

# Toward culturally sensitive tourism

## Report from Finnish Lapland

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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

In recent years, tourism has grown rapidly in Finnish Lapland. International tourists travel to the region to experience the northern lights, snowmobiling, husky rides, sleeping in an igloo, and feeding reindeer in a snowy winter wonderland. Tourism development has been the most expansive in Rovaniemi, which is both the home of Santa Claus and the administrative capital of Lapland. Besides Rovaniemi, there are several large tourist resorts in Lapland – such as Levi and Saariselkä – offering a great variety of winter and summer activities and entertainment. The Inari region, which hosts the Sámi Parliament and has a strong identity of Sámi cultures, has also been attracting an ever-growing number of tourists with an interest in encountering the North with all its special cultural features. Moreover, there are smaller nature-based destinations around Lapland, where the pace of tourism development has been slower.

This report approaches tourism in Finnish Lapland from the point of views of cultural sensitivity. While ‘culturally sensitive tourism’ is a new concept in Finland, the idea of respecting and caring for cultural diversity in tourism has been discussed in previous research<sup>1</sup>. Like this report, previous research has focused on the ways in which Sámi cultural elements are used in tourism settings<sup>2</sup>.

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

- stakeholders’ self-determination
- intra- and intercultural understanding and respect
- inclusion and empowerment.

This publication builds on the idea that using Sámi cultural elements in tourism requires cultural sensitivity. In past decades, tour operators and other tourism companies have marketed and commodified Lapland by misusing the ‘exotic’ features of Sámi cultures – without considering how this misuse was experienced by the Sámi themselves. Many Sámi have sharply criticized the ways in which the tourism industry has constructed a stereotypical and distorted image of the Sámi, which economically benefits non-Sámi tourism companies<sup>3</sup>. Such extensive forms of exploitation have not taken place in the other Nordic countries<sup>4</sup>.

Today the need for more culturally sensitive forms of tourism development has been recognized in Finnish Lapland. There are various factors that indicate this new recognition. Firstly, there are more Sámi entrepreneurs. Secondly, the misuse of Sámi cultural symbols by non-Sámi tourism com-



panies has been decreasing in their marketing communication<sup>5</sup>. Thirdly, the Sámi Parliament of Finland (2018) has created new [guidelines for the responsible and ethically sustainable use of Sámi cultural features in tourism](#) (in Finnish), which aim at '*removing tourism that exploits Sámi cultures and disinformation about Sámi cultures that is distributed via tourism*'. These guidelines call for responsibility, culturally sustainable tourism development, and trust, and underline the importance of self-determination of the Sámi in tourism. Fourthly, local non-Sámi tourism operators seem to be more interested in co-operating with Sámi tourism companies.

This report offers an overview of the current state as well as a vision for the future with regard to cultural sensitivity in tourism development in Finnish Lapland, with special focus on the Sámi cultures. The research is based on 44 interviews conducted during February–April 2019 in three different regions: 1) the Rovaniemi and Levi areas, which in this case can be seen as examples of mass tourism development, 2) the Inari and Utsjoki municipalities, where Sámi cultures are playing a quite visible role in tourism marketing and product development, 3) the Enontekiö municipality, where smaller-scale nature-based tourism is being developed in multicultural settings. The interviewed persons represented 26 small-

and medium-sized tourism companies, 3 big tourism companies, and 17 other tourism-related organisations such as associations, public authorities, and research institutes. Interviewing different kinds of tourism actors has enabled an approach to cultural sensitivity from multiple perspectives. The number of represented organisations is larger than the number of interviewed persons, as some persons represented several organisations simultaneously. For example, the interviewed person might have been not only an entrepreneur, but also the president of an entrepreneurs' association, a council-member, or a member of the Sámi Parliament. The interviewees were selected quite randomly. The most important criterion was involvement in tourism. The ethnicity of the interviewees was not asked, but many mentioned it during the interview.

The interview questions were focused on the use of local cultural elements in tourism, the running of tourism businesses, the development ideas, and the possibilities and challenges in tourism. While this overview concentrates on cultural sensitivity in Finnish Lapland, with special emphasis on Sámi cultures, the results can be applied to other areas and contexts.



Figure 1. Characteristics of culturally sensitive tourism.

