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EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN SÁPMI

An interview study with Sámi education professionals addressing the challenges and opportunities for respecting cultural diversity in education

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Abstract

Keywords:	Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Indigenous education, Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), Sámi people, Sápmi

In connection to global ESD discourse concerning the need for education to respect cultural diversity, the aim of this study is to investigate challenges and opportunities encountered by Sámi education professionals regarding the implementation of Sámi education in Sápmi. To meet this purpose, the study addresses the following research questions:

How do Sámi education professionals describe:

i)   culturally appropriate and locally relevant education in Sápmi?
ii)   challenges and opportunities for implementing culturally appropriate and locally relevant education in Sápmi?

To analyze the empirical material obtained through semi-structured interviews, a theoretical framework grounded in decolonial theory, using the concept of epistemic justice and critical place-based pedagogy, is applied. The results demonstrate that culturally appropriate and locally relevant education in Sápmi is described as including content adapted to the learner's perspective and cultural context, involving connections to the wider community through shared values, language and practices related to intergenerational learning. Further aspects include connections between Sámi culture and the living environment and its places through feelings of accountability and care, regarding them as sources and repositories of knowledge, as well as sites of connections to ancestry. Challenges for implementing Sámi education are described as dealing with the long-time consequences of colonialism, including assimilationist and discriminatory politics and attitudes, resulting in loss of language and connection to cultural heritage. Further challenges involve threats against the living environment and Sámi culture, such as increased natural resource exploitation and climate change. The widespread lack of knowledge about Sámi culture within the Swedish majority society is also affecting the integration of Sámi elements and knowledges in the Swedish education system, as well as access to resources in the Sámi education system. Opportunities for implementing Sámi education include existing Sámi schools and institutions being considered important sites for continued cultural knowledge transmission and learning, as well as symbols for the value of Sámi knowledges and culture for the Sámi themselves *and* the majority society. In this sense, these places of education become crucial sites, not only for supporting the cultural survival of the Sámi community, but also for protecting the cultural, linguistic and epistemological diversity of the whole region, adding important perspectives to the ongoing discussions regarding how the future should be envisioned – and educated for.

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To Nicolás and Maya, thank you.
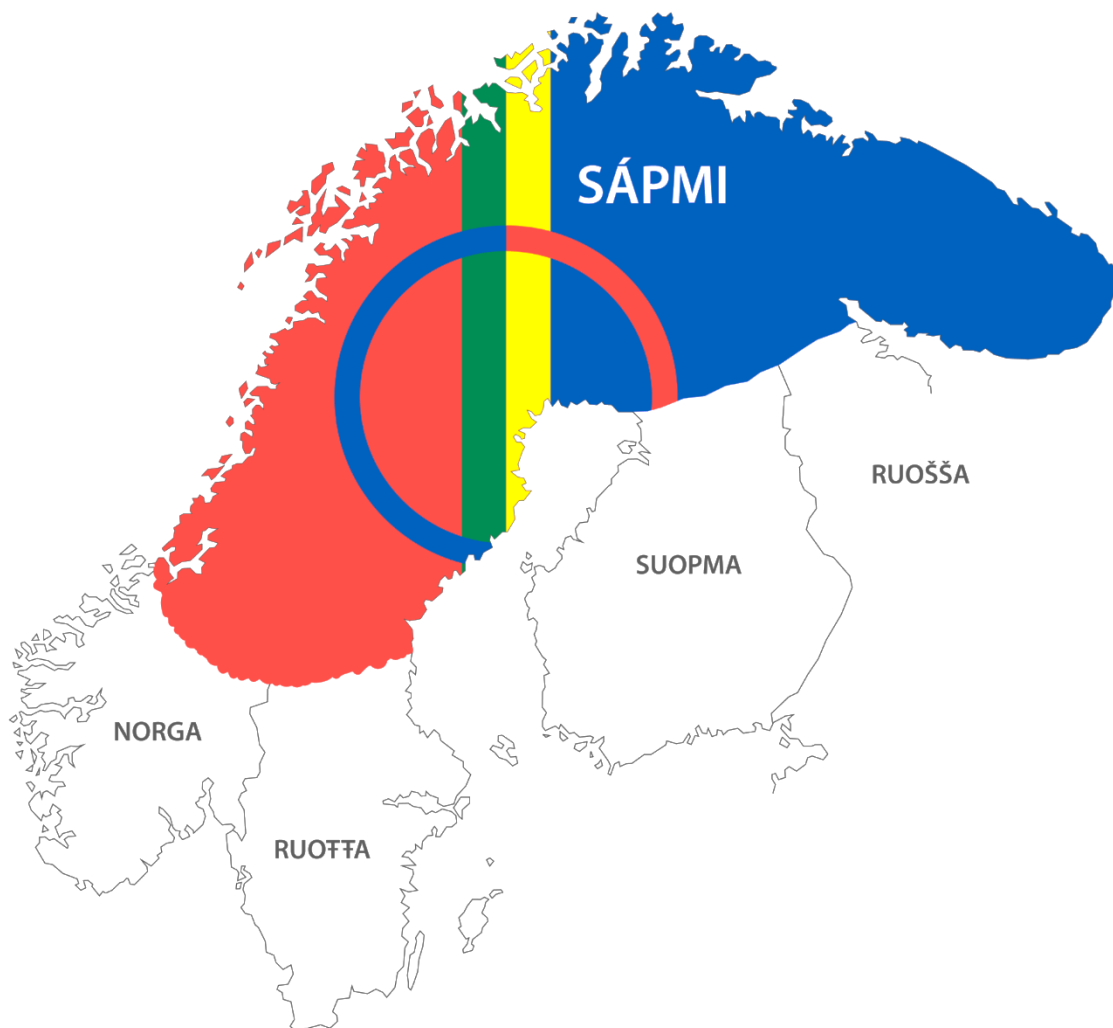
Visual: The Sápmi region stretching across Norway (Norga), Sweden (Ruotta), Finland (Suopma) and Russia (Ruošša). Illustrator: Ingemund Skålnes. Source: Instagram.com (reproduced with permission from the artist)

List of abbreviations

ESD – Education for Sustainable Development

IKS – Indigenous Knowledge Systems

SDGs – The UN Sustainable Development Goals

SP – The Sámi Parliament in Sweden

TEK – Traditional Ecological Knowledge

UNESCO – The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

PBE – Place-Based Education

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"*You're not helped by knowing that pi is 3.14 when you have to make a fire in a snowstorm*" (participant 6).

1. Introduction

In this chapter, Indigenous education as an ESD-related research problem area will be introduced. This will be followed by a presentation of the aim of the study, the research questions and its delimitations. The chapter ends by outlining the relevance of the research project, as well as providing an overview of the disposition of the present work.

1.1. ESD and Indigenous education in Sápmi

Forming part of the global discourse on Sustainable Development, the concept of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is, in a time of large-scale environmental degradation, climate change and gross economic and social injustice, presented as a beam of light. An essential element of quality inclusive education to build a more just and sustainable world, and an enabler of all the other UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNESCO, 2019a). According to the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), the main UN agency leading the work, ESD is the key to empowering people all over the world to transform society by *reorienting education*, both in its formal, informal and community shapes, to help them make informed decisions and take responsible action for "environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity" (UNESCO, n.d. A).

However, given that the meaning of ESD's core concept, Sustainable Development, remains highly contested, the practical workings of the kind of "reorientation of education" suggested by the ESD framework represent an area of interest for doing ESD research, as different interpretations make possible widely disparate real-world interventions (e.g., Bolis, et al. 2014; Gottschlich & Bellina, 2017; Hugé, et al. 2013). For instance, different interpretations become particularly evident when applying Indigenous peoples' perspectives[1] on what a sustainable society should look like, including deep human-nature interconnectivity, to debates regarding the meaning of concepts such as *sustainability* and *development* (e.g., Sámi Parliament [SP], 2009, p. 4). Furthermore, what becomes evident is that, although these debates are present at all levels of society today, not all perspectives are valued the same and the continuing marginalization of Indigenous worldviews, knowledges and ways of life illustrate the fact that, even though formal colonization may have ended, its intellectual and cultural counterparts have not lost momentum. As exemplified by the dominant

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[1] Following Kuokkanen (2000, p. 412), I acknowledge that categories such as "Western" and "Indigenous" are diverse and that Indigenous communities resist fixed, homogenizing definitions of indigeneity given their different cultural, political, and geographical contexts. Categorizations will however be used in a heuristic manner in this work to discuss existent differences between the categories, as well as their consequences.

promotion of *one* determined, anthropocentric and capitalist path towards "development" (Burman, 2017: 935; see also Apffel Marglin, 1995; Kuokkanen, 2000).

Taking as its point of departure the above debate, as well as the idea that, despite the globalized, post-modern and knowledge-intensive state of the world today, our local communities remain the primary location of human experience (Hertting & Alerby, 2009, p. 633), this study has nevertheless taken note of the aim of the UNESCO ESD framework to respect cultural diversity and the need for education to be both *locally relevant* and *culturally appropriate* (UNESCO, n.d. B). However, when keeping in mind the continued coloniality of reality, this is inevitably paired with the questioning of the *actual* possibilities for education to be just that. In order to further explore the intersection of these issues, as suggested by Teamy and Mandel (2016), the engagement with and learning from places of "alternative" education around the world becomes necessary, not the least for understanding new ways of learning about and envisioning sustainability, development and education in different local contexts. In the present study, this is done through an attempt of genuinely listening in on Sámi perspectives on education within the traditional Sámi territory of Sápmi[2]. Acknowledging the importance of not only paying critical attention to material power asymmetries, present everywhere within the world-system today, but also to the epistemological power asymmetries that underpin such unequal material flows (Burman, 2017, p. 935).

1.2. Research questions and aim

The present study is physically and culturally situated in a place that is both Swedish, as effectively located within Swedish state borders, but also Sámi, as it is situated within Sápmi. This "place" thus includes an overlapping of both physical, epistemological and cultural territories, within which colonial hierarchies, not the least expressed through the education policies of the Swedish state, have resulted in a history that carries with it different degrees of suppression of Sámi languages, religion and culture (Kullerud, 2009, p. 234; Omma, 2013, p. 3). Connecting this with the above introduction to current global ESD discourse, including the need for education to respect cultural diversity, the aim of this study is to investigate challenges and opportunities encountered by Sámi education professionals regarding the implementation of Sámi education in Sápmi today. For this reason, the focus of the study revolves around Sámi places for primary and post-secondary education and, meeting the requirement of involving others when engaging in ESD and Indigenous research (SP, 2010; Tkarihwaié:ri, 2011; UNESCO, 2012), empirical data has been collected through semi-structured interviews with the aim of addressing the following research questions:

> How do Sámi education professionals describe:
> i) culturally appropriate and locally relevant education in Sápmi?
> ii) challenges and opportunities for implementing culturally appropriate and locally relevant education in Sápmi?

In making sense of the gathered data, a decolonial theoretical framework involving both *epistemic justice* and *critical place-based pedagogy* provides a lens for answering the questions asked, as well as supports further scrutiny and discussion of the concept of ESD, both locally and globally, through the enabling of Sámi education professionals to voice their views on matters of importance for education in Sápmi – and the world.

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[2] The Sámi homeland since time immemorial does not have clearly defined borders but stretches northwards from what today is central Norway and Sweden (one southern limit being the town of Idre in the Swedish county of Dalarna), through northern Finland and Russia's Kola Peninsula. This region is collectively referred to by the Sámi as "Sápmi" (SP, 2020b).

1.3. Delimitations

The geographical delimitation of the study, encompassing the Swedish part of Sápmi, is connected to the theoretical framework which includes place-based pedagogy, involving the assumption that there is a great deal to be learned from paying detailed attention to any place that holds meaning for people. Furthermore, the fact that Sámi education is managed differently within each nation state and that the experiences of persons involved from different countries might differ substantially was also considered. This delimitation is thus both in line with the study's place-based focus, as well as it serves as a means for keeping within the time constraints of the project. Additional delimitations include the choice to pay special attention to persons professionally engaged in Sámi education, warranting the acknowledgment of the fact that they represent a limited group within the Sámi community, and that the findings of the study may therefore not be representative for Sámi society as a whole. This delimitation is nevertheless motivated by the study's focus on local education alternatives and culturally situated perceptions of education, which Sámi education professional have real-life experience of as co-producers of said alternatives.

1.4. Statement of relevance

Education is often considered an essential part of sustainable development and how it should be implemented. However, given that Indigenous peoples' perspectives are often marginalized (Jonsson et al., 2012; Kassam et al., 2017), the focus of the present research project constitutes a way of recognizing views that stands in contrast to dominant economic-centered discourse on sustainable development, "valid knowledge" and education (Kopnina, 2020). Connecting this with the ESD aim of education being both locally relevant and culturally appropriate, previous scientific literature regarding Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and ESD point in the direction of investigating formal education settings from a critical perspective (e.g., Chandra, 2014; Liu & Constable 2010; Teamey & Mandel, 2016). Most studies, the present one included, are furthermore connected through a joint quest, bound on exploring alternative understandings of (E)SD and what it means in different cultural contexts. This also includes passing on the findings to a broader public in order to benefit not only the holders of such understandings, but also society at large by pointing out important linkages between cognitive, cultural and ecological diversity, as well as the importance of exploring social, economic and cultural alternatives that serve, rather than threaten, our collective life on Earth (Gahman & Legault, 2019; Kassam et al., 2017).

In this research context – and adhering to the idea that "educational theory and research require not only that we denounce power imposition, injustice, and oppression but also that we name the possible ways to overcome those" (Freire, in Gómez et al. 2011, p. 241) – the value of the present study resides in its contribution to this growing body of literature with the adding of an exploration of a Sámi educational context, including its challenges and perspectives on education. This contribution is part of an attempt of taking one step further towards a recentering on Indigenous worldviews, knowledges and pedagogies in debates on ESD, and a way of counteracting the widespread view of Western perspectives on knowledge as superior to those of other knowledge systems, something which continue to impede sincere and meaningful collaborations for sustainability (UNESCO, 2019b).

1.5. Disposition

What follows this first chapter is a chapter aimed at providing necessary background information, presenting different understandings of the concept of sustainable development and situating the study within a historical and cultural context. Following thereafter, the third chapter provides an academic background and positions the research project with regard to previous studies. In the fourth chapter, the theoretical framework is described, starting with decolonial theory and moving on to the concept of epistemic justice, and critical place-based pedagogy. Once this framework has been defined, chapter five explains the methodological choices made regarding the methods used for collection and analysis of the empirical material, together with a presentation of the ethical framework. In chapter six, the results of the study are presented and analyzed in accordance with the theoretical framework. A discussion in connection to previous research and ESD is also presented. Finally, in chapter seven, conclusions drawn from the previous chapter are provided and suggestions for further research made.

2. Background

This chapter offers background information regarding current debates related to sustainable development and Indigenous peoples' rights, both globally and locally in Sápmi. With the hope of facilitating further reading, the cultural and historical context of the study is also presented, including an overview of present-day Sámi education. In addition, to help guide the understanding of the data presented further ahead, a brief presentation of the term *traditional knowledge* is also provided.

2.1. Sustainable Development and Indigenous peoples' rights

When applying a global perspective, the rights of Indigenous peoples[3] have gained greater recognition over the past 20 years, particularly regarding the rights to their traditional territories (Lawrence & Kløcker Larsen, 2017, p. 1164). Different international policy documents and treaties, such as Agenda 21, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), all stress the importance of Indigenous people's rights to their lands, culture and knowledge systems in connection to social justice and environmental sustainability (UNCED, 1992, chapter 26; UN, 1992, article 8j; UN, 2007, articles 13, 26, 31; Tkarihwaié:ri 2011, article 18). According to these documents, national states need to recognize the perspectives and values of Indigenous peoples' culture, including their traditional knowledges, ecological understandings and methods of biodiversity conservation and resource management for promoting environmentally sound and sustainable development (UNCED, 1992, chapter 26; UNESCO, n.d. C; UNESCO, 2001, Annex II:14). However, the growing attention given to Indigenous peoples' rights and their calls for justice can be contrasted with the fact that human induced land use change has become an urgent global concern as natural resource extraction has increased significantly within the same period and territories, partly because of rising commodity prices on the international market (Österlin & Raitio, 2020, pp. 1-2). Therefore, as the expansion of industrial activities continues on Indigenous lands, the two contrasting trends have led to an increasing number of land conflicts, rather

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[3] An *Indigenous people* is a people who identify themselves as such and who originate from groups with a long coherent historical connection to a geographical area, dating back to the time before the determination of current state boundaries. The people have also retained, in whole or in part, their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions (SP, 2020c).

than any real improvement regarding Indigenous rights in practice (Lawrence & Kløcker Larsen, 2017, p. 1164).

2.1.1. Perspectives on Sustainable Development in Sápmi

The dominant economic system of today is geared towards constant efficiency improvement and profit maximization, which results in a homogenization process where many Indigenous peoples' ways of life simply do not fit in (Newling, 2003, p. 111). Other values, where wealth is not measured in material terms, and traditional or alternative lifestyles which often include small-scale land use, are seen as disruptive pebbles in the great machinery of profit maximization, where landscapes are used as large-scale monocultures (Zoomers, 2006, p. 1035; see also SP, 2009, p. 4). Looking at the struggles of Indigenous peoples within this global capitalist system, it becomes evident that different social *understandings* of the world lead to different social *actions* (Hugé et al. 2013, p. 188), something which also becomes evident when discussing sustainable development in Sápmi, as important aspects of current local discussions include that of land use and natural resource exploitation on Sámi territory.

In the Swedish part of Sápmi, the perspective of the dominant development model, in accordance with the Western political-economic model (Gudynas, 2011, p. 447), is replicated in that political priority is given to extractive land uses like mining and logging, as opposed to traditional Sámi land uses (e.g., reindeer herding, hunting, fishing), considered less important as they result in less economic profit (Länta et al., 2013; Sehlin MacNeil, 2015, p. 40). This mirrors the dominant perspective on development in which economic growth is considered a necessity for other development to take place, including possibilities to protect the environment (Beland Lindahl et al., 2016, p. 3; Hugé et al., 2013, p. 189; Kopnina, 2020, p. 280). Furthermore, the *tangible* values of certain land areas and damages done to them are being assessed by Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) compiled through an objectified and westernized point-of-view with little consideration for Sámi perspectives, including the presence of *intangible* values and Sámi connections to the land (Pinto-Guillame, 2017, p. 227; Svonni, 2011). The dominant perspective on development is furthermore present in both local and national decision making, as the official Swedish Minerals Strategy declares mineral exploitation as of great importance for global, national and local economies, as well as for increased growth and quality of life in Sweden as a whole (Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, 2013; Persson et al., 2017, p. 21).

This prioritization and envisioned development is nevertheless questioned by Sámi communities (Länta et al., 2013; see also Cocq, 2014; Sehlin MacNeil, 2015), and, according to the Sámi Parliament[4], it is a healthy natural environment that is the fundamental prerequisite for all other development to take place (SP, 2009). Furthermore, for the Sámi people, their rights, cultural practices and identities are strongly interconnected with their traditional lands, which is why the cumulative effects from increasing natural resource exploitation on the same lands are posing an ever-greater threat to Sámi society and culture (Österlin & Raitio, 2020, pp. 1-2). Therefore, the Sámi Parliament has declared the ongoing mining exploitations in the Swedish parts of Sápmi as obvious human rights offences and demanded a revaluation of the national interests. Demanding that a sustainable living environment should be consistently prioritized, and long-term interests valued higher than short-term profit thinking (SP, 2014).

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[4] The Sámi Parliament (*Sámediggi/Sámedigge/Sámiediggie/Saemiedigkie* in Sámi) is a popularly elected parliament, as well as an advisory body and expert authority on Sámi issues (SP, 2020a). Throughout this work, what is referred to is the Sámi Parliament in Sweden and not its counterparts in Norway and Finland.

2.2. The colonization of Sápmi

For many Sámi, the colonial takeover of their lands has resulted in a history fraught with oppression and exclusion based on their differing ethnic and cultural identity in relation to the majority populations in the nation states in which Sápmi has been incorporated (Omma, 2013, p. 3). Swedish Sámi policy has affected Sámi society on both social and cultural levels during the centuries and the Sámi culture was long considered as a culture that would not survive in the "modern" world (Sámi Information Centre [SI], n.d. C). These views of the Sámi people and culture as "inferior" has led to great injustices being committed, including language and religious bans, forced relocations, as well as the Sámi being considered suitable subjects for racial biological studies (Beland Lindahl et al., 2016, p. 18; Lundmark 2002, in J:son Lönn, 2014, p. 43).

