture alive by being more immersed in it than otherwise would be the case (Leu, Eriksson, and Müller 2018; Tuulentie 2006). Tourism as investigated in this article refers to “the aggregate of all businesses that directly provide goods or services to facilitate business, pleasure, and leisure activities away from the home environment” (Smith 1988, 183). Indigenous tourism refers to tourism activities with direct involvement by indigenous peoples (Butler and Hinch 2007), with handicrafts being one of the components (V. Smith 1996).

By portraying tourism entrepreneurship as part of a diverse combination of opportunities accessible in rural areas, the sustainable rural livelihood framework can also aid policy-makers. As policies can influence tourism development they can also influence how much tourism can be part of a livelihood diversification strategy. Policy implications of tourism as livelihood diversification relate to expanding the sphere commonly understood as being encompassed by rural occupations. As such, policy objectives can aim to remove the constraints to diversification and help its development (Ellis 1998). Diversification as a strategy is a break with previous practices in Sweden which highlighted fulltime employment and specialization as an integrated part of modernization. For those unable to do that, migration to urban areas in the south was considered the only alternative. Hence, diversification can influence the ability of Sámi indigenous people to remain in the area and maintain a connection to their traditional lifestyles. Place identity and belonging to a place may be more significant among indigenous peoples given their histories of displacement and dispossession (Nash 2002). The idea of diversification marks a challenge to long-lasting ideas of gainful work within the Swedish welfare state, which endure within the primary sector and in sparsely populated areas.

**Research context: northern Sweden within the sustainable rural livelihood framework**

As part of the SL approach, the context forms a basic element, and the sparse population and rurality that make up the study area are central elements in the setting. The three
northern-most counties in Sweden, Jämtland, Västerbotten and Norrbotten have a total population of about 650,000, which comprises around 6.5% of Sweden’s total population (Statistics Sweden 2017a), but together make up around 45% of Sweden’s land area. Estimates regarding the total Sámi population in Sweden are around 20,000 (Axelsson and Sköld 2006), with many Sámi living in urban centres all over the country (Pedersen and Nyseth 2012), and no estimate exists on the number of Sámi living in the three northern-most counties. Only a few Sámi today, about 10–15%, are engaged in reindeer herding, however it is inextricably linked to Sámi history, trade and present day culture (Labba and Jernsletten 2004; Axelsson and Sköld 2006; Beach 2007), and therefore features prominently in the discussion among Sámi tourist entrepreneurs below.

The livelihood resources accessible to Sámi tourist entrepreneurs in northern Sweden relate to different forms of capital and concern indigeneity and traditional occupations. Demand for Sámi-related touristic products and experiences has increased in previous decades (Pettersson 2002; Pettersson and Viken 2007), making ties to indigeneity and skills related to reindeer herding valuable forms of human capital for some Sámi entrepreneurs living in the north. Social capital, in the form of networks and connections, might differ between members of the Sámi community and non-Sámi, with the Sámi community being considered more communal in nature (Rønning 2007), especially true among reindeer herding Sámi (Nordin 2007; Åhrén 2008). Regarding social capital in tourism, even though there is a long history of indigenous tourism entrepreneurship in Sápmi (the Sámi homeland in northern Fennoscandia), ties and partnerships are few. Tourist entrepreneurs in the north are typically made up of micro-firms (Müller and Hoppstadius 2017) and are said to lack large tourism businesses that would “take the lead”, have larger regional influences on decision making, help consolidate more formal networks, and have a “mobilizing role” (Brouder 2012; Müller and Brouder 2014).

An important part of livelihood resources is the accessibility to economic capital (Scoones 1998), unlike indigenous groups in other parts of the world, material standards and economic assets among the Sámi in Sweden do not differ considerably from the population at large (Axelsson and Sköld 2006). Sweden’s membership to the European Union also meant a lot of investment in tourism development (Almstedt, Lundmark, and Pettersson 2016), including projects aimed towards indigenous activities such as Interreg Sápmi, for example. Additionally, northern Sweden is readily accessible with relatively good infrastructure, including paved roads, airports and public transportation (Müller and Pettersson 2001). At the same time, the region is perceived as Europe’s “last wilderness”, natural and unspoiled (Müller and Huuva 2009), attributes which are considered effective tourist attractions (Blomgren and Sørensen 1998). This forms the natural capital that makes certain nature-based tourism activities such as hunting and fishing in the summer and snowmobiling and dogsledding in the winter possible (Niskala and Ridanpää 2016). Currently, no study has looked in more detail at the existence of such capitals and their role in motivating and enabling tourism entrepreneurship in sparsely populated areas of Sweden.