# Cultural sensitivity of tourism in Finnish Lapland



# Cultural sensitivity of tourism in Finnish Lapland

This chapter approaches cultural sensitivity of tourism from four different perspectives that are important in Finnish Lapland: Sámi cultures, land use, ethical guidelines, and quality certificates in tourism and tourists.

## Sámi cultures

As discussed in the introduction, the question of cultural sensitivity in tourism in Finnish Lapland is connected especially to Sámi cultures. Some of the interviewees pointed out that people might not know enough about Sámi cultures in general. In the following, we present some of the central aspects of Sámi cultures and how they are being used in tourism.

## The Sámi in Finland

The Sámi are the only indigenous people of the European Union, and there are about 10,500 Sámi living in Finland. The majority of them are North Sámi, and a small number are Inari and Skolt Sámi. Each of these three Sámi groups has its own language. That is why we speak of Sámi cultures, in the plural, in this report. The official Sámi homeland is situated in the northernmost Finnish Lapland (the municipalities of Enontekiö, Inari, and Utsjoki and the northern part of the municipality of Sodankylä), but the majority of Sámi live nowadays outside this area, either elsewhere in Finland or abroad<sup>6</sup>. Utsjoki is the only municipality in Finland where the Sámi form the majority of the population.

According to the Finnish Constitution (11.6.1999 / 731) §17, Sámi indigenous people have the 'right to their own language and culture' and 'the right to maintain and devel-

op their own language and culture'. The authorities have the duty to negotiate with the Sámi Parliament 'in all far-reaching and important measures which may directly and in a specific way affect the status of the Sámi as an indigenous people' and in those legally binding aspects that take place in the Sámi homeland<sup>7</sup>. Other laws relevant to Sámi cultures include the Skolt Act, the Sámi Language Act, and the Law Regarding Reindeer Herding.

## Use of Sámi cultures in tourism

There has been individual travellers in Lapland for centuries, and for just as long travellers have depicted the Sámi in their private and public travel writings and pictures. These descriptions have often contained incorrect information about the Sámi<sup>8</sup>. The beginning of tourism in Finnish Lapland is often situated in the 1920s when Petsamo became part

of Finland. Petsamo attracted tourists with its location near the Arctic Ocean, nature, salmon, an Orthodox monastery, and the Skolt Sámi population<sup>9</sup>. The Sámi have been part of Lapland's tourism marketing images ever since<sup>10</sup>. From then onwards tourism has also been a source of income for the Sámi although at first a very modest one<sup>11</sup>.

During the decades after the Second World War, Sámi identities became weaker because of the modernization processes in Lapland and policies that aimed at incorporating the Sámi into Finnish culture, for instance through the school system<sup>12</sup>. During this period, Sámi assimilation into Finnish culture and society accelerated<sup>13</sup>. The Sámi were, for example, forced to use the Finnish language and even to change their (sur)names into Finnish ones<sup>14</sup>.

During the same time, tourism in Lapland began to grow<sup>15</sup>. Many tourism companies started using 'exotic' Sámi cultural elements in their marketing to differentiate Lapland from other nature-based tourism destinations<sup>16</sup>. This led to a situation in which tourists expected to see Sámi during their visit in the same ways as the Sámi were portrayed in the travel brochures: wearing their traditional costume (gákti) and posing with reindeer<sup>17</sup>. However, in reality the Sámi and their cultures were not visible 'enough' to the tourists<sup>18</sup>. In order to satis-

fy the tourists' expectations and interests, the Finnish tourism industry started selling its own versions of Sámi cultural elements. These versions appeared not only in tourism marketing and souvenirs, but also in Finnish tourism entrepreneurs' and workers' clothing, impersonating Sámi<sup>19</sup>. Indeed, this impersonation can be considered one of the most striking examples of cultural insensitivity, as Sámi costumes are an important expression of Sámi cultural identities<sup>20</sup>.

In the past decades, a growing number of Sámi have voiced criticism of the touristic representations of their cultures that present the Sámi as a primitive, exotic, and mystic tribe, which does not even really exist. For a long time, the Finnish tourism industry has been economically benefitting from the distorted image of the Sámi<sup>21</sup>.

Today more Sámi have engaged with tourism as tourism entrepreneurs and workers, and direct misrepresentation of Sámi cultures has been decreasing. Nevertheless, there are still non-Sámi tourism companies in Lapland and other parts of Finland that reap economic benefits by exploiting various features of Sámi cultures in their businesses<sup>22</sup>.

