



## Editorial

# Creating, Authoring and Owning the Shared Challenging Commons in Cultural Studies

**Karina Lukin & Tytti Steel**

This thematic issue of *Ethnologia Fennica* is devoted to scrutinising cultural commons. The authors introduce topical viewpoints off the beaten track of the much-discussed topic of open culture and accessibility of collections in the GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums) sector. The articles discuss ownership, sharing and creativity both through cases that illuminate contemporary discussions and through historical case studies. The articles cover themes from the possibilities and problems of the notion of cultural appropriation in music and literature to aural commons. The authors are not so much interested in the possible adverse consequences of the media and regime changes; rather, they trace the different forms and practices surrounding the ideas of sharing resources and regimenting it.

In his prominent article ‘On the Author Effect’, Peter Jaszi (1992) stated that ‘the so-called “Internet”. . . [will be] one arena (among many) in which the continuing failure of copyright to comprehend collective creativity may soon have real, adverse consequences.’ Jaszi did not only pay attention to the Internet but also looked back at cases that showed how collective authorship and transformative appropriation have posed a constant challenge to lawyers and courts in the Anglo-American world. Jaszi was of course right in predicting that this once new technology would make people re-examine their views on authorship and creativity. Information technology has indeed affected the practices and possibly also ideas of collective creativity, and the effects are wider and more complex than could have been predicted or envisioned. As many studies focusing on the history of authorship, ownership and creativity show, the media, and more precisely, changes and differences in the media are the usual suspects in altering our comprehension of creativity as well as in classifying different kinds of creativities and authorships (Woodmansee 1992; Biagoli 2014; Coombe 1998). In history, parallels have been drawn between the differences between the oral and the written and those between the collective and the individual, and thus our common sense would highlight

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the collective authorship of oral (and traditional) cultural products and consider it modern to create individual works through writing. Such dualisms do extend beyond verbal commodities and common sense. The material, visual and aural arenas of lives can and have also been managed through these lines of thinking and through the regimes that control copyright, ownership, authorship and creativity.

This issue of *Ethnologia Fennica* is partly based on the seminar *Challenging Commons: A Seminar on Appropriation and Copyright* organised at the University of Helsinki in November 2016 by the research project Art, Copyright and the Transformation of Authorship (Taide, tekijyyden muutos ja tekijänoikeus), funded by the Emil Aaltonen Foundation. One of the challenges offered by the seminar was to compare natural and cultural resources through the concept of the commons, which, as noted by literary scholar Sanna Nyqvist in her welcoming words, has pointed to issues of protection and restriction in the case of both natural and cultural commons (Hardwick 2016). In addition to protection and restriction, which are central to intellectual and cultural creativity, this thematic issue shows how vernacular practices often go beyond or around the official discourses and tend to create their own kinds of structures and forms of activity.

Heidi Haapoja-Mäkelä's and Karina Lukin's articles discuss themes related to tradition and its reuse in non-oral contexts. Whenever histories, traditions or other cultural products are shared, they become commodified, detached from their previous contexts, attached to new ones, raise discussions and turn heads towards not only the contents of the shared commodities, but also the processes and terms of movement. These are discussions about ownership and creativity, about the right to tell, narrate or sing and listen, as well as about building communities and building ties or borders between communities. Although ownership, creativity, collective sharing and commons are extremely hot topics of discussion in the contemporary 'West' and among indigenous peoples, for example, the strands of discourses have deep roots in Western notions and legal practices of ownership, creativity, culture and tradition. They recur in conceptions that stress either individual authorship or solidarity to everyone who has taken part in the creation (Biagoli 2014; Strathern 2005), such as claims over entitlement, or the right to tell (or sell). Moreover, they stem from the notions of creativity and commodification and the fields or regimes that regulate and control the norms and relations between the private and the collective. Typically, authorship and ownership have been understood as overlapping or similar things, which has complicated and heated up discussions.

