

# Reflections on culturally sensitive tourism

## The case of Sweden

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Northern Periphery and  
Arctic Programme  
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Rovaniemi 2020

# ARCTISEN

Promoting culturally sensitive tourism across the Arctic

**Main result:** Improved entrepreneurial business environment for culturally sensitive tourism that will be achieved by improving and increasing transnational contacts, networks and cooperation among different businesses and organizations. Improvement of business environment will also result in concrete products and services, locally and transnationally designed, that support the capacities of start-ups and SMEs to develop sustainable, competitive and attractive tourism businesses drawing on place-based opportunities.

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# Introduction



# Introduction

Despite the dominant history of being a resource hinterland providing nature resources such as timber and minerals, tourism has been a part of the industrial mix of the Swedish North\* for a long time<sup>1</sup>. However, until recently tourism has not developed into a core industry within the entire region. Instead, tourism rather functioned as alternative livelihood during bust periods within the nature-resource industries<sup>2</sup>. During recent years, however, tourism in the Swedish North has experienced a boom period. In this context, new products and new seasons have emerged meeting the increasingly global demand for northern tourism. In the footprints of the Icehotel, established in the early 1990s, more winter tourism products were developed including dog-sledge tours and aurora borealis chasing. This development has sometimes been called an Arctification of northern tourism indicat-

\*The Swedish North is here defined as the country's two northernmost counties Västerbotten and Norrbotten.

ing the growing attractiveness of Arctic regions on the global tourism market<sup>3</sup>.

This development includes a growing interest for the indigenous people of northern Europe, the Sámi, as well<sup>4</sup>. This is in line with aspirations of various Sámi stakeholders. For example, the Sámi parliament has previously identified Sámi tourism as an important activity to support Sámi livelihood and a way of providing employment in the region<sup>5</sup>. However, the number of Sámi tourism firms has not grown and failed to meet the political aspirations, though tourism indeed turned out to be an alternative occupation for at least some Sámi<sup>6</sup>. Still, the growing tourism interest in the area has caused competition for land and hence, tourism is affecting reindeer herding, one of the traditional livelihoods of the Sámi. Consequently, today reports on conflict between tourism entrepreneurs and reindeer herding appear, which makes it timely to re-

think the relationship of tourism and indigenous peoples into a more culturally sensitive direction. This is not least since many tourists show little awareness and preparedness for the cultural and environmental context of the destination<sup>7</sup>.

The ARCTISEN project has been designed to involve local tourism entrepreneurs in the Arctic areas in the process of creating tools for a more 'culturally sensitive' tourism, not least in relation to the indigenous Sámi\*\*.

In addition to economic development, culturally sensitive tourism aims at enhancing:

- stakeholders' self-determination
- intra- and intercultural understanding and respect
- inclusion and empowerment.<sup>15</sup>

\*\*See ARCTISEN <http://sensitivetourism.interreg-npa.eu/>



Culturally sensitive tourism has so far not been an established concept in the Swedish discourse on tourism development. However, it reassembles ideas of ecotourism, which has been a more prominent initiative aiming to develop small-scaled tourism in Sweden for almost 20 years<sup>8</sup>. Not least Nature's Best, the quality label scheme developed by the Swedish Ecotourism Association launched in 2002, gained significant attention for a while, and its ideas were also translated into Sápmi Experience, a quality label for indigenous tourism in Sweden.

However, the success of Nature's Best has been limited. The adoption of the quality label failed not least because of entrepreneurs' limited trust in the scheme's ability to generate greater incomes<sup>9</sup>. Today about 70 companies offer tourists activities and services approved as Nature's Best and a fair share of them is located in the Swedish North, which traditionally has developed a profile of a nature-based tourism destination<sup>10</sup>. Compared to Nature's Best, the situation for Sápmi Experience is worse. The quality scheme was launched in 2011 as a project under the auspices of Sámiid Riik-kasearvi - the Swedish Reindeer Herders' Union (SSR). However, after the end of the program period, no new funding could be secured and thus, the scheme was discontinued<sup>11</sup>.