How many Sámi live in Sweden today is uncertain, as censuses do not include ethnic identity. The last official estimate made in 1975 put the range between 20,000 and 40,000 people, although researchers at the Centre for Sámi Research at Umeå University estimate it to be two or three times greater (SI, n.d. A; SI, 2013). Of the total Sámi population in Sweden, 4665 currently own reindeers (SP, n.d.), which, in previous laws would have greatly reduced the numbers of Sámi as the Swedish government stated that only those who engaged in reindeer husbandry could be defined as such. For the Sámi community, this became a source of internal dispute, as large groups were excluded from an official recognition of their Sámi identity, only considered to be connected to nomadic reindeer husbandry. On the same basis, they were also denied the special rights that came with being Sámi, such as the right to hunt and fish in areas where their ancestors had lived (Lantto & Mörkenstam, 2008, p. 29; SI, n.d. B; SI, n.d. C). Those who were no longer considered as Sámi according to the official view should instead be assimilated into Swedish society and work in other professions (SI, n.d. D). Despite such policies, reindeer husbandry nevertheless continues to play a major role in the Sámi community today as it is both a way of life and livelihood, as well as a bearer of tradition with great symbolic value (SP, 2017). Other important identity markers also include an emphasis on the feeling of belonging as an indication of a common identity, which can be defined as the sum of cultural heritage, values, language and traditions (Lantto & Mörkenstam, 2008, p. 40).

In the past decades, Sámi political mobilization combined with the international debate on minority and Indigenous rights has been decisive for the transformation of contemporary Swedish Sámi policy, at least when taken at face-value. This has also made the formal recognition by the Swedish state of the Sámi as an Indigenous people and a minority in their own country inevitable, including state obligations to respect and make room for Sámi political influence. Among other things, this recognition justified the inauguration of the Sámi Parliament in 1993, granting the Sámi people an opportunity to gain cultural autonomy and representation in a political body. However, the legal status of the parliament, as a Swedish state administrative authority, does not include any actual political influence or real power, such as veto power or the right to participation in decision-making in matters regarding the Sámi (Lantto & Mörkenstam, 2008, pp. 37-38). Concerns have furthermore been raised by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD, 2018, p. 4) regarding insufficient legislation to protect the rights of the Sámi people in their traditional lands, as well as to guarantee their right to free, prior and informed consent regarding the natural resource exploitation and industrial development projects that take place in Sápmi. In addition, the general lack of knowledge about Sámi society, history and culture is widespread in the Swedish majority society and violations and discrimination due to Sámi descent is common to the everyday life of many Sámi in Sweden (Omma, 2013, p. 35; Poggats, 2018).

2.3. Formal Sámi education in Sweden

The colonial policies adopted by the states in which Sápmi was incorporated also involved the education system and the church actively suppressing Sámi languages and culture, as well as forcibly assimilating Sámi children into the dominant culture, something that continues to negatively impact Sámi languages and education today (Sarivaara & Keskitalo, 2019, p. 470). A common feature of these assimilation policies included mandatory teaching of Sámi children at special boarding schools, resulting in that the extensive time passed away from their homes obstructed customary socialization and transmission of knowledges between generations (Wråkberg & Granqvist, 2014, p. 85).

It was not until 1980 that the Sámi themselves gained influence over their education in Sweden, when the Swedish parliament established a Sámi school board consisting of a Sámi majority. In the beginning, the board was only responsible for the Sámi primary schools (year 1-6), but this responsibility has since been expanded to also include the Sámi preschool. The Sámi school is a state school form that follows the Swedish curriculum, but the teaching has a Sámi profile. Currently there are Sámi preschools and schools in five places in Sweden: Karesuando, Kiruna, Gällivare, Jokkmokk and Tärnaby (SI, n.d. E). However, as the Sámi school only includes up to year 6, "integrated Sámi education" can be arranged in Swedish schools for the years 7-9, or earlier in non-Sámi schools.

Integrated Sámi education refers to students being able to receive education in *duodji* (Sámi handicraft) and social sciences with a Sámi orientation, in addition to the ordinary mother tongue instruction (Sámi School Board, 2020). In Jokkmokk there is furthermore a Sámi oriented high school program and a Sámi education center, Samij Åhpadusguovdásj, which is considered a central actor for Sámi adult education in Sápmi (SP, 2012, p. 2). At the center, the students come to study programs and courses in *duodji*, Sámi food practices, languages, culture and history, as well as courses related to reindeer husbandry (Samij Åhpadusguovdásj, 2019). As for higher education, opportunities for Sámi studies are offered at the universities of Umeå and Uppsala in Sweden.

2.4. Sámi traditional knowledge, *Árbediehtu*

According to Guttorm, *árbediehtu* (*árbi* meaning inheritance and *diehtu* meaning knowledge) can be used as a common term for both traditional knowledge and traditional skills, where "tradition" is related to "transmission from generation to generation" (2011, p. 64). Originally, such transmission was done through oral narration and the learner's active participation in a certain activity. In the Sámi Parliament's Policy Document for Traditional Knowledge, it is stated that the basis of *árbediehtu* is the relationship between nature-animal-man, making it a source for Sámi perspectives and knowledge about how to relate to nature, although it is emphasized that it should not be considered as knowledge limited to ecological aspects, as it also includes values, norms, heritage, traditions, customs and the ways of life that are the cornerstones of the Sámi culture and identity (Nordin Jonsson, 2010, p. 7). In this sense, *árbediehtu* can be understood as Sámi skills and knowledges inherited from previous generations, and for which the millennial practice as a reindeer herding, hunting and fishing people has played an important part in the creation of a common foundation for the Sámi community's familiarity with the use of the Arctic landscape, weather, climate and wildlife. Furthermore, such prolonged use has made the knowledge stemming from it become based on experience, which was incorporated into both Sámi culture and social organization, making another aspect of this that the knowledge has become connected to the life in a certain place, e.g., regarding where to cross a stream or pick berries, but also regarding connections to previous generations' use of the same places (Nordin Jonsson, 2010, pp. 8, 11).

3. Previous research – ESD and Indigenous knowledge systems

This chapter seeks to outline the academic "place" of the study with the purpose of entering into dialogue with literature directly concerned with Indigenous education and ESD. The following will therefore include an overview of previous research connecting Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) with ESD, as well as decolonial and place-based pedagogies, which represent the theoretical foundations of this thesis. The chapter concludes with a positioning of the study within this field of research.

3.1. Literature overview

In bringing together the concepts of IKS and ESD, previous studies have focused on the usefulness of Indigenous peoples' knowledges for sustainable development and the benefits of including said knowledges both in Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational settings and curricula. As an example, Kopnina (2020) affirms that policymakers and scientists are increasingly realizing the importance of combining both Indigenous and science-based knowledge and that ESD, although still exhibiting some worrying tendencies, may evolve into a vibrant patchwork of highly diverse and complex systems of local knowledge, targeting both non-anthropocentric ethic and degrowth. As opposed to the current "straitjacket of economy-centred anthropocentric indoctrination" (Kopnina, 2020, p. 287). In a similar spirit, Pearson and Degotardi (2009) point to the benefits of ESD-programs as important educational assets regarding contemporary concerns such as globalization and the spread of European-American ideals, arguing that ESD promotes the incorporation of local Indigenous understandings in formal education, as it acknowledges "the distinct social, cultural and physical environments in which children are raised and to which they belong" (Pearson & Degotardi, 2009, p. 103). Further examples of related perspectives include the research by Zidny and Eilks (2018) in an Indonesian context, in which they argue for new curricula to be developed for science education that expose students to multiple ways of understanding science, including insights that might enrich problem-solving capacity regarding sustainability challenges. Additional studies, such as the work of Jonsson et al. (2012), focus on Sámi children and their visions of the future, recognizing the importance of taking children's experiences as a starting point in both teaching and research situations. Moreover, as their findings point to the existence of different cultural horizons, they conclude that tensions between different cultures and the learners' perspective should be emphasized in education and that ESD efforts must be rooted in the life-worlds of the learners.

Along less optimistic lines, other studies have also picked up on such tensions, pointing to the inevitable clashes between different cultural systems and the obscuring of IKS in formal curricula. As an example, Breidlid (2009) has analyzed South Africa's Curriculum 2005, from which IKS are completely excluded, pointing to the problems of exclusively introducing Western-based scientific knowledge in a cultural context based on Indigenous epistemology. Identified consequences include difficulties for teachers and students alike when crossing between different cultural systems, one used at school and one at home. In addition, given the low success rate of earlier Western-based development strategies on the continent, the inclusion of IKS as a prerequisite for successful sustainable development in Africa is discussed.

Going further in highlighting the difficulties of straddling the Indigenous/Western divide when building epistemologically pluralist curricula, researchers Ryan and Ferreira (2019) demonstrate how efforts to re-appropriate Indigenous knowledges in South African eco-schools reveal

discursive friction. Finding themselves at a discursive interface, workers at the studied schools are shown to have generated a set of discursive rules identifying what constitutes legitimate knowledge, privileging scientific knowledge as well as *certain* Indigenous knowledges that can be validated by science and considered environmentally benign. Non-environmentally friendly knowledges are however omitted from training materials or branded as simple "beliefs" and not "acceptable" Indigenous knowledge. According to the researchers, this fixates Indigenous peoples to an imagined, green utopia of pre-modernity, only granting them value when they are living traditional lives, while considering Indigenous peoples of the present as "contaminated" by modernity and a threat to the environment.

Introducing similarly sharp critique, although from another standpoint, Chandra (2014) argues for the inclusion of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) in mainstream education and Western science definitions of sustainable development. Presenting a conservation project on the Solomon Islands, her study shows how TEK has been integrated as anything but contrary to "real" science, becoming an important part of the project's success through the combination of it with remote-sensing techniques and geographic information system technologies. Challenges for wider acceptance of TEK are nevertheless discussed, pointing out that IKS might provide romanticized explanations of the world which could be inadequate and misleading in situations of rapid change. Moreover, mainstream science is not convinced that Indigenous knowledge can be successfully applied in a global context, given its primary usage in narrow geographical settings, and the cultural disruption caused by colonization may have led to a degradation of local knowledge systems. In discussing these issues, a different perspective on IKS is provided, although many of the researchers presented in this overview would most likely oppose Chandra's claim that it is crucial to integrate IKS *into* Western science (Chandra, 2014, p. 124), as IKS are commonly positioned within the field as systems of knowledge that do not need to prove their validity by way of Western scientific methods and standards alone.

For instance, Kassam et al. (2017) focus on education in rural Lakota and Dakota communities in the United States to shed light "on the value, diversity, and necessity of indigenous and place-based knowledge to science curricula in rural areas" (Kassam et al., 2017, p. 97). In their study, education is conceived of as performative, and rural Indigenous communities as sources of innovative, unique knowledges, co-generated from their places of habitation. What is shown is that Indigenous and rural place-based knowledge is nuanced and pragmatic in character, offering solutions to both local and global challenges. As an example, children in standardized science education learn that specific plants are edible without ever learning how to locate, gather, or prepare them, something that is contrasted by the experiential pedagogical approach of the Indigenous communities where, in order "to know [something], you have to have experienced it" (Kassam et al., 2017, p. 105). Community Elders participating in the study further oppose the idea of their community knowledge as being homogenous, emphasizing the practicality of the diversity of knowledge within the group and of being able to tap into multiple approaches as conditions and situations change.

In a similar sense, leaving the dominant sphere of formal education even further behind, Liu and Constable (2010) argue that ESD should not only be a matter of formal schooling but integrated into lifelong learning as people of all ages are important actors for change and should be valued as such. Moreover, since non-formal sectors make up areas where ESD might have more of a breakthrough, given their less regulated and assessment-focused nature, the local project of the Bazhu community (China) is informed by place-based education (PBE) and community learning strategies

that allow learners to move even further away from top-down and standardized education than in the former studies, as they are leaving the classroom behind all together.

In further exploration of the research field, other researchers have made decolonization their priority, focusing on disrupting Western educational contexts, as well as on exploring autonomous settings *outside* of Western-influenced education altogether. An example of the former can be found in the study by Gahman and Legault (2017), where the authors explore the geographical context of British Columbia with the aim of demonstrating how critical pedagogy and decolonial PBE can disrupt the "settler colonial academic status quo" in a university context where "taken-for-granted colonial epistemologies and banal exnominations of white supremacy remain orthodox" (Gahman & Legault, 2017, p. 50). Starting off with the firm statement that their program takes place in the unceded Syilx territories of the Okanagan Valley, the authors engage in decolonial praxis, designing curriculum and activities based on Indigenous consultation and anti-colonial scholarship. Through this, the program is positioned as leverage against the primacy given to Western knowledges and settler colonial rationales by the unsettling of the dominant perspective's claims to legitimacy, land and authority over learning.

As for additional examples, Teamy and Mandel (2016) set off on a "trans-local ethnography", leaving the Western context in search of alternative ESD practices "outside" of the field itself, engaging with autonomous places of learning in Río de Janeiro, Oaxaca, Alberta and Rajasthan. In an attempt to put aside the traits of trained academics, e.g., clear research objectives and methodologies, the researchers see themselves as visitors, learning *with* various forms of imaginative resistance "to reveal emerging knowledge movements—that is, different forms of the production, organization, dissemination, and praxis of knowledge lived from within indigenous communities" (Teamy & Mandel, 2016, p. 157). Examples encountered include a fluid curriculum, constantly moderating its course in response to learners' and communities' needs and interests, as well as an Indigenous learning program teaching the traditional ways of knowing of the local region by reconnecting to the land and its living beings through an autonomous knowledge paradigm. Further research taking place on the "outside" include Sapp Moore's (2017) study of Haiti's peasant movement's land-based decolonial educational praxis, focusing specifically on movement-based pedagogies as sites of emergence for educational spaces outside of global capitalism and providing an interesting shift of perspective, from the question of "what is *excluded*" from hegemonic knowledge systems to that of "what is *imaginable*" when the production and circulation of environmental knowledge is rooted in autonomous, collective projects of liberation (Sapp Moore, 2017, p. 251).

3.2. Positioning the present study within the research field

The research front regarding studies of IKS and ESD is broad, spanning over different geographical locations such as South Africa, Canada, Brazil, China and Sweden. It is, however, mainly pointing in the direction of investigating formal education from different critical perspectives, emphasizing the importance of the local cultural context and its views, attitudes, perceptions and values, while promoting the active involvement of the learners and representatives of the local community. Furthermore, the analyses made are to a great extent informed by critical pedagogy and decolonial theory, including stretches to place-based, experiential and enlived educational methods being implemented by the researchers themselves. In addition, common approaches stem from phenomenography, anthropology and ethnography, and the methods used are exclusively qualitative.

The studies are furthermore connected through the mutual goal of exploring alternative understandings of sustainable development and education, searching for the meaning of this within each local context. Another common goal is that of sharing the findings with the broader public in order to benefit the development of a more just human and non-human world. As for the present study, it should be understood within this research context, as it too explores formal education from a decolonial perspective, making use of qualitative research methods for investigating a local educational setting and culture. However, this investigation moves away from the predominance of the focus on primary education as it also includes post-secondary education institutions and, given the particular and place-specific traits of every local context, new perspectives and findings are presented.

Additionally, the focus on formal *Indigenous* education institutions (i.e., exclusively by and for Indigenous communities) is something that I found to be under-examined, leaving much more left to explore in this shared endeavor to highlight different aspects of the important linkages between cognitive, cultural and ecological diversity. In this sense, the present study further contributes to the understanding of the importance of diversity in education for the ability of local societies in Sápmi, but also in other places in Sweden and the world, to imagine and uncover alternative horizontalities that move beyond the linearity of the development paradigm and the currently dominant unsustainable social forms of being in, educating and learning from the world.

4. Theoretical framework

As mentioned in the study's background chapter, the discussions regarding what kind of development is wanted in Sápmi – and what kind of values will be protected – reflect other debates occurring around the globe involving Indigenous peoples' rights to their lands and culture. Connecting these issues with underlying clashes between dominant and alternative worldviews and knowledges, the key concepts and theories used for studying the gathered material of the present work are directly engaged with matters of dominance, exclusion and power. In this sense, *decolonial theory* is a useful point of departure for bringing together Boaventura de Sousa Santos' (2014) conception of *epistemic justice* and David Gruenewald's (2003a, 2003b) *critical pedagogy of place,* serving as theoretical tools for analyzing the empirical material. Combined, they will aid the exploration of what "culturally appropriate and locally relevant" education means within the context of the study, as well as help situate the participants' accounts within a broader political and historical context.

4.1. Decolonial theory

Decolonial theory involves a diverse group of scholars and ideas. However, a common perspective, as Quijano has argued, is that the continuation of global capitalism, including the enduring geopolitical supremacy and economic dominance of the Global North, as well as racist hierarchies, represent present-day coloniality, taking on the expression of colonial impositions and causing the suffering of those who were – and are – colonized (Moosavi, 2020, p. 336). One aspect of this continuing colonial reality is that knowledge from the Global South[5] is discarded in favor of knowledge from the Global North to the point of epistemic suppression of a wide array of knowledges (Moosavi, 2020, p. 336). This aspect also connects to the present work, given that educational institutions have been central to

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[5] In the present study, the Global North/South are not fixed categories based on geographic location alone and Indigenous peoples in the geographical North therefore included in what many of the cited scholars refer to as the Global South. As Santos explains, "the two are intertwined—the South is embodied by marginalized communities living in the North and the North can be found in the privileged sections of the South" (2011, p. 16).

the process of colonizing Indigenous peoples' minds all over the world, which is why a focus on the decolonization of knowledge, that is, of the *mind,* is needed (Kuokkanen, 2000, p. 412). For Thiong'o (1986, in Moosavi, 2020, p. 336), such decolonization takes place when colonial alienation, which is a consequence of the imposition of European languages that has resulted in the eradication of African Indigenous culture, history and people's ability to confidently articulate their worldview, is overcome by the inclusion of native languages and revitalization of the ability of people to express themselves in ways that are authentic to their lived realities. In a similar way, Kuokkanen (2000, p. 411) argues for a re-centring of Indigenous knowledge systems, values and cultural concepts as a way of becoming intellectually self-governing and empowered, overcoming the subtle ways of internalized colonialism and the devaluation of one's own culture. As contexts differ, intellectual decolonization may however also be expressed differently (e.g., Battiste & Henderson, 2018; Mignolo, 2011; Odora Hoppers, 2009; Visvanathan, 2009), which is why, to provide coherence in the analysis of the material, only one conception of the decolonization of knowledge will be presented in greater detail below: Santos' (2014) theory of epistemological justice.
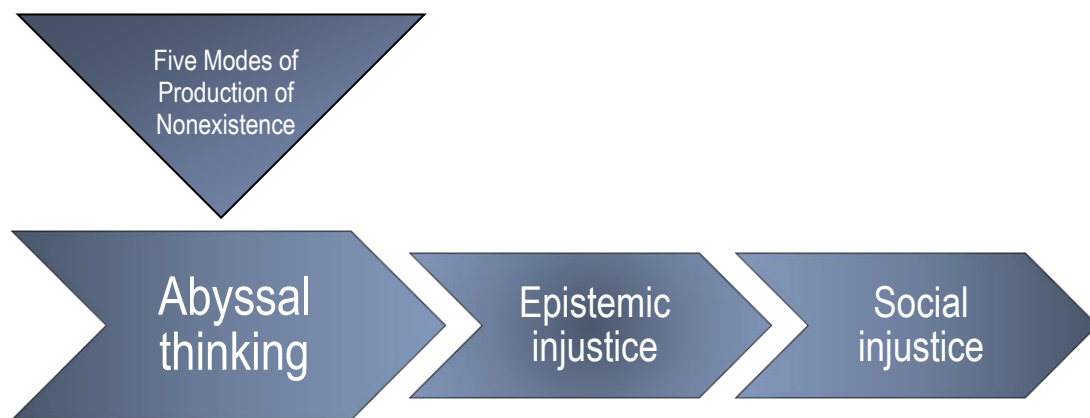
Figure 1: The relationship between abyssal thinking, epistemic injustice and social injustice.

