

Negotiating Indigenous participation and heritage at a multicultural museum event in Norway

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Abstract

This article investigates how Indigenous participation and heritage are negotiated at a multicultural festival at the Norwegian Railway Museum. While such events respond to the call for meeting places fostering social inclusion and belonging, researchers within museology and festival research warn against promoting superficial and biased understandings of Indigeneity. Based on fieldwork and semi-structured interviews with festival organizers and Greenlandic contributors, we found that Indigenous participation was negotiated along two lines. First, the organizers and the Greenlanders shared enthusiasm for the festival's inclusive vision, yet they experienced different levels of ownership. The organizers were in charge; one Greenlandic contributor took on an active role while others became more silent consultants. Second, the negotiations revealed contrasting perceptions of Indigeneity, ranging from the organizers' traditional understanding to the Greenlanders' ambivalence toward the term. We argue that for multicultural museum and festival events to succeed in being inclusive, they must adopt critical and reflective approaches to ownership, as well as more complex understandings of Indigenous participation and heritage.

Keywords: negotiation, Indigenous, participation, heritage, museum, multicultural festival

Introduction

Since 2008 the Norwegian Railway Museum has hosted the annual multicultural festival *Stoppstedet Verden*. The two-day festival is the largest of its kind in Norway, drawing more than 11,000 visitors each June to Hamar, a medium-sized town in the south-east of Norway. The location is an open-air park by the shores of Lake Mjøsa that features vintage locomotives and carriages. At the festival visitors can see and experience cultural expressions as if traveling around the world. Visitors that participate in workshops can make Thai-inspired flowers with recycled paper, craft sand sculptures alongside artists from Albania, have their faces painted by a Greenlandic mask dancer, and learn the traditional Inuit method of bending wooden ribs used in constructing kayaks. The website describes the festival as aiming to “develop awareness and understanding of our multicultural society”, to “build bridges across cultures and create a meeting point for people of different backgrounds and groups”, and to take “preventive measure[s] against xenophobia and racism”. As such, the festival takes a stand on current social and political concerns relating to inclusion, which resonates with debates in museology and festival research. Within the museum studies field – particularly new museology and critical museology (Vergo 1989; Shelton 2013; Bettum et al. 2018) – researchers question the “value, meaning, control, interpretation, authority and authenticity” (Stam 1993: 267) of museums' approaches to minority group perspectives and participation. These questions have become particularly prominent in discussions about Indigenous participation and representation (Kalsås 2015). Within these discussions, centuries-long histories of dehumanizing policies and practices are addressed; so too are ongoing struggles for the recognition of Indigenous rights (Eidheim et al. 2012) and “native empowerment” (Ronan 2014: 132). Thus, these questions show a need to change existing perspectives, to “incorporate decolonizing and Indigenizing principles” (Phillips 2022: 112).

Similarly, Michelle Duffy and Judith Mair (2021: 15) have called for a wider understanding of diversity in “[f]uture trajectories of festival research” to include “[k]ey areas’ of ‘gender, disability, generation, LGBTQIA+ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual], Indigenous identities, and religious affiliation”. They urge researchers to “continue problematizing and critically engaging with [festival] ideas and practices, and facilitate the use of festivals as sites for on-going dialogue and negotiation between members of diverse communities” (Duffy and Mair 2021: 15). Failing to do so will result in “lazy multiculturalism” or “superficial understandings” and engagement with “essentialised representations of these cultures” (Watkins and Noble 2019: 295). In short, the two research fields have overlapping interests, and engage in similar debates regarding ambitions, aims, and means; likewise, they feature debates concerning perspectives on heritage and minority participation, which is the focus of this article.

Our study is part of a larger multi-case project focused upon multicultural events in schools and communities, which explores the perspectives of various participants, including young people, teachers, parents, and people involved in school and event leadership (Dewilde et al. 2018, 2021a, 2021b). In this article, we address the Greenlandic contributors, the festival’s headline participants of the year, who were framed as Indigenous and traditional Inuit people by the organizers. We start by presenting theoretical perspectives on Indigeneity, participation, and heritage. After discussing the study and methods, we analyse Indigenous participation and heritage from the perspective of festival organizers and Greenlandic contributors. Finally, we discuss what we can learn from this case to organize more inclusive events and build more cohesive societies – the aim of multicultural museum events and multicultural festivals across the world.