Although the economic situation for most Sámi tourism enterprises in Sweden remains challenging, it is obvious that their motivations for getting involved in tourism are not necessarily related to economic reasoning<sup>12</sup>. Instead, tourist entrepreneurs mention communicating Sámi heritage and current lives as important motivation. In this context, representations of Sámi history are contested, and what is allowed and not in Sámi tourism is debated constantly<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, as de Bernardi<sup>14</sup> argues, authenticity becomes a problematic term in Sámi tourism. Hence a more flexible approach is chosen that is not too objective, but also not too subjective in relation to authenticity. The discontinued quality scheme Sápmi Experience, outlining a compromise for how to represent Sámi tourism, provided an important effort for achieving this.

This report offers an impression of the current state of tourism in the Swedish North. It is based on 13 interviews with tourism entrepreneurs and tourism organizations conducted during May-July 2019 all over the North of Sweden. The group of respondents contained a mix of well-established companies with long time experience in not least indigenous tourism, but also relative newcomers to the area and to tourism. Moreover, tourism organizations aiming at developing the destination

and promoting tourism were among the respondents. The interview questions were connected to the use of local cultures in tourism, the experience of running tourism businesses, ideas for further development as well as possibilities and challenges in tourism.

The report begins by focusing on the policy framework for tourism and protagonists of culturally sensitive tourism in the Swedish North. Then the report addresses the opportunities and threats that Sámi entrepreneurs and non-Sámi tourism stakeholders identified in the interviews and relates them to previous knowledge on the topic. Furthermore, interviewees' perceptions of current needs and potential solutions are scrutinized. In this context, some respondents used the opportunity to voice their visions regarding tourism development in the Swedish North. Finally, the issues brought up by the respondents during the interviews are discussed in light of the national situation of Sweden.



Figure 1. Characteristics of culturally sensitive tourism.

# Framework for culturally sensitive tourism in Sweden



# Framework for culturally sensitive tourism in Sweden

This chapter presents first an overview of the present situation in Sweden, especially regarding policy and existing tourism guidelines in order to give the reader an overview of the context in which the respondents operate.

## Public policy and tourism

Tourism is not a core target of state governance in Sweden and there is a lack of national regulation and public guidelines specifically targeting tourism, too. A recent government report on tourism<sup>16</sup> recognizes the increasing importance of tourism and asks for a national strategy for accomplishing a more sustainable development of tourism. Growing tourism is the overarching objective of this initiative. The report mentions even cultural tourism and Sámi dimensions particularly, but favours efforts to establish business networks, i.e.

it suggests invigorating the previous Sámi destination organization Visit Sápmi and its quality scheme Sápmi Experience. However, since the report has been presented, no action has been taken and there seems to be a risk that none or only few of the suggestions in fact will be implemented.

Overall, after being an active regulator and investor into tourism before<sup>17</sup>, today government applies a laissez-faire approach with minimal direct involvement in the industry. The most prominent exception besides state ownership in SAS, is the public-private partnership Visit Sweden aiming at promoting Sweden abroad. On the regional and the municipal level however, public funding supports DMOs and various development projects. EU structural funds are used for supporting a plethora of temporary projects referring to various aspects of tourism development<sup>18</sup>. Even Sámi tourism projects have been funded from this source.

## Guidelines for ecotourism and indigenous tourism

As already mentioned, Nature's Best, the quality label introduced in 2002 by the Swedish Ecotourism Society – recently rebranded to Naturturismföretagen – is one of few more established tourism-specific attempts to assure quality development and business success within the tourism industry. The requirements for qualification circle around six rather broad principles<sup>19</sup> summarized on the next page.

These basic principles are further elaborated in a detailed catalogue of criteria comprising both requirements toward the tourism company and the product. The criteria comprise a broad array of aspects addressing economic, environmental, and cultural issues. Particularly, the criteria require that tourism assures “cultural conservation”. Scrutinizing the scheme's descriptions, it is

### **Six principles of the Nature's Best quality label:**

- 1) Respect the limitations of the destination - the least possible impact on nature and culture
- 2) Support the local economy
- 3) Make all the operators' activities environmentally sustainable
- 4) Contribute actively to nature and cultural conservation
- 5) Promote knowledge and respect and the joy of discovery
- 6) Quality and safety all the way

rather obvious that the point of departure is environmental concern, which has been extended to speak to cultural tourism activities, too.