4.1.1. Epistemic injustice and abyssal thinking

According to Markus and Rios (2018, p. 41) diversity in education is a human right which introduces the right to learning that is inclusive of one's own cultural worldview, in other words, the right to epistemological justice. However, as the dominant epistemology is supported by Western ideals alone, other knowledge systems have been deleted or significantly distorted in the past, as well as the present, resulting in restricted epistemological lenses through which we can understand life on Earth (Santos, 2014, pp. 35, 38). For Santos (2014, p. 149), this elimination entails an *epistemicide*, the eradication of the plurality of perspectives in favor of one sterile, Western monoperspective through which everything is filtered. In resistance of this "waste of human experience", epistemology is situated as the key site for critique of modernity and the Westerncentric bias of knowledge. Furthermore, asserting that there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice, as economic and political injustices are sustained by their cognitive counterpart, Santos offers a critical characterization of modern reason, outlining the core problem as that of Western *abyssal thinking* which produces the

establishment of a radical distinction, an abyss, between Northern and "other" knowledges (2014, pp. 189, 207). On this side of the metaphorical line of the abyss, "true knowledge", embodied in ideas and perspectives emanating from the North is produced and acknowledged, whereas on the other side of the line, only incorrect knowledges are found. Through this *invisible* distinction in the realm of epistemology, both human and nonhuman realities existing on "the other side of the line" are actively produced as nonexistent – a process which in turn result in *visible* distinctions that come in the shape of social injustice, including the radical forms of social exclusion present in societies across the globe (Santos, 2014, pp. 11, 189; see Figure 1).

According to Santos, the origins of the abyss can be traced back to the European colonial takeover of the world which laid the groundwork for the current global political-economic and the epistemological order. This epistemological order has granted modern science the monopoly of universal distinction between truth and falsehood, and modern neoliberal economics and capitalist development have been promoted as universal models towards which to aspire. Nevertheless, it is becoming increasingly clear that, after five centuries of "teaching" the rest of the planet, the West is not only lacking the capacity to learn from the experiences of the world, but its conception of it, including the mode of experiencing society and nature, is being proven unsustainable (2014, pp. 34, 38). In the light of such deficiency, the limits to the conception of nature as separate from society and of natural resources as unconditionally available to human beings are being increasingly called into question by groups from "beyond the abyss". Suggestions are also made on "this side of the line" regarding how to develop sustainably, but, according to Santos, it does not matter how many qualifiers are added to the concept of development, as dominant understandings of it do not address the fundamental Man/Nature division, keeping intact "the idea of infinite growth and the unstoppable development of productive forces" (2014, p. 43). As social struggles in different places of the world intensify and introduce new concepts that have no precedent in Western thought, going as far as the lack of adequate expressions for them in any of the colonial languages in which such thought has been formulated, the restrictive limits of what is included within the intellectual and political horizon of the sayable, credible, or legitimate and of the unsayable, incredible, or illegitimate are becoming visible. This, in turn, effectively highlighting the dominance of *one* kind of knowledge (Santos, 2014, p. 59).

To understand these complex processes and struggles, it is however necessary to first understand the different obscuring technologies of knowledge that have led to the opening and sustaining of the abyssal rift. At its core, *abyssal thinking* is specialized in making distinctions and radicalizing them, presenting the North of the line as the creator of scientific, truthful and universal knowledge, followed by comprehensible and correct actions. In contrast, the South of the line is presented as a sphere of opinions, superstition, falseness, or of traditional knowledge and knowledges limited by their local origins and thus unworthy of consideration. "That side of the line" is also the realm of incomprehensible behaviors and ways of life, based on incorrect beliefs and therefore considered backwards, underdeveloped and inferior in the hierarchy of knowledges created by the abyss. Although invisible, such relegation of Southern knowledges to nonexistence has visible consequences and is what triggered the colonial *epistemicide*, the annihilation of entire cultures, languages, religions and knowledge systems, resulting in the waste of centuries and millennia of experience and creativity (Santos, 2014, pp. 190, 198).

Controlling what constitutes "this side of the line" is the underlying "laziness" of modern reason, which according to Santos, results in that Western modernity not only has a limited understanding of the world but also of itself (2014, p. 266). This restricted understanding is grounded

in metonymic reason which is a kind of reason that is both partial in itself, as well as very selective, given that it claims to be the "only form of rationality and therefore does not exert itself to discover other kinds of rationality or, if it does, it only does so to turn them into raw material" (Santos, 2014, p. 263). Paired with proleptic reason, a kind of reason that "does not exert itself in thinking the future because it believes it knows all about the future and conceives of it as a linear, automatic, and infinite overcoming of the present" (Santos, 2014, p. 263), the two underpin Western modernity's reduction of the multiplicity of worlds to the material, earthly world and the multiplicity of times to linear time (Santos, 2014, p. 267). The result of this is *abyssal thinking* and an abbreviated version of world experience, refusing to acknowledge and valorize other experiences simply because they are outside the particular reasons that can identify them. For this abbreviation to take place, absences are inevitably created, and Santos distinguishes *five technologies of knowledge that produce the nonexistences that sustain the abyss* (2014, pp. 272, 279; see also Figure 1).

Presented as manifestations of the rational monoculture discussed above, Santos designates the first logic of nonexistence as *the monoculture of knowledge and the rigor of knowledge*. It consists of turning modern science and "high culture" into the sole criteria of truth and aesthetic quality, respectively, and all that is not recognized or legitimated by this canon is declared nonexistent. Nonexistence appears in this case in the form of "ignorance" or "lack of culture". The second logic is found in *the monoculture of linear time,* the idea that history has a well-known meaning and direction (e.g., progress, modernization, development, and globalization). This produces a relationship where core countries of the world-system, including their dominant knowledges, institutions, and forms of sociability are moving forwards. However, whatever is considered as moving in the opposite direction, backwards, is produced as nonexistent, non-contemporaneous, a residuum of the primitive, traditional, simple, obsolete or underdeveloped (2014, p. 273) . Identified as the third logic is the logic of social classification, based on *the monoculture of the naturalization of differences*. This consists of the distribution of populations according to categories that naturalize hierarchies (e.g., racial classifications) which produce nonexistence under the form of an insuperable inferiority vis-à-vis "superior" people (Santos, 2014, p. 273). *The monoculture of logic of the dominant scale* is the fourth logic identified. According to this logic, the scale adopted as primordial determines the irrelevance of all other possible scales. In Western modernity, the dominant scale appears as the "universal" and the "global", privileging entities or realities that widen their scope to the whole globe. Rival entities or realities are therefore labelled as "local" or "particular", and thus produced as nonexistent as they are captured in scales that render them non-credible alternatives to what exists globally and universally. The final and fifth logic of nonexistence is *the monoculture of the capitalist logic of productivity*. According to this logic, capitalist economic growth is an unquestionably rational objective, and the criterion of productivity that best serves this objective applies both to nature and to human labor, where profit maximization is the goal and nonexistence comes in the form of non-productiveness (Santos, 2014, pp. 274-275).

In summary, five social forms of nonexistence can be distinguished: the ignorant, the residual, the inferior, the local, and the nonproductive, all of which represent disqualified forms of existence because the realities to which they give shape are produced as obstacles for the realities considered relevant, scientific, advanced, global, and productive (Santos, 2014, p. 275). Having explained the roots of *abyssal thinking*, leading to epistemic injustice, Santos moves on to the envisioning of epistemic justice, affirming that what the Western epistemological paradigm conceals is that Western thought is as important as it is *partial*, and its claims to universality erroneous given that

all forms of knowledge are inevitably ignorant of certain things and incomplete in different ways. For this reason, if all knowledge systems, including the Western, were to accept their reciprocal incompleteness rather than looking for false completeness by producing non-existences, a possibility for the acknowledgement of the others as equal producers of knowledge and valuable conversation partners would instead present itself (2014, pp. 35, 334). This would be the antidote against continued silencing and a bridge across the abyss, built on the recognition of the fact that what "cannot be said, or said clearly, in one language or culture may be said, and said clearly, in another language or culture" (Santos, 2014, p. 35). Such recognition would further open the world to new horizontalities and challenge the limitations of Western thought and modern scientific knowledge regarding the types of real-world intervention and development that is possible today (Santos, 2014, p. 305).

4.2. A Critical Pedagogy of Place

Gruenewald's critical pedagogy of place (2003a, 2003b) is based on environmental ethics and place-based education's (PBE) focus on environmental issues, paired with a critical perspective stemming from critical pedagogy's focus on social issues. As such, critical PBE pays close attention to the nexus between environment, culture and education, where critical consideration is given to places both as centers for environmental destruction and domination, *as well as* experiential centers of the social domination that comes with the domination of land, producing multiple sites of oppression of human and non-human "Others" (2003b, p. 634). In relation to the previous theory, critical PBE can be used as a complementary tool for opposing the branding of knowledges and experiences on "the other side of the line" as "local" and "particular", and therefore non-credible alternatives to what exists "globally" and "universally", given that a place-based approach inevitably focuses on realities and knowledges that are grounded in the very locality of the world. Furthermore, shining a light on the "profoundly pedagogical nature of human experience with places" (Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 619). In this regard, a place-based approach can serve to re-centre Indigenous perspectives on education in ESD discussions, and, in the context of this study, connect the importance of "place" found in Sámi knowledge and culture (Kremer, 1999, in Kuokkanen 2000, p. 418; see also Sehlin MacNeil, 2017; SP, 2009) with the educational context and activities explored. Additionally, given the colonial practice of dispossessing Indigenous peoples from land, education efforts that (re)connect Indigenous peoples to land, including the social relations, knowledges and languages that arise from it, become crucial when adopting a decolonial perspective (Wildcat et al., 2014, p. I). This relates to critical PBE's twin social and ecological objective of reinhabitation and decolonization, which points out that, to live well socially and ecologically, we must learn to recognize disruption and injury and address their causes. To do this, Gruenewald starts with a fundamental critique of the abstract notion of "universal" education, affirming that it is not possible to live in the world in "general" (2003a, p. 3; 2003b, p. 621).

From a place-conscious perspective, the places we occupy teach us about how the world works and how our lives fit into it. Places "make us", given that as "occupants of particular places with particular attributes, our identity and our possibilities are shaped" (Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 621). Hence, the world is *places*, an understanding that translates into a place-based perspective on education which can be characterized as: *emerging from the particular attributes of place*; *inherently multidisciplinary*; *inherently experiential*; *reflective of an educational philosophy that is broader than "learning to earn"*; and *connecting place with self and community* (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 7). However, according to Gruenewald, the consideration given to places should not exclude the

important recognition of that *how* we view these places, and the teaching and interaction that places accomplish, depend on the *kind* of attention that is given to them, as "culture" and "place" are deeply intertwined. Consequently, the diversity of human experience gives rise to many different places, although the physical location might be the same, a relationship that nevertheless is overlooked by the current dominant educational system based on Western thought, within which "place" simply is synonymous to "location" (2003b, p. 621).

Acknowledging that human beings and learners exist in a cultural context, critical PBE not only affirms that human culture will always be nested in ecological systems, but also that ecological themes, like the environmental crisis at hand, must be linked with critical themes such as the homogenization of culture under global capitalism (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 4). As an example, moving in the opposite direction of the universalizing "placelessness" of Western standardized education and curricula, Gruenewald signals the alienation of students from their cultures and places that Western one-size-fits-all education entails, as one of the leading causes of the profound lack of care for the environment witnessed today. The reason behind this being, among other things, the individualistic standards and testing methodology, which cuts off the process of teaching and learning from community life and the places students and teachers actually inhabit (2003b, pp. 624, 642). Because of this, a critical perspective becomes essential when confronting the assumptions, practices, and outcomes taken for granted in dominant culture and conventional education, such as the belief that education "should mainly support individualistic and nationalistic competition in the global economy" (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 3). Instead, focus should be grounded in the local, making pedagogy more relevant to the lived experiences of teachers and students through firsthand experiences of local life, encouraging a notion of accountability to place and community beyond the classroom that also includes engagement in the political process of understanding and shaping what happens there (Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 620).

4.3. Critical reflections on the theories

Critics of both place-based approaches and decolonialism might maintain that they risk further division of peoples and groups through a narrow sort of provincialism or sectorization. However, according to Gruenewald (2003b, p. 646), it is quite the opposite as dominant trends of standards and testing, aligned with global economic objectives, promote a kind of generic education for "anywhere" or, even the abstract "nowhere", which has led to the division between people and the places they inhabit. As for critiques regarding decolonial suggestions for colonized peoples to respond in new ways, e.g. by becoming "non-subjects" (Dion-Buffalo & Mohawk, in Apffel Marglin, 1995, p. 869), thinking and acting in ways *removed* from those of the modern West, as opposed to simply continuing to resist within the parameters of the colonizing world – both Santos (2014) and Indigenous writers (Apffel Marglin, 1995, p. 871) point out that robbing Western thought of its claims to universality does not entail a strive to exacerbate boundaries between peoples and cultures as much as simply the placing of different knowledge systems in a dialogical, equal relationship to each other.

When applying a decolonial perspective as a non-Indigenous researcher, other questions may also be raised regarding whose agenda it is to "decolonize", including the risk that decolonization processes might be appropriated by anyone but Indigenous peoples themselves (Swadener & Mutua, 2014, p. 5). In addition, Santos firmly criticizes the persistent turning to critical theory for help, as it is sprung from within the West and by default follows the grammars and scripts available to the colonizing world (2014, pp. 8, 10). Given this critique, the use of Gruenewald's *critical* pedagogy of

place might seem like a contradictory pairing with Santos' call for a thorough epistemological break with Western thought, although critical PBE echoes his critique of the obscuring of the local/particular in favor of the global/universal (2014, p. 274). However, agreeing with Silova et al. (2019, p. 6) it is my view, based on my own positionality, that seemingly contradictory theoretical tools should not be assumed to be mutually exclusive, and that interesting things can come from bringing together critiques from within the West and critiques rooted in non-Western thought from beyond it. From this standpoint, I believe it is possible to move forward by collaborating, as the common goal is to replace that which keep us trapped within, as well as marginalized without.

5. Methodology

This chapter introduces semi-structured interviewing and qualitative content analysis as methods for collection and analysis of the research material. Furthermore, the possible limitations of these methods are discussed, and the chapter concludes with a presentation of the study's ethical framework, including a discussion of researcher reflexivity.

5.1. Data collection

The study's primary source of data consists of interviews conducted with Sámi education professionals. Instead of using the participants' names or other forms of identification, the term "education professional" refers to teachers, former teachers (of *duodji* and Sámi languages) and administrative staff working at a Sámi education center, a culture and a language center, as well as schoolboard employees and persons engaged on a political level with Sámi education issues. In addition, many are or have been professionally active within more than one of these categories. The first contact with possible participants was made through referral by an acquaintance of mine who suggested persons to reach out to. Thereafter, a continued referral or "snowball" sampling technique (Morgan, 2008, p. 815) was used where the contacted persons suggested others who shared the characteristics of being professionally involved with Sámi education in the Swedish part of Sápmi. An effort was nevertheless made to include both male and female participants and they were between 25 and 65 years old. The material was then collected through semi-structured video and phone interviews, with a duration of between 1 and 2 hours, with 8 participants (3 male and 5 female). Three participants opted for phone interviews and five for audio-visual interviews. One advantage of the latter was that both parties could see each other, and observation of body language/non-verbal cues helped me connect with the participant (Kozinets et al., 2014, p. 267). Interviews including video were however dependent on the Internet connection of both parties and some participants expressed a more relaxed attitude towards a simple "phone call". All interviews were conducted in Swedish. However, Sámi research guidelines suggest that it might be easier for Sámi speaking Sámi to talk about traditional practices using Sámi terminology (SP, 2010, p. 20). This may therefore have restricted the participants' ability to express themselves, if they refrained from using specific Sámi vocabulary.

Following Esaiasson et al., (2012, p. 228), guidelines for the interviews were set up to include pre-formulated, yet open, questions that all participants were asked (see Appendix) and which were aimed at covering core aspects of the research agenda: (i) culturally appropriate and locally relevant education; (ii) challenges; and (iii) opportunities. This can be considered an advantage of the semi-structured method as it facilitated subsequent comparison and analysis of the material (explained in 5.2). Further advantages included that the respondents were met by a more relaxed interview setting where flexibility in terms of chronological order was maintained, while assuring that the interviews

revolved around the previously mentioned key themes (Nilsson, 2014, p. 150). Qualitative interviewing also provides the researcher with an opportunity to gain deeper knowledge by allowing respondents to develop their answers in ways that are not possible in, for example, survey studies (Esaiasson et al., 2012, p. 228). This makes the method well suited for exploring complex phenomena, which the review of previous research has shown that Indigenous peoples' knowledges and education in relation to ESD are examples of.

Apart from interviews, other common qualitative research tools include participant observations that can support interview data (Creswell, 2013, p. 72). However, due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic it was not possible to travel to the research locations, which, on the one hand, can be considered a limitation to this study. However, on the other hand, this gave me the opportunity to interview people from a greater variety of places than would otherwise have been possible within the timeframe of the research project. In addition, the keeping of a research diary was added to help me remain self-aware during the process and critically reflect and monitor my own involvement in the research context (Tricoglus, 2001, p. 145). Given that an inevitable part of the method when conducting interviews is the *interaction* itself (Sprague, 2005, p. 105), such monitoring considers the active role of both participants in the co-construction of data and include the weighing of the possible effects of the researcher's presence, personae – and participants' perceptions of this – on the produced material (Tricoglus, 2001, p. 145).

5.2. Data analysis

All interviews were audio recorded and the material obtained was transcribed in full so as not to risk overlooking any data. Transcripts were edited for the sake of clarity and features of delivery added if considered crucial for how talk was to be understood (Roulston, 2014, pp. 299, 303). In accordance with Sámi Parliament research guidelines (SP, 2010, p. 22), the participants were offered the opportunity to review the transcripts to avoid misunderstandings and, when requested, further insight regarding how answers were to be presented in the study was offered through e-mail correspondence. For the final representation of data, I translated the key examples to English. Therefore, some terms and expressions might have been translated by the participants from Sámi to Swedish, and then from Swedish to English.

As for the practical steps of the analysis, the transcripts provided the basis for a content analysis, where the statements made were compared against each other, in search both for similarities and particularities, as well as against the theoretical framework. The material was also segmented and divided into *meaningful* components, that is, in relation to their ability to answer the research questions (Roulston, 2014, p. 304). This meant that, after reading through the material in its entirety, a highlighting of the transcripts' most relevant parts (data reduction) served to detect and summarize core statements that represented general patterns found (data reorganization), which in turn served as reference points when presenting the results (data representation). Preserving the connection of the *parts* to the *entirety* was however important and the process of analysis continued throughout the whole duration of the project, including an iterative process of sense-making through writing, rewriting, and revisiting data. Furthermore, reviewing the material repeatedly in search of negative cases and discrepancies that might have complicated the findings served to improve data trustworthiness (Roulston, 2014, pp. 301, 306).

The research diary served as additional support when analysing the interview material and helped address the challenges of qualitative data interpretation, which include the need to revise

the researcher's own pre-understandings during the process of sense-making of the material (Roulston, 2014, p. 302). This is necessary given that prior experiences might affect researchers' response to participants' stories, resulting in stronger emotional reactions to some stories and an overestimation of their importance when analyzing the data (Sprague, 2005, p. 106). In addition, it must be acknowledged that any analysis implies a partial representation of the data set, given that no single interpretation can represent an all-encompassing portrayal of a phenomenon (Roulston, 2014, p. 308). An effort was nevertheless made to give precedence to the gathered material itself and to remain open to what could (and could not) be found in it. In making this effort, the keeping of the research diary, as well as attention to ongoing reflection, helped me track my own prior assumptions as well as monitor my interaction with the material (Tricoglus, 2001, p. 145).

5.3. Ethical considerations

When conducting an interview study, there are several ethical considerations that need to be kept present. In accordance with the Ethical Review Act (2003, p. 460) and the Tkarihwaié:ri (2011) articles 10, 11 and 13[6], the participants' free, prior and informed consent of involvement in the study was obtained. All participants were informed about the research plan, purpose of the research, its methodology, who the responsible researcher was, as well as that participation was voluntary, and that they had the right to cancel their participation at any time. Additionally, they were informed about the intended use of the gathered data material, collected for research purposes only (i.e., not for commercial or other non-scientific purposes), as well as the fact that the stories and knowledge they shared were considered their intellectual property. This included the possibility to retract statements or add clarifications, should they feel it necessary.

In addition, as I found myself immersed in the stories and lifeworlds of the participants, basic issues of respect and reciprocity were acknowledged (Creswell, 2013, p. 72). A first step included that of not presenting myself as an expert on the issues discussed, but as curious and open to what the participants wanted to share – and respecting what they did not. This was important for the sake of transparency and building trust, which might be especially warranted when research is related to Indigenous groups, as their knowledge systems have often been trivialized and their perspectives marginalized in the past *as well as* the present. The result of this is that even the term 'research' might be associated with colonial processes of cognitive and cultural domination (Drugge, 2016, p. 275; Stordahl et al. 2015, p. 5). For this reason, the interview context was set up with the clear positioning of Sámi knowledge as knowledge on a par with Western scholarly knowledge, in accordance with the Tkarihwaié:ri (2011) article 12 on inter-cultural respect.