Theoretical perspectives on Indigeneity, participation and heritage

In the afterword for the anthology *Indigenous Experience Today*, Mary Louise Pratt emphasizes the “retrospective” and “relational nucleus of indigeneity” (2007: 399). She points to the historical and colonial roots of Indigeneity, when settlers retrospectively denounced those who were there first – the people encountered and finally conquered – placing them in essentialist and biased categories. As Pratt explains, “‘indigenous’ [is] rarely if ever the primary identity of indigenous people” (398). Indigeneity is instead secondary in their self-identification, as this study suggests. Despite this critique, the term has also functioned as an “umbrella category” (399) used by Indigenous peoples, particularly in the post-World War Two era, which has seen a rise of Indigenous initiatives on a global scene. Pratt refers to this development as “indigeneity as a process of emergence” (402) or, leaning on Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a “process of becoming, self-creation and self-determination” (399). What becomes visible in our study, is that the presence of a pan-Inuit identity covering the Arctic peoples of Greenland, Siberia, Canada, and Alaska, although there are indications of a weakening in this tendency – what Adam Grydehøj (2016: 104) more strongly identifies as a “lack of interest” in a common cause.

Colonialism has also long forced Indigenous peoples into public expressions of identity that Laura R. Graham and H. Glenn Penny (2014: 1) refer to as “performances of Indigeneity”. Within “intercultural spaces”, they claim, “each act has the potential to reinforce or challenge the category of Indigeneity; each can be the starting point for new conceptualization” (2014: 1). The Norwegian Railway Museum has become a place for such negotiations, potentially also a place for “relationality” that encourages “[r]ethinking indigeneity” (Cattelino and Simpson 2022: 376).

These negotiations within the institution’s discourses of inclusion have highlighted the concept of participation as a community characteristic that encourages an open approach towards diversity (Hauge 2007; Quick and Feldman 2011; Bailey and Angit 2022). Active participation – a key factor in building inclusive communities – involves recognition, responsibility, and genuine influence upon democratic processes and decision-making (Haug 2017). Listening to minoritized people, and recognizing their presence in social and public life, is a “continuous, systematic process [...] [that] requires training and engagement at all levels and, therefore, the provision of adequate resources” (Council of Europe 2021). As part of an inclusive and diverse community, everyone should be guaranteed equitable opportunities

for full and active participation in every facet of life, including the political, social, civic, and cultural sphere (Haug 2017). However, the notion of participation can be misinterpreted in several ways. For example, it is argued that some people or groups “lack the experience and maturity to participate and that they do not understand what is in their best interest” (Council of Europe 2021). Such rationales have contributed to long histories of colonization and the marginalization of Indigenous people, along with their continued systematic exclusion from political and economic power (Weber-Sinn and Ivanov 2020). The dominant society establishes conditions for participation, neglecting the impact of discrimination and racism. Participation is reduced to consultation and therefore not “holistic, shared and equally distributed” (Fouseki 2010: 183). Megan Watkins and Greg Noble (2021) note that ongoing acts of recognition of Indigenous groups through participation can thus resemble cultural tokenism, with individuals used merely for display. If Indigenous cultures are put on show through a museum exhibition or a festival only to tick a box, the activity does not necessarily enhance participation, but rather positions the group as ‘other’, and may instead perpetuate stereotypes. Thus, as Richard P. Bailey and Suria Angit argue, participation should be conceived of as a “necessary, but not sufficient condition of inclusion” (2022: 8). To facilitate inclusive communities, participation should be complemented by other factors, they suggest, such as “non-discriminatory attitudes and values, legal measures, and support mechanisms” (2022: 8).

In relation to museum exhibitions, Kalliopi Fouseki (2010: 180) argues that community consultation should be replaced with “active negotiation and engagement that is aimed at shared power and ownership”. One of the challenges here is that museums often identify or construct communities with whom they want to collaborate; in doing so, they are already in a position of power. While minoritized communities can actively participate and feel included in museums, “dominant ideas of history and heritage remain unquestioned” (Fouseki 2010: 182). Hence, a lack of what Fouseki (2010: 183) has framed as “holistic and shared ownership” may lead to tension and the withdrawal of minority groups. To remedy this problem, Fouseki suggests “narrative driven” as opposed to “object-driven exhibitions”, explained as “exhibitions in which the narrative define[s] the selection of objects and images”, not the other way around. This approach, Fouseki claims, “provide[s] a more democratic consultation process” (2010: 186).

To facilitate a “narrative driven” multicultural event, Ana Deumert’s distinction between *inheritance* and *heritage* is useful. She argues that “[i]t is a consequence of our very mortality [...] that we inherit ideas, practices, beliefs and artefacts from earlier times” that we “select, choose and filter as we bring the past into the present (and future)” (2018: 150). Heritage is the outcome of this selection, as “history-as-memory-work” (Deumert 2018: 150). In the process of appropriation and delineation, some aspects are taken up and claimed, whereas others are left behind in a particular context and by particular people. Critical heritage scholars have contributed with nuanced studies of how people perform heritage in their everyday lives. Drawing inspiration from Mikhail Bakhtin and Jacques Derrida, Deumert is concerned with a “multiplicity of voices”, and with “pay[ing] close attention to those voices that have been silenced and forgotten”, arguing that “the past too is open to multiple interpretations, leading to a multitude and diversity of heritage practices” (2018: 152). In this article, we are interested in how certain aspects of Greenlandic heritage are negotiated for presentation in the museum event.

