

Traditional knowledge—New experts

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Abstract

The dualism of the internet, with an ideology of individual freedom and hopes for empowerment on the one hand and logics that contribute to a consolidation of power on the other, is reiterated in contemporary digital practices and discourses. The internet is an arena where power structures—both institutional and non-institutional—meet and intertwine with one another. In this article, I discuss how expertise and authorities are shaped and (re)defined online based on recent examples of Sámi initiatives for the revitalization of endangered languages and for knowledge production. The recent increased use of digital practices implies that new experts and authorities emerge, challenging and bypassing institutional structures.

Traditional knowledge—New experts

The internet and other digital and mobile technologies are often perceived as democratizing due to their availability, interactivity, low cost, and ease of use. The web indeed encourages participation and enables more people to collectively engage in the opening of public debate in the political, social, and cultural spheres (Papacharissi 2004; Benkler 2006). It has also become easier for internet users to create their own tools, apps, websites, etc. In this context, the number of digital resources to strengthen the Sámi languages has grown considerably in recent years (Cocq 2016a; Cocq 2013; Cocq 2015; Cocq 2016b).

Previous research has discussed the impact that this alleged democratization entails. Rainie and Wellman write, for example, that the democratization of media participation “enables a new breed of media creators to step onto the cultural stage. This reshuffles the relationship between experts and amateurs and reconfigures the ways that people can exert influence in the world” (2012, 220). The so-called web 2.0 that has opened up opportunities to participate and influence can be seen from this perspective as a means to question and challenge structures and power relations and to assign the role of experts to new actors.

This positive attitude towards the internet and web 2.0 that Rainie and Wellman (2012) illustrate has been problematized and questioned by other researchers, and the potential of social media to enable marginalized voices to reach arenas that they otherwise would not have access to has been debated. As previous research (e.g. Sassen 2004) underscores, social media are not isolated from the social logic. Discourses of democratization nuance the effects of new media on the larger political debate (Hindman, 2008; O’Neil, 2014), and critical voices suggest that social media contributes to maintaining or even strengthening existing structures and power relations (Dean 2003; Fuchs 2010; Lovink 2005).

The dualism of the internet, with an ideology of individual freedom and hopes

for empowerment on the one hand and logics that contribute to a consolidation of power on the other, is reiterated in contemporary digital practices and discourses. On the internet, power structures—both institutional and non-institutional—meet and intertwine with one another.

Here, I will discuss how expertise and authority are shaped and (re)defined online based on recent examples of Sámi initiatives. In order to provide a balanced picture of the potential that digital tools can have for Indigenous groups, this article examines a few examples of initiatives designed and implemented in order to strengthen the Sámi languages. The first one deals with a web resource and mobile application for beginners in Ume Sámi, one of the smallest Sámi languages that, until very recently, did not have an official orthography. The second example is an application that, through GPS-technology and augmented reality, recomposes a Sámi linguistic landscape. This is an illustration of how mobile technologies provide alternative modes of mapping and naming. The third example focuses on a language activism project that problematizes and questions relationships to Indigenous languages and language learning. These examples are the results of initiatives that took place outside traditional institutional frameworks, and they illustrate how digital and mobile technologies are used and applied with the intention of challenging, questioning, and/or revisiting attitudes towards Indigenous languages.

Digital practices are here approached in terms of intersection and interplay between online practices and what takes place offline—which is also true for the way I conduct my research, including collecting data. The examples in focus in this article were studied through digital ethnography supplemented with qualitative interviews with the project leaders behind the initiatives.

Contemporary challenges for the transmission of Indigenous knowledge

The Sámi are Indigenous people¹ of Europe. Sápmi, the traditional area of settlement, is a broad area that comprises the northernmost parts of Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Russia. National borders, however, have political implications because language areas, modes of land use, etc., span across these borders. Despite the varieties of languages, the heterogeneity of livelihoods, and diverse conditions and prerequisites for cultural and linguistic vitality, the Sámi are one nation with a common flag, a common national song, and a common national day. The Sámi are thus one nation stretching over the nation states of Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia. In terms of politics, there are Sámi parliaments in Sweden, Norway and Finland, which are representative bodies subordinated the national parliaments of their country.