The basic principles of Nature's Best formed the foundation of the Sápmi Experience label, too\*. The label was launched in 2011 in the context of a project hosted by Sámiid Riikkasearvi - the Swedish Reindeer Herders' Union (SSR), aiming at strengthening and stimulating Sámi tourism as a complementary industry offering an in place-alternative to reindeer herding. The project and not least the quality label Sápmi Experience have to be seen against the background of great expectations towards the potential of Sámi tourism that various Sámi and non-Sámi stakeholder have voiced recurrently. These expectations were accompanied by fears that Sámi tourism could develop according to a non-authentic Finnish model featuring fake Sámi products and experiences<sup>20</sup>.

Even the Sápmi Experience scheme applied a catalogue of criteria in order to determine whether the activities met the high-quality requirements. As with Nature's Best the label did not only aim at assuring

\*Indeed, the quality label Sápmi Experience was developed by a core member of the Swedish Ecotourism Association previously working with the Nature's Best label and a Sami entrepreneurs and ecotourism pioneer whose company gained the Nature's Best label in an early stage of the program.

high quality and awareness for cultural and environmental constraints. It intended to improve business practices as well. The program was highly appreciated by the involved companies and had high credibility<sup>21</sup>. Altogether more than 50 companies were engaged though not all of them managed to pass through all steps of the application process. However, a long-term funding strategy was lacking and hence, the project, Visit Sápmi and the label faded away when Sámi and non-Sámi stakeholders chose to concentrate their efforts elsewhere.

Another Nature's Best spin-off has recently been launched by Visit Västerbotten in Lapland<sup>22</sup>, the public regional tourism organization\*\*. The quality label Västerbotten Experience is a consequence of an ambitious program to align the regional tourism industry with the Global Sustainable Tourism Councils' (GSTC) objectives for sustainability within the tourism industry. Introducing the Västernbotten experience quality label had a threefold objective. First, to implement sustainable development practices and become a leading sustainable destination, and this way support the local economy. Second, to

\*\*Even Västerbotten Experience was developed by the same person who had a core role in developing Nature's Best and Sápmi Experience.

assure a high quality for those companies and organizations that aspire a formal recognition of their strive for high quality and sustainable development. And third, to assure a comprehensive interpretation of sustainable development including environmental respect, smart solutions in relation to climate change, as well as responsibility for the local community and concern for nature and culture.

According to Visit Västerbotten the raison d'être for the label is to get more customers, greater profitability, and improved competitiveness. In a first round 30 companies representing accommodation, food and activity providers were awarded the status of being a Västerbotten Experience.

Hence, although clear policies and labelling programs for culturally sensitive tourism are absent, there has been a tradition of quality labels comprising cultural dimensions. Sámi stakeholders have initiated one of the quality schemes, and Sámi tourism companies have participated in all of them. However, so far there is no explicit or coherent Sámi tourism strategy.

*'... although clear policies and labelling programs for culturally sensitive tourism are absent, there has been a tradition of quality labels comprising cultural dimensions.'*







# Opportunities for Sámi tourism



## Opportunities for Sámi tourism

In this section the general situation of Sámi tourism is discussed from a general viewpoint to then go in more detail in the issues and opportunities that the entrepreneurs have identified for Sámi tourism.

### Current situation in general

There have been great expectations towards Sámi tourism in Sweden for quite a while from both the Sámi and the Swedish governments. However, as has been noted, reality has not met the high expectations<sup>23</sup>. Still the recent boom seems to have entailed new hopes for an improved position of tourism. More or less all interview respondents agreed that tourism is an important industry for northern Sweden. Tourism is described as *'a way to get people a job'*<sup>\*</sup>. Sure, there is a dominance of nature resource industries even when it comes to

<sup>\*</sup>Direct quotes in Swedish are translated by the authors.

public discourse, but as one respondent pointed out, it cannot be taken for granted that mining and other nature-resource industries would be there forever. Thus, he and many other respondents think that there is a possibility for tourism to take a greater role.