Institutional processes and organizational structures comprise an important component of rural livelihoods. Economic policies related to deregulation during the second half of the last century have resulted in a gradual decrease of the importance of the public sector in Sweden. This had a negative effect on many sparsely populated regions in Sweden (Pettersson 2002). However, employment in the public sector continued to
be important in Sweden’s sparsely populated regions, where by the turn of the century it was still around 40% (Wiberg 1994). Nonetheless, population decline and aging, which still characterize the region (Statistics Sweden 2017b), have negative socioeconomic consequences and policymakers and planners constantly look for solutions, such as entrepreneurship, outside state institutions and organizations.

Methods

This study presents findings from 13 semi-structured interviews with Sámi indigenous tourist entrepreneurs. These make up to a third of all Sámi tourist companies in Sweden (cf. Müller and Hoppstadius 2017). Interviewee selection was done by consulting representatives from Region Västerbotten, Umeå, an organization responsible for regional development, and the Swedish Sámi Association (SSR), Umeå, an organization looking out for the interests of reindeer herders and other Sámi enterprises. The search for additional interviewees stopped when responses became repetitive and no new themes developed. The interviews took place in Fall, 2016, in the three northernmost counties of Sweden. Seven interviews were conducted in the county of Norrbotten, four in Västerbotten and two in Jämtland. Nine respondents were men and four were women. The average age was around 53 years old, the youngest of the respondents was 41 years old and the oldest was 73. Eight of the respondents were entrepreneurs offering either guiding and nature-related tours or indigenous-related products such as reindeer tours and accommodation in traditional Sámi lodgings; four were artist entrepreneurs making and selling handicrafts and one was both an artist and offering tours. Only four of the interviewees were not involved in reindeer herding, however herding was frequently present in their dialogue. Typical interview duration was 30 min. Though this may appear to be short, it was the time that the respondents chose to allocate. Making a living in Sápmi can imply a combination of several jobs distributed over several places, which makes time a critical asset. Ten interviews were conducted in Swedish and three in English. Choice of language was left to interviewees; as the author’s first language is English, some respondents chose English most likely with the researcher’s comfort in mind and being fluent in English themselves. The respondents’ identity is kept confidential.

The interview material was analyzed using thematic content analysis (Riessman 2005). The responses were examined by focusing on the content of what was said and less on the precise manner and language in which it was said. Through the analysis of the interview material, certain themes emerged among the respondents. Evidence and information was gathered for each theme and carefully analysed. The responses presented below are organized and shown by theme with selected quotes for illustration purposes. To ensure confidentiality, no information which can be used to identify an individual is included with the quotes or any other text. The results presented below are the opinions of those respondents already involved in tourism and therefore are not necessarily representative of the Sámi community in general.

Analysis

When asked about the reasons they became tourist entrepreneurs the respondents’ answers were varied, but a few common themes emerged. For some respondents,
passion in the form of loving what they do was the reason why they started working with tourists or handicrafts. For example, as one respondent involved in manufacturing handicrafts explained: “I have always loved working with my hands and to make things”. Most of the handicraft manufacturers said they started doing it when they were children and some even mentioned being born in it by having parents and grandparents engaged in the trade. “Both my father and grandfather were great handcrafters so I followed successive generations” stated one respondent. This shows how a livelihood resource in the SL framework, existing human capital, often skills learned in childhood, become influential behind the motivation to become an entrepreneur. Getting involved in handicrafts felt very natural to these respondents. Sámi handicraft production is considered a Sámi trade and is closely associated with Sámi identity (Sámediggi 2017); this was not neglected by the respondents, some of whom said that handicraft production to them is considered a lifestyle. For those not working with manufacturing handicrafts but interacting with tourists in a more direct manner, passion involved loving to work with people, which was mentioned as the reason for becoming tourist entrepreneurs by a few respondents. Put simplest by one respondent: “I like working with people, it feels right”. Such motivations relate less to economic reasons and more to aspects of well-being, which shows that for some people the service sector is preferred over other sectors due to the nature of the work, in this case its social aspect.