The Sámi languages are endangered, but efforts at revitalization can be witnessed in many areas in Sápmi. All Sámi speak the majority language in each country (i.e. Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, or Russian); however, not all Sámi speak or understand a Sámi language. In the colonial context of Fenno-Scandinavia, Sámi culture and languages have been marginalized. Efforts to counteract and question this invisibility and marginalization have multiplied in recent years—as will be illustrated here.

The population of Sápmi has been generally quick to adopt new technologies,

from the first generation of cell phones in the 1980s to the modern use of social media in domains as diverse as e-commerce, language acquisition, and activism. There is a high level of digital literacy in Sápmi—and a relatively good standard of internet accessibility as is the case in large parts of Sweden.

Formal education has proved to be deficient when it comes to the needs for Sámi language learning, including access to teachers and learning materials in Sámi, and this has been pointed out and criticized by the Council of Europe on several occasions since the ratification of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages in 2000—a criticism that applies to Sweden, Norway, and Finland.

Impediments to implementing effective revitalization efforts within the Swedish education system are also brought out (Vinka 2015). Therefore, knowledge transmission has to be problematized: for Sámi speakers who wish to pass on their language to the younger generations, and for those who want to learn a Sámi language, modes of learning and teaching need to be supplemented outside educational institutions.

The fact that the institutional education system does not meet the criteria to enable effective knowledge transmission (Keskitalo, Määttä, and Uusiautti 2014) does not apply only to the revitalization of the Sámi languages. Several researchers problematize education and learning in Sámi contexts and highlight the need to develop a culturally based education model with more focus on cultural knowledge, including, for instance, elders as a resource and a source of knowledge, and based on Sámi ontology and epistemology (Nutti 2012; Owens et al. 2012; Hirvonen 2004; Pettersen 2006; Svonni 2015).

The availability of resources and the need for culturally based teaching courses vary between areas, schools, and students. In this context—where resources are uncertain regarding Sámi language training and education—community-based initiatives take place using online digital media and digital tools in order to counteract the mismatch between the needs of the community and what the schools can offer.

Conceptualizing authority in digital settings

How power and authority are shaped and negotiated online is often described in terms of complexity and messiness. The breadth and range of internet-based communication and information channels is one of the reasons why it is difficult to identify and explain how power is distributed online. Theoretical approaches to authority provide us with a framework that allows us to grasp the dynamics, effects, and implications of digital initiatives.

For instance, the concept of vernacular authority—in contrast to institutional authority—has been discussed comprehensively by Robert G. Howard (2005, 2008, 2011) who underscores the role of the articulation of tradition in discourses and the empowerment and disempowerment it implies (Howard 2013). Vernacular authority is a concept that allows us “to critically assess the role that elevated authority plays in the ideologies [...] media users are constructing for themselves” (2013,76). This concept is relevant to the study of digital tools for Sámi languages because it highlights the importance, intentions, and effects that individual initiatives can have in a broader

context in which other experts, authorities, and power conditions exist.

Folklorist Diane Goldstein underscores how there has been “a vernacular turn”, i.e. an “explosion of interest in the vernacular” (2015), and she gives examples of movements and situations that began in the 1990s and 2000s

to change the relationships of ordinary people to experts and expert knowledge. Grassroots organizations, particularly in development, environmentalism, and health, began to combine ideas of lay expertise with activism in a new form of political participation and a new form of science. (2015,128)

Different forms of vernacular and institutional authority interact rather than stand in opposition to each other—for example, when official sources refer to folk traditions in order to gain legitimacy, or when institutions’ and organizations’ websites refer to or retrieve information from individuals, such as posts on social media (Cocq 2013).

Authority has also been approached in previous research from the perspective of digital democracy (see e.g. Dahlberg, 2011), a concept that refers to how different positions and attitudes take place online. The media can be seen as a tool for communication and for facilitating decision-making, but also as an arena for counter-positions and for questioning. Digital media are sometimes seen constitutively, “as bringing into being particular spaces, objects, and practices” (Dahlberg 2011, 865). Thanks to digital media, marginalized voices acquire the opportunity to be heard through online and offline activism, and social movements online are able to get organized, coordinate, and cooperate in a way that can bypass established institutions and structures.