The study and methods

In this section, we describe the participants and reflect upon our positions as researchers. Afterwards, we describe our data collection and analysis methods. With respect to the participants – although the Norwegian Railway Museum hosts Stoppedstedt Verden, the festival leader is a local performing artist who has extensive experience participating in cultural exchange projects. The festival leader initiated the festival, together with the event manager, who is responsible for shaping the event. In this case, the festival leader recruited one of our contributors, a professional mask dancer from west Greenland. Two women and two men from east Greenland were recruited by the festival leader through a cultural exchange project. During the multicultural museum event, the Greenlanders were responsible for a stall in which they displayed artefacts, instructed polka, and painted masks on children’s faces. They also

performed mask dances and polka on the festival's main stage.

Although together at the stall, we recorded in our fieldnotes how there was little interaction or visible collaboration between the mask dancer from west Greenland and the east Greenlanders during the festival. Living on the largest island in the world, separated by a massive ice sheet, the people of the west and east do not see themselves as close neighbors. Moreover, as Grydehøj (2016) notes, the impact of Danish colonization and western influence have left the southwestern part far more urbanized than the rural and isolated east. As differences became visible in parts of our study, we distinguish between the eastern and western Greenlandic contributions in our analysis. Despite the differences, our data also shows that these Greenlanders shared a strong Greenlandic identity, and negotiated certain aspects of Indigenous participation and heritage in coinciding ways.

We collected participant data before and during the museum event. During the week leading up to the festival, we collected publicity articles from the local newspaper and interviewed the festival organizers for almost two hours. Because the festival was a short-term, intensive, and complex multicultural event, we also needed to reflect upon our role as researchers, and to be sensitive to how we positioned ourselves and the Greenlandic contributors during data collection, data analysis, and the writing process (Warriner and Bigelow 2019). As part of this reflection, we acknowledged the potential pitfalls of exploring Indigeneity as non-Indigenous researchers (Phillips 2022). Our team of three researchers have all lived in the area for a long time, and we visited the festival multiple times with our children before returning as researchers. In this sense, we could be considered insiders. And yet prior to our endeavour, we knew little about Greenland, its peoples, languages, and cultures, making us outsiders with respect to the contributors.

The Greenlanders were allotted space and time in the stall they operated for the two days. They performed on the festival stage at set times. Within the context of a Norwegian festival, they were outsiders, external to its organizational structure. However, within their stall and when they were onstage, they were insiders. These complex layers of cultural and linguistic insider–outsider dichotomies created opportunities and challenges.

To investigate how the festival organizers and the Greenlandic contributors negotiated Indigenous participation and heritage, we conducted participant observation across the two festival days, with careful attention to the 'here and now' as we asked what was unexpected, and to whom it mattered (Ferrell et al. 2015; Bartlett and Vavrus 2017). We took pictures of two tables with information about the Greenlandic stall that the festival organizers had set up and of the artefacts the Greenlandic contributors had placed on display. Fieldnotes documented the action in and around the stall, as well as informal conversations we held with Greenlandic contributors. We also filmed dance performances, and we conducted semi-structured interviews with the mask dancer (39 minutes in length) and with the two women from the culture house (43 minutes in length). We noted that the festival leader mentioned the Greenlandic contributors in the opening speech (five minutes).

We conducted interviews with the Greenlanders in English and with the organizers in Norwegian. During the interview with the two women from east Greenland, one served as an interpreter for the other, switching between English and Greenlandic. We have not been able to recruit a Greenlandic research assistant; for this reason our analyses are limited to the concurrent English translation of one of the interviews. We coded our sets of data in multiple-cycle processes (Saldaña 2016), first individually, and then as a team. Next, we searched for patterns and deviations across the data, considering our research question and theoretical framework. Themes such as innovation, preservation, acceptance, and resistance stood out as central. We have translated into English extracts from the interview with the festival organizers, the festival leader's opening speech, and the items on the information boards.

