

# The Potential of Sámi/Indigenous Festivals to Inform and Bridge Formal Education Systems

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## ABSTRACT

This article aims to explore how Indigenous knowledge and skills acquired at Sámi festivals can supplement and critically inform knowledge in the Norwegian formal education system. The empirical data for this study are derived from extensive fieldwork (2009–2019) comprising observations of Riddu Riddu festival participants, and semi-structured in-depth interviews with open-ended questions conducted with festival participants and volunteers who also work at different educational and cultural institutions, such as schools, language centres, libraries, and museums. We applied an Indigenous paradigm and methodology (Koukkanen, 2000; Smith, 2010) that favours land- or place-based pedagogies (Thornton, et al., 2021; Wildcat et al., 2014), along with a holistic research method approach. The results show that Sámi/Indigenous festivals have been and still are crucial in revitalising Sámi cultures and ways of knowing that are still marginalised in mainstream education systems. The Indigenous knowledge and skills acquired at Sámi and other Indigenous festivals have the potential to supplement and critically inform knowledge in formal education systems such as schools, teacher education, libraries, and museums.

**Keywords:** *Indigenous festival; Sámi culture; Sámi language; decolonisation; Indigenous education*

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## Introduction and background

The aim of this article is to explore how Indigenous knowledge and skills acquired at Indigenous festivals can supplement and critically inform knowledge in formal education systems. We examine the link between schooling for and about Sápmi, and Sámi/Indigenous festivals organised in Norway. In the context of Sápmi, Norwegianisation/colonisation refers to the political, economic, cultural, and linguistic oppression of the Sámi peoples, and the building and maintaining of social hierarchies (Olsen & Sollid, 2022). Discrimination against and assimilation of the Sámi

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peoples took place from the 1800s until recently. The systemic destruction of Sámi history, culture and languages was carried out using the educational system. This has also been acknowledged in the recently published *Truth and Reconciliation Commission report* (2023), which underlines how the Norwegian government systematically colonised the Sápmi, Kven and Forest Finn regions through education and schools, and how the destruction of the languages, cultures, and identities of these peoples still affects these communities. To facilitate this ethnocide (cultural genocide), the Norwegian government used scientists and researchers to show that Indigenous peoples are primitive and have lower intelligence than Norwegians. The Commission also describes how military recruits were subjected to physical anthropology such as craniology to determine race, which contributed to stereotyping and stigmatisation, as well as trauma and humiliation, especially because the recruits had to undress for such measurements (Commission Report 2023, p. 82).

Reconciliation with and the revitalisation of lost Sámi knowledge, culture, identity, and pride after such a harsh period of colonisation is complex for all parties involved. Nevertheless, reconciliation is gradually taking place within formal education institutions such as schools, as well as through alternative forms of education systems and institutions such as Indigenous festivals. Studies have shown that festivals are and have been crucial in revitalising the Sámi cultures and ways of knowing, which are still marginalised in the mainstream education systems (Leonenko, 2008; Skogvang 2020; 2021; Skogvang & Massao, 2023; Viken, 2011). We argue that Sámi/Indigenous festivals have the potential to inform mainstream education systems and create a bridge with Sámi educational and cultural institutions, such as language centres, libraries, and museums.

### ***Schooling in the (de)colonisation project***

Historically, formal schooling has been a double-edged sword that has been used to both colonise the Sámi and revitalise their history, culture, and knowledge. The Norwegian state enacted Norwegianisation, an assimilation policy that sought to intensify the Norwegian state's control over the Sámi population by forcefully changing their ways of life from the mid-1800s onwards (Evju, 2022, p. 259). This included intensifying the teaching and learning of Norwegian among Sámi children and limiting the use of Sámi languages. To further disrupt Sámi children's language and identity development, the children were sent to boarding schools away from their families and communities.