When engaging in research with an Indigenous group as a non-Indigenous researcher, questions may furthermore be raised regarding who holds the power to decide what research topics and questions are valid and how such power might reify existing power relations between researcher and researched populations (Swadener & Mutua, 2014, p. 5). "Outside" critical research regarding *the* Sámi point of view might for example risk exacerbating Sámi feelings of being victims or marginalized, if the researcher fails to acknowledge that nobody carries only one colonized/colonizer subjectivity/identity and that experiences and perceptions of colonization and colonial power relationships (e.g., experiences of oppression, alienation, xenophobia) may differ between the

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[6] The Tkarihwaié:ri Code of Ethical Conduct to Ensure Respect for the Cultural and Intellectual Heritage of Indigenous and Local Communities articles: 10 (transparency/full disclosure), 11 (prior informed consent and/or approval and involvement) and 13 (safeguarding of collective or individual ownership).

individuals of the group (Gahman & Legault, 2019, p. 52). Further issues when applying an outsider's perspective might also include that Sámi culture and knowledge becomes defined as static, based on the majority culture's view of what it means to be Sámi. Essentialization or harmful consolidation of stereotyped perceptions of the Sámi as a group of homogeneous thought and traditions was thus a concern that had to be kept present in the presentation of findings, as the study discusses a minority group, its culture and perceptions in relation to dominant counterparts (Valkonen 2009, in Sarivaara et al., 2014, p. 8).

Despite these risks, research carried out by non-Indigenous researchers might however, at least in part, help resist colonization as it affirms Indigenous epistemologies (Swadener & Mutua, 2014, p. 5) and, in this case, increases the presence of Sámi perspectives in research (Drugge, 2016, p. 265). Furthermore, even though "outsider" involvement risks the occurrence of misinterpretations of what interview participants are expressing, as the researcher might lack the kind of deep understanding of a subject that only "insiders" possess, an "outsider's" perspective can also make it easier to identify recurring patterns or trends in the research material (Sprague, 2005, p. 64). In addition, based on the above considerations, an effort was made in this study not to speak *for* the participants, which is why the gathered data has been presented through an extensive use of direct quotes. The project was nevertheless carried out in critical acceptance of the difficulties inherent to qualitative research, as researcher involvement and power over collection, organization, analysis and representation of data, can only be critically reflected upon, but not omitted (May & Perry, 2014, p. 110).

A final consideration also regarded the issue of anonymity, given that within the field of Indigenous research, complete anonymity might be problematic for several reasons. For instance, naming might be important to prevent the above discussed homogenization/mystification of Indigenous groups. Anonymity might also be difficult to guarantee as the studied groups are generally small, for which reason the researcher may have to abstain from publishing a great variety of data to avoid recognition of the participants (SP, 2010, p. 26). In relation to the latter, the present study is no exception, and the participants were consulted regarding their preferences, which is also reflected in the presentation of the material.

5.4. Researcher reflexivity

An important aspect of the research process included self-reflexiveness on my behalf. This required acknowledging that although an "outsider" in the Sámi cultural context, I am an "insider" regarding debates on sustainable development in the North, as I was born and raised in the county of Norrbotten, where conflicting interests regarding use of land and natural resources is an ever-present topic of discussion. In addition, many of my family members and relatives have made or make a living in connection to the different extractive industries in the region, which provides insight into the importance of these industries for the local communities, as well as their influence on local perspectives on development. Further aspects however include the experiences of Sámi relatives and older family members of mine and the impact that attending Swedish schools had on some of them, e.g., regarding feelings of self-worth and shame for being associated with a different cultural group than other students and teachers, leading to a distancing from their Sámi heritage. On a final note, I am also a student at a state university in Sweden, legitimizing a way of producing scientific knowledge that stands in contrast to many Indigenous knowledge practices, which, together with the above, point towards important aspects of my past experiences, interests, pre-understandings, position and available tools for approaching the research topic.

6. Results and analysis

In this chapter, the material obtained through the interviews with the research participants is analyzed in accordance with the theoretical and methodological chapters of this thesis. The analysis is divided into three themes, corresponding with the different aspects of the research agenda: (i) culturally appropriate and locally relevant education; (ii) challenges; and (iii) opportunities. Finally, the analytical findings are discussed in relation to ESD and previous research.

6.1. Culturally appropriate and locally relevant education

In this first theme, Gruenewald's (2003a) critical PBE is used to explore what *culturally appropriate* and *locally relevant* education means in the educational context studied, providing a foundation for further analysis regarding the challenges and opportunities encountered in the implementation of the same. The categories used to structure the analysis include the understanding of the education as: *connected to self and community*; *emerging from the particular attributes of place*; *involving experiential learning*; and *being reflective of an educational philosophy that is broader than "learn to earn"*. In addition, the works of decolonial scholars Kuokkanen (2000) and Thiong'o (1986) are referred to, given their special connection to themes brought up by the participants, such as the importance of Indigenous languages for cultural survival.

6.1.1. Connection to self and community: education for cultural understanding

Starting out, most participants agreed that discussing what makes, or would make, education "culturally appropriate and locally relevant", was not about proposing a set of fixed categories that had to all be included. However, their answers nevertheless involved common themes when asked what Sámi education should consist of. These themes were interconnected in several ways, although the overarching focus, as expressed by the participants, was that education should be adapted to the learner's perspective and cultural context, in the sense that the relevance of what is taught can only be defined by the Sámi themselves. In the words of one participant,

> What I think of primarily, if you see it from a Sámi perspective, is that it should be the Sámi who decide what our education should look like, because we know what's best for us and it's something you talk a lot about in other issues as well, that we as Sámi people should not be talked *about* or told that 'this is how *your* education should look like, this is how it should be to be culturally adapted to *you'*. It must instead be adapted to us by ourselves (participant 1, female. Participant's emphasis).

Although the currently dominant educational discourse seeks to standardize the experiences of students from different geographical and cultural places in order for them to compete in the global economy (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 7), the interviewed education professionals described their view of Sámi education as anything but culturally and geographically "placeless". Instead, emphasis was made on the importance of education based on Sámi cultural knowledge and understanding, that is, education rooted in Sámi values and traditions that makes it relevant for Sámi learners. The importance of education that meets these requirements for cultural survival and the continuation of the Sámi cultural heritage was also stressed, mirroring place-based pedagogy as understood by Gruenewald (2003a, p. 7), as the pedagogical approach suggested is directly linked to students' experiences of the world and seeks to improve the quality of life for the community through cultural continuity. As indicated by one participant, "[i]t's about starting from the student and what he or she needs to learn to be able to interact and become part of the community he or she belongs to" (participant 8, male) and further explained by others,

> It's about having an education that includes everything from Sámi norms to cultural content such as joik[7] during the music lesson or Sámi history during the history lesson, or discuss current Sámi social issues in social studies, because it's not like this today, unfortunately (participant 3, female).

> It's education from a Sámi perspective and then it's about the cultural heritage and understanding too. My generation has got it from our parents and grandparents and now it's our turn to pass on our knowledge to our children and young people (participant 5, female).

In this sense, the participants expressed the need for education to address the specificities of the experiences, problems and histories that communities rely upon to construct a narrative of collective identity (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 8, citing McLaren & Giroux, 1990). What was further included in this was a special emphasis on the importance of the Sámi languages for Sámi learners, as well as for the well-being and future survival of the cultural community and its knowledges.

> It probably means a lot that you speak another language too, there's a lot of knowledge in that, and values that may not be the same […] I would like for Sámi to be used more because so many nuances in the language disappear, so much disappears in the handicraft, there is so much knowledge in the language and I would want to implement it more because if it disappears, a large part of the culture and knowledge also disappears (participant 4, female).

According to the participants, the Sámi language is crucial for a vital Sámi culture and society, given that, through the language it is possible to express and talk about shared cultural themes, practices and knowledges that do not have equivalents in Swedish or other languages. Moreover, as indicated in the work of Kuokkanen (2000, p. 417), the language has long been the foundation for the oral knowledge transmission as well as rich storytelling tradition of the Sámi. In connection to this, the participants unanimously expressed concern regarding the loss of traditions, as well as possibility of future cultural development, if the Sámi languages are not kept alive. Furthermore, the importance of the language for the Sámi individual regarding feelings of cultural belonging, identity and personal well-being was described by several participants.

> As they say, knowledge is power, also over your own life, and I had a conversation with a man who suffers from mental health problems the other day and he told me that 'if I had been able to speak Sámi I would have been alright', and I have thought about this, especially today, that the knowledge, this traditional knowledge we have, and the language, is so important for our minds as well, it's not just that we 'should' know it to be Sámi, but that they are so rooted and we need these knowledges in ourselves to feel mentally well too (participant 1, female).

The above reflects the importance given to language in the work of Thiong'o (1986, p. 16), affirming that language carries culture, and culture carries the values by which a cultural group come to perceive themselves and their place in the world, given that it affects the way in which they view their relationship to nature and to other beings. For the individual, as well as for the community as a whole, the loss of language therefore becomes a threat to culture, as the ties to one's own way of life and culture-based values and knowledges are cut off (Kuokkanen, 2000, p. 413).

6.1.2. Connection to place: the living environment as the basis of knowledge

Although the themes are tightly interwoven, another aspect resonating with Gruenewalds' critical pedagogy of place is that, not only are learners viewed as existing in a cultural context, where learner's connection to a cultural community or "place" is emphasized, but that culture, in turn, is nested in ecological systems as well (2003a, p. 4). As voiced by one participant,

> Our language is a way of expressing our relationship to nature and to the life we live in it. So, to keep our language alive is to keep our way of life and the way we treat nature alive, it's to protect our culture, but that includes nature too (participant 8, male).

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[7] Joik is a Sámi way of singing.

In this respect, the participants' descriptions of their conception of the educational contexts they form part of deviate from the notion of "place" as simply a geographical "location", signaling an understanding of the pedagogical nature of human experience with places. For instance, the accounts provided included a perspective where places in the surrounding environment were seen as repositories of knowledge, as well as points of connection between generations, highlighting a process of teaching and learning that connects both with community life and with the places that the learners inhabit (as discussed by Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 620).

> It's about starting from the child and its background, what you are and where you belong, and then it should be based on, in my opinion, traditional Sámi knowledge transfer that's based a lot on the meeting between generations, linked to the oral tradition that exists, but also to the encounter or interaction with nature that one lives in. Nature isn't only a place of recreation but also a library for so much knowledge that is connected to lands, water and mountains. This is also connected to how you can live in harmony with nature and not have this Western way of looking at nature in which nature exists *for* humans (participant 6, male).

> It's possible to sit at the kitchen table and read poems in Sámi or sew coffee pouches in reindeer skin, but if you want a sustainability in the Sámi culture, you have to go out in the terrain and practice the lived culture, that's where it all has its beginning and end and that's where the language comes in handy and where you have contact with ancestors and history and the present and what comes next… how you teach the children the terrain and what's there and how it's connected to everything (participant 7, male).

These accounts can be linked to the perspective presented in Gruenewald's (2003b, p. 621) place-based pedagogy, affirming that the places we inhabit teach us about how the world works and how our lives fit into it. As recognized by the same perspective, "culture" and "place" are nevertheless deeply intertwined and how these places are viewed, and the teaching and interaction that becomes available, depend on the kind of attention given them, which may give rise to different perspectives on what the relationship between humans, nature and places entails, as differently assigned meanings to places also enables different kinds of interaction with and learning from them. Connecting this to the participants' descriptions, the perspective and interaction with place, and the learning that comes from this, included both values that influence behavior, such as responsibility and care for nature, as well as connection to shared history and ancestry through stories and place names. As explained by one participant, this stems from "the millennial use of the same places that leads to this connection to land and water, and that generation after generation have used the same place and walked along the same paths leads to enormous love and respect for these places and the knowledge connected to them" (participant 6, male). This was further explained in the following manner,

> It's related to this with sustainability and not leaving traces behind and being careful with the land, or that you see the value in cohesive natural landscapes, so that it doesn't become fragmented and make reindeer husbandry impossible ... and to be aware of this and see it as if we have a relationship with nature, and that there is a lot of valuable knowledge, traditional knowledge, linked to that relationship […] It's amazing to be able to sneak with them [older family members] through the landscape, because you realize that every little place has a name, and many have a history attached to it. It can be about how animals behave, about how they think and function, it can be about nature, it can be about culture and norms and values, spirituality and many times about older relatives too. I can imitate people who have been dead for a hundred years, because it has been transmitted in this place, and there you remember that person and you tell their story, and you would never have remembered it if you just sat at the kitchen table. It becomes so clear that the Sámi language has not been a written language for long, but that we have preserved all that which others have in books in the land (participant 3, female).

In the nexus between environment and culture, education thus becomes involved as the perspective of the participants, interacting with their places of habitation and the knowledges they harbor and give rise to, makes the values promoted, such as respect for and accountability to places in nature, as well as the curricula and educational activities, become deeply rooted in the relationship with the surrounding environment. As discussed by Gruenewald (2003a, p. 8), this stands in contrast to

conventional education, mainly limited to the school building, and becomes an important aspect for understanding Sámi education as it goes against the trend of the dominant educational and economic system, which are headed away from, rather than toward, an intense consciousness of our environments (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 8, citing Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000). As an example of this, instead of actual experience with the phenomenal world, many educators simply accept what is found in the standardized "placeless" curricula (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 8), whereas the conception of the intimate connection to place and nature found in the participants accounts translates into practical learning activities. As an example, two participants described the interaction with place as follows, and I quote at length,

> We had a whole course where we worked with root handicraft. It was time consuming, but we went out and they learned to take birch roots, what to think about and how to do it. Talk to the trees to ask for permission, just as I grew up doing, because I don't own the land, it's Mother Earth who owns everything, and it's about this balance, you don't clear it all out, you leave no trace behind and you cover everything up again. The roots are under all the moss, so you cannot simply pull them up, you cut big sheets that you lift and then you leave the roots lying against the next moss, you cannot turn them upside down because then they dry and die, so once I have covered everything up, I turn them so that the roots point downwards and then those that are left can grow back. When I'm done it appears as if no one has been there, I let it be this regrowth and so it is with everything you learn about material collection, you are thankful and you don't leave traces (participant 5, female).

> We go out and harvest from nature and collect materials like wood, shoe hay, bark, we take different materials from the reindeer, but in the Sámi approach you shouldn't take more than you need, you must leave some so that it is available for the next person too, and for the forest and nature to survive, and it's something we work very hard to bring into [the education], that you cannot just go out and take everything. Just because there are ten things of something you shouldn't take ten, because you might only have time to use two this year… and this about letting things take their time, it shouldn't have to go so fast, in the outside society it's very much so that things must go so fast and it should be an economic profitability in everything, but if you imagine you take wood from the forest it should dry first before you use it and it takes a long time […] So, there's a lot of such knowledge that you must take into account, even if you just go into the woods to pick something, you should ask for permission, it should not be done too quickly, there's this about protecting nature, you must have respect for nature (participant 4, female).

Based on the above accounts, the learning that emerges develops from the particular attributes of place and the ways of life made possible by these. Additionally, the cultural understanding and attention given to place further affects the learning it makes possible, in turn influencing the educational activities taking place, which, in the case in point, are described as experiential, with an extended notion of accountability outward toward places, another key element of place-based education, where education engages with local settings outside the classroom (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 7; 2003b, p. 620). In this regard, the described aspects of Sámi education point toward a pedagogy that goes against conventional schooling, which remain disengaged from and unaccountable to the connections between people, education, and places. Instead, as opposed to common education's keeping of students indoors, thinking about outdoor places mainly in the abstract, activities promoted in Sámi educational contexts involve firsthand experiences of local life and engagement in the understanding of what happens there. As discussed by Gruenewald, this serves as way of extending pedagogy, as it becomes relevant to the lived experiences of the learner and conceptualizes accountability in a way that makes places matter to educators and students in tangible ways (2003b, p. 620; 2003a, p. 7).

6.1.3. Reconnecting with community: intergenerational knowledge transmission

As made evident in the previous sections, no clear-cut division can be made between culture and community and the knowledges that arise from the relationship to the land, the living environment. Therefore, returning in this final section of the theme to close the loop, an aspect of Sámi education that was just as highlighted by the participants as the connection beyond the classroom to the natural

environment, is that of further community connection through intergenerational knowledge transmission. This includes the involvement of knowledge-bearers other than the teacher and, as explained by the participants, such connections not only serve to connect learners to the cultural community, but also to personal heritage and land through the generational use and knowledges bound to it, "[y]ou need to collect the right things at the right time of the year and follow nature's seasons and flows. This can an older person teach you, how to read nature and what to look for and where" (participant 8, male). Other participants explained it in the following way,

> It would be my dream scenario that the school today wouldn't just be a physical building but included the whole environment, and then I also think that it's important that you as a learner get to go out in these environments together with knowledge-bearers, the older generation, who can explain things in that place instead of sitting in a classroom and receiving things in an abstract way where you're only shown pictures of things. Say that you should sit and only talk theoretically about how to get handicraft material or how to slaughter a reindeer, instead of actually going out and being part of taking care of all the different parts, or to go out in the terrain and forests and collect the handicraft material and getting told how to think, what to do and also what your responsibilities for future generations are, that you cannot simply take whatever you want but you must have this circular thinking, you're just borrowing the place (participant 6, male).

The above descriptions interlink community, environment and learning, while further highlighting the importance of experiential learning with and from place in the context of Sámi education. In addition, following Gruenewald (2003a, p. 7), intergenerational learning is not only described as relevant for creating such linkages, through the providing of a connection both to land and transmission of cultural traditions and knowledges, but is also a practice that potentially contributes to the well-being of community life as it promotes a pedagogy for student engagement that goes beyond mere preparation for market competition. As such, the education described includes a focus both on cultural responsiveness and on learning communities that reach beyond the classroom, where knowledge-bearers other than the teacher become engaged. This further encourages a structure which directs curriculum towards community needs (Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 642), such as that of cultural survival and the safekeeping of traditional practices, knowledges and language, through place-conscious teaching and learning. Additionally, viewed from the perspective of Gruenewald's critical pedagogy of place (2003a, pp. 9, 11), this does not only put the discussed Sámi educational activities in connection to ecological places "beyond the classroom", but also social places and community life, serving together to expand school experience outwards and strengthen learners' connections to others *as well as* to the regions and places which they and their communities inhabit.

6.2. Challenges for implementing Sámi education

When exploring the second theme of the analysis, the current state of Sámi education was related to both historical accounts, colonial politics and the remainders of these, as the participants pointed towards past collisions between Sámi and Swedish societies and knowledge systems as setting the stage for what is happening in Sápmi today. When taking a closer look at this, Santos' (2014) theory of epistemic justice and, although to a lesser extent, the critical PBE of Gruenewald (2003a) are jointly applied as both share a decolonial objective, Gruenewald pointing out that, to be able live well socially and ecologically, we must first learn to recognize disruption and injury and address their causes (2003a, p. 3). In an attempt of such recognition, Santos' theory of abyssal thinking will guide the way in the identification of struggles in the epistemological realm, as well as of the concrete consequences of this for present-day Sámi society and schooling.

6.2.1. Opening the abyss

As discussed in the study's background chapter, colonialism for the Sámi people involved experiences of subordination and oppression similar to those of many other Indigenous peoples across the globe, finding themselves on "the other side" of the abyssal line as their knowledges and ways of life were produced as inferior and residual realities, obstacles for the societal models considered relevant, advanced and productive (Santos, 2014, p. 275; SI, n.d. D). Through this, what came into play according to Santos' (2014, p. 273) theory also included a naturalization of differences, where people were distributed along a hierarchy of racial categories and nonexistence came in the form of the Sámi's "insuperable" inferiority when compared to the "naturally" superior Swedish people (Lantto & Mörkenstam, 2008, p. 30). This hierarchization was likewise recognized by the participants, who on many occasions circled back to Swedish colonial policy and the consequences of racist perspectives and attitudes for the Sámi people.

> In Swedish history, we've had a thoroughly racist society until the Second World War, with the State Institute for Racial Biology and the view of the Sámi as half-humans and basically adult children who needed to be 'managed' and who couldn't make their own decisions […] Sámi culture was thought of as completely meaningless, a leftover from an ancient time that was no longer needed… perhaps they were a bit exotified, as the 'mysterious Sámi sorcerers', but for the most part they were only considered as people who were in the way for the future (participant 3, female).

> We must remember that during at least the last 150 years we've had this power relationship and the basic attitude that it's the Swedish that is the norm. The Sámi have been officially declared as a lower standing race and a culture that would die out, and they only introduced certain policies and regulations that allowed Sámi to continue living in a Sámi way to some extent to avoid social problems and the need to care for the poor, not because the Sámi had the right to exist in themselves (participant 7, male).