Several of the respondents confirmed that tourism indeed is taken more seriously today, also because of its current boom. This is exemplified by a quote from a respondent regarding tourism as an industry:

*'But, if you think about the political arena, I experience that it has been taken more and more seriously [...] in the beginning tourism was not even considered an industry.'*

This attention seems to last since interest in nature experiences is growing and the region has substantial resources to meet such demand. In this context, one respondent highlighted the tourism industry's abil-

ity to create employment as crucial for the growing acceptance.

Some respondents pointed at the potential of tourism to invigorate small communities, too. Tourism is identified as a way of making a living in such places, often suffering from population loss and ageing. Particularly where tourism sustained year-around activities, it is welcomed by the local population. An example is a respondent saying that tourism *'is a good source of income for preserving the culture'*.

Tourism development entails, according to some respondents, greater attractiveness for the entire region, which can indeed make people choose to stay. It is argued, too, that others and particularly young people attracted by employment in the industry, move to small communities or choose to stay. This applies for international entrepreneurs too and indeed this has been important for some communities already, one

respondent argues. Recent scientific studies confirm this notion, demonstrating how immigrants play important roles in innovation and network building in remote communities in northern Sweden<sup>24</sup>. However, it has been shown, too, that the integration of incoming tourism entrepreneurs' lifestyles motives and business strategies sometimes compete with public strategies and development ideas<sup>25</sup>.

### The situation for the Sámi tourism entrepreneurs

The respondents agreed that tourism is an opportunity for the Sámi population and particularly young Sámi. One respondent argued that the current popularity of Sámi arts and music further support interest in Sámi tourism. Another interviewee noted that Sámi tourism products are popular since tourists increasingly are interested in getting *'behind the scene'*. However, this is obviously not without risks. An experienced Sámi tourism entrepreneur pointed out that other actors that are not connected to the Sámi have used Sámi culture in Finland in inauthentic ways. One respondent explicates this opinion by telling how there are *'varied opinions by people who think that the Rovaniemi version of tourism is horrible and cultural appropriation'*.

A recent PhD-thesis in Sweden addressed tourism as a Sámi livelihood<sup>26</sup>. Leu highlighted that Sámi tourism involvement seldom has been for pure business reasons. Instead, Sámi entrepreneurs point out that tourism enables them to communicate Sámi culture to tourists and other interested people<sup>27</sup>. The interviewees confirmed this notion frequently. They said that this contributes to sustain the Sámi culture. One Sámi entrepreneur even argues that tourism actually responds to the lack of information on Sámi culture in the public space. Since government fails to inform about Sámi culture, tourism is filling this gap. Knowledge about the Sámi is limited even among domestic tourists, and stereotypes assuming that all Sámi are reindeer herders are common. One respondent explains how: *'much focus is put on the reindeer [...] I do not want to market the reindeer.'* Therefore, one respondent highlighted the need to portray the Sámi as the modern people that they are.

However, the interviews revealed as well that Sámi get involved in tourism in order to support reindeer herding economically. Besides visits to reindeer corrals, meat and souvenir sales raise money to reinvest into reindeer herding, which is suffering from poor grazing conditions due to climate change. One example is one re-

spondent saying: *'In other words, if you are in the business of reindeer herding, it will not work in the future without financial support.'* Leu<sup>28</sup> met similar voices. One of his respondents mentioned that he considered tourism as an integrated part of reindeer herding, where visits to the reindeer corral meant another way of harvesting from the livestock industry.

The interviews revealed however that there is dissent among the Sámi when it comes to the roles of reindeer in the tourism industry. One respondent thought the focus on the reindeer is in fact problematic. It only confirms stereotypes and superficial expectations rather than informing about a wider Sámi culture. These different positions within the Sámi community have been previously highlighted, too<sup>29</sup>.