As recently as after WWII, it was still common for teachers to humiliate Sámi pupils by telling them that they were less intelligent and giving them extra work outside the classroom, claiming that this would not influence their performance, since they could not learn anyway (Karlsen, 2007). However, it was also after WWII that a big shift in Sámi politics in relation to school started. The *Primary School Act* of 1959 introduced the principle of using Sámi as a language of instruction, but it was not until 1967 that primary education in Sámi was first offered in schools in Kárašjohka

and Guovdageaidnu (Lund, 2003, p. 36). The issue of Sámi schools became a topic of debate, particularly the establishment of Sámi language schools (Broderstad, 2022). During the 1970s and 1980s, there was a strong political move towards recognising and emphasising the use and promotion of the Sámi languages and cultures as important educational elements in education (Broderstad, 2022).

The establishment of the 1997 curricula (Norwegian and Sámi) L-97 and L-97S was the first time that the concept of Sámi schools and pupils was discussed at the curriculum level, acknowledging its existence as an independent system (Gjerpe, 2017). This was an important political milestone, as it affirmed and institutionalised the existence of Sámi schools and pupils (Gjerpe, 2017). However, the concept of the Sámi school has also been seen as problematic given the diversity within the group, with Sámi comprising the northern, southern, and Lule-Sámi areas (Gjerpe, 2017, p. 157).

### ***Sámi in the new curriculum (2020)***

What is taught in school very much depends on established structural and institutional frameworks such as the curriculum, textbooks, materials, and assessment systems. The new Norwegian curriculum – *Kunnskapsløftet 2020* (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017) has both a Norwegian and Sámi version, and Sámi languages, cultures, and community life are more articulated than in previous curricula. The Sámi version is an interpretation of the national curriculum in the different school subjects, using Sámi. This version (which the Sámi Parliament is responsible for) is legally equivalent to the national curricula in these subjects (which the Directorate for Education and Training is responsible for), and both versions are predominantly the same or closely coincide (Gaare, 2021). Despite good intentions, however, there are still challenges, given the lack of systematic coordination and cooperation between the Sámi Parliament School Department, the Directorate for Education, and the school owners, who, according to the Norwegian public education administration, are mainly municipalities and counties. The Norwegian Constitution stipulates that the state shall create conditions that enable the Sámi to secure and develop the Sámi languages, cultures, and societies, which must be followed up in the *Norwegian Education Act*. Chapter 6 of the *Education Act* regulates teaching and learning for, in and about Sámi peoples, languages, cultures and civic lives for pupils inside and outside Sámi districts, and all Sámi have the right to learn the Sámi language wherever they live in Norway. According to Kesitalo (2022, p. 44) Norway provides wide access to Sámi tuition, regardless of background, in core Sámi areas, defined as Sámi language administrative areas, consisting of 12 municipalities. Outside the defined Sámi regions, a Sámi pupil is defined through family bonds.

Despite Sámi educational rights, implementation of the Sámi curriculum has been complex and contested. This is partly due to a lack of resources in municipalities and counties for implementing the curriculum in different Sámi areas (Evju & Olsen, 2022). Some scholars like Gjerpe (2017, p. 162) even argue that over time,

less Sámi content is being taught in schools, despite the increased emphasis in the national curricula, leading to suspicions that the Sámi curriculum is a merely symbolic commitment.

### ***Sámi and Indigenous festivals***

The Indigenous *Sámi* peoples belong to the ethnic minority populations of in Finland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden. Today, Sámi live across the four countries and are accepted as Indigenous in all four countries. Finland, Norway, and Sweden have a Sámi Parliament, and the Sámi in Norway have the collective right to act as an advisory body to the national parliament, through the Sámi Parliament established in 1989 (Skogvang, 2023). The Sámi are also entitled to participate in any Norwegian government Sámi projects and plans. Sámi rights secured by the *ILO Convention 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries* (1989) was ratified by Norway in 1990. Article 32 of the Convention obliges Norway to collaborate across borders and states and gives the Sámi in Norway stronger collective rights than in the three other countries, where the Convention has not been ratified (Skogvang, 2023, pp. 38–43). In Norway, Section § 2–6 of the *Sámi Act* (1987) defines who the Sámi are. The Sámi today number between 80,000 and 100,000, with approximately 50,000 to 65,000 in Norway (Skogvang, 2023). 23,488 Sámi are registered in Norway's Sámi electoral roll (Sámediggi, 2023). Most Sámi work in mainstream jobs, while 3,307 participate in reindeer-husbandry (Sámediggi, 2023). The Sámi Language Council estimates that there are approximately 25,000 Sámi language users in Norway, with the Southern Sámi language being the most endangered and vulnerable. The Sámi languages are no longer the everyday language used in many Sámi families (Sámediggi, 2023). In spite of the *Sámi Act* coming into force in Norway in 1987, recent studies show that the Sámi still struggle with experiences of inferiority, harassment and discrimination (Eythórsson, 2003; Hansen, 2015).