According to the participants, although the above views of the Sámi as an inferior people and culture might have changed during the years, in part due to the discourse on human rights, the change has not been substantial enough to make Sámi perspectives and ways of life into the equals of its Swedish counterparts. Instead, the participants describe their position as one of continued marginalization.

> Of course, that kind of views legitimized that the state took over our lands, or simply that they saw it as obvious that their use of it was better than ours, but it's still like that though, although the rhetoric has changed. Now they don't say it's because our culture is inferior, but at the same time it's exactly what they're saying because what we do never matters once there's an investor and some other project in sight (participant 8, male).

In other words, following Santos' (2014, pp. 210, 273) and other decolonial scholars' (e.g., Quijano, 2000) line of thought regarding the intimate link between colonialism and capitalism, with modern day neoliberal economics and capitalist development being promoted as the universal models to strive towards, the clash between Sámi and Swedish societal models is still undeniably present. For example, according to the capitalist logic of productivity, economic growth is an unquestionably rational objective, and the criterion of productivity that best serves this objective applies both to nature and to human labor, making profit maximization the only goal while branding other possible objectives as non-productive and thus not worthy of consideration (Santos, 2014, p. 275). This narrow view of what constitutes "productiveness" is also encountered in the discussions regarding the best use of land in Sápmi, a theme that was previously outlined in the background chapter, as well as further described by the participants as a question of difference between underlying perspectives. According to Santos' theory, coinciding with the participants' accounts, the dominance of capitalist logic effectively excludes the possibility of consideration being given to immaterial values, such as cultural values of Sámi ways of life, as the value assigned to both industrial and to Sámi land uses is based on monetary value alone. This is further explained by two participants in the following manner,

> The collision happens automatically. The industry has a one-time perspective, while the Sámi have an eternity perspective. This is *the* place for us, so our future rests on us using nature sustainably, while the industry sees it like 'now we should dig this hole as deep as possible, as fast as possible, so that we get as much money as possible in the shortest possible time and then we leave this trash area for someone else to take care of' (participant 6, male).

> I would say that the dominant perspective, not the one that everyone has but that the bigger social structure has, is that land is valued, natural resources are valued in money, whereas in a Sámi perspective natural resources are valued in relation to oneself and the long-term cultural value. That's why it's a complete clash when developers come and say 'but we're replacing you with *money* for this area', since those are things that cannot be replaced […] So, when someone comes and says 'yes, we'll clear-cut all of this, but we give you money', you must understand that it's a completely unreasonable compensation because for all generations to come we have lost that which is the basis of our culture (participant 3, female).

The above accounts mirror the experiences of other Indigenous peoples around the world given that, as was discussed earlier in this work, although different international policy documents emphasize the importance of Indigenous people's rights to their lands and culture in connection to social justice and environmental sustainability (e.g., UN, 1992; UN, 2007), the fact remains that increasing industrial exploitation of land and natural resources has become an urgent global concern (Lawrence & Kløcker Larsen, 2017, p. 1164). In the context of the present study, the struggles and tensions that this entails for Sápmi are especially highlighted by the participants and, when exploring their accounts in accordance with Santos (2014, pp. 190, 198), the Sámi perspectives and ways of life are found to be produced as nonexistent in several ways as they oppose the underlying logic of the Western development model and land use, falling on the other side of the restrictive limits of what is included within the intellectual and political horizon of what is "credible", "legitimate" and "productive".

For instance, Sámi knowledges and perspectives are located on the "other side of the line" in the hierarchy of knowledges created by the abyss, where "incorrect" beliefs such as holistic understandings of nature and interconnections between land and community give rise to equally "incomprehensible" behaviors and ways of life, effectively branded as backwards, underdeveloped and inferior. At work here is the monoculture of linear time (Santos, 2014, p. 273), the idea of history's well-known direction towards progress, modernization and development. According to this logic, the societies on "this side of the line" are following the dominant, straight line of development forwards, whereas societies like those of Indigenous peoples on the "other side", are moving backwards and thus produced as non-contemporaneous, a residuum of the primitive, traditional, simple or obsolete. This understanding of Sámi culture and livelihoods as "unmodern" when compared to the "modern" Swedish society and way of life was also described by several participants, here exemplified by two of them,

> I was asked by a journalist when the mining question was very much on the agenda, 'but aren't you really going on and fighting for something that belongs in a museum?' (participant 3, female).

> It feels as if modernity or industrialization has become the main thing, that it's what 'should' prevail and there is no *balance* between what is sustainable and modernization, which means that industrialization and deforestation get to take up so much space just because it is considered the norm. That's what I think is sad, because then those who live and think in more sustainable ways are considered to be backward-striving, because they haven't put it in the perspective that there should be a balance, asking 'if I exploit here, what do I have around me?' Instead, they just see their little square piece of land, thinking 'this is what I should get. I'm focused on forest, I'm going to get this piece of forest', while there are also wind turbines two kilometers away, and roads and… so I think you must look at the whole and see it in a larger perspective and that they forget that, and we're often seen as backwards or not considered to be 'for' things because we rather see the whole regarding how nature works (participant 4, female).

Following this line of thought, what is obscured by abyssal thinking is the fact that the same place and the relationships it makes possible may be viewed from different perspectives, and that perspectives

on "place" in turn are entirely dependent on culture (as discussed in 6.1, following Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 621). Given the nature of the abyss, there is nevertheless a hierarchy to be found also concerning the valid interpretations of place, including the productiveness and relevance of the uses arising from these interpretations, as was discussed above. In this regard, the hierarchy of interpretations of place can be related to the accounts of several participants, describing the Swedish view of Sápmi as "empty territory" and signaling the invisibilization of Sámi culture and ways of life as a prerequisite for the continued industrial exploitation of land in accordance with the dominant view of what development "should" look like.

> Throughout history, the mountains have been described as this 'untouched' wilderness and this idea still exists today, but the mountain world is really a Sámi cultural landscape, characterized by thousands of years of human presence, first through hunting and fishing and then reindeer husbandry. The land bears clear traces of human life for those who know *how* to look… but, of course mining politics is easier on 'empty' lands (participant 8, male).

> A word that I've become increasingly allergic to is that of 'wilderness', which automatically relates to this as an uninhabited area or untouched land, when the truth is that there is no land in Sweden today that doesn't show traces of humans, although perhaps not from a Western perspective where there has to be a hotel or a café, but of traces different from that. So, it's something that makes it very easy for them and you can look at how Sweden advertises itself and I think it was Business Sweden that has a webpage promoting mining and encouraging investments where they have these magical images of this so-called 'wilderness' and talk about how there are no people here, 'population zero' (participant 6, male).

Connecting this to Santos' (2014) theory of abyssal thinking, the produced non-existence of the people, cultures and ways of life residing on "the other side" of the abyss makes them invisible to the people, cultures and ways of life residing on "this side of" it. More specifically, are Sámi ways of valuing, inhabiting and occupying land not recognized when compared to the majority populations' modes of doing the same, leading to the dominant side not only considering nature as devoid of value other than economic value, but also of people and productive activity.

6.2.2. Consequences of abyssal thinking for Sámi society

As indicated by Santos, the invisible distinctions and hierarchies constructed in the realm of epistemology and discussed above result in highly visible consequences in society. For the "other side of the line", these consequences may for example include violence in the shape of social exclusion, racial and cultural discrimination (2014, pp. 11, 194). Starting out from this point of view, a threat towards the survival of Sámi society and culture in its entirety, including many of its traditional knowledges, was unanimously identified by the participants in the loss of land due to both climate change and increased industrial land use. As industrial projects develop, landscapes are destroyed or severely fragmented, making reindeer herding increasingly difficult and expensive as, among other things, reindeers might need to be transported by truck between areas, or fed, as natural lichen becomes scarcer as a result of natural resource extraction and changing winter temperatures. This puts a lot of pressure on both reindeers and the Sámi community as a whole, given that, as explained in section 6.1, the basis for the Sámi culture is found in the living environment.

> As land is destroyed, the knowledges will disappear. As simple as that. Because without the connection to nature, we will lose the purpose of why we should know it […] and it's important for everyone to understand that even if you are not a reindeer herder yourself, you as a Sámi are affected if things go badly, because reindeer husbandry has such a central role for what the whole culture in Sápmi looks like and, if you think of sustainability, if the conditions for the reindeer are destroyed, great traditional knowledge will disappear from our culture (participant 1, female).

> If we consider the big picture, which of course affects the Sámi community in general but also the school, it includes that Sámi environments are decreasing every day due to encroachments on nature and the natural

resource extractions that are made through forestry, hydropower, mining and so on, where this 'library of the lands' I talked about is also impoverished and therefore the knowledges connected to it (participant 6, male).

Furthermore, when discussing if the ongoing debates regarding sustainable development could favor the consideration of values other than the strictly material, most of the participants reiterated that such discourse did not change the actual conditions for the Sámi and the living environment in Sápmi, nor for the valuation of their culture. According to Santos (2014, p. 43), this is due to the underlying deficiency of the Western understanding of sustainable development, which takes as its point of departure the conception of nature as separate from society and of natural resources as unconditionally available to humans, sustaining the idea of infinite growth and the unstoppable development of productive forces. As explained by the participants, Sámi perspectives on land, based on their cultural understanding of its value, are in connection to this often considered irrelevant when comparisons are made between Sámi land uses like that of reindeer husbandry and extractive land uses, as the dominant perspective only considers economic value to be of relevance, making the weighing of different modes of usage a simple matter of quantifying the economic profit made possible by each.

> Sustainability is not something that is taken seriously at the societal level, other than that it's thrown in like some nice words somewhere, but in practice there's *nothing* that goes in that direction. Rather, such new ideas of green change and moving away from fossil fuels and all such talk only give the state and companies new arguments to exploit Sápmi even faster and harder. Now they're building windmills and make industrial areas out of both forest and mountains, and almost only in Sápmi. That way they only remove the physical habitat further… but if money is involved the Sámi perspective weighs extremely light. Then it's at best seen as an 'interest' that should be weighed against other interests and if this other interest puts billions in spin, then this Sámi 'interest' is not even mentioned anymore (participant 7, male).

Following Santos (2014, p. 263), this leads to the exclusion of Sámi ways of life from the consideration of viable social forms, as they are not considered "productive" by the majority society. The continuous overlooking of Sámi perspectives can moreover be traced to the consequences of Western abyssal thinking which, due to metonymic reasoning's selective blinders, successfully overlooks the possibility of discovering other rationalities, resulting in the claim of being the *only* form of rationality which also leads to difficulties for the "others" to make themselves heard. Viewed in this way, Sámi culture and ways of life are still not valued or seen as possible alternatives to Western culture and rationality, only including dominant perspectives and knowledges and exclusively accepting the forms of sociability that are made possible by the these. As exemplified by several participants, this leads to structural marginalization of Sámi perspectives and makes it difficult when discussing the use of land with different industry representatives and decision makers, as the Sámi do not feel that their perspective is taken seriously, nor that they are considered as equal partners in the discussions.

> First of all, we're always consulted at the last possible minute and if they can skip a consultation with us, they will. Many industry giants criticized the suggestion regarding the new consultation order[8] as it would give us a say in matters that directly concern us, and I think that says a lot because, second, we're always considered as being against everything and as naysayers, but we're not against 'development', just their *kind* of it! (participant 8, male)

> It's like what I said about this with the Sámi being seen as backward-striving and resource exploitation, because then you sit there with two different perspectives and try to solve it. And from a Sámi standpoint you are ready to open up and show everything and say "look, see this!", while those who sit on the other side have a pair of sunglasses on with lots of filters and can't take in what is said, they don't understand it. So no, I think it's a tilted process and there you must also look at colonization and at how other views are considered, if at all (participant 4, female).

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[8] The Swedish government has proposed an introduction of a special order for consultation on issues of importance to the Sámi people, with the purpose of strengthening Sámi influence in matters that concern them (Swedish Government, 2020).

According to Santos, behind this lies a further technology of abyssal thinking, the monoculture of knowledge, which brands everything outside of Western modern science, considered the sole model of truth, as "ignorance" (2014, p. 273). Because of this, "this side of the line" becomes the creator of scientific, truthful and universal knowledge, followed by comprehensible actions, while the other side of the line becomes a sphere of opinions, falseness, or traditional knowledges, limited by their local origins and therefore unworthy of consideration (Santos, 2014, p. 190). These notions were also found in the participants accounts, as they pointed out that Sámi perspectives and knowledges brought to the table are not considered "real" knowledge unless they are backed up by academic research or otherwise validated by the standards of Western knowledge production. For instance, one participant connected this to the view that "Indigenous peoples are still classified as dumb and unintelligent people who don't understand what's best for them" (participant 5, female), while others raised the question regarding the monopoly on what constitutes "valid" knowledge and the difficulties encountered when having to adapt Sámi knowledges to the Western and Swedish format when attempting to get through to authorities and business representatives.

> It's the same as having to *research* traditional knowledge in order for it to become "real" knowledge you can use. You really should have written a dissertation on something for you to bring it to Stockholm or Oslo and how do you do it as a Sámi village member or as a Sámi within an organization, how do you take this knowledge to a ministry and to someone who sits there in a suit and present it to this person who doesn't have that understanding, but when you come up with the same knowledge on a piece of paper after researching it then it's suddenly easier to take in? It gets skewed when we cannot bring our knowledge directly, but it must first become "proven" knowledge (participant 4, female).

> When I got my university degree, I felt that *now* I can speak the Swedish language and make myself understood, I spoke Swedish before of course, but I'm referring to being able to change to this academic language when you have to meet some high-up person. Because I've heard that 'but little girl, shouldn't you go back to the reindeer forest?' before. And many have understood that you must educate yourself, because only then can you argue with them […] but they don't have to read up on things, they hardly know Swedish history, or maybe some things from southern Sweden, but there's a difference, because when Sámi end up in situations like this with land right claims, we're *required* to read up, investigate, hire archaeologists to make our case and speak in their language (participant 5, female).

As pointed out by Santos (2014, pp. 35, 38) although invisible, this kind of relegation of Indigenous knowledges to nonexistence, perpetuated by abyssal thinking, has resulted in highly visible consequences as it sustains a continued *epistemicide*, leading to the marginalization, deletion and/or distortion of entire knowledge systems, languages and cultures not included in the Western mode of knowing and being in the world. This does not only create issues connected to differing cultural understandings of land and nature in Sápmi, but also to language. For example, according to Santos, it is not only a problem that "different participants in the argumentative discourse may master the language unequally" but also that the dominant language may be responsible for "the very unpronounceability of some of the central aspirations of the knowledges and practices that are oppressed" (2014, p. 361). In other words, the linguistic supremacy that comes with cultural domination carries with it a conceptual and normative prevalence that may exclude perspectives and ideas perfectly pronounceable in Sámi, but not in Swedish. As made evident by the participants' accounts, this hierarchy of knowledge, culture and language has also left its mark on Sámi society as, among other things, previous forced assimilation policies and the loss of connection to cultural heritage and language, affecting whole generations, were highlighted as serious obstacles facing the Sámi community today regarding its cultural survival and continued life in Sápmi.

In relation to the effects that the dominance of Swedish culture and ways of life, historically and currently considered the norm, have had on Sámi society, one of the participants explained it in

the following manner, "[m]any people today live urbanized lives, what does that do with culture, what do you forget when you don't live close to nature or listen to it? This is also a threat" (participant 4, female). Furthermore, in relation to the consequences of long-time social exclusion and cultural discrimination, which, according to decolonial scholars also leads to a colonization of the mind, including the internalization of the dominant society's devaluation of one's own culture (Kuokkanen, 2000, p. 411), personal accounts of auto-invisibilization and active under-communication of Sámi identity due to discrimination, structural and direct racism were put forward as living reminders of previous politics and their continued consequences for the Sámi people today.

> Given the history, it's not certain that the elderly can speak Sámi and it may be so that for older people it's even more difficult to speak it than for the younger, because the elderly might have this 'language block' and are perhaps closer to trauma than what younger people are (participant 1, female).

> There's still terrible racism towards the Sámi and has always been so, ever since I was a child and since my parents were children and were forced to go to school and their language was taken away. They weren't allowed to speak Sámi at school and were beaten for it, but back then Sámi was all they knew... and still there's this hidden racism. I grew up with the language at home, but when I went to high school, I locked my language in a 'coffin' of sorts, because I preferred not to be Sámi then and I got into many fights for it. So, I grew up receiving this hatred, and I hid the language away, which meant that I had to take it back myself when I was older and started at the Sámi education center (participant 5, female).

In addition to this, and related to Santos' assertion that social justice is not possible without cognitive justice, as economic and political injustices are sustained by their cognitive counterparts (2014, pp. 189, 207), the continued devaluation of Sámi knowledges and realities was further linked by the participants to the total dominance of Western/Swedish culture and modes of being in the world and the resulting lack of knowledge about Sámi culture throughout the Swedish society. Being a consequence of abyssal thinking, where ongoing invisibilization of Sámi life and culture leads to lack of understanding of matters of importance to the Sámi people on several levels, issues identified as of special importance included prejudice and stereotyped perceptions of the Sámi and their ways of life being sustained by the majority society. As a result of this, the participants pointed to difficulties when interacting with authorities, schools and health care providers, although, among these issues, the lack of knowledge and cultural understanding among Swedish politicians and decisionmakers, was emphasized the most.

> If you look at the [Swedish] parliament and at what they know about Sámi issues, it's simply miserable, because they haven't received any more education about it than anyone else in Sweden and I think it's awful that they happily sit and decide on things that directly affect our lives without even talking to us or knowing *anything* about us. So, of course they cannot value anything Sámi as it's all based on what they themselves piece together (participant 3, female).

> [As a legislator] I don't think you should be able in 2021 to get away with saying that you don't know anything about the Sámi or northern Sweden. It becomes completely absurd if you apply it to anything else, say that you're in the Finance Committee and were to say that "I know nothing about economics", I mean, that decision maker would get kicked off immediately. So why should you be able to get away with not even having basic knowledge about northern Sweden's and the Sámi people's life conditions? (participant 6, male).

6.2.3. Consequences of abyssal thinking for Sámi education

Although viewed from a broad perspective, the above challenges faced by the Sámi society interlink with the study's more specific focus on Sámi education, as threats against the Sámi culture, consisting of continued abyssal thinking and the loss of land due to changing climate and industrial exploitations, challenge the possibilities to continue living in a Sámi way, as well as the knowledges connected to this. However, given its importance for answering the research question, the following section will explore the consequences of these challenges for Sámi schooling in greater detail. To present the

findings in a clear manner, the section has been structured to start out with a focus on Sámi education within the Swedish school system, followed by attention being given to Sámi education within the Sámi education system.

Consequences for Sámi education within the Swedish school system

According to the participants accounts, Sámi education in Swedish schools is affected in several ways related to the historical and current abyssal subordination of Sámi perspectives, interests and knowledges. For instance, a majority of the participants agreed that the invisibilization of the Sámi in Sweden is bound to continue, as Sámi history and culture is largely ignored in the Swedish curricula and, when included, the information lacks nuances and the Sámi are mainly presented as static historical fixtures – a people who did not have a history until their territories were "discovered" by the Swedes. As stated by the participants, this is something that does not only affect the Swedish students' knowledge of the Sámi culture, but also deprive Sámi students of important knowledge of their own history and heritage, if that knowledge is not provided in environments outside the school. As explained by one participant, "[e]ven today in 2021 you learn nothing about the Sámi, perhaps you're only shown some old text and an old picture that roughly illustrates that the Sámi existed *back then*" (participant 5, female). This was further elaborated on in the following manner,

> For most children today, it's only a theme day about Sámi culture, or maybe it's included in the religious studies where you learn about the older Sámi religion, but otherwise the Sámi culture is absent. You learn a lot about Swedish kings, but nothing about leading figures in Sámi society, nor about colonization or Sámi history […] The problem is that there's very little good information to get from schoolbooks and the teachers receive no education about this during their training and in southern Sweden, if you talk about the Sámi at all, we're seen as exotic remnants from ancient times. The Sámi don't live in huts, not everyone is a reindeer herder, we have electricity! It's strange what people think of us. People don't understand that they can have a classmate who is Sámi, who just hasn't said anything (participant 3, female).

Viewed in the light of Santos (2014, p. 263) theory, *not* teaching about Sámi culture is a result of metonymic reasoning and of the dominant knowledge system not recognizing other rationalities as existing, possible and equally valid alternatives to Western knowledge and ways of knowledge production. This also relates to the monoculture of dominant scale (Santos, 2014, p. 274), an abyssal technology due to which Sámi knowledges and ways of life are rendered as simply too "local" and "particular" to be able to outweigh, or even add to, Western knowledge and its resulting societal model as credible alternatives, as the latter are considered complete, universal and global. In this sense, it was pointed out by several participants that Sámi issues and perspectives are considered regional at best, but hardly something that concerns Sweden on a national level, including its national curricula.