Rainie and Wellman (2012) consider that the internet provides strong opportunities for empowerment:

The role of experts and information gatekeepers can be radically altered as empowered amateurs and dissidents find new ways to raise their voices and challenge authority. (2012, 14)

In a similar manner as the notions of *author* and *original source* are questioned in internet research because they belong to an age “dominated and even defined by the cultural significance of print” (Sauerberg, 2011,2; see also McLuhan, 1962; Parland-von Essen, 2014), the notions of authority and expertise need to be reconsidered. In the digital age, these are not assigned through apparent controlled frames, and they are exercised under different premises today than they were during the period referred to by some scholars as the Gutenberg parenthesis (e.g. Sauerberg 2011).

This perspective describes the web as democratizing and as an arena where new voices emerge and potentials for change are greater than through traditional media. Whether these new voices reach out and actually challenge authority, however, is another question. Regardless of skepticism or faith in the internet, new technologies contribute to a new media ecology that affects not just the technology, but also communities. Kahn and Kellner (2008) observe that “the emergent information and

communication technologies are transformative in the direction of more participatory and democratic potentials” and that these allow “self-determination and control from below” (Kahn and Kellner, 33–34). This perspective is interesting to apply to the study of specific digital tools in order to further investigate whether and how new technologies can contribute to an increased degree of influence and a renegotiation of the distribution of authority when it comes to matters related to language and language learning.

Initiatives in digital environments need to be understood in relation to other factors such as the influence of popular and local movements as Goldstein mentions, as well as political and cultural processes in minority politics. The next section therefore contextualizes contemporary initiatives related to the Sámi languages and digital technology.

Alternative resources, reclaimed domains, and decolonizing strategies

In order to investigate how expertise and authority are shaped, negotiated, and redefined on the internet, three specific examples will be discussed here: a web-based language learning resource (also available as an app for mobile devices), an app that displays Sámi place names, and an art and activism project on Tumblr. These represent different efforts to strengthen the use and status of the Sámi languages and to support language learning.

Memrise - Umesamiska ord och fraser

Because we have to deal with these problems – that is, a lack of teachers and resources along with the geographical distance between those who want to learn and those who have the knowledge – digital communication is the only solution, to me, that can make things happen. Oscar Sedholm, project developer, Sáhkie (interview).

The first example is a course on Memrise, an online tool for language learning (web based and as an application for mobile devices). *Umesamiska ord och fraser* (Ume Sámi words and phrases) is a course in Ume Sámi for beginners. It was launched in 2014 by Sáhkie, the Sámi Association of Umeå, in collaboration with Álgguogåhtie, the association “Ume Sámi [community members] in collaboration”. This Memrise course was initiated by Oscar Sedholm, project developer at Sáhkie in 2014, based on previously recorded material. The Ume Sámi language is one of the smallest of the Sámi languages²; there are few teachers, almost no teaching materials, and the range of courses is very small and sporadic.

The Memrise tool consists of a frame and a structure provided by the app developers, within which anyone can create a course and fill it with content. Course participants, i.e. those who use the app to learn Ume Sámi, register with a username. The Ume Sámi course on Memrise then follows a textbook structure. The user builds a vocabulary that begins with simple basic words, continues with word lists that follow different themes, and then progresses to simple sentences, questions, and phrases. A voice reads the words, and the beginner can practice both pronunciation and spelling.

The app is based on a form of gamification where the user receives points for every word that he/she practices and acquires. Everyone can follow their own progression through the score list, but they can also follow other users through a leaderboard of the most frequent users. Users receive a badge in pace with the learning process and are upgraded on a scale from “Membryo” to “Overlord”. Memrise also contains a function to interact with other “Mempals”, i.e. other users. In this way, the app can serve as a way to create, strengthen, and/or maintain a network and to make it easier for users to keep in touch with each other. At the beginning of 2016, the course had 185 registered users (individual accounts).

The course had a greater impact and spread than Oscar Sedholm had hoped for³. When he contacted the CEO of Memrise and British memory grandmaster Ed Cooke—it turned out that the company was very eager to participate in the project. Cooke and colleagues came from the United Kingdom to Umeå in December 2014 in order to meet Sámi community members, gather material, and further develop the application with videos. During the visit, the conference “Viessuojeđ Mujttuo: A Digital Future for Ume Sámi” was organized. The conference and the *Umesamiska ord och fraser* initiative were covered by *The Guardian*⁴.