International studies have shown that festivals can revitalise Indigenous knowledge and culture and elicit a sense of pride that cannot be achieved through learning about Indigenous knowledge at school. Tan's (2012) and Trollvik's (2014) studies of Indigenous traditions and gatherings in Taiwan stress that a key factor for a specific culture's survival is the embodiment of cultural practices, through which young people are taught traditional and practical knowledge, which builds their self-esteem. Activities such as harvest festivals create local pride, strengthen communal relationships, and allow possibilities for reconnecting to the Indigenous living in the city (Tan, 2012). Indigenous festivals in Australia empower Indigenous peoples (Phipps & Slater, 2010), and events like the North American Indigenous Games, the World Indigenous Nation Games and the Arctic Winter Games are all presented as crucial for cultural resistance, networking, and empowerment of Indigenous cultures (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006; Hallinan & Judd, 2013; King 2006).

Few studies have examined Indigenous festivals in the Nordic countries (Jæger, 2019; Skogvang, 2016; 2020; Tjora, 2013), and there are a lack of studies linking

Indigenous festivals and mainstream education. Festivals have been regarded as free spaces for enjoyment and recreation, where tradition, customs, myths, beliefs, and freedom are celebrated, as well as being arenas for identity development (Jæger, 2019; Quinn, 2005). The Sámi festivals have long traditions, with the oldest one in Norway starting in 1966, but Easter gatherings were celebrated much longer than that. During the Easter holidays, the reindeer-husbandry Sámi met in their villages for reunions with relatives and families and for celebrations of weddings, confirmations, and children's baptisms (Hætta, 2007). Today, festivals are organised during Easter, the summer holidays or in connection with the Sámi national day on 6 February (Leonenko, 2008; Skogvang, 2016). In total, about 25,000 people participate in the Sámi festivals in Norway every year (Skogvang, 2016).

In Norway, studies have shown that Indigenous festivals are crucial in revitalising Indigenous cultures (Lervoll, 2007; Skogvang, 2020; 2021; Skogvang & Massao, 2023; Viken, 2011) and strengthening Sámi peoples' identities (Hovland, 1999; Jæger, 2019), and they are important for the development of local areas (Pedersen & Viken, 2009). Jæger (2019) underlines the importance of the festivals as meeting places for the development of pride, tourism, and overall benefits for local communities.

### ***Theoretical and methodological positioning and reflexivity***

To decolonise or indigenise knowledge (Virtanen et al., 2021, p. 12) and ways of knowing, we used critical Indigenous pedagogies and methodologies (Bleazby et al., 2022; Gaudet, 2016; Kuokkanen, 2000; Smith, 2010; Virtanen et al., 2021). Critical Indigenous pedagogies take different approaches. We found that land-based and place-based educational pedagogies (Thornton et al., 2021; Wildcat et al., 2014) resonate with the ways Indigenous festivals are used to teach and revitalise Indigenous Sámi knowledge and culture. Land-based pedagogy considers land, nature and the surrounding community and environment as interwoven and the source of knowledge. It emphasises “the Indigenous conceptions of land and place, which are integral to Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, especially the ontological relationship to land” (Thornton et al., 2021, p. 23). Thornton et al. add that Indigenous critical pedagogy should connect caring thinking to place so that caring for others includes caring for ecological others. Place-based education (or pedagogies of place) and a community-based experiential approach to education can also be traced to Dewey's pedagogy (1938). This approach connects *head, heart, hands*, and experiential learning in communities to increase learners' engagement and foster their understanding of their world. Although there are government efforts to revitalise the Sámi languages and culture through mainstream education, there is still a deficit of Sámi pedagogy and didactics, resulting in using learning models designed for learning majority languages (Outakoski, 2021, p. 93).