When reflecting on the position of Sámi tourism in Sweden, several interviewees referred to the Finnish situation, where much of the Sámi tourism is seen as inauthentic and not very appealing as a role model. There is agreement among Sámi and non-Sámi respondents that a tourism development according to the Finnish model is not desirable. Although the situation has been improving during the past years in Finnish Lapland<sup>30</sup>, the interviewed entrepreneurs often mentioned Finland as a neg-

ative example. Some examples are the fact that *'reindeer has become a Santa Claus animal'*, but *'for the Sámi population the reindeer is something completely different'*. Another example is a respondent mentioning how what is sold in Rovaniemi is "plastic": *'not something plastic like in Rovaniemi or similar, instead it should be authentic'*. Another respondent also mentions *'not, not like Rovaniemi Sámi'*. It became apparent after several interviews that the Sámi and other entrepreneurs in Sweden do not see the tourism development in Finland, as they envision it, as a positive benchmarking example. However, respondents agree as well that the situation in Sweden is not at all the same. Hence, the idea of culturally sensitive tourism appears as somewhat abstract.

All respondents agree that tourism should be developed in a culturally sensitive way, even though this matter is sometimes awkward. Of course, what is presented to tourists should be authentic Sámi culture and, as one Sámi respondent put it, when one is Sámi, Sámi culture is per default a part of the product and the idea of cultural sensitivity becomes obsolete. There is however a notion that non-Sámi stakeholders could improve their cultural sensitivity. Another respondent, certified and educated according to one of the earlier presented schemes, adds that authentic Sámi culture

includes aspects of nature and sustainability. This is exemplified in a quote about the company's products:

*'it is an unusual product to experience [...] it has lots of influence because we talk very much about that, about nature, sustainability and ecology'*.

This means that the company cannot grow too big since this would imply that the lifestyle of the owner and the authenticity of the product would be contested. The aim is however to offer *'100% Sámi culture!'* Another respondent connected the authenticity of the product also to his desire to feel proud about his work. One example of this is the quote:

*'I try to be as authentic as I can be. Eehm if, to say it, and if everything which isn't really authentic [...] I wouldn't sell.'*

The representative of a tourism organization confirmed the impression mentioned above that indigenous tourism is mainly seen in the context of sustainability and concern for the environment. One respondent mentioned that not least domestic tourists are increasingly sensitive for sustainable practices and demand sustainable products. Hence, tourism development should not produce resort towns, but develop as community-based activity. A stronger inclusion of Sámi tourism en-

trepreneurs in planning but also in business activities is thus desirable since this enables both Sámi and non-Sámi tourism stakeholders to learn from each other. This is in line with a recent OECD-report on Sámi inclusion in regional development<sup>31</sup>.

For non-Sámi tourism entrepreneurs, the situation was of course radically different. Several entrepreneurs reported that they always were careful when talking about Sámi culture. They also cooperated with Sámi companies and packaged products together with them. One respondent said that products should not turn into "shows" but provide an authentic impression of Sámi culture. An interviewed project manager mentioned that in Sweden Sámi culture is usually presented by Sámi companies and hence, conflicts have been avoided. Moreover, according to several of the non-Sámi respondents there was a good climate for communication and cooperation between Sámi and non-Sámi stakeholders. As one respondent noted, if something did not seem to be done ethically correct, the partners let him know, so that things could be fixed. This procedure is possible since people were positive towards his work in general. Other respondents told similar stories. The owner of a souvenir shop exemplified cultural sensitivity in relation to his own purchases where

he only bought and offered locally produced items. In his own words: *'I have a complete ban against all kind of handcraft which isn't made in Scandinavia'*. However, he also noted that Sámi culture as well as artisanship were developing and sometimes this meant that it did not meet the stereotypes of the tourists.

Still, there were signs of tensions, too. Particularly companies operating from outside the area were suspected to act in less acceptable ways. A respondent mentioned that these intrude into protected areas without permits and without any regards for reindeer herding. This became particularly problematic when dog-sledding companies operated carelessly since their potential of disturbing reindeer herding was significant. One company explained that they:

*'Try to have a good relation with the Sameby\*\* because we [...] reindeer and dog sledding do not match very well so it is very important to have good communication so that we don't scare the reindeer or things like that.'*

Another respondent talked about conflicts that have been visible in the paper and said that:

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\*\*Sameby is an administrative and economic cooperative for the sole purpose of reindeer herding. In Sweden there are 51 such units and their operation is regulated by law. Read more: <http://www.samer.se/4555>

*'dog sledding companies versus reindeer herders but we have had a similar situation and therefore we think [...] that it is so important that we learn from where conflicts have already arisen.'*

Respondents identified however even heli-skiing and snowmobiling as activities that created tensions. A representative for a tourism organization pointed out that their role was to moderate a dialogue on whether and how these superficially conflicting activities could be hosted within the same area. This required however a will to cooperate, too.