This social aspect is not just a motivation for getting involved in tourism entrepreneurship but an outcome as well. Even if such feeling was not the initial reason, it can become so as the tourism venture develops. According to one respondent: “I am an involuntary tourist entrepreneur; but at the same time now that I take in tourists, I think it is cool to meet people from the whole world”. Job versatility and freedom was another reason mentioned. Tourism ventures in general do not follow the standard nine to five schedule that the majority of occupations oblige to and some respondents stated that such jobs would not suit them and that is why they chose to become tourist entrepreneurs. This closely matches findings on Norwegian farmers for whom the autonomy that comes with being tourist entrepreneurs was also emphasized as important (Brandth and Haugen 2011). It also demonstrates that full-time jobs with a potentially higher salary, such as mining for those living in such municipalities, even if available are not a preferred option. This has implications for understanding what constitutes a successful livelihood. While not pursuing a standard nine-to-five job because it does not fit an individual’s lifestyle is not unusual, research acknowledging it when comparing employment opportunities in northern Sweden is uncommon. Previous comparisons in employment between tourism and the resource extraction sectors, while discussing the dissimilarities between the workforce for each, do not delve more deeply into what those dissimilarities are (Lundmark 2006b; Müller 2013). The SL approach used here encourages the recognition of such variety of outcomes through its emphasis that livelihood outcomes extend beyond financial incentives.

Other reasons cited by the respondents for starting work in tourism are more strategic in nature. For example, some simply saw the potential for it. Tourists were coming to the region in increasing numbers and the demand for specific experiences was increasing. Examples of this would include seeing visitors curious about reindeer herding and wanting to experience the Swedish mountainside, or realizing the need for short-term snowmobile use, i.e. snowmobile rental. According to one respondent who offers,
among other things, snowmobile safaris and other tours: “there was a need, people were just coming, they were coming at new times, showing up in October, who will take care of them? What will they do? So it’s a business idea to take care of them”. Becoming entrepreneurs themselves was the most viable option presented to them. Small enterprises, family-owned or self-employed, is the most common form of tourism involvement among Sámi in northern Sweden (Palomino 2012). Entrepreneurship becomes a strategy for taking advantage of existing opportunities. In some cases, the strategy appears to be incidental. For some it began by taking a few tourists out in nature or showing them their handicrafts without thinking of it as a tourist activity and gradually having it grow from that, realizing they can make some income off it. For example, a tourist entrepreneur offering mountain tours said the following:

there were many in Sweden which saw the [television] program and read in the newspapers [a report on the specific trek in the mountains the respondent was engaged in] and rang up and said they are willing to pay to be taken up in the mountains themselves. Then the idea was born [for the tourist company]. […] so I started taking up some folks, little here and there.

Haugen and Vik (2008) and Brandth and Haugen (2011) have shown that in Norway existing natural capital and farm assets were important components for farmers starting a tourism enterprise. In this study, for the respondents offering nature-related tours, having access to the natural capital, such as access to the fishing waters, an indigenous right in parts of the Swedish mountains, played an important role in starting up the business. In other cases, there were people from outside the region and foreigners setting up tourism ventures that triggered the respondents’ own involvement in tourism; “I saw that many tourist entrepreneurs came from southern Sweden and sold fishing trips up here and made money off it, so why can’t we ourselves do that?” said one respondent. Not only could they themselves take advantage of an opportunity available in the region, but they could also be in control of disseminating information about their own culture. This aspect of indigenous tourism entrepreneurs communicating factual information on Sámi issues to tourists has been a common theme throughout the interviews and is discussed in more detail by Leu, Eriksson, and Müller (2018). The findings above show that certain aspects highlighted by the sustainable livelihoods (SL) approach are clearly present among Sámi tourist entrepreneurs in northern Sweden as well. Namely, that the availability of certain assets, such as human and natural capital, has a large impact on people’s motivation to start a tourism venture, as well as showing that personal choices beyond income also feature frequently in the respondents reasons for starting as tourist entrepreneurs.

Another important hypothesis that arises from the SL approach is the possibility that people in sparsely populated areas often rely on an intentional, long-term and successful strategy of diversification and are not just looking to replace one occupation with another, a standard restructuring discourse. This paper now turns towards investigating the extent to which tourism entrepreneurship is part of a livelihood diversification strategy.