> I think that, first you must get away from this idea that the Sámi society and history only concerns the Sámi people, because it really concerns the whole of Sweden, and you should get that from the education you receive, not just the same and never updated Wikipedia post, 'the Sámi are an Indigenous people who live in four countries and have colorful clothes'. Instead it must touch upon specific, current issues like what does a ratification of ILO 169 [9] mean, or what is the practical significance of the Girjas case [10] for Swedish administration? (participant 6, male).

In addition, not teaching about *current* Sámi issues and society renders Sámi culture and knowledges as non-contemporaneous and obsolete in accordance with the monoculture of linear time and its ideas of a single road to modernization and development, as was discussed in 6.2.2 (following Santos, 2014, p. 273). Moreover, relegating Sámi culture to the past and considering its knowledges and ways of life

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[9] The ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples' Convention.
[10] The Swedish Supreme Court has awarded Girjas Sámi Village exclusive rights to issue licenses for hunting and fishing in its management area (Swedish Supreme Court, 2020).

as "traditional" as in "not up to date" is, as pointed out by Kuokkanen (2000, p. 418), a racist notion of a culture as frozen in time, which further serves to conceal development and change in Indigenous cultures and overlooks the fact that change is inevitable and a prerequisite of any living culture. This was a theme discussed by all participants, as they opposed the idea found in the majority society of Sámi knowledges as stagnated. As put by one participant, "Sámi knowledges are only seen as traditional, but 'traditional' doesn't mean that they aren't still valid today" (participant 8, male) and further explained by another,

> Within the Sámi society, we have always known that the knowledge we have is important, so it's just about how the surrounding society views that knowledge […] and also, if we talk about sustainability issues and the climate, it's important to actually be able to take advantage of the knowledges that Indigenous peoples have regarding their place in the world and the coexistence with place *and* all other species that we share it with. It must be recognized that, even though Sámi knowledge may not be able to show nice SMHI[11] graphs of changes in the climate, there is still something else here, for example in that you have used this place for such a long time that you can *see* the changes (participant 6, male).

Considering the above accounts, the abyssal line identified by Santos (2014, p. 59) is continuously maintained through the Swedish educational system, as inclusion and exclusion of content becomes a way of rendering perspectives and knowledges more, or less, valuable and worthy of teaching, affirming the intellectual and political horizon of the sayable, credible, and legitimate. In accordance with the participants' statements, for the Sámi learner, this means being made aware of the invisibility and invalidity of Sámi perspectives and knowledges as teaching material is exclusively departing from a Swedish point of view, based on what fits into the validation criteria of Western scientific knowledge, closing the door for other interpretations and rationalities, simply seen as "incorrect".

> Just to take one example, one of the questions of the national exams was 'how many seasons are there?' and based on the Swedish context we only have four seasons, but if you're a Sámi child, you *know* that we have eight seasons and they therefore answered based on that context, but it was put down as wrong because according to the solution it could only be four. Although there is no right or wrong in this, it's just that these children have grown up and live in a Sámi context, but in cases like this, they're punished for having that knowledge (participant 6, male).

This was furthermore connected by the participants to the lack of knowledge and understanding of the Sámi culture encountered in the Swedish majority society, something which in turn was seen as leading to lack of adequate education about the Sámi people, resulting in a vicious circle of invisibilization and deficient societal understanding and knowledge. According to several participants, this is one of the main obstacles faced by the Sámi today, given that the lack of understanding for Sámi issues encountered among policy makers, discussed in 6.2.2, also can be connected to their passing through the Swedish education system. This resonates with Santos (2014, p. 198, 207) theory of abyssal thinking, affirming that the injustices perpetrated in society will not be solved if the abyssal power relationships in the sphere of epistemology remains the same. In this sense, what was highlighted as of special importance by several participants was that the aforementioned lack of knowledge in addition includes principals and other school staff and that, as Swedish teacher education does not include content about the Sámi, Swedish schools therefore become places for continued invisibilization and ignorance at best, but also for perpetuated prejudice, stretching as far as the bullying of students and direct racism.

> In teacher education you don't get any information about the Sámi and I worked on an information project where we went around to high schools and talked about the Sámi and we went to a place where we knew there was a lot of opposition against the Sámi and afterwards we were sitting there completely shaken, because we had had to

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[11] The Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute.

defend ourselves, not against the students, but against the teacher's prejudices, opinions and outbursts (participant 4, female).

In addition, as indicated by the participants' accounts, the widespread lack of understanding among school employees further leads to that when Sámi learners request Sámi content, it is often treated as something that belongs outside of the regular classes, which the participants signaled as due to that it is not considered as of equal value to the "normal" content. This is furthermore in line with Gruenewald's pointing out of how place-conscious traditions may be pressured to prove their worth by conventional measures in national and local systems of education (2003b, p. 621), as the participants explained that taking time off from school for attending Sámi activities or language camps is not seen as a priority, given that the knowledge attained there does not measure up to "real" knowledge and attendance therefore often put down to simple absence, leaving many students with a higher workload if they want to integrate culturally appropriate content, if not being simply denied attending. In this sense, what is favored instead is both Western knowledge as well as the Western conventional model of education, which promotes a "placeless", standardized education and curricula that cuts off the process of teaching and learning from community life and the places Sámi learners actually inhabit (as explained by Gruenewald, 2003b, pp. 624, 642). Such favoring is furthermore demonstrated through the example of one of the participants regarding how the schools often expect the parents to find Sámi teachers themselves which, as pointed out, "would *never* happen in mathematics and this means that an image of Sámi content as not very valuable, nor as a natural part of Swedish society, is communicated" (participant 3, female). Other participants simply contended when asked how Sámi knowledges were valued in the Swedish school that "it's more like second class knowledge" (participant 8, male) while others provided even more in-depth examples,

> I chose to stop studying Sámi in secondary school because I didn't think it worked with the school […] and I bet that 90% of my students also feel an inner stress because they feel that they're missing other things because Sámi classes are usually simultaneous to other lessons. I understand that you cannot plan everything based on a few students, but if you do it in advance you can do it so that the students can both exercise their right and not be punished for it. For I see that kind of double punishment all the time in my students, if they don't study Sámi then they'll lose a large part of their identity and then they're punished for that, but if they study it, then the lessons are placed on the lunch break so that the students almost don't have time to eat, or they get extra homework from the other lessons (participant 1, female).

> I dare to say that, from a Sámi perspective, it's devastating as it is right now, when you have compulsory schooling that means that the children are forced to spend whole days in an environment where there's no Sámi mediation and you cannot be involved as previous generations in everyday life, where the Sámi knowledges are exercised. A much greater understanding is needed of that the children must be able to get time off to be involved, that the *value* in this is understood. Because it says a lot, and I *understand* that they need to have math lessons and that it cannot be replaced by being on a reindeer round-up, but the children learn lots of other things that is also relevant knowledge. And this is repeated in many situations where it's less of a distance between the subjects too, for example children who have this integration of Sámi elements in their regular schooling where often, for example when reading Sámi literature, the teachers in the regular class simply give homework from the other literature lessons because they were "away", but in both classes you read books! This results in a lot of extra work for the children, so they almost don't have the opportunity to participate in integrated activities (participant 3, female).

What is further included in the participants' accounts regarding the lack of knowledge of Sámi culture, history and life conditions among teachers and school staff, is that it leads to deficient knowledge of Sámi rights to language education. This, in turn, results in that it becomes up to the students themselves to be knowledgeable regarding their own rights – and willing to fight for their fulfillment. Moreover, participants link this to the profound lack of understanding of the importance of Sámi cultural content for the individual learner, especially regarding feelings of cultural connection and well-being when learners are trying to reconnect with their Sámi identity and heritage. This leads to

that Sámi languages are often compared to "high status" languages likes Spanish and German, or even Chinese, which are considered more "relevant" languages to study, and examples provided included being suggested to simply "keep this Sámi thing going as a hobby, as you will not be able to make a living out of it" (participant 1, female). As explained by Gruenewald (2003a, p. 3), this is due to conventional Western education's focus on "learn to earn", that is, on students first and foremost being educated in order to support individualistic and nationalistic competition in the global economy. It can furthermore be connected to the dominant capitalist logic of productivity, in which economic profitability is the main objective of any activity undertaken by society, and according to which the learning of a Sámi language for other than economic reasons is rendered as nonproductive (Santos, 2014, p. 275). In this regard, the outright questioning of the usefulness of learning Sámi, or of integrating other Sámi content, is further explained in the following manner,

> What I think of as my main challenge at school is to conduct Sámi teaching, simultaneously or in parallel with Swedish society, and that we have our Sámi society with our traditional values and culture and then we have Swedish society with its values and culture and many times it can be a clash due to many prejudices stemming from a lack of understanding of how important Sámi teaching is for Sámi individuals […] I feel that Sámi knowledge is not valued to the high degree it should be, for example, I have students who other teachers ask 'but why should you study Sámi?', because those who aren't Sámi don't understand the importance of this on all the levels on which the knowledge lies, it's not just 'now I know I can eat this mushroom', but about one's whole identity and self-image (participant 1, female).

> If, for example, we imagine that students should learn Sámi and to learn Sámi, even if you are in a Sámi school, it is to learn a language that has a very, very low status outside the school walls. It's not possible to compare with learning Spanish or English or something else, even if they are not the majority language in Sweden, they are high-status languages (participant 7, male).

In connection to the above, it becomes clear that, as stated by Kuokkanen, educational institutions have been central to the process of colonizing Indigenous peoples' minds all over the world (2000: 412) and that the Sámi culture and language are still effectively subordinated its Swedish counterparts-something which affects both the Sámi learners themselves, as well as the Swedish learners. Additionally, according to several participants, the exclusion of the Sámi from the school curricula and content, forms part of a continuing colonial process of domination, where the history, knowledges and perspectives of the Sámi are not recognized so that political action on their behalf is not warranted. As most of the Swedish majority population lack knowledge about the contemporary Sámi culture, issues and life conditions, there is furthermore no understanding or interest in supporting Sámi causes. Moreover, participants pointed out that as Sweden today is promoting itself as a "humanitarian superpower" and "top of the class" when it comes to human rights, it is not in the governments' interest to acknowledge Sweden's colonial history and the structural oppression of the Sámi people. Sámi perspectives and interests might therefore not be officially opposed, but are only supported to the extent that they do not threaten the dominant perspective and societal model.

> After the Second World War, politics changed and Sweden became this land of fantastic humanism, the world's best at human rights, but history was never really dealt with. What happened instead was that they just put the lid on all the crummy racist attitudes and they could simply simmer on in society […] I mean, of course it can be that you have different views on things in Sámi and Swedish society, but since there's so little knowledge about the Sámi and Sámi issues, there is also no pressure in public opinion of the Swedish population to improve the situation for the Sámi, and the only ones that those in power receive pressure from are these large industries. That's my theory about why it still looks the way it does (participant 3, female).

> Even in modern thinking, with everyone having their human rights, it hasn't really included us, and there's still an opposition to us having the same rights to our language and culture as the Swedish population. So, there are structural problems with doing something at the societal level and when changes are to be made that will benefit something Sámi, an investigation must be done and if you read the investigation directives, if, for example, land use is involved, the investigator must not come up with a proposal that leads to any difference for or any impact

on any exploitation interest or industry, so it's difficult to see any kind of sustainability since no one really wants to change anything about the status quo (participant 7, male).

Consequences for education within the Sámi education system

As indicated above, following Santos (2014, pp. 11, 194), the intangible hierarchies constructed in the realm of epistemology result in highly tangible consequences for society, something that also becomes evident in the education system. For instance, a matter discussed in the previous section included the prioritizations made entirely in accordance with the dominant perspective on what knowledges (and languages) are "valid" and "useful" in society and thus warrants resources. Going forward, the effects of this for the Sámi will be further explored, starting out with the participants emphasis on how resources – financial and human – are not allocated to Sámi education, which affects the opportunities of Sámi learners negatively. Focusing on the education within the Sámi education system, one of the main obstacles agreed upon by the participants included the fact that there are only five Sámi schools in Sweden and many Sámi learners lack access to these as they do not live close enough. In addition, the Sámi schools only include grades 1-6 of primary school, making learning in a Sámi context beyond that difficult, as shown above when discussing the inclusion of Sámi content in the Swedish school system and further exemplified in the following account,

> Not all children can go to Sámi school because there are so few and Sámi integration has disappeared a lot from Swedish schools, or you can choose to study the language and when you come to high school and you choose Sámi as a mother tongue, some handicraft is also included and Sámi social studies. But it's not possible to get in all schools and in several places you have to fight just to be able to study the language at all (participant 5, female).

Another major challenge connected to Sámi adult education, such as cultural learning centers, but also independent language courses and cultural camps, was identified in the dependency on external financial support, resulting in many cases in the lack of steady funding. As several participants explained, this can be seen as a consequence of the previously discussed lack of knowledge, understanding and political interest among decision makers, which results in that Sámi schooling is not prioritized and that a lot of the time the money received is project-based and cannot be counted on as a continuous resource. According to the participants, it becomes clear in this regard that what is considered as valuable is decided in accordance with the dominant perspective, which makes real improvements in agreement with Sámi perspectives and interests difficult to maintain, as projects run for a limited amount of time and are then discontinued when denied further funding.

> The Swedish is the norm and there's no interest in improving anything for the Sámi at the national level. The Minister of Culture usually speaks in a pleasant way about Sámi culture, but has no further support so then we're really just handed coffee money. I don't know if you have seen that the Sámi Parliament has presented an action program for the Sámi languages to the government and even if you only focus on the educational part of the it, you would make immense improvements. There isn't a cost estimate but say that it would cost 100 million or 200 million in 10 years to turn the system around, or if it would cost 1 billion, then that's no money at all for Sweden. Just compare it with the money that is withdrawn from Sápmi by forestry industry, mining and wind power. Still, we only get half a million here or half a million there, or some extra support one year, and that's only enough to make *no* real difference […] A lot of Sámi cultural and language work is built on projects. You apply for money and then there will be some foundation that can do their project for three years and then there will be a new project and you start with something else. And bigger projects must first go through the Ministry of Education or Culture and there they might be willing to help, but in the end it's the Ministry of Finance that sets the budget and decides what things may cost and then the Sámi perspective suddenly has no value at all but only gets pennies, even though there's a proven need for it (participant 7, male).

The lack of resources is seen in other aspects as well and, in both Sámi and Swedish schools, the shortage of Sámi teachers is indicated by the participants as a major issue when it comes to providing

learners with a professional language instructor. This was exemplified by one participant in the following way,

> It's not the same to be able to simply communicate with the students as being confident in teaching the language. This is true for any other language, every Swede speak Swedish, but that's not the same as feeling comfortable teaching it (participant 8, male).

The issue was further signaled as a significant obstacle, not only for receiving education in the Sámi languages, but also for Sámi speaking students' opportunities to use their mother tongue in school. This in turn was connected by several participants to student's feelings, induced by the attitudes of the surrounding majority society, of Sámi being more of an informal or day-to-day language and not as a language to be used in public settings. Instead, as explained by the participants, if Sámi cannot be used at school, the view of it as something to be mainly spoken at home and not valued as a language needed for operating within society might be exacerbated. In addition, the participants connected the lack of teachers of Sámi, as well as Sámi speaking teachers and school staff in general, to previous assimilation politics and oppression of the Sámi languages and culture, which continues to affect Sámi learners today as "all the Sámi languages in the Swedish part of Sápmi are threatened because there are so few who speak and use them" (participant 6, male). This was further voiced in the following accounts,

> There are many children who don't receive good Sámi education because there are no teachers and this in turn is due to the fact that the previous generation did not receive any Sámi education before them. So, it's like a self-playing piano (participant 3, female).

> Now you have the *right* to education in your own language and it is something that our national politicians like to point out in international contexts, and sure, you have the right according to the law, but in practice you don't as it doesn't matter what the law says, you cannot study if there is no course (participant 7, male).

In relation to this, several participants considered the low priority given to Sámi education as made evident by the fact that it is regarded as too expensive by decision makers to provide adequate Sámi teacher training opportunities as a measure counteracting the teacher shortage. This is a prioritization that is questioned from a Sámi perspective,

> Who gets to set the price tag on the survival of the Sámi languages and culture? And, who says it's too expensive to build an educational system on Sámi pedagogy and with teachers who are trained in Sámi cultural understanding for *five* small schools? (participant 8, male).

> You can read independent courses in Sámi languages and culture at university level, but they're often provided at half speed or every other year and there is no room for that in 'normal' teacher education. So, for some it might take several years extra to gain cultural competence (participant 7, male).

The consequences of the lack of education opportunities for teachers is further described as making education at the Sámi schools dependent on individual teacher knowledge and engagement, which, in turn makes Sámi education vulnerable in yet another regard, as educational quality comes to depend on the presence of certain individuals and their privately attained knowledges.

> The Sámi school is an institution that deviates a little from the previous history and there's an ambition, at least in writing, that teaching should be based on Sámi cultural understanding, but for those who work there or want to educate themselves it's still only possible to get an education within the Swedish school system and context. So, once they are finished and about to go and teach within a Sámi context, it depends on if they as individuals can do it, since you cannot get an education in it and this will be a big problem in the long run. It may work well where it works, but there is no sustainability in it, because if the individual who keeps the whole school's Sámi way of thinking up retires or quits, who comes in then? So if you're critical, the whole school depends on individuals bringing with them their private knowledge in teaching things in a Sámi way, but they have no education for that because it almost doesn't exist (participant 7, male).

Furthermore, the lack of understanding for Sámi culture and current life conditions, discussed above as a product of abyssal thinking's invisibilization mechanisms (Santos, 2014, p. 263), results in that decision makers on both national and local levels fail to further appreciate the special needs present in Sámi education. For instance, one need indicated by the participants is that learners, both children and adults, who already have a strong Sámi identity, or who have grown up in an environment with strong Sámi cultural presence, have different needs from students who have not. The latter might for example need additional support to avoid feelings of insecurity that might come from assimilation pressure from outside society, or in the shape of the obstacles discussed for gaining access to Sámi education such as having to wait years before receiving language education. This was indicated as an issue leading to frustration for the learners, risking the giving up on discovering or reconnecting with their Sámi heritage and culture all together. In addition, other concrete issues that might be completely overlooked included the need for extra resources for the development of adequate Sámi educational material and that further funding is needed if more than one Sámi language is spoken by the students at a school.

> I know many teachers who simply develop their own teaching materials because there are none in that particular language or subject, and perhaps more so in the languages that have only been written languages for a short time. But that's often something they do on their free time, and not something that they get something for. I think it's often overlooked that in order to provide adequate Sámi education more resources are needed, it's not just that 'you have the right to it, so just go ahead and do it', but there are many aspects that need more resources than decisions makers or principals are aware of, if it is to *really* work (participant 8, male).

> It's also like this that, if Sámi was one language and if the Sámi schools only handled that one language, things would be easier. Now most Sámi schools have students who speak two or three different Sámi languages and there is almost no consideration for that. You must understand that it is not the case that you learn South Sámi because there are North Sámi staff at the school. It does not work that way. You must have South Sámi-speaking staff, too. If we take a small school as an example, with one teacher who teaches North Sámi and another South Sámi, then it must also be the school's responsibility to ensure that the Sámi language environment outside the classroom that is so crucial for learning exists, it cannot be the students' responsibility. You cannot say that if the students don't speak Sámi, they have themselves to blame (participant 7, male).

Reconnecting with the past as well as the current status of Sámi culture and knowledges in the Swedish majority society, reproduced by continued abyssal thinking as ignorant, residual and inferior (Santos, 2014, p. 275), a final challenge pointed out by several participants also included internalized devaluation of Sáminess among the Sámi themselves, as previously discussed in connection to the work of Kuokkanen (2000) and Thiong'o (1986). This further indicates the complexity of the challenges faced by the Sámi people regarding the possibility to implement Sámi education. As exemplified in the participants descriptions of the struggles of acting in spaces of cultural and epistemological tension, one result of this is found in Sámi parents' concern for the wellbeing and future of their children if attending Sámi instead of Swedish schools.

> Because of how things have been, and still are, I think some parents don't want to send their kids to Sámi school because they don't want them to be too different, or perhaps they think they'll be more prepared for the wider society and the coming school years if they go to Swedish school from the start… and naturally that says something about how things still work (participant 8, male).