Memrise – Umesamiska ord och fraser is the result of collaboration between different actors. The course is based on user-generated content within an existing structure (an application) created by an external actor. This is where local players contribute with information and knowledge and thus fill the provided structure with content. The local, non-profit organization Sáhkie was the initiator of this resource based on needs and demands of the community. Part of the project developer’s responsibility at Sáhkie was to collect and make resources in and about the Sámi languages more widely accessible. Oscar Sedholm pointed out that in the case of Ume Sámi “there’s not much you can link to. We had to create something ourselves.”

The project developer mentioned that he is now looking for funding from various agencies in order to further develop Ume Sámi material for Memrise. Commenting on the relationship and dependency between the non-profit organizations and government agencies, he said:

Municipalities as administration work in a certain manner – and that way of working does not work for Ume Sámi. [...] Because the very system is wrong, the work lands on the shoulders of the non-profit organizations.

In this context, it is worthwhile mentioning that Ume Sámi is not only one of the smallest Sámi languages; it is also a language that, until very recently⁵, had no officially acknowledged orthography. The work with the Memrise course took place at a time when the spelling was under discussion and negotiation. *Memrise – Umesamiska ord och fraser* is not just an initiative outside national educational institutions; it is also shaped outside the official frame. The lack of an official orthography implied that the language itself was not recognized as a distinct language to the same extent as the other Sámi languages. While this could have been an impediment for printed material, the lack of an official orthography was not an issue in the production of the Memrise course.

iSikte Sápmi

I hope that there will be more awareness about Sámi place names, that the names will be used more often, and that new groups will take them into use. Inger Persson, project developer for *iSikte Sápmi* (interview).

iSikte Sápmi is an application for mobile devices that reveals Sámi place names in the surrounding landscape via augmented reality. It was developed in 2012 by *Gáisi giellaguovddáš* (the Sámi language center in Tromsø, Norway) as the product of a documentation project and a database of place names. The official description of the app reads:

What is the name of the mountain you can see in the distance? What are the lakes you see in front of you? Point there with In Sight – Sámiland and you'll see on the screen what they are called. In Sight – Sámiland shows Sámi POIs [points of interest] in Norway. See what's near you when you travel in Sámiland: mountains, lakes, places, buildings, etc.⁶

The application connects a database to a map using GPS technology to identify the location of the user on the map. The user can then, through the camera of a mobile device, get a view of the landscape overlaid with the names of places, mountains, lakes, etc. Users can add names of other places, suggest place names, and upload pictures of landscapes annotated with names in Sámi to social media platforms. This echoes other digital practices such as interacting with geographic locations by “checking in” on social media or adding a photo of a place with an associated hashtag.

The structure of *iSikte* (In Sight) was produced by the company Apps Fab AS. The application was not designed specifically for Sápmi or the Sámi languages, and it exists for other countries and regions and in several languages. Names from areas not covered by the *Gáisi giellaguovddáš* project are derived from the Norwegian mapping authority. The application is therefore the result of combined efforts of national authorities, community initiatives, and user-generated content.

Colonization processes have implied the erasure of Indigenous presence and history, which is linked to constructions and perceptions of the land as a *terra nullius* (Fitzmaurice 2007; Frost 1981). This aspect was taken into account in the motivation of the production of *iSikte Sápmi*:

Here in the north, many of the Norwegian names of mountains and places have been Norwegianised from their original Sámi names to names that do not mean anything.⁷

This erasure is expressed in the scarcity of Indigenous languages in the landscapes and in discourses that legitimize exploitations. The mobile application promotes a Sámi linguistic landscape, i.e. a landscape constructed by the combination of “road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public

signs on government buildings” in a given “territory, region, or urban agglomeration” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, 25). In the case of *iSikte Sápmi*, vernacular knowledge about place names that do not appear on official maps becomes essential. The act of renaming geographical names in the Indigenous language is part of a decolonizing project (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012, 158) and is a way to make visible the connection to the land, to the knowledge connected to it, and to a cultural heritage. While Norwegian names in Sápmi reveal a colonialized landscape, *iSikte Sápmi* offers a way to rename the landscape. The app contributes to strengthening the status of the language and the valuable knowledge embedded in it.

The project manager is the one who determines how the content is to be used, and the application as a tool provides the opportunity to gain more knowledge from others because the users can contribute by suggesting corrections and additions. The empowering dimension for the users lies in the possibility to interact with the app and influence its development—something that is not possible with official maps produced by national authorities. By revealing place names in mobile and digital contexts, the app contributes to the visibility of a linguistic landscape in tandem with the physical landscape. *iSikte* as a mobile application also has the advantage of enabling the user to explore the landscape through a language other than the one found on a standard map. A mobile phone can thus be transformed into a tool that connects a specific place with multiple names.