A significant reason uncovered in the interviews for people becoming tourist entrepreneurs relates to financial independence and income diversification; this was especially true among those respondents involved in reindeer herding (9 out of 13). It has previously been shown that cash income advances the quality of life of Sámi reindeer herder households in Sweden (Buchanan, Reed, and Lidestav 2016) and findings here show that individuals
actively pursue tourism entrepreneurship as a source of additional income. A few of the respondents clearly stated that they started getting involved in tourism to add revenue to help with reindeer herding. One respondent said:

I started the tourist company to find a way to stretch out the income. Reindeer herding for 20 years, as now, is in a poor financial position, one has to find a way to keep on with it, […] [I did it] to continue with that which I grew up in and not have to work in a different place.

Another stated: “It was a question of survival, simply put”. Further, this respondent mentioned the increased costs and decreasing income he experienced in herding and he just could not continue herding the “classical” way as he put it, which was: feeding, slaughtering and collecting the income that would last for a whole year. Others succumbed, the same respondent stated; they had no choice but to quit completely due to the predator activity that was going on at that time in the region. Here, outcomes of diversifying their livelihoods through tourism entrepreneurship are closely linked to enhancing resilience and reducing the vulnerability that comes with the unpredictability and fluctuations in primary sector income. It also shows the active choice for in-situ solutions that allow households to remain in Sápmi and not have to resort to migration as a livelihood strategy.

Place attachment and feelings of belonging to the indigenous homeland are important parts of the indigenous identity of many Sámi (Olofsson 2004).

Tourism entrepreneurship, of course, is not the only option available; the primary and energy sectors, alongside the public sector, provide some employment options available for people living in the sparsely populated north. At the same time, many Sámi, including many outside the herding community, hold a negative opinion of employment in mining, forestry and hydropower due to the perceived damage these industries inflict upon reindeer herding (Revelin 2013). Echoing frustrations mentioned by a few other respondents, one tourist entrepreneur stated that he got involved in tourism because he did not want to work “for the enemy, the mine which takes land from us”. Here, tourism entrepreneurship was seen as a better alternative seemingly solving a moral dilemma. Although, for some, it would be more accurate to say they wanted to reduce how much they worked for mining because they had a third job in which they already worked for a mining company, driving a truck for example. Having three different occupations throughout the course of the year, two in addition to being a tourist entrepreneur, was mentioned by seven of the 13 respondents.

The findings here show no detailed discussions on other options in diversifying livelihoods besides tourism, aside from superficial remarks; this is likely a result of the interview guide that did not prioritize such a discussion. Overall, out of the 13 interviewees, nine stated that income received from their tourism venture is, or was in the past, used to support another main livelihood in one way or another. With such prevalence of tourism as complementary to other occupations, it becomes clear that more holistic, multi-sectoral approaches are better suited for investigating tourism development in sparsely populated areas in northern Sweden. Otherwise, there is a danger of overlooking roles in tourism that are clearly there.

The extent of involvement in tourism as a livelihood diversification strategy also varied over time. A recurring characteristic in the interviews was the slow start and gradual development of the tourism venture. Previous literature has hinted that Sámi small to medium-sized tourism enterprises are slow to develop, mostly as an intentional lifestyle choice
One explanation given by the respondents in this study was that people were unsure about whether becoming a tourist entrepreneur was right for them; as one responded stated: “start it with your heart, then you must start slowly and you must feel that this is your thing, and not listen to other people. You must feel that what you deliver is your soul. And therefore it doesn’t go so quick”. Some were unsure whether they could make any type of living off it:

From the beginning I didn’t think it would become a company or be able to support myself off it, so for a while I did it as a hobby [...], I did this on my own free time and then sold a few items [handicrafts]. But in the end I saw that the demand was great, [...]. So I started this company [...] and I worked half the time at [another job] and half time at [this company] for a few years before I got rolling really well.

Part of the reason for why it takes time to develop is also related to getting the word out to customers about the product offered. Many mentioned that it took time until word spread and as it does, they see the business grow and become more reliable over time, making them able to count on the stable income. Social media and networking in general was often mentioned as a great way to spread knowledge about their companies and products, something considered important among small to medium-sized tourism enterprises in general (Halme and Fadeeva 2000). Such findings demonstrate that livelihood strategies, while easily included and described in a research framework, can be difficult to implement. The respondents show that time is one of the challenges they face. It takes time to develop tourism into a successful livelihood strategy, an important finding for policy makers or any stakeholder with vested interest in tourism development in sparsely populated areas.

