Foreword: towards a Nordic manifesto

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Let us start with tasting the metaphor of place branding. Place branding (or the practice of branding places) is a strategic endeavour to make places visible and competitive in the attention economy. Branding creates a visionary platform of becoming; it envisions prosperous viable futures for generations to come. A place can be described as a bounded geographic space, a multiple figure of materialities, politics and investments. A Nordic take on branding augments this view with communitarian perspectives. What we need to relate to is that a place is also *home* for individuals with their hopes, losses, ambitions and everyday lives, and their need to be cared for and recognised as members of a community: a community created by relations and through nodes in a network that we humans cannot do without. A place is always home for humans and other beings, a home where we all instinctively dwell. Previous Nordic studies have taught us that places, even the most remote, expand in time and space. They are not stable, but a vibrant field of diverse actors, governance, materialities, interests, memories and mobilities that inflict place conceptions – that challenge the need to fix a place (Førde, Dale, Kramvig, and Gunnerud Berg 2013). I learned this the hard way, being an anthropological student who settled in a village on the northern Arctic Coast, being possibly the only one not constantly on the move.

Considering these arguments, how are we to think about a place, and how can it be identified as an entity? As researchers, we do create them, even though they exist before we came. This is why place and space is a tricky research object. Space and place is everywhere (or nowhere . . .) following Geertz (1996). So how can we grasp it? A place is always in the making, always in the state of becoming – and we as a research community work to make sense of this. Place branding is a participatory endeavour, as one activity among many in the remaking of a place through multiple narrative, performative and governance techniques. The authors of this book argue that place branding has emerged as an object of study, a specific approach to branding practice and policy, a sensitivity to research and a type of hybrid scholarship that have a specific Nordic flavour. This is an interesting argument.

The study of place-based activity could take inspiration from Ingold (2000), concerned with the relationship between human beings and their environment. He argues against the notion that nature is this empty space constructed by human activity. He criticises the culture vs. nature dichotomy reproduced in the construction paradigm and resists the separation between the built of the human environment and the non-built environment. Instead, he adheres to an indigenous positionality which argues that we are part of nature and we are always in the world. This is a philosophical argument, but it could also be an argument embedded in his ethnographic research in Sápmi. Together with other species, humans instinctively dwell in places. Only through our capability to dwell can we build – because to build is already to dwell, Ingold argues. Just like waves, places are in a constant state of becoming – hence, branding is an act of dwelling; it adds to the becoming of the specificity of places. Waves have no borders or boundaries but they do have undercurrents that pull surfers in specific directions and at moments can pull them down. Writing from coastal Sámi communities, these collective knowledges are part of storytelling events through which the places are remembered and enacted, but also rebranded so to speak, to those that at that moment dwell and at other moments move, in and out of places.

The making of Sápmi as a place for tourism is an interesting case. Organised tourism in Sápmi goes back to 1875 when Thomas Cook & Son started cruises to the North Cape. From there on “Sámi Touristic Camp” became part of what was offered to the travellers at different locations on the coast where siidas dwelled during the summer. The World Exhibition in Paris in 1889 included a group of South Saami from Røros, as did the one held in Chicago in 1893. These exhibitions offered the participants the opportunity to witness the primitive races (Baglo 2001) and brought the curiosity to the fore that later brought new groups of travellers to the North or Ultima Thule. Ultima Thule – the farthest point, and the limit of any journey and people living at the edge of civilisation – was the figure that participated in the European self-image. In addition, these first tourist encounters were organised to reproduce stereotypical images of the Sámi within an ambiguous racial discourse that, as Baglo (2001) argues, supported Social Darwinian ideas. Essentialising ideas about race and culture is very much the foundation of Sámi tourism and the ongoing branding of Sápmi: a settled discourse that indigenous people and companies struggle to resist as well as renegotiate. Often consultants, working through innovation programmes, are not helpful. More than one of the Sámi tourist companies that I work with has been advised to hold on to the problematic clichés of the past, such as the concept of Lappland, because the European travellers know Sápmi as such. Through these reproductions, a culture

that is not concerned with authenticity becomes so, within the touristic discourse.

The becoming of a place through branding, and through engaging with the collective acts of remembering or forgetting, contributes to the configuring and forming of places (Ahmed 1999). This is very much so in the Nordic Sámi communities that during the colonial period were forced to collectively give up, or to forget, the Sámi heritage, stories, languages and objects, and accept the branding of the place in line with the authorities. Ahmed (1999: p. 341) argues:

The lived experience of being-at-home hence involves the enveloping of subjects in a space which is not simply outside them: being-at-home suggests that the subject and space leak into each other, inhabit each other. To some extent we can think of the lived experience of being at home in terms of inhabiting a second skin, a skin which does not simply contain the homely subject, but which allows the subject to be touched and touch the world that is neither simply in the home or away from the home.

The home as skin suggests that the boundary between home and away is permeable and so is the boundary between self and home. In addition, Ahmed argues that movement away is always affective: it affects how “homely” one might feel and fail to feel. The Nordic wave is a figure of thought inspiring many of the writers in this book, undertaking an understanding of the Nordic as a movement whose size and boundaries flow back and forth in time and space. Despite the large number of studies addressing Nordic place brands and branding, little attention has been given to the practices of branding and place branding research within the Nordic welfare states. Place branding is undertaken through strategic political as well as business actors; still, also, the numerous storings of place that are conducted by less strategic actors should be considered in academic analyses. As Ren, Pram Gad and Rastad Bjørst argue in this volume, place brands are unruly and have multiple sites of enactment. This volume encourages us as researchers concerned with place and place branding to identify and relate to these complexities, as well as always asking the difficult questions about what and whose stories are not told that enact places, homes and brands.

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