While official maps and map services provide information about the Sámi area only in the national language, digital technology enables one to visualize the presence of the Sámi population and languages. The *iSikte Sápmi* app is a particularly interesting example because it focuses on a neglected aspect of language—the language of the landscape. To make the language visible also means emphasizing traditional forms of communication of knowledge through oral storytelling, cultural history, and land use.

Sápmi 2.0 - Subaltern No More

As for the bigger, structural [issues], we cannot do anything about these... the Sami Parliament might do things, or the municipalities. But we're not in that position. Instead, we must help to motivate people on an individual level. Anne Wuolab, project leader (interview).

Sápmi 2.0 - Subaltern No More is introduced as a “collaborative art and activism project” on Tumblr⁸ “which seeks to empower Saami individuals to reclaim their languages by decolonising their bodies, minds and ancestral homelands.”⁹ The title echoes “Idle No More”, the Indigenous movement founded in 2012 by First Nation women in Canada that rapidly spread around the globe and led to increased collaboration between Indigenous communities and to greater awareness of Indigenous rights. The project leaders chose to call the project *Sápmi 2.0* because they wanted “a new, better Sápmi, without the bugs we have today when it comes to language issues”¹⁰. The title “Subaltern No More” was described by one of the project leaders as encouraging one

to “to talk with the voice you have”, and not from the subordinate position you might have been given.

The project leaders for *Sápmi 2.0* are two cultural workers dedicated to language revitalization in Sápmi. The project on Tumblr is part of a larger project that focuses on revitalization and decolonization. “A decolonial fanzine”, part of the same project, was released on February 3, 2016, at the annual Winter Market in Jokkmokk¹¹. It supplements the texts on the Tumblr blog with, among other things, a list of “culture challenges” and more information about the work with the project and about the project leaders. *Sápmi 2.0* also has a YouTube channel with short videos in and about the Sámi languages. Another part of the same art project consisted of setting up a Sámi Embassy, which was a performance that took place during the *Ubmejen Biejoieih* Sámi cultural festival in Umeå in March 2015. Citizens of Sápmi were invited to come to the embassy to report language loss and apply for a passport¹².

Sápmi 2.0 - Subaltern No More on Tumblr is a collection of quotations by Sámi authors (e.g. Paulus Utsi, Kirsti Paltto, Nils-Aslak Valkepeä, and Elsa Laula), artists (Maxida Mäarak, Sofia Jannok, and Max Macké), other community members, Indigenous people outside of Sápmi, and scholars such as Franz Fanon and Linda Tuhiwai Smith. Thus, the blog becomes a digital booklet and a multilingual collage of text extracts from literature, journals, newspapers, and other media as well as academic books about colonialism and decolonization. This “collaborative project” brings together many voices, both famous and less famous, in all Sámi languages and connects to the international Indigenous struggle for decolonization. Topics illustrated by the quotations are colonialism and colonial processes, language and the relationship to language and to language learning, and history, including how the Sámi languages were forbidden at school, how the Sámi were objects of study, etc. Empowerment takes place in the way one confronts, contests, and redefines history, as is illustrated by this quotation:

We are not on the brink of extinction. We are on the path to freedom, a place where we can find and rediscover our own Saami soul. *Tobias Poggats, Nuorat (01.2015)*¹³

Also, the voices of the contributors are unedited because the project leaders chose not to correct the language in order to “remove a barrier of language use”, as the project leader explained. In fact, the project leaders have a rather hidden role in the Tumblr blog. At the beginning of April 2016, the Tumblr blog consisted of 42 pages of posts tagged with hashtags such as *#indigenous*, *#indigenous resistance*, *#endangered languages*, *#saami*, *#language revitalization*, *#native*, and *#decolonization*.

Sápmi 2.0 - Subaltern No More was primarily meant as an internal critique according to Anne Wuolab, one of the project leaders. The decolonizing aim of the project focused on encouraging members of the Sámi community to speak with their own voices and in their own languages. But the project as a whole went beyond decolonization efforts:

When we came to [the part of the project that was] the embassy, we had left the term “decolonization”. Okay, what needs to be decolonized is perhaps Sweden, and not

Sápmi. We started talking about something that we called *sámáidahttit* [to “samify”] – that’s the concept we use now. We want *sámáidahttit* – to have the Sápmi that it is, when it comes to language, culture, politics ...