Methodologically, we are aligned with the Sámi researcher Jelena Porsanger, who argues that as an alternative to Western paradigms, researchers ought to “contribute

to the body of knowledge of Indigenous peoples about themselves and for themselves, and for their own needs as peoples, rather than as objects of investigation” (Porsanger, 2004, p. 105). Similarly, Māori researcher Linda Tuhiwai Smith has emphasised “centring our concepts and worldviews and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives” (Smith, 1999, p. 91). Indigenous researchers underline holistic thinking that sees nature and society as a whole and insist on collaboration and partnership approaches which have been the source of sustainability for Indigenous peoples’ societies through generations (Jaimes\*Guerrero, 2003; Kuokkanen, 2000). Rigney (1999, p. 119) stresses that “the interests, knowledge and experiences of Indigenous peoples must be at the centre of research methodologies and construction of knowledge about Indigenous peoples.” This underpins Olsen’s (2016) claim that research should be conducted on Indigenous peoples’ premises, support their interests, use their own language as far as possible and pinpoint ideals such as respect, mutuality, humbleness, and a relational approach. In this way, research can contribute to rebuilding the trust ruined by the colonising regimes that have used education and research to oppress and dehumanise Indigenous peoples (Skogvang & Massao, 2023; Smith, 1999).

In this study, the first author is coastal Sámi educated in the Norwegian school system and has *not* learned to speak her parents’ language / her mother tongue Northern Sámi fluently. This made her a linguistic outsider when she interviewed Sámi speakers and Indigenous participants at the festivals; the interviews had to be carried out in Norwegian or English. The first author grew up in the same village where *Riddu Ridđu* is organised, and she knows the festival and culture of the area very well (Skogvang, 2021). Over the years, the author has accumulated both experiential and empirical knowledge about the *Riddu Ridđu* festival (Skogvang, 2020) and has used this as a tool in revitalising Sámi knowledge and culture (Leonenko, 2008; Lervoll, 2007; Skogvang & Massao, 2023; Viken, 2011). The second author is neither Sámi nor Indigenous. However, she has experience from a former colonised land and is a non-White immigrant with research experience of ethnic minorities both in Norway and internationally. We both have backgrounds as physical education teachers, sport and/or recreational researchers and (currently) sport and teacher educators. We use a bottom-up approach (Olsen, 2016) in combination with our intersectional experiences and critical reflexivity to push both theory and methodological frameworks beyond the mainstream perspectives we are educated with and bound to adhere to.

### ***Long-term fieldwork and semi-structured in-depth interviews***

The empirical data are derived from extensive fieldwork (2009–2019) comprising observations of participants at the *Riddu Ridđu* festival, and semi-structured in-depth interviews with festival participants and volunteers who also work at different educational and cultural institutions such as schools, language centres, libraries, and museums. The data collection from the overall study includes documents, field notes

from conversations and observations, and in-depth interviews from Riddu Riđđu and seven other Sámi festivals in Norway (Skogvang 2020; 2021). The observations at Riddu Riđđu focused on activities at *Mánáidfestivála* (3–13 years) and *Nourat* (13–18 years). Some of the interviews were with employees at other educational and/or Sámi cultural institutions, such as schools, language centres, libraries and museums that collaborate with the festivals. Author 1 conducted 46 in-depth interviews (24 women/girls and 22 men/boys), field notes from participant observations and document analysis. The in-depth interviews lasted from 45 to 120 minutes. Some of the participants were interviewed several times. Parents/guardians and children were interviewed together, while some adults were interviewed alone. Four families were followed up across several years. Most interviews were conducted in the Norwegian language, or English when people from Finland, Russia or Indigenous guests were interviewed.

The data collections were carried out to contemplate how outdoor activities included in the festivals create identity and an awareness of nature and culture among Sámi and other Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples participating at the festivals. The data for this article focus on the learning aspects of Sámi for Sámi, the types and nature of the activities offered at the festivals, aims of the activities and the activities' meaning for the participants. This includes the participants' experiences of the meaning for the (re)creation of their identities, cultural and environmental awareness, as well as education in Sámi languages, duodji/handcraft, and other Indigenous knowledge.