Analysis and discussion

Innovation and preservation – perspectives of the festival organizers

To understand participation from the perspective of the festival organizers, it is important to study what they want in terms of the image of the festival, their framing of the event, and

their reflections on collaboration and consultation with different contributors, including those from Greenland. When asked how the festival leader and the event manager would describe the multicultural museum event, they gave various answers, including: a meeting place for people from diverse backgrounds, an entertainment venue, a site from which to share public information, and an opportunity to offer new thoughts and to set diversity and inclusion on the agenda. The organizers added that since the region where the festival took place is not as diverse as the larger cities, local people have less experience and competence regarding multiculturalism. Also, the region in which the festival is organized is outside the administrative area for the Indigenous Sami languages, which is situated in the north of the country. Even though Sami people live in all parts of Norway, most people attending Stoppedstedt Verden have limited knowledge of and experience with Sami – and thus Indigenous – culture.

The year's festival programme listed a variety of contributors, including professional artists, local minority community centres, embassies, kindergartens, and schools. This diversity was also visible among the funders, including Art Council Norway, the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs, and local municipalities. This inclusivity suggests that the festival organizers' way of working is in line with critical museology and its commitment to "developing new exhibitionary genres, telling untold stories, rearticulating knowledge systems for public dissemination, reimagining organizational and management structures, and repurposing museums and galleries in line with multicultural and intercultural states and communities" (Shelton 2013: 7). In terms of artistic performances, the festival leader was less interested in preserving traditions than in offering an appealing programme of responsive and engaging events. She balanced a desire for high visitor numbers with attracting diverse audiences to fulfil the goals of social inclusion and community cohesion:

We are not interested in being streamlined. We will never become a commercial festival. What we want is to constantly challenge thoughts, ideas about these stereotypes that you have, but also to have some personal encounters that perhaps make you stop and not only be in dialogue but stop and think through your own situation, and especially for those who have moved here ... who are immigrants and live here now.

As this extract shows, the festival leader linked nontraditional performances with opportunities for personal conversations that could challenge stereotypical ways of thinking (see Fouseki 2010, and Deumert 2018). Later, she gave the example of a musician invited to the festival from Palestine who lives in Norway and works with sound showers originating in a Tibetan tradition; the festival leader was clearly excited about crossing traditional boundaries and creating something new.

The organizers worked in varying ways with the contributors to design acts they believed would succeed, explaining that "there is no recipe or template that we somehow force onto all the countries. Everything is customized" and adding that "we probably control quite a lot, without them knowing it". The organizers felt that the participants from Thailand were particularly successful. The Thai group initially had many different ideas, such as fruit carving, but the organizers believed they did not understand what would work at a large festival. In conversation with the organizers, the Thai contributors briefly mentioned the water festival *Sonkran* and the tradition of colourful flower petals floating in a bowl. The latter ended up being the main focus of their contribution to the festival, because the festival leader underlined that they wanted activities that visitors could engage in to get a taste of the culture, without a formal effort to "teach people about different cultures". We do not know how the Thai contributors experienced this consultation process, but the organizers appeared to be 'experts' in terms of what would work at the festival. Some contributors from Greenland presented examples of activities that were particularly challenging for visitors to engage with, even though Greenlandic – or more precisely, Inuit – participation was the festival's headline act of the year. From the main stage in the opening speech, the festival leader said:

It is a great honour to be allowed to bring the Greenlanders here. There are great distances [in Greenland], and we have had the opportunity to travel there ourselves and experience this. And we now understand much more of Greenlandic

culture after having been there. But you can also experience a small part of this today and here tomorrow because Greenland is putting on both a mask dance and various activities.

As she mentions, a two-year exchange project included travel to Greenland to discover how the organizers could showcase Greenlandic culture. Ultimately, the professional mask dancer from west Greenland was deemed to fit well with the profile of the festival. However, dialogue with the contributors from east Greenland was more challenging:

It's a fantastically exciting country because they are a colony and have in a way lost their identity, so we [spent] a whole week- [we asked], "What do you think Greenland should be at Stoppedsted Verden this year?". So, we never got an answer.

The organizers' strategy of asking questions and building on the answers to design an act they were sure would work at the festival did not succeed as it had with the contributors from Thailand. The organizers were aware of Greenland's dark history as a colony of Denmark, but this narrative did not fit the more light-hearted tone of the multicultural event. The cheerful and perhaps overly optimistic introduction of the Greenlandic participation was also evident on the information board displayed in front of the stall, which stated, "This will be an interesting meeting with a traditional Inuit culture from both East and West when Stoppedsted Verden welcomes visitors from Kalaallit Nunaat [Greenlandic for 'Greenland'] – country of human beings". With these texts, it became clear that in the context of this creative festival, dominant discourses around Indigenous history and heritage went unchallenged (Fouseki 2010; Eidheim et al. 2012), and risked being labelled as "lazy multiculturalism" (Watkins & Noble 2019: 295). The organizers were very much in a position of power when they took it upon themselves to participate in the process of selecting and filtering which elements of Greenlandic heritage should be showcased. Their work echoed Fouseki's (2010) "object-driven" – as opposed to "narrative-driven" – focus. The Greenlandic silence may be interpreted as withdrawal from consultation because their narrative was not heard in a more active manner. In the interview, organizers elaborated on their frustration and their view of the challenges of what it means to be Greenlander today:

The communities get really small, and [...] it's obviously incredibly important for these kinds of communities to get both input from other places, and we have of course wanted that input here as well, because those kinds of cultures are of course incredibly exciting to high-tech modern societies.