A respondent who only recently has moved to the area and who offered dog-sledding tours illustrated that this is possible. He had managed to establish a contact to the local Sámi community and to set up a cooperation with a Sámi tourist entrepreneur as well. The latter was now included in the product in order to provide accurate information about Sámi culture and reindeer herding. The company's desire to co-exist with reindeer herding and the consecutive adaptation to the needs of reindeer herding were also conveyed to the customers. Other companies also exemplified this desire by saying that:

*'we try also to bring up for the guests that we have a very good relation to the sameby here around and if they say they are coming with the reindeer [...] to another place. So that we don't, like, disturb each other.'*

In summary, the respondents agreed that the position of tourism in northern Sweden had improved. This applies for Sámi tourism, too, although there has not been any major growth of the supplies. At the same time, Sámi tourism is not contested in the same way as in Finland – Sámi tourism is offered by Sámi companies only – and there are only few examples of actual conflicts. Thus, culturally sensitive tourism remains a somewhat abstract concept. However, all respondents agreed that an authentic representation of the Sámi culture and an integration of Sámi tourism in the overall development is crucial for a successful tourism development in the region.

***'I have a complete ban against all kind of handcraft which isn't made in Scandinavia.'***



# Needs and practices



## Needs and practices

In this section we present some of the dimensions related to tourism entrepreneurship in Sweden and which are the most pressing issues identified by the respondents. The impacts of a growing tourism industry, together with the involvement of culture in tourism are very important issues, but also structural obstacles to tourism entrepreneurship were mentioned. These problems are then discussed in regard to the opportunities offered by the ARCTISEN project.

### Tourism impacts

Overall, several respondents were concerned about the scope of tourism development. Certainly, tourism figures are not too high but at certain time in certain places, numbers peak and imply risk for disturbance and irritation. Several Sámi companies highlight this, not least in relation to

reindeer herding, but even representatives for tourist organizations confirm this perception. Finding the right number of tourists for each place is obviously a challenge for many of the interviewed stakeholder. In this context, one respondent claimed that attracting the right type of tourists is important: This means people who spend money in the local shops and do not use cottages or RVs. For achieving this, a stronger central organization is needed. Another respondent argued that scoping tourism was likewise important to maintain the quality of the products.

These notions entail that many respondents expressed a need for improved communication between local and regional stakeholder but also within Sámi communities to negotiate challenges and future development paths. Companies combining reindeer herding and tourism need to plan ahead and cannot deal with tourism at all

times. That some companies had problems to adapt to sudden changes within reindeer herding creates problems as do companies that overall do not engage in cooperation with others.

### Cultural dimensions of tourism

Even though there was agreement that most local companies are aware of cultural dimensions in their products and the consequent need to be sensitive, respondents mentioned that there are non-Sámi companies using various dimensions of Sámi culture, usually in order to improve their competitiveness. However, problems arose not necessarily in relation to other companies, but in relation to customers. Offering an authentic Sámi experience to tourists with stereotypic and sometimes simply inaccurate ideas about the indigenous population is a challenge according to several respond-



ents. An experienced entrepreneur saw the 'Santa Claus-industry' as the template that tourists are referring to when meeting Sámi and indigenous reindeer herding. This was one example of the remark that Finland, and the Christmas industry, are seen as a negative role model for tourism development. Having a fairy tale as point of departure implies risks of becoming disrespectful for the Sámi and their culture. Hence, improving the attractiveness of authentic Sámi experiences, overshadowing fake and fairy tale-related products, is therefore an important mission. A similar standpoint was forwarded by a Sámi entrepreneur who argued that Sámi symbols and names are used to seduce tourists. As a consequence, what the tourists finally consumed was not Sámi although they maybe thought it was.