Tourism as a livelihood diversification strategy does not come without dilemmas. Respondents stressed the balance between tourism entrepreneurship and another occupation was an important issue when diversifying their livelihoods. Voluntarily reducing involvement in a previously dominant occupation as they dedicated more time to the successful tourism enterprise was common among many respondents. There is mention of coming to a crossroad where the development of the tourism business is progressing and a decision has to be made in regard to which way to continue. “My husband has been a reindeer herder since [youth]” says one respondent “but now we feel that we take down the number of reindeer and we, I, am working here [the tourism company] for example”. For this particular respondent the reindeer are a central part of the product offered and the intent behind the statement is certainly not to abandon reindeer herding but only to reduce the herd size. For those respondents who were reindeer herders, greater involvement in tourism is not detached from the need to remain a herder. Similar evidence from farmers shows that a gradual decrease in farming activity as the tourism enterprise develops is not always associated with a direct decrease in farming identity (Brandth and Haugen 2011). Even though this study focuses on Sámi tourist entrepreneurs in general and not just reindeer herders, evidence emerges showing the complicated ties between reindeer herding as an occupation and reindeer herding as an identity, adding important nuances to the understanding of reindeer herding as one’s life (Nordin 2007).

This is further illustrated through the concerns the respondents expressed when asked about potential problems with tourism entrepreneurship as a livelihood strategy. Even
though some of the respondents have no connection to reindeer herding at all, the majority expressed two concerns: disturbances to reindeer herding and uncontrolled growth. Sensitive periods for reindeer herding, like calf marking, were particularly mentioned as times when tourism could be most damaging. “It is important that the reindeer gets fat, so fat before the winter. And if there are people around and disturb the reindeer that he gets no peace to feed, then it doesn’t get that fat put on his back” made clear one respondent. Snowmobile tours, for example, was one way of disturbing the animals at a time when they need peace and quiet. Such activities also included locals going on joy rides with snowmobiles and not just tourists. However, the respondents affirmed that disturbances and encroachments to reindeer herding would be minimal if Sámi with knowledge of herding and connections to the local Reindeer Herder Cooperative (RHC) would be the ones involved in taking out tourists. As one respondent explained:

a foreigner or a Stockholmer, he doesn’t know reindeer herding, so when he’s involved in fishing he has no idea, maybe he thinks he’s not disturbing the reindeer but he does. Or maybe he thinks he is disturbing the reindeer but he doesn’t.

According to another: “you have to make sure that you can steer tourists to areas that don’t disturb the reindeer […] if you are a RHC member then you know where you can be without disturbing”. Essentially, this again links existing human and cultural capital to the pursuit of specific livelihood strategies, only in this case the knowledge is not only used to enable the start of a venture but to make the entrepreneur better suited than another individual without such knowledge. The implications of this are that while a livelihood strategy is available to many, its adoption by particular individuals makes it a more sustainable strategy than if others were to adopt it.

Similarly, fear of uncontrolled growth and mass tourism development that is not steered by locals also featured often in the respondents’ discussions. As one respondent explained, tourism has to be “sustainable and small scale”. Another respondent clarified with a hypothetical situation; if it happens too fast “there come new owners from [elsewhere] and buy and build hotels, make new ski slopes. It is people that don’t have cultural ties to the place that want to develop the place”. To some extent, this relates to wider discussions on owning the resource important to successful livelihoods. Given indigenous peoples’ past related to displacement and colonization, issues of control over tourism development are particularly important for them (Zeppel 2006; Butler and Hinch 2007). At the same time, this also relates to maintaining a competitive advantage through the character of the locality. Under fast growth, the non-locals will quickly outnumber the locals and the cultural ties are lost. These concerns echoed outside of Sweden as well; shifting power to steer, and profit from, tourism development to outsiders is a worry frequently expressed elsewhere in Sápmi (Tuulentie 2006; Pettersson and Viken 2007) as well as among indigenous groups worldwide (Butler and Hinch 2007).