> The Sámi community isn't necessarily ready for suddenly having a complete Sámi educational alternative, from preschool to university level. It's not necessarily the case that it would automatically be filled with students at once, because for more than 100 years you have been taught if you go to a Swedish school that the Sámi culture has no value, perhaps they don't say it explicitly now, but the whole thing is built that way. So even Sámi graduate having learned that it has no value, and not only that it has no value but that it's sometimes downright bad or wrong or dangerous. It has not only no value but even *negative* value, and that's subconsciously internalized by the Sámi too (participant 7, male).

Summarizing the above, the participants have identified the combined pressure from a changing society and threats to traditional livelihoods and environments, as well as to the cultural heritage and effects of colonial policy, including the continued push for assimilation, as major challenges for Sámi education. Among other things, this has also resulted in the loss of customary knowledge transmission environments, something that puts additional pressure on the present-day Sámi educational system and its institutions to provide adequate Sámi education and being increasingly responsible for cultural knowledge transfer, albeit with limited resources and education opportunities for the staff.

> [traditional knowledge] is important to transmit, but the question is whether we at the school can do it, because if you're to think like that, it's a very big responsibility that rests on each individual educational institution, to teach all this silent knowledge that exists. We have a lot of knowledge-bearers out there, but we are not able to convey everything as knowledge institutions, so I had hoped that more traditional knowledge could be taken into account in society at large (participant 4, female).

In this regard, although the lack of resources was indicated as one of the main challenges for Sámi education, this was also related by several participants to further concerns regarding the need for changed attitudes in society in general, including ways to re-value and access Sámi knowledges that exist outside the formal education system – and have previously been hidden or under-communicated by the older generations due to discrimination and social exclusion.

6.3. Opportunities for implementing Sámi education

Many challenges for implementing Sámi education have been discussed above, reflecting the material obtained through the interviews. However, in this final theme, opportunities found within current Sámi educational settings for carrying out culturally appropriate and relevant education from a Sámi perspective are presented and analyzed. In exploring the meaning of the participants accounts, both Gruenewald's (2003a) and Santos' (20014) theories are applied, allowing a decolonial understanding of the described sites as educational counterpoints, working against the abbreviation of world experience.

6.3.1. Sámi education as a place for empowerment and resistance

According to the participants, existing Sámi schools and adult learning centers are crucial societal nodes in today's Sámi society, serving as spaces for the promotion of Sámi knowledges, cultural understanding and empowerment. For both teachers and learners, these sites were described by the participants as providing an opportunity for being in an environment where Sámi culture and identity is allowed to be the norm, breaking away from historical trends through the creation of educational places by and for the Sámi. They also provide a counterweight to Swedish schooling and offer a much-needed platform for culture and language revitalization.

> At Sámi schools and centers the students are in a safe environment of sorts, they're not confronted about or have to explain their Sáminess. They don't have think so much about their identity, just show up to school and they get to use their language outside their home environment too. I think they're strengthened by this. They don't need to have a home identity and a school identity. And those who speak Sámi at school but not at home are also strengthened in their Sámi identity, since one of the goals at the school is that the students should be functionally bilingual when finishing 6th grade. Of course it's a bit of a fuzzy term, but it shows how the language is valued, at the very least it has the same status as Swedish, and that sends an important message to the students (participant 8, male).

> It's the irony of fate that the Sámi school, or the nomad school back then, used to be about forcibly colonizing a people, and now it's this safe harbor. That probably has to do to some extent with empowerment, that we started to take over these places and make them our own (participant 6, male).

In this sense, Sámi places for education are described as crucial for meeting the needs of the individual learner in that they encourage the strengthening of the learner's Sámi identity. Viewed through an understanding of the workings of abyssal thinking, the creation of these culturally safe environments further counteracts the majority society's continued homogenizing and assimilationist push, based on the belief that there is but one "correct" or "normal" social mode of being in the world (as discussed by Santos, 2014, p. 275). In connection to this, it was also pointed out by several participants that these educational sites are not only important for the Sámi child's identity development, but also for providing the opportunity for older learners who want to reconnect to, or reconstruct, a lost or previously hidden identity in an environment where the importance of this, and the personal and emotional context, is understood.

> It's very common, one of the most common backgrounds is to have grown up barely knowing that you're Sámi, or that it has been under-communicated externally. This means that many, many Sámi have quite little knowledge about their culture which leads to a sense of longing and a void, which I think affects your mental health, because you want to belong to a context where you also feel very inadequate (participant 3, female).

According to several participants, the creation of spaces for the learning of a Sámi language, as well as other knowledges connected to the culture, thus becomes an important part of both individual and community processes of healing from colonial trauma.

> I had a woman in my course who sewed her first breast-cloth ever, and it was her first own breast-cloth, and she had sewn it herself… I just really saw how proud she was. For her, it was a huge deal and there are often a lot of emotions connected to traditional knowledge, especially among those who haven't been allowed to practice their culture. I see that it means so much to them to be able to learn it and it's also part of making us heal from the historical trauma that the state has inflicted on us (participant 1, female).

Furthermore, these places were described as a crucial counterweight to the previously discussed difficulties of reclaiming a lost identity and cultural connection.

> There are many 'new' Sámi today who have started to search for their roots and who have a lot of knowledge to take back, because they haven't had this natural transmission and haven't received it from their parents and grandparents. So, they have a lot to learn, but that's why it's important with these schools where you get to learn as an adult how everything works. So that it doesn't stay lost (participant 5, female).

In this regard, as was also discussed in section 6.2 regarding continued internalized devaluations of Sámi culture and knowledge as an effect of colonialism and abyssal thinking (following Kuokkanen, 2000, p. 411; Santos, 2014, p. 190), other important aspects described by the participants included Sámi learning institutions being considered crucial for offering the learners the possibility to connect to other learners and to a wider cultural context and network, which was signaled as an opportunity to reduce negative internal attitudes and insecurities. As explained by one participant, "[l]anguage camps are a very popular activity among students and especially important in terms of the learners' language network, approach and attitudes toward the language" (participant 7, male). Other participants described it in the following manner,

> I know it myself, since, when I decided to take back my Sámi identity, it was a lot of work. It takes time. But if Sáminuorra[12] and Sámi associations hadn't existed, if the Sámi education center hadn't existed, or the chance to study Sámi in school, I wouldn't have been able to do it (participant 1, female).

Sámi places of education thus become important for the learner in terms of (re)connecting both with self and the wider cultural community, counteracting the assimilationist trend and addressing majority society's abyssal exclusion of Sámi identity, languages and knowledge by creating alternative spaces for inclusion and development of the same. In addition, and given that, as voiced by the participants in

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[12] The Sámi national youth association in the Swedish part of Sápmi.

section 6.1, the Sámi languages are important carriers of culture and knowledge, as well as for expressing nuances, values and perspectives that are not found in the Swedish language, educational settings working towards language revitalization become crucial tools for overcoming the subtle ways of internalized colonialism. For instance, they affirm Sámi perspectives in contemporary Sámi society, as they improve the learners' ability to express themselves in ways that are authentic to the Sámi cultural understanding of the world (as argued by decolonial scholars Kuokkanen, 2000, p. 426 and Thiong'o, 1986). Furthermore, viewed through Santos' theory, they serve to safekeep epistemological diversity as language is an important carrier of knowledge, and what "cannot be said, or said clearly, in one language or culture may be said, and said clearly, in another language or culture" (2014, p. 35).

In accordance with the above, Sámi educational institutions can thus be understood as important physical sites of knowledge transmission where otherwise threatened knowledges are passed on. As such, they also become places of resistance against the streamlining of society supported by Western standardized education (resonating with Gruenewald's critique, 2003a, p. 4) as well as majority society's devaluing of Indigenous and Sámi knowledges and culture "on the other side of the line" (Santos, 2014, p. 334). In relation to this line of thought, the participants discussed Sámi education institutions as particularly important for the future survival of Sámi culture, given that the historical devaluation of the culture and its knowledges. This was additionally connected to the previously discussed process of assimilation and the changed ways of life of many Sámi today, which have resulted in that the customary knowledge transmission between generations have been partly, or completely severed. In this regard, as the transmission of traditional Sámi knowledges and skills is not occurring to the same extent as earlier in the home environment, schools and institutions are playing an increasingly important part in knowledge transmission, as explained by one of the participants, "I think that, for the craft traditions to survive, the handicraft program is of enormous importance, even though there may be families where the transfer of traditions and knowledge between generations works" (participant 8, male). Others explained it in the following manner,

> When I started, I had already learned some things at home because I belong to that generation and when I went in the early 80's there were many who had tried a bit of handicraft work and done some ribbon weaving, leather sewing or maybe some more, but today it's not like that. Almost no one has done anything before coming. So, that's why it becomes important for young girls and boys and even older people who haven't crafted, to learn and to know the traditions (participant 2, female).

> It's incredibly important that you get this foundation to stand on and that you get to bring with you the impression that this knowledge and yourself as a person are worth as much as anyone else. And regarding this silent knowledge that's not found in teaching materials it's also very important that it can be passed on, because us Sámi aren't isolated from the Western way of life. We also have full-time jobs and the children at day-care, so of course the traditional knowledge transfer is affected, because you have less time with the children and then the school becomes even more important to, perhaps not fill that role, because it can never take over parental responsibility, but it can contribute with being an additional place where you can acquire this traditional knowledge (participant 6, male).

For this reason, and although the curricula at the Sámi schools and institutions follow national guidelines, the participants additionally pointed to the importance of having the space to adapt both educational content and activities according to Sámi perspectives and priorities. Following this line of argument, the participants described Sámi educational spaces as important environments, not only for learner empowerment, but also for educational self-determination for the cultural community.

> Determining what to teach and how entails a strength for the education context, and it means an increased self-confidence in that you're involved in deciding what's relevant… that you feel that what you teach is relevant… that this is *ours*. You could say that this way it comes more from below, or from within and not so much from the outside as before (participant 1, female).

As such, these educational settings provide an opportunity for implementing education that includes a focus both on cultural responsiveness regarding content, as well as on learning that reaches beyond the classroom as it directs curriculum towards community needs, including that of cultural revitalization and survival through the safekeeping of traditions, language and knowledge (as discussed in section 6.1, following Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 642). Nevertheless, according to the participants' accounts, opportunities are not only presented in terms of allowing relevant Sámi educational content and transmission of knowledges, but also regarding the pedagogy utilized, offering further possibilities to express Sámi culture and identity in the learning environment. An example of this includes the physical organization of the classroom, where participants expressed that it could preferably be organized in a circular manner so that everyone could see each other, as opposed to the teacher being positioned in the front of the classroom and the students' desks placed in rows. As further explained by one participant, "when we have gathered sometimes, like for a student union meeting, instead of sitting on chairs in a room it felt perhaps more natural that we discuss what's important around the fire and sit outside in our own environment" (participant 1, female).

In the same sense, other participants described additional opportunities for the expansion of the learning environment, leaving behind conventional schoolings' abstract classroom teachings of the natural world (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 7) as it opens itself to other teaching and learning settings beyond it. In particular, this was described as including the involvement of other knowledgeable members of the community and places outside the school building, as exemplified by one participant, "I've had courses in collaboration with Sámi associations where they have chosen to have an elderly group mixed with young people to specifically get this knowledge exchange between generations" (participant 1, female). Further accounts elaborated on the perspectives discussed in 6.1, in which places in the surrounding environment were perceived as repositories of knowledge, as well as points of connection between generations, indicating a process of teaching and learning that connects both to the wider social and cultural community as well as with the places that learners inhabit (following Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 620).

> I went to a Sámi school for 6 years and what I remember the most are the things we did outside the classroom, like when we were out and an older person described the Milky Way to us and how you could see through it what the winter would be like, for example. It's such unique knowledge that basically only exists in the persons who have lived this kind of life and in turn got it explained for them, and especially since there is so extremely little Sámi teaching material produced, these meetings with knowledge-bearers become even more important. Because it's invaluable knowledge and it's also important for strengthening the self-image, to learn early on that the knowledge that we Indigenous peoples have also has a value. That it's not just about this measurable knowledge that the Western world is so incredibly fixated on, where one should be able to produce graphs and tables, but that there are other knowledges that are at least as valuable and important to be able to survive in this Arctic region. You're not helped by knowing that pi is 3.14 when you have to make a fire in a snowstorm! (participant 6, male).

When combined, the above accounts can be connected to decolonization, understood not only as an act of confrontation with the dominant system of thought through a process of cultural and historical liberation, dislodging externally imposed ideas (Gruenewald 2003a, p. 9, citing hooks 1992) through the valuing and promotion of Sámi knowledges. Instead, it can also be understood as dependent on recovering and renewing traditional, non-commodified cultural patterns such as intergenerational relationships (Gruenewald 2003a, p. 9, citing Bowers 2001) through a pedagogy that expands outwards and includes both place as well as community relations. As indicated by the participants, Sámi educational spaces thus become important both for social connections within the community, as well as for cultural survival, given that the older generations are considered essential knowledge-bearers.

Continuing with another theme related to the valuing and promotion of Sámi knowledges, the existence of physical sites for learning, such as schools and cultural centers, was described by the participants as having important symbolic value, not only for the individual learner but for the Sámi cultural community as a whole, given that they become visible symbols for the value of the knowledges and perspectives they transmit and preserve. In addition, as "other" knowledges are given importance, this in turn becomes an act of resistance against the majority society's historical and current devaluation of knowledges that do not fit within the Western model for scientific knowledge production (following Santos, 2014, pp. 11, 189). In the words of one participant, despite the weaking effects of assimilation and structural oppression of Sámi culture and traditional knowledges, "there is a lot that lives on and in addition has become stronger as the Sámi culture is something that more and more people want to be a part of and that you dare to show and that you're welcome to show" (participant 3, female). This was further voiced by other participants in the following manner,

> First of all, I think there are Sámi who have historically been displaced and due to the racist policy that Sweden has pursued against the Indigenous people in Sweden, there are Sámi who have abandoned their identity who now feel that they can spread their wings, and that children get the same feeling, which makes them seek out these education environments and maybe apply to a handicraft program or put their children in Sámi school. It becomes like this circular thing that oxygenates everything, even the places of education (participant 6, male).

> I think that everything Sámi that is allowed to be seen is good. That it's allowed to be out there without being shamed. I also see increased pride in the older generations when us younger people are proud, and when you strengthen the Sámi society as you do now with the help of the knowledge, I can see that the elderly also get back their pride and feel that the knowledge that they already possess but that they haven't wanted to talk about begin to resurface and then they can begin to share it and feel that their knowledge in Sámi culture is important and useful (participant 1, female).

The above was signaled as part of a positive trend including both an increased sense of pride as well as additional openings regarding knowledge transmission opportunities, as the older generations feel that their knowledge is valued. This was furthermore related to the increased interest in learning, especially among the younger generations. According to several participants, although the structural issues discussed in the previous theme remain present, the growth of interest within the community can be connected to the fact that the younger Sámi have the opportunity to grow and develop their identity in an environment that is not as affected by openly racist state policy as previous generations. The increase of internal interest within the Sámi community for learning both the languages and other cultural knowledges and skills was additionally, and unanimously, pointed out by the participants as one of the main opportunities for Sámi education today.

> It's higher, absolutely, it's not possible to say anything other than that there has been a development, because we know that not so long ago it was forbidden to speak Sámi in school at all. So, I absolutely believe that it has improved in general, there are more young people who want to learn Sámi and that people my age and younger think it's important. It's noticeable that there's a hunger for knowledge (participant 1, female).

6.3.2. A symbol for the value of diverse ways of knowing

As previously signaled by the participants, the value, validity and usefulness of Sámi knowledges today are questioned by the majority society, resulting in many of the challenges for Sámi society and education discussed in 6.2. According to Santos' theory, this is due to abyssal thinking and its production of knowledges and social forms on "the other side of the line" as ignorant, residual, inferior, local and nonproductive, all of which represent disqualified forms of existence considered obstacles for the realities considered relevant, scientific, advanced, global, and productive (2014, p. 275). Despite the many problems encountered, the participants nevertheless voiced an optimism

regarding the possibilities present in the increased visibilization of Sámi knowledges that the presence of Sámi schools and institutions represent in Swedish society.

> You see this greater awareness that the majority society has gained about the Sámi and which has also been forced upon it from our side by taking our place and no longer apologizing. There is of course a correlation between places like the Sámi education center and Sámi schools where you have this safe environment, which also means that you become equipped to meet the wider society and can stand up for what you are… which then means that society at large cannot turn a blind eye to it, or to history, to the same extent as before (participant 6, male).

> Sámi institutions, not just the Sámi school, are important in many ways. Being without it would be something completely different and one dimension of that is that they are such a clear signal to society in general. A Sámi institution therefore turns into a player in Swedish society too in different ways, as something that must be considered, perhaps to write referral responses and be heard in different contexts and taken into account. If you're not seen, you don't exist, as you say and that's how it is (participant 7, male).

According to the participants, having these educational spaces within which the validity of Sámi knowledges is not questioned and where they can be kept safe against further assimilation and instead develop, is not only a symbol for the presence of Sámi culture, perspectives and knowledges, but also represent an opportunity for demonstrating the usefulness and importance of them for the wider society. As an example, several participants pointed to the fact that the existence of Sámi educational institutions made possible showing the majority society that Sámi knowledges are not just "traditional" in the sense of "static", but that they evolve in the same way as Sámi society evolves and thus remain highly relevant for life in the region.

> We have an old culture in a modern society and I think that's beautiful. But what many don't understand is that we still use this knowledge. I'm thinking, for example, about food, very useful today! Especially when more and more people want to return to organically grown food, more locally produced, we know about food management and traditions that are still relevant. There's so much in the Sámi culture that's relevant today because more people are looking to go back to this more minimalist way, you should do and grow things yourself, and it should be locally produced and you shouldn't have such a big impact on our planet. So, I think this view of nature and how we should take care of it is something that Indigenous peoples all over the world know best and I think that more and more people will consult with us when it comes to this with the climate, because our knowledge is important (participant 1, female).

In this regard, it was further explained that Sámi perspectives harbor understandings of human/nature interaction that is of special relevance in today's unsustainable times. This echoes Santos' (2014, p. 59) in that, given the intensification of social and ecological struggles in different places of the world, including Sápmi, "disqualified" forms of existence increasingly stand up to the Western development model, something which is also found in Sámi critique of the Swedish development prioritization (as shown in section 6.2). Santos further points out that, after centuries of "teaching" the world, the West is not only unable to learn from the experiences of the world, as discussed in the previous theme, but its conception of it, including the mode of experiencing society and nature, are being proven unsustainable (2014, p. 38). This can be connected to the Sámi participants accounts, given the emphasis made on the usefulness of their knowledges and perspectives, not just for the Sámi people, but for the wider society as well, in connection to current debates on sustainable development.

> I had hoped that more traditional knowledges could be considered. Some things are of course more culture-based and belong more to the cultural community, but other traditional knowledges are very important to teach others, for example, forestry companies or mining companies, asking them: 'Have you thought of this? Otherwise, this will happen' (participant 4, female).

> They are still relevant, it's so clear in Sámi knowledge that you can track changes in nature that you might not perceive otherwise and how early you can see changes and how you can be helped to adapt to, for example, climate change. Then, a purely economic issue for society at large is that the mining industry is automated more and more, and there are fewer and fewer jobs, while the tourism industry, because of this enormous potential that we have in these natural areas, is only growing. Where do we have the future? If you think about the jobs.

> Because what we all want, also from the Sámi side, is that there should be health centers, police, good roads and everything else in northern Sweden and then money must come in, it's just a matter of what perspective you look at it and who it should benefit. Should it benefit huge corporations, multinational companies or should it benefit the local population? I believe that it will be very important for the future that we have people who are fighting for cohesive landscapes, to counteract climate change, for biological diversity and for the lives of future generations in these places (participant 3, female).

Following the above, Sámi educational institutions can be further understood through the work of Santos in that their existence and awareness raising of Sámi perspectives and knowledge point to what the Western epistemological paradigm conceals, namely that Western thought is as important as it is partial (2014, p. 262). Although, as discussed in the previous theme, the Sámi might be far from being considered as equal producers of knowledge, the increased visibility of their presence serves as an opportunity to present themselves as conversation partners, challenging the limitations of modern scientific knowledge regarding the types of real-world intervention and development that is considered possible and relevant. In line with this argument, the visibilization of Sámi perspectives and knowledges further represents an opportunity for the incorporation of them in Swedish schools, at least those located in Sápmi, which was a possibility signaled by some of the participants, although cautiously, given the current status of Sámi culture within the majority society. As pointed out by several participants however, this would not only be important for Sámi learners, as well as the Sámi community at large, resulting in increased recognition of their perspectives and knowledges, but would also be important for others who share the same territory. For example, a mutual understanding between different groups was signaled as key for building stronger societies in a shared territory where a plurality of knowledge is acknowledged.