Another Sámi entrepreneur voiced concern about the impacts of tourism. Tourists consume places but without being aware of the community context. This manifests a disrespect for reindeer herding. Therefore, the respondent called for better management and communication of local values to visitors and companies active within the tourism industry. Another Sámi respondent followed a similar line of argument. He exemplified this in relation to dog-sledding tours and snowmobile safaris, which other respondents mentioned,

too. Noise from these activities partly troubles reindeer herding partly it disturbs wildlife. One example was a respondent explaining how snowmobiling tours are not offered because *'it's noisy and it's like with pollution.'* There are simply too many machines around and thus, nature should not be too accessible, he argued. He saw also limitations in the carrying capacity of communities and thus a need for a more sustainable approach to tourism is pertinent.

The lack of Sámi tourism organization is a problem that is addressed repeatedly. Hence, as one respondent claimed, certifying Sámi tourism is a way to connect the small and sometimes geographically isolated companies with each other. The organization in itself could provide knowledge in marketing, product development, sales etc. There has not been any sufficient support for this kind of development in the Sámi society. Furthermore, labeling is a way towards a more sustainable approach to tourism as well, another respondent argues. It makes entrepreneurs aware that development does not equal a growing number of tourists, since this would imply both large emissions through air transportation and greater pressure on local communities and environment. A certification also guarantees for *'the customers that this is indeed Sámi and it is guaranteed then that it is knowledge bearers'*.

Not only Sámi stakeholders discussed the issue of companies coming from outside to the region and running activities such as helicopter skiing and dog sledging. The common perception was that these often lack knowledge about and respect for Sámi culture and reindeer herding. Herein is a great potential for conflict. However, as some respondents pointed out, it is not necessarily the activities that are problematic. Obviously, well-established local companies running dog-sledding tours manage to respect the reindeer herding. Instead, one respondent said, the struggle over dog-sledding tours is also about mutual prejudice and ignorance of the actual activities on both sides, as previously shown by the direct quotes on the communication between company and sameby. There is thus a need for courses and information campaigns towards non-Sámi companies informing about Sámi culture and for Sámi entrepreneurs to get to know the operators of dog-sledding companies. For one experienced Sámi entrepreneur conflicts have a positive side, too. They can be a good way to bring up issues that need to be discussed.

## Structural issues

An overall concern voiced by a representative of an economic association refers to the demographics within the tourism industry. Many stakeholders had been around for quite a while, and now there is a need for younger people to engage, but also a need to reinvest into infrastructure, a point that is mentioned by several respondents.

Several respondents addressed the organization and management of tourism in northern Sweden as an area where improvements could take place. In this context, they referred to different aspects that in one or the other way cannot be solved by a single entrepreneur but rather require structural change or concerted action.

The tourism industry in northern Sweden is in competition with their counterparts in northern Finland and Norway. From that point of view, diverging regulations and taxation schemes are seen as unfair and problematic. Cost of operations are higher in Sweden and in fact, even within Sweden different tax offices apply diverging standards regarding the classification of various tourism products. Here, one respondent saw an immediate need for action and national as well as transnational standardization.

One shopkeeper complained that there is a lack of branding within the region and

tourist information is not coordinated either. In addition, the increasing globalization of tourist demand requires information in more languages, even beyond English, which is not a lingua franca among the tourists.

Infrastructure and accessibility are other issues highlighted in the interviews. This refers to transportation to and within the region. Public transportation, busses, are simply not available or poorly scheduled. This was an important question for one of the respondents. Another respondent provided an explanation for the current situation. Government does not take tourism seriously and thus, investment in infrastructure for a mine is always granted, for tourism never.

Besides these examples, several respondents called for a more centralized organization and coordination of tourism without specifying what particular needs their companies have identified.

*'Although clear policies and labelling programs for culturally sensitive tourism are absent, there has been a tradition of quality labels comprising cultural dimensions.'*

*'Certifying Sámi tourism is a way to connect the small and sometimes geographically isolated companies with each other'.*

## **Opportunities for the ARCTISEN project**

Many participants voice their mixed feeling about projects and mean that a majority does not result in anything useful or lasting. Hence, even expectation regarding ARCTISEN are modest and not very specific. Still, many respondents agree that projects need to do practical things and preferably result in physical outputs as well. One respondent asked for activities that support existing companies rather than supporting start-ups or activities that cannot be maintained without project support.