When comparing Greenlandic culture to more technological societies, the organizers drew on understandings of Indigenous people as close to nature, and connected to something their societies lost. They also described Indigenous society as needing input from elsewhere. This is in line with Grydehøj (2016: 106), who reports that Danes often refer to Greenlanders as "people of nature", echoing "essentially Western and colonial representations". As we will see in this study, some Greenlanders also subscribe to this view, but it holds a broader and more complex meaning for them.

To summarize, from the festival organizers' perspective, successful participation was linked to visitor engagement and innovative performances. The creative, light-hearted tone at the festival was a constraint, limiting opportunities to engage more critically with what it means to be Greenlandic today. Thus, despite the organizers' vision for creating an inclusive space, their understanding of Indigeneity stood in the way of "shared power and ownership" in representing Greenlandic Indigenous and Inuit culture (Fouseki 2010: 180).

Embracing the multicultural festival and challenging understandings of Indigeneity – perspectives of the mask dancer from west Greenland

At first glance, the mask dancer's performance on the main festival stage seemed to be a traditional dance connected to Inuit hunting traditions, and Greenlanders as "people of nature" (Grydehøj 2016: 106). The black and red face, the sounds and movements, were associated with the Arctic wolf: its tremendous power and natural habitat of the extreme Arctic. As we observed in our fieldnotes, the performance captivated the audience – us too – and it also

seemed frightening, especially for young spectators. In the interview, the mask dancer explained that the dance was a short extract from a 15-minute dance. She explained that towards the end, the dance more clearly highlights spiritual aspects, expressing the “passing from death to spiritual[ity], moving to reincarnation of the spirit”; more generally, she stated that the dance was a display of “Greenlandic *spiritus*”, commenting that “without spirit, nothing, no Inua, nothing”, pointing towards the imperative of preserving “Inuit” or “Greenlandic culture”.

Eventually, a more complex origin story emerged. The creative process for the dance started as late as 1998. A Danish artist and friend of the mask dancer contributed sound and music. Then the mask dancer discussed her own “research” on the Greenlandic culture, that is, its rhythm, sounds and music, based on consultations with her parents about her ancestry. The mask dance, therefore, evolved through a mix of traditional and modern impulses. In going through this process, the mask dancer “realized”, as she put it, that she had “made that music, actually”. This response reflected her creative “ownership” (Fouseki 2010) of a performance that challenged stereotypical and essentialist understandings of Indigeneity (see Pratt 2007).

When we asked the mask dancer about her background, she began talking about her ancestors from the north and west of Greenland, elaborating on their hunting traditions. She responded according to a common idea of Inuit culture, an idea that was further strengthened by the way she expanded on the present challenges of preserving what she referred to as “dog culture”:

I grew up as a kid, dogsledding with my cousin and my uncle. I've seen my grandfather dogsledding and hunting and everything. I know how to take care of dogs. I learned that you have to respect dogs because they make [you] survive in the Arctic. Without them, it will never be. There will [not] be any Arctic. No, there won't. They [Greenlandic people] started to hate dogs. And you see it on Facebook when they write or complain about things, a lot of things. They're not even allowed to have dogs near the houses. It's in a lot of laws. So, you see, in my eyes, in my soul, I can see a lot of unhappy dogs. So, losing culture. It's very sad, and if you don't know your culture, you lose yourself inside in your soul.