## Results and discussion

Our results stem mainly from children's programmes found at Sámi festivals such as Riddu Riđđu. Children festival/*Mánáidfestivála* started at Riddu Riđđu in 2003 and offers activities annually to 120 children to increase Sámi knowledge both for Sápmi and for the majority communities. Participants at the *Mánáidfestivála* include Sámi, Norwegians and Kvens, and these children come from all over Norway and from other countries accompanied by their parents/guardians. Sámi *duodji*/handcraft were central to all Indigenous festivals. Duodji-related activities include *dollastallat* (bonfiring: making a fire and preparing food on it), *lávvestallat* (lavvu-ing: making a campsite and putting up and furnishing the Sámi tent lavvu), clothing, traceless and environment friendly traffic in nature. Other activities include fishing in the fjord and making of *goike-guolli* (coastal Sámi tradition), making *goahti* (Sámi turf-hut) and *bealljegoahti* (a combination of a turf-hut and lavvu), making a *stállu* (Sámi troll used in the stallu-parade on New Year's Eve in Olmaivahkki) and paying a visit to Sámi museums. Central activities include *duodji*/handcraft-activities, outdoor-domestic activities (such as reindeer-husbandry activities, fishing and making dry-fish edible, a coastal Sámi tradition) and learning to *yoik*/the old Sámi song-form. We present data in two sets of experiences; *Detached from home, culture, and land* and *"Taking back" the*

land, language and culture and discuss how these experiences can critically inform contemporary formal education.

### ***Detached from home, culture, and land***

Interviewees shared their experiences from the Norwegian schools during Norwegianisation, where Sámi knowledge and skills learned at home were ridiculed and absent from the school curriculum, and how this still has a negative impact on subsequent generations. Young children and youth were forbidden to speak their mother tongue Sámi. Sámi pupils had to move away from their families to state boarding schools, and the value of Sámi knowledge and culture both among reindeer-husbandry Sámi and coastal Sámi living from fishing and farming were seen as primitive and deemed unfit for Norwegian society. Using school and education the younger generations were separated from their sources of knowledge and strength: that is, family, land, and language (Wildcat et al., 2014). Schools and the education system applied colonial-power-knowledge which elevated Norwegian colonial knowledge as the important knowledge while ignoring other groups' knowledge, including Indigenous knowledge. This was demonstrated by the older generations at the festivals. They talked about how this process disempowered and frustrated them. As one of the great-grandparents at the festival expressed: "At school, all the activities we learned at home in our '*siida*'/reindeer husbandry were invisible, and they taught us that this is not necessary to know in Norwegian society." She continued:

When I went to school, we had to stay at a government boarding school far away from our family and *siida*, and it was forbidden to speak Sámi languages there. If we spoke Sámi, they punished us in different ways. Our family was herding the reindeers on the mountain plateau. We had no parents or relatives with us [at school], and for me it was lonely and hard to be harassed every day.

Another older coastal Sámi said the following:

I did not speak Norwegian when I started school. At school, we were forced to learn this different language. I stayed quiet, but my friends who spoke Sámi were hit, kicked, or had their ears or hair pulled by the Norwegian teachers, who were sent North to make us Norwegian.

These experiences are in line with what the current Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Norway (2023, p. 83) concluded: "By bringing Norwegian, Sámi and Kven pupils together at boarding school, the government had full control over the Norwegianisation process by colonising both land and the culture." Given that Indigenous knowledge is rooted in land and community, the separation of Sámi children from their families and the land where the activities of their communities took place was a harsh invasion of Sápmi land and culture which also disrupted the ways knowledge was transmitted from one generation to another. The experiential



knowledge disseminated by the older generations during the festivals is an important narrative connecting the generations and providing insights about the role of the festivals and Sámi education in schools in revitalising the Sámi culture. The expression of the sense of loneliness and disempowerment experienced in boarding schools gives insight on the effects of epistemic injustice through education and the need for diverse pedagogies in revitalising the lost sense of culture and land. The different activities and language practice and teaching at the festivals act as both a decolonising practice and a source of pride for the younger generations, who expressed how their parents' struggles for the revitalisation of Sámi rights, including the opportunity to learn the Sámi language, have empowered them:

My mother did not learn Sámi at school, and she still only speaks a few words, and from the start she had to fight for my right to learn the language, but after a while the rector understood our rights. Today, I speak and write fluent Northern Sámi, and here at Riddu Riddu we are many youngsters that speak Sámi together. The festival organisers also use our competence to teach other participants Sámi, for instance at *Mánáidfestivála*/the children's festival.