With this concept, Anne Wuolab illustrates her vision, hope, and goal for a cultural awakening and for empowering community members to define themselves based on their own interests and premises.

Challenging structures

In these examples, authority is not explicitly articulated, but it is negotiated in relation to institutions and established structures. The digital initiatives illustrate how authority is shaped by being taken rather than by being distributed. In the context that this article is interested in, there are few resources and obvious experts, which thus differs from the context described in previous research such as that of Rainie and Wellman:

In the less hierarchical and less bounded networked environment – where expertise is more in dispute than in the past and where relationships are more tenuous – there is more uncertainty about whom and what information sources to trust. (Rainie and Wellman 2012, 18).

In the contemporary Sámi context, expertise is less of a “dispute” – it is rather an empty space to fill, where people with expert knowledge rarely have had a chance to take a place or come forward outside their own sphere. Instead, people have been directed to institutional structures such as the school—which, as mentioned above, does not fulfill its purpose in this context. Efforts by non-profit organizations are “what is needed today, because the state and the framework we have are too rigid—we are getting nowhere”, according to *Memrise Umesamiska* project developer Oscar Sedholm.¹⁴

Canadian media scholar O’Neil (2014, 883) discussed situations where the state is absent and how this affects how power is perceived and how informal decision-making takes shape. In a context where the educational and training resources cannot meet the existing needs, Sámi initiatives have arisen as a response and as a reaction to these shortcomings.

The cultural knowledge that is embedded in language is promoted in the examples discussed in this article, thereby enhancing the value of Indigenous languages and the need to support revitalization. For instance, “tradition” is referred to as a source of knowledge, such as traditional land use and traditional knowledge in the case of iSikte Sápmi. Through such references, a vernacular authority is created that is rooted in the local culture and in a specific context. In a similar manner, language use is focused upon from the perspective of language speakers and beginners and in opposition to an idea of “perfection” in written language. This is obvious in the case of Sápmi 2.0 and the choice of the project leaders not to correct the texts written by contributors, but also in the case of *Memrise - Umesamiska ord och fraser* that was launched before an official orthography was adopted. Vernacular authority is empowering for the users because it enhances and makes visible the presence of the Sámi languages in new

domains and allows re-mapping and thereby establishes the existence of Sámi people and languages that would otherwise be erased. Such authority also allows for the formulation of counter-discourses, as illustrated in the Tumblr blog by the following: “Our languages are not threatened. I think this is an important message to all of us who are working on revitalising our languages.” (*Mattias Harr, Nuorat 01.2012*)

The use of digital resources contributes to knowledge production and knowledge transmission, partly through the emergence of new practices for language learning. For Indigenous and minority groups, this might contribute to increased influence, which is in contrast to traditional media that is designed by the majority society and often from the majority’s perspective. Mobile technology also implies that information can be provided via a smartphone, i.e. an object that is personal and that the user is familiar with, and such digital resources can be used in private. Access to information in Sámi, e.g. the ability to listen to the Sámi language in everyday situations through a phone, means that the Sámi languages are reappearing in more domains, i.e. several situations and more areas where languages are used.

Digital tools have the potential to be valuable instruments for the strengthening of languages. Only a comprehensive study focusing on the users would be able to evaluate whether these tools have a real impact on how languages are used and developed, but the examples discussed here indicate a changing and more favorable climate for strengthening the Sámi languages. A prerequisite for language revitalization is that the language is used in as many domains as possible, including at home, at school, in the media, at public events, etc., (Huss 1999; Hyltenstam 1996; Grenoble and Whaley 2006). There is also an empowering dimension in extending the presence and use of the Sámi languages to new arenas and taking the languages from private into public domains. Such initiatives might not affect media ecology in general, and might not affect the rest of society extensively, especially because these initiatives are relevant to a limited audience (users of an application or bloggers, for instance).