The importance of preserving “dog culture” was further expanded to include the lives of Inuit people elsewhere, reflecting a pan-Inuit consciousness covering “Alaska, Siberia or Canada”. The mask dancer explained that these were areas where “you feel more welcome. Because this is you. The same mentality”. When touching upon the pan-Inuit experience of “losing culture”, however, she sadly reported, “we are not that close anymore”, expressing a gradual weakening of identity (see Grydehøj 2016). Her account did not end here. Holding on, seemingly, to an Indigenous identity understood strictly within traditional terms, she answered the follow-up question, “how do you experience living like Indigenous’ peoples?”, with these three words: “I am mixed”. As she explained, “I am mixed in Danish”, as well as “Norwegian, a little bit”, and that she had a “grandmother from Asia”. She ended by clarifying that she was far from an exception, rather a rule. “A lot of Greenlanders are mixed”, she told us. Thus, she challenged an essentialist notion of Greenlandic and Indigenous identity as exclusively Inuit, what Grydehøj (quoting Kirsten Thisted) refers to as an “incarnation of the authenticity and spirituality” of “people of nature” (Grydehøj 2016: 106). When we explained that as far as we knew, she was the only Indigenous person at the festival, and we asked whether she “would like to see more?” Her response again showed a rejection of essentialism: “I am not the only Indigenous here. We have all the Indigenous here. I see Pakistanis. I see Africans. I see you [are] Indigenous, too. You are Norwegians, aren't you?” When we agreed, she asked, “Am I right? You have a lot of culture, farming culture and fishing. It's like a hunting culture”. In short, she refused to be perceived as different from others, echoing Deumert's (2018: 152) understanding of heritage as a reflexive process open to a “multiplicity of voices”. By inviting us as researchers to engage in “[r]ethinking indigeneity” (Cattellino and Simpson 2022), the mask dancer appears to suggest a broad conceptualization of Indigeneity (Graham & Penny 2014).

The mask dancer's reference to “all” can also be read as a connection to all humans. The sense of being part of one larger humanity was possibly formed and strengthened by her cosmopolitan experience living as a young woman in California with “friends all over the world”. She elaborated: “I loved it. We don't look at colours. We look at human beings. It

was cool. We hang out [with] all ethnicities. It was so nice". Her life in California was not only open to "different cultures", but "[at the] same time keeping its own culture". Interestingly, the multicultural museum event appeared to trigger these cosmopolitan memories. The festival, as she put it, brought her "back to that journey". Enthusiastically, she elaborated:

It's like paradise. This is beautiful. You see trains going. It's like an international journey. And I was amazed to see all the world's people smiling and the free spirit of the kids. Oh my God, I want that. Yes. I become rich here. I get very, very rich.

Clearly, the mask dancer embraced the festival. It was a creative space for participation where she could meet people on equal terms and experience Fouseki's "shared power and ownership". The mask dance itself, following Fouseki, could also be viewed as a 'narrative driven' exhibition, as she was given the opportunity to tell her own story. Although she called it her "paradise", the festival experience was not without friction and resistance for the mask dancer. In the interview, she brilliantly unmasked researcher ignorance and bias on Indigeneity and its interconnections with other cultures. This resistance targeted us as a research team, even as it expressed disapproval of the festival's stereotypical and essentialist framing of Inuit and Indigenous culture (Pratt 2007; Phillips 2022).

Finding inspiration and expressing resistance – perspectives of the participants from east Greenland

When we asked the east Greenlandic contributors about their participation, they said that their main purpose was to find inspiration for their intercultural work with young people at home:

It is very important that we are here because we are getting so many inspirations. We are learning so much. We are seeing different kinds of people. We are learning so much and everything we can use to come up with ideas about what we can start in [town].

In particular, the contributors emphasized the positive impact of recycling, referring to the fact that several exhibitions reused glass, plastics, and paper to create new artistic expressions. For the east Greenlanders, the focus on recycling represented not only an inspiration to make climate action a priority, but also an opportunity to "be more open" towards new cultural formations and reformulations of the traditional culture: "in Greenland we have focused on traditional culture, and maybe we can get new ideas using the traditional culture to make something new".

Furthermore, meeting people and interacting with other participants and performers allowed the group to envision new networks and to consider bringing home some of the cultural experiences they had at the festival: "If we want to make something similar in east Greenland, we can think back to what we saw at this festival. So, we can use the knowledge and try to get a hold of people". In addition to finding inspiration from activities and cultural interaction for their work in their hometowns, the east Greenlandic contributors saw the festival as an opportunity to present Greenlandic culture, and more specifically, east Greenlandic culture: "Greenlandic people are very proud of their culture, and east Greenlanders too, because there the culture is quite different from west Greenland". Although they did not elaborate on the differences, we assume they agreed with the mask dancer, who stated:

We are lucky that we had east Greenland. [...] Because west Greenland started their civilization too early. So, they lost a lot of cultures. That you, I can see now. You can see in west Greenland. Many people don't know anything.

For the display at the stall, the group had collected traditional artefacts, including a drum, national costumes, and Arctic footwear made from skins with white leg sections and floral embroidery around the top. They also displayed pencil sketches of kayaks, igloos, and mythological creatures (such as a *tupilaq*, a carving of a monster). This collection of artefacts and illustrations appeared somewhat randomly selected, as the east Greenlanders seemed less familiar with the multicultural festival context and uncertain of how to respond to the organizers' request: "The festival asked us if we could take elements from Greenland. And

we just collected what we could find”.