Another interviewee said the following:

When I am *bargi-nourat*/youth-staff at the *Mánáidfestivála*, I speak as much Sámi as possible with the children, and I feel more confident when speaking with children. To speak Sámi with the children and other participants at the festival even improves my own vocabulary in my "heart" language.

The sense of connection, pride and learning experiences acquired by these youths during the festival show a dimension that is not always acquired in formal education, such as learning from the older generations and teaching the younger generations. Due to Norwegianisation, few *bargi*/staff and *veahkki*/volunteers speak Sámi languages, but the examples above also show how *bargi*/staff at the festival gain more confidence, as well as the potential for collaboration across generations and institutions to improve their skills in the lost languages. The findings from the different generations at the festival reveal how experiences of Norwegianisation were experienced differently between the generations, with grandparents' separation experiences in boarding schools, parents' lack of opportunity to learn Sámi at school and now younger generations' rights and opportunities to learn Sámi at school. This shows the role of school in degrading but also revitalising lost Sámi languages and culture. The theoretical knowledge from formal education finds a practical arena at festivals through the ways *Mánáidfestivála* and *Nourat* act as an extension and learning arena for Sámi languages and culture. We argue that festivals have the potential to bridge and inform the Sámi knowledge learned at school with the Sápmi land. For instance, through practicing the Sámi language, the singing tradition/*yoik*, as well as *duodji*, learners acquire a more holistic learning of Sámi history, land, people, and cultures.

### **“Taking back” the land, language and culture**

Revitalising the Sámi languages and cultures is a huge and complex task that no one societal institution can manage alone. It is also complex to revitalise culture and language without getting back the land where that knowledge and culture evolved from. This is proven by the intersections at Riddu Riddu, where knowledge and activities connected to land are crucial to revitalise Sámi culture, language, and identity. Previous studies show that the linguistic aspect of local knowledge is highly relevant, since it contains and transmits histories, oral traditions, philosophies, and literatures to future generations (Porsanger et al., 2021, p. 51). That is why the involvement of schools and families at Sámi language centres at Riddu Riddu and other Sámi festivals is crucial.

The Riddu Riddu Festivála (*riddu*: coast; *riddu*: little storm), meaning a “little storm along the coast,” was started by young people aiming to take back their coastal Sámi culture, and it celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2021 (Hætta, 2021). The festival organisers underline the need to “take back” the power of defining what it is to be a Sámi and Indigenous today. As one participant expressed:

The festival is strategically used as a decolonising project to centre Indigenous knowledge, take back the culture, language, and identity for coastal Sámi in Olmaivahkki/Mannaldalen and Gaivuotna/Kåfjord, a region highly influenced by colonisation over the decades. To wear the Sámi dress *gákti* is an important Sámi symbol and for some, Riddu Riddu is a safe place for people daring to use the *gákti* for the first time.

Due to Norwegianisation, not only were the Sámi languages and cultures lost; it has also created fear and shame of associating oneself with Sámi culture, such as dressing in *gákti*. As the above participant expressed, wearing *gákti* does not always feel safe. Traditional dress like *gákti* have been documented to represent gestures, history, interconnectedness, and relational symbols (see more in Porsanger et al., 2021) that cannot easily be replaced by oral or written knowledge in communities or schools. At Riddu Riddu, it felt safe and right to express and communicate the Sámi culture (symbolised by *gákti*).