**Conclusion**

Tourism entrepreneurship is often promoted as a livelihood strategy for Sámi indigenous people living in northern Sweden. This is done mostly in relation to the tourism sector being able to fully take over struggling primary sectors. A livelihood approach gives rise to the premise that there are multiple strategies that individuals and households can
engage in to ensure a successful livelihood. This study investigated to what extent this is true among Sámi tourist entrepreneurs. The sustainable rural livelihoods (SL) approach was used due to its attention to diversification as a livelihood strategy alongside traditional rural occupations and because it recognizes different forms of capital and assets as an important background to rural livelihoods (Scoones 1998). The findings show people get involved in tourism for many reasons. Some were passionate about it. Working with people was considered enjoyable and rewarding. Among those entrepreneurs working with handicrafts, it was also considered a lifestyle, closely associated with pride and Sámi identity. Job independence, in the form of control over working hours, was also considered a contributing factor to choosing to become tourist entrepreneurs. Tourism demand for indigenous products and experiences is increasing in northern Europe (Petersson and Viken 2007); for some respondents, witnessing this demand prompted them to try it out. In some cases it started off experimentally, by taking a few tourists out in nature and realizing that it is possible to make a living from it. Access to existing capital, such as knowledge of the surrounding nature and access to fishing waters, an indigenous right in parts of the Swedish mountains, was also a driving factor for starting a tourism venture. These varied motivations for getting involved in tourism show how available assets linked to nature and indigeneity make tourism entrepreneurship a viable livelihood strategy for Sámi indigenous people in northern Sweden. Previous emphasis when analyzing tourism involvement in sparsely populated areas was on employment potential (Lundmark 2006b; Müller 2013). Through the use of the SL approach, with its emphasis that the existing context and resources strongly influence livelihood strategies, the results presented here are distinct in that they show specific motivations behind tourism involvement which depend strongly on forms of capitals and geographic context. As such, a variety of previously unrecognized reasons were uncovered.

Through the SL approach, it can be hypothesized that intensification and diversification are common livelihood strategies among people living in sparsely populated areas. The findings showed that as livelihood strategies of intensification were difficult to implement in primary sector occupations, tourism entrepreneurship as a livelihood diversification was indeed a strategy. Diversification promotes a livelihood strategy that favours in-situ household solutions over mobility. Diversification as a viable strategy has ramifications for long-lasting ideas of gainful employment in Sweden, where intensification and migration feature most prominently in the discourse on rural livelihoods. While previous studies have hinted that diversification is an important strategy among Sámi entrepreneurs living in northern Sweden (Müller and Huuva 2009; Palomino 2012; Revelin 2013; Turunen et al. 2016), detailed empirical evidence and explanations were lacking. Nine out of the 13 respondents stated that income from tourism was at some point used to support another main occupation. Given the unpredictability of primary sector income, having a reliable stable income, in this case from a tourism venture, reduced the vulnerability and enhanced the resilience of Sámi entrepreneurs engaged in other occupations. While in certain locations a diverse livelihood portfolio can also be achieved by working in the available resource extraction sector, tourism entrepreneurship was a preferred option on moral grounds as well. In addition to the tourism venture, some respondents even held two additional jobs, and all these jobs made up their livelihood portfolio. Often the money would be pooled together and reallocated to each pursuit as deemed appropriate.
This study shows that research agendas that do not use a livelihood perspective and aim to assess tourism entrepreneurship as full-time careers replacing other ones miss a large part of the actual role of tourism in northern Sweden. According to the original author of the sustainable livelihood approach introduced in 1998, the approach has not expanded as expected (Scoones 2009). In relation to tourism development research, the livelihood approach has been used predominantly in an Asian context (cf. Lee 2008; Liu, Cheng, and Cheung 2017; Su, Wall, and Xu 2016; Tao 2006; Tao and Wall 2009a, 2009b; Wu and Pearce 2014), potentially because the approach was advanced by an institute focusing on developing countries. However, according to Scoones (2009), the approach is intended for rural development issues in many parts of the world. This study contributes to the SL framework by demonstrating its use and benefits in a northern European context as well.

Currently, too little is known about the role of tourism entrepreneurship among Sámi in Sweden. Besides gaps in knowledge regarding the motivations to start a venture, there is also little information regarding the entrepreneurs’ experiences and challenges over time. This study sought to fill some of those gaps. For many Sámi tourist entrepreneurs in this study, the start of the venture was typically characterized as being slow, followed by a gradual development as they became more familiar with the requirements and rewards. For these respondents work in tourism can develop into something rewarding and meaningful (cf. Leu, Eriksson, and Müller 2018). Balancing the time between the tourism venture and another occupation was also an issue taken up. Out of those respondents that were reindeer herders, a reduction in reindeer herding activities was not associated with a loss of reindeer herder identity. Overall, the respondents’ fears of tourism development revolved around the potential disturbance to herding, even among those who didn’t herd themselves, and the hypothetical situation where the locals, both Sámi and non-Sámi, are not in charge of controlling and steering future tourism development. Perhaps encouraging is that no major problems were cited as occurring right now, allowing for the possibility of entrepreneurs, planners and politicians to steer indigenous tourism development in Sweden away from such problems.

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