The east Greenlanders also took the organizers’ request for inclusive, interactive, and engaging activities seriously, but in a different way than intended. To present something traditionally Greenlandic, the group had agreed to introduce the Greenlandic polka, known as the *kalattuut*, which is a dance used in national and community celebrations (Ringsted 1997). The *kalattuut* developed through adaptations of the traditions of European sailors and hunters. It is more up-tempo than the European polka and includes additional dance steps, probably originating from the spiritual drum and mask dance. Interestingly, the east Greenlandic group did not know how to dance the *kalattuut*, so they practiced for the festival. They danced on the main festival stage but in a rather shy and seemingly uncomfortable way, as we documented in our fieldnotes. Both the artefacts on display and the *kalattuut*, therefore, indicated a lack of shared ownership and an essentially “object driven” rather than a “narrative driven” approach (Fouseki 2010). In another activity at the stall, the group introduced the craft of bending wood with hot water. Here, children could interact with the east Greenlanders by forming a rib that had been soaked in water for three days, slowly bowing the rib into a curved and rounded wooden piece used to form the body of a kayak. The activity did not attract many people, however, as no progress could be seen during the two days of the festival. By choosing this slow-paced activity, the group accepted but also challenged the organizers’ wish for an engaging contribution.



Figure 1. The activity of bending wood @Dewilde.

Figure 2. Map of Greenland and traditional Inuit artefacts on display @Dewilde.

Out of all the artefacts the group had brought to the festival, the Greenlandic flag stood out as particularly important. The flag was placed in the centre of a big, open white tent provided by the festival organizers. In the interview, the group elaborated on what the Greenlandic flag meant to them: “Greenland is still a part of Denmark. So many people ask if we are Danish. We are Danish citizens, but we also have our own flag. We get very proud when we see our flag in international settings”. The flag stood out as the key expression of their primary identity. When elaborating on their relationship to Denmark, we noted a clear contrast between the mask dancer, who embraced her mixed background, including Danish roots, and the east Greenlanders, who avoided the topic:

Danish people are still trying to rule us. All that stuff. Frankly, I am really tired of that, so I am not even interested in explaining. So, we really want to show the Greenlandic aspect. The problem of the Danish is so tiring.²¹

To be Greenlandic, as Grydehøj (2016) also noted, can entail a spectrum of perceptions about being Danish and belonging. The east Greenlanders were insistent about their non-Danish identity and were proud of their background from a traditional Inuit community; however, they did not want to be framed as Indigenous people. Like the mask dancer, they challenged the notion of Indigeneity as their primary identity. When we asked the group – again revealing researcher ignorance and bias – how they experienced being the only Indigenous people at

the festival, the participants dismissed the question: “I do not know. We don’t know how to answer. [...] Because there is nothing special: ‘Oh, we are Indigenous’. We don’t think that”. The east Greenlanders expressed resistance to being othered, objectified, and tokenized (Fouseki 2010) as representing only a traditional Indigenous community, a “people of nature” protected from high technologies and modern influences (Grydehøj 2016).

In sum, neither the lack of shared ownership nor a common understanding of the complexity of Indigenous participation led to passivity or withdrawal for the east Greenlandic group. Although the east Greenlanders negotiated participation by somewhat uncomfortably playing along as more silent consultants, they also found ways to construct participation on their own terms and even to challenge and express resistance to biased and essentialist Indigenous perceptions.



Figure 3. The Greenlandic flag in the centre of the Greenlandic stall @Dewilde.

Conclusion

Both multicultural museum and festival events strive for inclusion. At a time when diversity is high on the public agenda (Duffy and Mair 2021), museum curators and festival organizers face challenges beyond simply ticking off boxes representing different marginalized populations (Fouseki 2010; Watkins and Nobel 2021), including the Indigenous box.

With regards to ownership, the festival organizers and Greenlandic contributors shared the festival’s vision for inclusion, and its call for innovative cultural expressions. The festival organizers were undoubtedly aware of the pitfalls of superficial, essentialist representations of cultures, as they explicitly encouraged participants to challenge stereotypes. The Greenlanders appeared to respond accordingly in their expression of enthusiasm for the festival and its vision, which presented a challenge they found meaningful and therefore accepted.