Another Sámi cultural expression, which has survived over the generations despite the Norwegianisation process, is the Sámi *duodji*/handicrafts. All the festivals studied offer *duodji* courses and highlight the importance of *duodji* skills. *Duodji* reflects typical land- and space-based pedagogies (Thornton, et al., 2021; Wildcat et al., 2014), as the material and skills developed are connected to the land and space. All the activities offered to children and young people aim to revitalise the knowledge and culture connected to the land that the colonial settlers invaded. During the activities, the participants mostly communicate in Norwegian, but the organisers, including the language centres, put effort into teaching Northern Sámi languages along with these activities. These are often unseen or unacknowledged everyday actions, such as knowledge about the Indigenous environment, plants, and sustainable food production systems, representing important sites for renewing relationships

with community, family, and homelands (Corntassel & Hardbarger, 2019, p. 89). Additionally, the presence of grandparents and great grandparents who can both speak Sámi with the children and/or teach about the traditional activities, proved to be a valuable pedagogical and didactic model not found in the mainstream school tradition. Today, more and more young people at the *Nuorat*/youth festival (13–18 years) have learned Sámi at school. However, learning the Sámi language at a festival is different, given that learning Sámi at school uses pedagogical and didactic models designed for learning the majority's languages (Outakoski, 2021), while the festival uses land- and space-based methodologies that connect language learning with the activities connected to land and communities.

Land- and space-based pedagogies seem to be useful in learning the Sámi language during the festivals. Over the years, more Sámi-speaking *bargi*/staff and *veahkki*/volunteers have been recruited to facilitate the learning of Indigenous knowledge, skills, and culture. However, the destruction done to the Sámi during the Norwegianisation process is still noticeable both in mainstream education and at Sámi festivals such as *Riddu Riddu*. This was illustrated by one of the festival participants from a Sámi language centre in the region, who explained:

I teach Northern Sámi at the language centre in the region. At the festival, we can increase language knowledge among the participants at the children's festival. Every year some of our employees organise activities at the *Mánáidfestivála*/children's festival. We teach through activities, sing Sámi songs when dancing the *stallu*/Sámi troll dance, teach Sámi names on excursions in the village, and last year we taught the Northern Sámi names of animals familiar to the children.

This participant expresses how the language centres integrate language learning with the festival's activities and environment, an approach which symbolises the *head, heart, hands* connection (Wildcat et al. 2014), linking learning with communities to increase learners' engagement and foster their understanding of their world around them. Related collaboration approaches were utilised by nearby libraries and museums. Sámi books were available for children and adults at the festivals. Occasionally, authors were invited to read for the children, or children's books in Sámi were launched. At the centre in Olmaivahkki, where *Riddu Riddu* is organised, and in the neighbouring village, *Birtavarre*, museums collaborate with the festival. During the festival, children visit the museums, where they learn about Sámi cultures, such as the Sámi names for the tools and equipment on exhibit.

In contrast to school learning, at the festivals the children gain holistic learning, and the Sámi language is connected to nature, activities and skills and contextualised beyond institutional structures such as family, school, or work. The festivals offer young people knowledge and skills connected to Indigenous communities as the intersection between the land and people. We argue that the land- and space-based Indigenous pedagogies deployed in most of the activities at the festival are valuable pedagogical approaches that can be utilised in and by the Norwegian schools in

teaching about Indigenous and community-based knowledge. Festival activities are of great value and can be beneficial not only for schools nearby, but also for teacher training to highlight the importance of alternative pedagogies as part of developing epistemic justice. In collaboration with other institutions like language centres, libraries and museums, these institutions can bridge education systems and create a synergy that cannot be achieved through a single institution alone.

## **Conclusion**

As the title of this paper states, our aim has been to explore how Sámi/Indigenous festivals can inform and bridge formal education, thereby decolonising and Indigenising education, and research. Our conclusion is that Sámi and Indigenous festivals have been and still are crucial in revitalising Sámi cultures and ways of knowing, which are still marginalised in the mainstream education system. Through land-based and space-based pedagogies, it is possible to revive and sustain Indigenous life and knowledge that was interrupted and destroyed by Norwegian colonialism given its drive to suppress and eliminate Indigenous ways of life, including Indigenous claims to Sápmi land. The Indigenous knowledge and skills acquired at Sámi and other Indigenous festivals have the potential to supplement and critically inform knowledge in the formal education systems such as schools, teacher education, libraries, and museums.

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