> I mean, the societies where not all stories have a place are also societies that are very fragile. Knowledge is, after all, how you build strong societies in which all knowledge can be put on the table and all knowledge is considered to have the same value (participant 6, male).

> Through better visibility of the Sámi as a group it's harder to ignore us and our history, which is absurd, because not teaching about us reduces the understanding of all members of society for where we are today and why we have the problems we have in some communities, and what can be done about them. Greater understanding for one another is just the best way to get there I think (participant 8, male).

This mirrors Santos' understanding of epistemic justice as a dialogue between knowledges (2014, p. 305), as well as it points in the opposite direction of the placelessness of conventional education and, as stressed by Gruenewald (2003b, p. 621), towards a greater understanding of the place one shares with others, including the different cultural understandings of that place. In this regard, the participants accounts can be further connected to a perspective and pedagogy grounded in the local and understood as relevant to the lived experiences of both Swedish and Sámi learners, as the understanding of the meaning of place names in Sámi and of shared local history were highlighted as important for increased understanding of the place inhabited. Furthermore, participants explained that leaving out Sámi knowledges that are relevant when living in the Arctic makes the learners less equipped for life in the region, as important knowledges are made unavailable to them.

> I think that, especially in different inland municipalities, where history has always been written by someone else, it's even more important to actually get to know your own history and get an education, partly to get a knowledge of your place and get to know your place in history, but also feel a pride for where you live as you see that the history of your area didn't start with the industrialization, but goes so much further back and it's incredibly important to understand if you live in places where there are many different cultures living side by side. Then it's even more important that you understand each other's backgrounds and also how much you have in common. All of us who live here share the place, but we have different connections to the place. However, for us to have been able to survive in this spot at all we have needed each other, so I think it's very important that the education highlights all the local histories, not just the Swedish, nor just the Sámi, much more than it does now. Sweden happened to end up in Sápmi and we share this territory and are also part of Sweden's history and future and

> therefore we have an obligation in every generation to equip our children with *all* the knowledge available here (participant 6, male).

The point made resonates with Santos' theory (2014, p. 325) in that the crediting of other histories and nonscientific knowledges does not entail discrediting scientific knowledge. However, it also connects with the critique of the eradication of the plurality of perspectives and knowledges in favor of one sterile, Western monoperspective, leading to an abbreviation of the world through the limits put on the ways of experiencing, being in and learning from it (Santos, 2014, p. 149). In this sense, the presence of, and continued struggle for improvement and expansion of Sámi education, creating a space for the validation of Sámi knowledges and perspectives, constitutes a way of exposing that "the understanding of the world by far exceeds the Western understanding of the world" (Santos, 2014, p. 8), and that this holds true in Sweden and Sápmi as well.

In addressing the challenges for implementing Sámi education, a majority of the participants further reaffirmed that their stance was not that of "victims" but of people offering resistance, working against the unjust marginality and inferiority imposed on them. This became especially clear as a common feature of the above identified opportunities for implementing Sámi education was pointed out to be the work of the Sámi community itself. In this sense, several participants expressed that, although there have been improvements regarding their educational rights granted by the majority society, it is not something that has come spontaneously from the Swedish government or politicians, but as a result of consistent Sámi collective action and struggle.

> What Elsa Laula[13] once said is just as accurate today, our future is in our own hands, no one will come and just 'here are your rights' or 'here's a big bag of money for strengthening the Sámi community'. We must fight for it, unless we say something, if we don't raise the issue of the quality of Sámi education, not only that there should *be* Sámi education, but that there should be competence and quality in it, no one from outside will notice (participant 1, female).

In this line of argument, further opportunities were identified by several participants in the use of technology for the diffusion of knowledge about the Sámi culture and struggles, as well as of Sámi perspectives. In particular, given that lack of knowledge about Sámi culture among the majority population, previously discussed as an obstacle for prioritization of Sámi education and access to resources, further use of technology and Sámi presence on social media was described as tools for increasing awareness of current Sámi issues and sharing Sámi perspectives with a wider audience. Additionally, the nature of social media was also described as helpful for gaining ownership of the narrative, making Sámi representations by the Sámi themselves become a counterweight to the above discussed static, stereotypical understandings of Sámi culture encountered in Swedish society.

> Young people today are proud and many want to show their origin and wear Sámi attributes such as jewellery, the shawl or shoes. Then there's more Sámi music, podcasts, the young write in Sámi on social media… overall Sámi is made more visible, exhibited outwards now and social media is also a place for raising awareness of things happening in Sápmi, and then we can see that we've gotten support, only recently regarding the clear-cutting of old-growth forests. And of course, if more knowledge about us and our rights exist, then our perspective becomes harder to ignore (participant 8, male).

> There is starting to be more and more awareness that there's actually an Indigenous people living in Sweden and we have a lot to thank Sámi activists and youth organizations for this, because they push for the acknowledgement of many political issues and write and appear a lot online too (participant 5, female).

Following Santos, this becomes a strategy for resisting the continued invisibilization of knowledges and social forms existing on "the other side of line", as the pervasiveness of the epistemicide brought about by the Western-centric abyssal thinking becomes exposed through the increased presence of the

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[13] Elsa Laula is an important Sámi leading figure and pioneer for Sámi rights during the early 20th century (SP, 2021).

groups and knowledges that have been produced as "absent" (2014, p. 370). Furthermore, the articulation of resistance and the diffusion of knowledge about Sámi issues made possible by social media has allowed for connections to be made with other Indigenous groups, as well as environmental groups that share similar agendas of opposition against, among other things, natural resource exploitations. As exemplified by one of the participants,

> I remember this with Gállok[14] as such a fine example of how a Swedish and the Sámi movement can work together and it's something that's very positive and growing more and more. It is not the case that you agree on every single issue, but in the big picture of 'what do we want a forest to look like?' we are very much in agreement with the environmental movement. Biological diversity is important, a long-term perspective is important, to have a nature that makes you feel good is important (participant 3, female).

When examining this through the use of Santos' work (2014, p. 316), it becomes possible to detect further opportunities as this becomes a way of resisting the production of subaltern experiences of resistance only as "local" and therefore "irrelevant" and nonexistent by Western abyssal thinking. Instead, it opens up for further trans-local connections and articulation of shared resistance, both with groups on "this side" of the abyssal lines, such as Western and Swedish environmental movements, but also other Indigenous groups on the "other side", mobilizing against the currently dominant ways of relating both to the natural and social world.

6.4. Discussion

In this section, the results of the study are discussed in relation to previous research and the concept of ESD, considering the possibilities for a recentring of local and Indigenous perspectives in global policy debates regarding both sustainable development and education.

6.4.1. Epistemological resistance for sustainable development

As mentioned in the beginning of the thesis, being an important part of the successful implementation of Agenda 2030, the UNESCO ESD framework is seen as crucial for helping individuals and societies across the globe make informed decisions and take responsible action for "environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity" (UNESCO, n.d. A). However, as discussed in the background chapter, as well as by the participants, what is also pointed out is that the current degradation of the natural environment, happening all around the world, results in the loss of cultural and linguistic diversity, which also has negative impact on biodiversity as the extinction of languages leads to the loss of unique cultural and ecological knowledges (UNESCO, 2003; UNEP/CBD, 2004). In other words, and despite the ones found in international policy documents, these contrasting trends remain the reality of many Indigenous groups today, including the Sámi people, pointing to the continued homogenization of culture under global capitalism which threatens the diversity of ideas and perspectives on the natural environment expressed by different languages and sustained by different cultures (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 4; UNESCO, 2003; Santos, 2014, pp. 35, 319).

In the face of such threats, not only affecting the future of the Indigenous communities in question, but also other societies through the loss of social, economic and cultural alternatives to the status quo that serve, rather than threaten, our collective life on Earth (Gahnam & Legault, 2019), it becomes necessary to learn to recognize the disruption and injury caused by the currently dominant

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[14] Protests against the planned mine in Gállok/Kallak outside Jokkmokk in 2013 involving both Sámi and non-Sámi protesters (Kråik Jannok, 2014)

mode of sustaining socio-ecological relations, leading to the subjugation of both human and non-human "Others" (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 3). Although making visible the tangible injustices and harm done by these relations is important, which was also indicated by the participants of this study, what becomes even more crucial is the addressing of their causes. As shown in the present study, this can be done through the identification of the ongoing struggles in the epistemological realm, where Indigenous knowledges are discarded in favor of Western knowledge to the point of epistemic suppression, leaving us with one restricted epistemological lens through which to understand the world and educate for life in different regions and places (as discussed by Santos 2014, pp. 35, 38). Consequently, if, as indicated by the UNESCO ESD framework, we are serious about preserving diversity in all its forms through educational systems that promote truly culturally appropriate and locally relevant education, an understanding of epistemology as the key site for critique of the dominant development paradigm and Western-centric bias of knowledge is needed. This must furthermore be combined with the idea that it is not only imperative that "we denounce power imposition, injustice, and oppression but also that we name the possible ways to overcome those" (Freire, in Gómez et al. 2011, p. 241).

For this reason, the present research project did not only set out to gain knowledge about Sámi perspectives on education, but of doing so to add to the "cacophony of subaltern voices" (Gandhi, 1998, in Swadener & Mutua, 2014, p. 11), joining the growing resistance to the Western paradigm of being and knowing in the world, which continues to impede meaningful collaborations for sustainable development (Breidlid, 2009; Gahnam & Legault, 2019; UNESCO, 2019b). In this sense, the study can be connected to the previous literature on ESD (e.g., Kopnina, 2020; Pearson & Degotardi, 2009; Sapp Moore, 2017), as it shares the objective of "naming the possibilities" through the use of a place-based, decolonial perspective, serving as a tool for engaging with and learning from existent and already occurring alternatives, as well as for making the epistemological alternatives presented by them visible to others. Through this perspective, it is possible to understand the many Indigenous places of education explored, including those of the Sámi, as crucial pockets of resistance and safekeeping of epistemological diversity, not only essential for the cultural survival and future of the communities themselves, but also for the rest of us, given the important linkages between linguistic, cultural and biological diversity (Kassam et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2003). Such understanding, supported by this study, further helps the shift of focus in ESD debates towards Indigenous knowledges, pedagogies and education by allowing for a focusing on the margins, situating the local, the traditional and the rural as vibrant counterpoints – the edge of a movement challenging the homogenizing forces of economic globalization. As confirmed when listening to the participants of the present study, this serves in addition to change the stereotypical idea of the Indigenous and rural as "backwards", as the localized struggles and resistance against consolidation, standardization and monoculture affirm the importance of retaining diversity of knowledge that provides adaptive capacity for the future, rather than sustains the continued waste of human experience and creativity (see also Kassam et al. 2017; Zidny & Eilks, 2018).

Because of this, and as the race towards reaching the objectives set by the global community through the Sustainable Development Goals intensifies, it becomes increasingly evident that further visibilization of these social and epistemological struggles is crucial for increasing the awareness of that the possible understandings of the world greatly exceeds the Western understanding of it (Santos, 2014, p. 8; Gahman & Legault 2017; Teamy & Mandel, 2016). By becoming more visible, the struggles of Indigenous groups such as the Sámi, may therefore lead the way forward

towards the accepting of that every knowledge system is partial and incomplete, but that we might expand our understanding of the world through the genuine listening and interchange with other knowledge systems and the different cultural understandings and perspectives carried by different languages. Moreover, what is also made clear is that an increased support for these alternative understandings is needed and investigations into the challenges and opportunities encountered by them become crucial for helping us move toward true diversity in education, for present and future generations. This is an urgent necessity everywhere, but in the context of the study, in Sweden in particular, if the still existing alternatives are to be able to help us identify, affirm and conserve the cultural knowledges through which we might nurture and protect both people and ecosystems, moving beyond the linearity of the development paradigm and the currently dominant unsustainable forms of being in, educating and learning from the world.

7. Conclusions

In connection to global ESD discourse concerning the need for education to respect cultural diversity, the aim of this study has been to investigate challenges and opportunities encountered by Sámi education professionals regarding the implementation of Sámi education in Sápmi. To meet this purpose, the study addressed the research questions, *how do Sámi education professionals describe: (i) culturally appropriate and locally relevant education in Sápmi? (ii) challenges and opportunities for implementing culturally appropriate and locally relevant education in Sápmi?* These questions are answered below, followed by suggestions for future research.

7.1. Answering the research questions

In the interviewed Sámi education professionals' accounts, key features of education considered culturally appropriate and locally relevant in a Sámi context included educational content adapted to the learner's perspective and cultural context, involving connections to the wider community through shared values, traditions and practices related to intergenerational and experiential learning outside the school building. The Sámi languages were also described as an important aspect, given that, through them it is possible to talk about cultural themes and knowledges that do not have equivalents in other languages. Further common features involved connections between the Sámi culture and the living environment and its places through feelings of accountability, respect and care, regarding them as sources and repositories of knowledge and history, as well as sites of connections to ancestry. With the help of Gruenewald's critical pedagogy of place (2003a; 2003b), the results have shown that the Sámi educational contexts investigated include contrasting perspectives and pedagogies with regard to the current trend of the dominant educational and economic system, which are headed away from, rather than toward, a profound consciousness of and connection to our environment and its places.

As further demonstrated, the challenges for implementing the kind of education described above may be understood through Santos' (2014) theory of epistemic justice, illustrating how injustices in the realm of epistemology, governed by Western abyssal thinking, effectively disqualifies Sámi knowledges and culture, which leads to further – more tangible – injustices in society. For instance, important challenges were identified by the participants in the managing of the long-time consequences of colonialism, including assimilationist, oppressive and discriminatory politics resulting in loss of language, connection to cultural heritage and under-communication of the Sámi identity. This was paired with threats against the living environment in Sápmi due to increased natural resource exploitation and changing climate. Additional obstacles described included the

continued, widespread lack of knowledge within the Swedish majority society regarding Sámi life conditions and culture, affecting the learning opportunities of Sámi students in the Swedish school system, as the incorporation of Sámi elements in their education remain difficult. An example provided concerned the fact that students of Sámi languages are often forced to do additional work for "missing out" on regular content when participating in Sámi cultural or language activities. Regarding Sámi education at Sámi schools and institutions, lack of understanding and knowledge about the Sámi people among decision makers was further signaled by the participants as a reason for the low value and priority given to Sámi education, resulting in the lack of economic and human resources. In addition, the shortage of Sámi teachers and lack of teacher education opportunities result in that many students are left without learning opportunities and that schools must depend on the individually obtained knowledges of the persons hired.

Regarding the opportunities present within the researched context for implementing culturally appropriate and relevant Sámi education, the results have shown that the participants consider existing Sámi schools and institutions as important sites where learners can study in environments in which Sámi culture and identity are the norm. This goes against historical trends and creates spaces by and for the Sámi, providing a counterweight to Swedish schooling and offering important platforms for culture and language revitalization. It also becomes part of both individual and community decolonial processes of reconnection and strengthening of Sámi identity, as well as healing from colonial trauma. Moreover, these educational settings allow for cultural responsiveness regarding content, as well as for a pedagogy that reaches beyond the classroom as it directs curriculum towards community needs, such as cultural survival through the safekeeping of traditions, language and knowledge. This includes the involvement of knowledge-bearers other than the teacher and furthers the important customary tradition of intergenerational knowledge transmission. Viewed through a decolonial lens, Sámi schools and institutions meet exclusion from the majority society and dominant knowledge system by creating spaces for inclusion of Sámi identity, knowledges and pedagogies. In addition, the investigated places of education are described by the participants as important symbols for the continued presence and value of Sámi knowledges and culture for the Sámi themselves, but also as symbols of the validity and importance of these knowledges for the majority society. In this sense, these places of education become crucial for protecting the cultural, linguistic and epistemological diversity of the region, as they serve to preserve and increase the visibilization of alternative perspectives regarding how the future should be envisioned – and educated for.

To summarize, it has been shown that the participants of this study acknowledge that Swedish and Sámi ways of knowing and being in the world have been intermixed in diverse ways throughout history. Furthermore, the stories that the participants have shared affirm that within the enduring coloniality of the world-system and the modern state, including its educational institutions, Indigenous knowledge systems like that of the Sámi people are still systematically subordinated. However, as also made evident by the participants' accounts, these inferiorized ways of knowing are nevertheless still present and, continuing to resist the abbreviation of world experience, they have a lot to add to the discussions regarding how our societies are to "develop" and what the pathways to this development should look like. These conclusions have been reached by using a decolonial theoretical framework based on the notion of the importance of epistemological diversity in education. However, a broader ESD perspective has also been useful for approaching the issue in question.

In particular, it has allowed for a better understanding of both global educational policy, discourse and dominant knowledge systems in relation to local contexts. Additionally, the experiences

and struggles of the interviewed Sámi education professionals have illustrated how education can serve both to maintain domination as well as to liberate – and that neither is a straightforward process nor does one completely exclude the other, given that schools can be sites of colonial reproduction and dominance, as well as places where change is allowed to take root. Through this, the study has not only shown that there are fundamental connections to be found between the many complex processes happening in the intersection of culture, education and place, on both global and local scales, but also that the exploratory aim of the project of partaking in the studying of educational alternatives has been reached, including that of enabling the co-producers of such alternatives to voice their views on matters of importance for culturally appropriate and locally relevant education in Sápmi – and the world.

7.2. Further research

An interest in the many intersecting aspects and challenges found in debates regarding sustainable development, ESD and Indigenous knowledges is what has been the main driver behind the attempt to explore the educational context focused on in this study. Although this exploration has provided some answers for others to consider, question and build from, a feeling of barely having scratched the surface presents itself, and the suggestions for future studies are therefore many. To help broaden the understanding of the context investigated, further research might for example consider including participant observations as a methodological tool in combination with interviews. Listening to the views and experiences of the students is another suggestion, given that they are also co-producers of these alternative educational contexts and can bring new perspectives into the light. Further interesting aspects relate to the question of Sámi teacher training, and what knowledges and perspectives should be included in this. Another theme regards the role of intergenerational learning, including informal learning situations and the pedagogical tools and practices used for passing on traditional knowledges, and what can be learned from them. Related to this is also the possibility to turn towards the physical school environments and architecture, exploring connections between "inside" and "outside" and its effects on culturally appropriate learning environments.

In addition to these suggestions, the participants of the study were also asked regarding what further research they considered to be of relevance for their communities. A common point made was that more research involving Sámi researchers is needed and suggestions included research for developing better methodologies for the preservation of *árbediehtu*, as well as research topics not only geared towards improving Sámi curricula for Sámi students, but also for Swedish students – to improve all students' knowledge of Sámi culture (participant 3). Additional propositions included investigating the experiences of Sámi children in Swedish schools who study Sámi languages, to better understand the obstacles faced and how it affects both knowledge and identity development (participant 1). Final suggestions involved researching how the language environment outside of the classroom affects how well the students learn and how much they use the language (participant 7), as well as how to make more room in current Sámi education for non-conventional methods and ways of teaching (participant 6).

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Appendix

Interview guide

Culturally appropriate and locally relevant education in Sápmi
This section investigates what culturally appropriate and locally relevant education mean in a Sámi context.

What does culturally appropriate education mean to you? What do you think it means for the Sámi community? Are there any special features that make it culturally appropriate or specially adapted to Sámi culture?

What does it mean that education is locally relevant? Is it important that education is linked to the place where it is carried out? Can Sámi education/perspectives also be relevant for non-Sámi residents in the same areas?

Opportunities for culturally appropriate and locally relevant education in Sápmi
This section focuses on opportunities for conducting and implementing Sámi education as described by the participants in the previous theme.

What opportunities do you see for conducting/implementing Sámi education today? What does the attitudes/interest in Sámi knowledges/education look like within Sámi society?

What role do physical sites in the form of schools, education centers or other institutions play in Sámi education? What is their role in the Sámi community? What do they mean for the view of/attitudes towards Sámi knowledges/culture?

What does the social climate outside Sámi society look like? Is it possible to see any changing trends or attitudes towards Sámi education/knowledges in the majority society?

Challenges for culturally appropriate and locally relevant education in Sápmi
This section focuses on challenges for conducting and implementing Sámi education.

What challenges do you see for conducting/implementing Sámi education today? Both based on your own experience and workplace, as well as the Sámi community in general. What does the attitudes/interest in Sámi knowledges/education look like within Sámi society?

What does the social climate outside Sámi society look like? How are Sámi knowledges valued? What role do Swedish views and understandings of education play in the design of courses/activities? Does this require adjustments?

If Sámi knowledge is linked to the landscape, what happens if the landscape/places change?

Additional questions

Do you want to add something further that has not been discussed?

What do you think should be investigated more in the future?