In response to the organizers’ invitation for innovative expressions, the mask dancer embraced the call and took the lead. Well acquainted with the festival’s vision and methods of work, she found her “paradise”, a place where she could express her personal narrative (Fouseki 2010). In short, knowing what would work at the festival, she took on the role of an expert. In contrast, the east Greenlanders’ first and foremost wanted to learn and find

inspiration for activities and cultural interactions to bring home. Moreover, the display at the stall and their performance of the Greenlandic polka seemed reminiscent of a more “object driven” process as opposed to a more “narrative driven” approach (Fouseki 2010). Worryingly, despite well-intended outreach from festival organizers, the hierarchic powers that Weber-Sinn and Ivanov (2020) claimed are embedded in historical and contemporary relations between minoritized people and the dominant society seemed to come to the fore. The festival organizers set conditions for participation in a way that jeopardized the east Greenlanders’ engagement in the festival. In the negotiations between the organizers and the east Greenlanders, Fouseki’s (2010: 180) vision of “shared power and ownership” seemed difficult to realize. Thus, the same invitation resulted in two different responses. This outcome serves as a reminder that contributors bring different narratives to the scene, adding to the complexity of developing shared ownership.

Regarding the negotiation of Indigenous participation and heritage, the Greenlanders refused to be framed and headlined as Indigenous in the traditional sense of the term. The mask dancer, obviously accustomed to responding to the issue, elaborated by explaining the innovative process of creating the dance. This explanation referred to the Danish influence upon Greenlandic culture. Through “history-as-memory-work” (Deumert 2018: 150), the mask dancer constructed her heritage, signalling both continuity and change of cultural tradition. In contrast, the east Greenlanders’ contributions did not reflect a similar process of “history-as-memory-work” (Deumert 2018: 150), because they played along with the framing of Indigenous participation by the festival organizers, exhibiting what they could find of traditional artefacts, and learning a traditional dance specifically for their performance. However, like the mask dancer, they explicitly resisted both our and the organizers’ understanding and framing of Indigeneity as their primary identity, as exemplified in the interview. Gathering around the Greenlandic flag, they positioned themselves as Greenlandic first, choosing an identity that emphasized their Inuit roots and distance from Danish influence and rule.

Our study shows that the organizers’ framing of Greenlandic participation as Indigenous was problematic. Clearly refusing a label that separated Greenlandic culture from all other cultures and which reduces them to a “people of nature” (Grydehøj 2016), the Greenlandic contributors opted to define their identity and what it means to be Indigenous and Greenlandic today with much greater nuance.

Based on the findings of this study, curators and festival organizers working with Indigenous populations around the world may need to adopt more critical and reflective approaches to ownership, as well as more complex understandings of Indigenous participation and heritage. To promote such participation, multicultural museum and festival events need to be open, and different narratives need to be heard. Promoting such openness requires shared ownership developed through negotiations between the actors involved. If this is lost, asymmetrical power relations, and biased, essentialist perceptions of Indigenous participation will be perpetuated. Moreover, the critical content of participants’ (like the Greenlanders) negotiations will not come to the surface.

Notes

- 1 The Norwegian Railway Museum is one of the oldest railway museums in the world. Established in 1896, the museum documents Norway’s railway history and its role in Norwegian society over the years.
- 2 Norwegian Railway Museum, Stoppedsted Verden - Barnas Internasjonale Kulturfestival [Next Stop the World - Children’s International Culture Festival]. <https://jernbanemuseet.no/stoppedsted-verden-barnas-internasjonale-kulturfestival/>, accessed 8 June 2023.
- 3 Festival leader, interview by authors, digital recording, 22 June 2018, Hamar.
- 4 Festival leader, interview, 22 June 2018.
- 5 Festival leader, interview, 22 June 2018.

- ⁶ Festival leader, opening speech, digital recording, 2 June 2018, Hamar.
- ⁷ Festival leader, interview, 22 June 2018.
- ⁸ Festival leader, interview, 22 June 2018.
- ⁹ Mask dancer, interview by authors, digital recording, 3 June 2018, Hamar.
- ¹⁰ Mask dancer, interview, 3 June 2018.
- ¹¹ Mask dancer, interview, 3 June 2018.
- ¹² Mask dancer, interview, 3 June 2018.
- ¹³ Mask dancer, interview, 3 June 2018.
- ¹⁴ Mask dancer, interview, 3 June 2018.
- ¹⁵ East Greenlandic contributors, interview by authors, digital recording, 3 June 2018.
- ¹⁶ East Greenlandic contributors, interview, 3 June 2018.
- ¹⁷ East Greenlandic contributors, interview, 3 June 2018.
- ¹⁸ East Greenlandic contributors, interview, 3 June 2018.
- ¹⁹ Mask dancer, interview, 3 June 2018.
- ²⁰ East Greenlandic contributors, interview, 3 June 2018.
- ²¹ East Greenlandic contributors, interview, 3 June 2018.

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