These discourses do not only concern the 'West', however. Rather, it seems that while it has been the Internet that has raised issues of collectivity in the West, collective creativity has been a tricky notion and an effective form of control within imperialistic practices and their consequences. As a result, the notion of tradition as a non-authored form of culture that was collected, stored, represented and used by and for those in power has left a complicated legacy not only for colonies but also for mother countries. (E.g. Hafstein 2012; Naithani 2010.)

In her article, Heidi Haapoja-Mäkelä traces the life of a fracture of Kalevalaic *runo* singing, a poem called 'Oi dai'. Haapoja-Mäkelä introduces the reader to a sphere of producing, performing and documenting music. The discussion sheds light on the much-debated concept of cultural appropriation. Places, ethnicities and individuals are othered and silenced in the processes related to the 'Oi dai' text. Haapoja-Mäkelä argues that the complex questions of authority, originality, collectivity and copyright cannot be fully explained through the essentialist concept of cultural appropriation. Similarly to Haapoja-Mäkelä, Karina Lukin's study takes us to the realm of artistic expression and layered versions of cultural products. Instead of appropriation, Lukin investigates strategies of claiming entitlement and rendering a story tellable in the Soviet context characterised by strong ideological regimenting. Lukin shows how an indigenous writer, Ivan Nogo, used his knowledge of language and his ethno-linguistic belonging as a basis for his entitlement to tell a story. In order to render the story tellable in the Soviet context, Nogo also made seemingly small changes that resulted in remarkable recategorisations, for example, in words characterising his main actor. In the process, Nenets shared knowledge was turned into a Soviet commons: a local variant of the great Soviet narrative.

Juhana Venäläinen discusses aural commons, in other words, soundscapes as a shared field in urban environments. Venäläinen's article builds a challenging frame of commons that could be conceptualised as natural but in the contexts of dense settlements easily become places of contest and controversy. The study presents a case in which a city centre's residents and visitors fight over the right to silence and the right to entertainment in the form of loud music and partying. These issues are not so much about creativity and authorship but stem from the central dilemmas of ownership, rights, restrictions and protection. The article sharply reminds us that commons are not simply about owning or protecting, but about different rights towards various aspects of shared space or another commodity. As for the legal solutions related to aural commons, Venäläinen's article is closely related to the commentary written by Tuomas Mattila, which is an excellent and welcome con-

tribution to the issues of regimenting culture or cultural heritage. The kinds of legal issues discussed by Mattila are typically discounted by those studying traditions or vernacular expressions, which has become apparent in the constant criticism towards UNESCO's cultural heritage practices. As Mattila shows, what he calls legalisation is an inherent part of cultural heritage processes, which we should be aware of. Furthermore, ethnologists and folklorists could and should also engage in discussions around legalisation in order to provide their insights.

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In 2020, *Ethnologia Fennica* (vol. 47) is published in two issues for the first time. We can be proud of our journal, which has no article processing fees for authors and is open access to anyone who is interested in our themes. This would not be possible without the funding from the Federation of the Finnish Learned Societies. Behind the scenes, this also requires a lot of unpaid voluntary work from the editorial team, visiting editors-in-chief and reviewers as well as some investment of time and effort from the board of the Ethnos association as the publisher. The editing of this year's second issue is well under way, and there will be yet another topical issue, which will focus on the themes of posthumanism and multi-species aspects of everyday life. In 2021, our themes will be ethnology and policy-making, and the politics of dress and appearance.

In the current issue, we publish our first Commentary. It is not a peer-reviewed text, which enables faster publishing on topical issues or reporting about a research project at its initial stages, for example. There are many ethnologists working outside the academia, and one idea behind the new Commentary category is that it provides an easier publishing channel for those experts who simply do not have the time to write a peer-reviewed article but would like to take part in academic discussions.

## **AUTHORS**

Karina Lukin, PhD, is a postdoctoral researcher of folklore studies at the University of Helsinki, where she holds the title of Docent of Folklore Studies. She has studied Nenets oral and written creativity, including everyday narration, oral history, mythology and shamanism. Currently, she is working on twentieth-century Nenets literature, especially the strategies of defining and reworking the borders of literature, folklore and heritage. Lukin is a visiting Editor-in-Chief for this issue of *Ethnologia Fennica*.

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