The dual heritage of the internet, on the one hand being an ideal of empowerment and democratization and on the other an ambition to control, is at work here. The examples discussed in this article illustrate not only how empowerment takes place online in a context where new voices enter an empty space that needs to be filled, but also how control of information and structures becomes visible. In the case of efforts for language revitalization, it becomes clear that digital initiatives are a mode of establishing platforms for a structured work toward the strengthening of culture. These examples are not isolated; together, and along with other examples, they show a path toward alternative modes of learning, activism, and cultural work. They illustrate the dynamics that foster altered roles of information gatekeepers as suggested by Rainie and Wellman (2012), and they form “control from below” that Kahn and Kellner associate with prospective self-determination (2008, 34).

In line with Goldstein (2015), we can see how “between the narrative turn and the local knowledge movement, an epistemological revolution has been playing out that celebrates [...] the vernacular.” In the same way that Howard has demonstrated how institutional music becomes vernacular (Howard 2008) and similarly to how Goldstein

observes how “the availability of medical information on the internet created a lay population refusing to be silenced” (Goldstein 2015), we can see how the availability of digital tools and participatory media has created an arena for the Sámi lay population to produce, consume, and control knowledge—and to step forward as experts. Their expertise as language speakers, storytellers, cultural workers, etc., has always existed, but the vernacular turn in relation to the digital turn has given the position of experts and gatekeepers to community members wanting to enter the scene and fill the void.

The effects of these efforts on the larger political debate are, however, limited. To a great extent, instances of digital media uses—such as those discussed in this article—address and are significant to cultural workers, language learners, and community members. Possible effects on democratization would require a larger impact and a different primary intention than the one articulated by the producers of the tools described here. The effects on structures and power-relations that has been observed by (compare Dean 2003, Fuchs 2010, and Lovink 2005) do not seem to be of immediate actuality in the Sámi examples in relation to majority society. The impact of these resources on structures within the Sámi community would however require further inquiry that would preferably include a broader range of examples.

By studying a few examples of the digital tools and resources that are being used to strengthen the Sámi languages, one can observe how authority is shaped and how it contributes to building new structures that complement, question, and challenge institutional structures. New players are emerging, highlighting the dysfunctionality and inadequacy of the existing structures.

These initiatives can be seen as constitutive rather than instrumental (compare Dahlberg 2011): it emerged in the interviews that have been conducted with the initiators and their networks that there is a clear goal and ambition in terms of education and ideology. There is also an empowering dimension in the expansion of the presence and use of the Sámi language into new arenas from private to public domains. Rather than making a significant difference in language revitalization, these initiatives contribute to making a change in so far as they set the agenda and lay the foundation for strategies based on the needs of the community.

Notes

- 1 Following the official definition of the term “indigenous” worked out by the UN. The understanding of the term is based on “self-identification, historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies, a strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources, distinct social, economic or political systems, and distinct language, culture and beliefs”. Indigenous peoples “form non-dominant groups of society and resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities” (http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session_factsheet1.pdf).
- 2 There are 10 Sámi languages of which 9 are listed by the UNESCO as endangered and one as extinct.
- 3 Interview with Oscar Sedholm, February 3d, 2016.
- 4 <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/dec/22/-sp-reindeer-herders-an-app->

and-the-fight-to-save-a?CMP=share_btn_tw

- 5 April 6th, 2016.
- 6 <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.appsfab.insight.sapmi>
- 7 <http://www.nrk.no/sapmi/app-med-samiske-stedsnavn-1.8862238>, interview in the Norwegian newspaper NRK with Mariam Rapp, District Administrator in the region of Troms.
- 8 The social networking service Tumblr is a microblogging platform that has grown substantially since its start in 2007, especially during the last few years. Tumblr allows users to publish in blog form, upload multimedia materials, and interact with each other.
- 9 <http://subaltern-no-more.tumblr.com/provsjektenbijre>
- 10 Interview April 15, 2016.
- 11 The Winter Market in Jokkmokk is a 400-year-old meeting up event that includes a market, entertainment, and cultural events such as concerts, conferences, exhibitions, and sports.
- 12 Sápmi is not a state or a defined geographical area with official borders, and being Sámi does not imply a citizenship. Therefore there is no real Sámi embassy, and the Sámi are citizens of the countries they live in.
- 13 <http://subaltern-no-more.tumblr.com/page/7>
- 14 Interview with Oscar Sedholm February 3rd, 2016.

Interviews

- Persson, Inger. Interviewed by e-mail with the author. March 4th, 2015.
 Sedholm, Oscar. Interviewed by the author. February 3rd, 2016,
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