An appreciated aspect of projects is that they enable meetings and knowledge exchange between stakeholders. It is also interesting to get insights into how things are done in other countries, since this is not so easy to accomplish on an individual level. Establishing contact between non-Sámi and Sámi companies in order to enable continuous dialogue on cultural issues was seen as a beneficial output of projects, too.



# National analysis



## National analysis

Tourism in northern Sweden experiences currently a boom and even though the focus of interest is towards natural phenomena rather than culture, many respondents benefit from this development. Hence, their overall concern for culturally sensitive tourism seems to be limited, even though they can point at negative experiences.

Still, the rapid development implies uncertainty and questions about the future. The Finnish case of tourism development with a seemingly more Fordist-mode of production and the commodification of Sámi culture for tourism purposes by non-Sámi companies<sup>32</sup> are usually used as backdrop for mirroring the own situation and for reflecting about various development options. Against the Finnish backdrop, the situation in Sweden seems relatively small-scale and harmonic, even though incidents occur, not least in relation to incoming tourism operators lacking knowledge and re-

spect for Sámi culture. However, tourism stakeholders seem to reflect about the future in isolation and hence, many of the respondents pointed at a need for dialogue and communication, and, one can argue, public leadership.

In a study of the Sámi tourism industry in Sweden, it has been shown that most Sámi tourism entrepreneurs are mainly concerned about environmental deterioration when it comes to their future development<sup>33</sup>. Mining and wind power parks are seen as greater threats to the industry than cultural threats or business-related factors. The interviews in this study confirm this notion. Sámi tourism is often seen in the context of sustainable development and a sustenance of environmental qualities and reindeer herding are therefore important to not least the Sámi stakeholders. Business-related factors such as infrastructure and marketing play a role, too,

but respondents for tourism organizations mention them more often.

However, many respondents obviously agree that they would like to get their Sámi tourism organization, previously Visit Sápmi, back. It obviously filled an important role for product development, networking and knowledge exchange and strengthened the notion of being a collective rather than a number of lone entities in an increasingly complex and globalized tourism industry.

*'Many of the respondents pointed at a need for dialogue and communication, and, one can argue, public leadership'.*







## Notes and references



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## Notes

1. Müller et al., 2019.
2. Müller, 2013.
3. Müller & Viken, 2017; Rantala et al., 2019.
4. Müller & Viken, 2017.
5. Müller & Pettersson, 2001.
6. Leu et al., 2018; Leu, 2019; Müller & Hoppstadius, 2017; Zhang & Müller, 2018.
7. Pettersson, 2002; Rantala et al., 2018.
8. Fredman et al., 2006.
9. Margaryan & Stensland, 2017.
10. Lundmark & Müller, 2010.
11. Müller & Hoppstadius, 2017.
12. Leu et al., 2018; Leu, 2019.
13. Müller & Pettersson, 2006.
14. de Bernardi, 2019.
15. See Olsen et al., 2019.
16. SOU 2017, p. 95.
17. Bohlin et al., 2014.
18. Almstedt et al., 2016.
19. Naturturismföretagen, 2019.
20. Saarinen, 1999; Müller & Huuva, 2009.
21. Müller & Hoppstadius, 2017.
22. Visit Västerbotten in Lapland, 2019.
23. Müller & Hoppstadius, 2017.
24. Carson & Carson, 2018.
25. Eimermann et al., 2018.
26. Leu, 2018.
27. Leu et al., 2018.
28. Leu, 2019.
29. Müller & Pettersson, 2006, Müller & Huuva, 2009.
30. See Kugapi et al., 2020.
31. OECD, 2019.
32. E.g. Saarinen, 1999; Müller & Huuva, 2009.
33. Müller & Hoppstadius, 2017.

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## Reflections on culturally sensitive tourism

### The case of Sweden

This report for Sweden highlights the situation for the entrepreneurs operating in tourism, both from a Sámi perspective and from other local and non-local stakeholders. Based on the interviews, there are several issues that have been identified connected to the expansion of tourism. One is sustainability, but also the use of culture in tourism and different structural problems related specifically to tourism entrepreneurship. Even though not mentioned specifically as cultural sensitivity, a more ethical treatment of Sámi culture in tourism is something that is important for the respondents to achieve.