## The Sámi register

The question of who is Sámi and who is not, who belongs to the electoral register of the Sámi Parliament (the Sámi register) and who does not, is on many levels a highly sensitive issue (in ways ranging from personal to national political). In recent years, this topic has been widely discussed both locally and nationally. Some of the interviewees discussed tensions and traumas related to the decisions of who has – or has not – been accepted for inclusion in the Sámi register<sup>23</sup>. The most visible symbol of these struggles is the Sámi costume.

As one tourism actor in Enontekiö pointed out, the conflictive situation has direct implications for tourism businesses. In her view, the question of belonging to or being excluded from the register is difficult for all the actors in Enontekiö. It is a question of who can use Sámi cultural elements in their products and who cannot. In a similar vein, a tourism entrepreneur interviewed in Rovaniemi brought up an example of a Sámi reindeer herder who tells his clients about Sámi traditions but does not want to present himself as a Sámi without being registered as one.

### **Act of the Sámi Parliament 17.7.1995 / 974 includes the following definition of a Sámi:**

- 1) That the person her/himself, or at least one of her/his parents or grandparents, has learnt Sámi as her/his first language;
- 2) That the person is a descendent of a person who has been entered in a land, taxation, or population register as a mountain, forest, or fishing Lapp; or
- 3) That at least one of her/his parents has or could have been registered as an elector for an election to the Sámi Delegation or the Sámi Parliament.

The definition of indigenous people is controversial not only in Finland, but in many other countries as well<sup>24</sup>. In Finland, the struggle over who should be accepted for inclusion in the electoral register of the Sámi Parliament and thus officially as Sámi began in the mid-1990s when the Sámi Parliament was established<sup>25</sup>. Some of the Finns living in Lapland were (and still are) afraid of losing their rights to the Sámi – or not being granted the same rights as them – as a result of the possible ratification of

the international Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (ILO169 convention) in Finland, which emerged in the public debate at the same time as the Finnish government passed legislation to give the Sámi cultural autonomy rights<sup>26</sup>. Those who were excluded began to claim that they should be accepted for inclusion in the electoral register of the Sámi Parliament because they were the descendants of forest Lapps or Sámi who had been living in Lapland for a long time, and because of this they should be granted the same Indigenous peoples' rights as the Sámi<sup>27</sup>. These claims have been strongest in the municipalities of Enontekiö and Inari<sup>28</sup>. The concept of a 'statusless' Sámi is connected to the same debate<sup>29</sup> and applies to all those people who saw their applications rejected,

According to the prevailing Sámi view, Sáminess cannot be defined on the basis of ancient ancestral roots, but a Sámi person must have a genuine present-day connection to Sámi culture and a sense of belonging to the Sámi community. It is a matter of both self- and group-identification; that is, a person needs to identify her- or himself as a Sámi, and the Sámi community must identify her or him as such as well<sup>30</sup>. Group identification is part of the rights of Indigenous peoples as defined in the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples<sup>31</sup>.

Finland has still not ratified the ILO169 convention because it is under dispute what kind of rights it would give to the Sámi and what the practical consequences in Finland would be.

Persons applying for the electoral register of the Sámi Parliament do not necessarily do it in order to enjoy the rights of an Indigenous people. There are many kinds of persons among the applicants<sup>32</sup>. The previously described history of systematic assimilation politics imposed by the Finnish authorities led to a situation in which many children could not learn Sámi language(s) at home. This is one of the reasons why there are people with a Sámi background who are today left without official Sámi status<sup>33</sup>.

### **Land use**

Another sensitive issue in Finnish Lapland is land use. Some of the interviewed tourism actors call for well-defined clarification of how the everyman's rights\* – or the so-called 'freedom to roam' – should be interpreted, marketed, and used in tourism contexts. In connection to this, one of the most daunting challenges is the ongoing struggle for land between the tourism industry

\* The right of everyone to enjoy outdoor pursuits regardless of who owns or occupies an area ([Environment.fi](http://Environment.fi))

and reindeer herders. Some of the interviewed tourism entrepreneurs connected the idea of cultural sensitivity to the need for respecting others' livelihood (i.e. reindeer herding) and respecting the animals. Practicing such respect can mean that in May the safari-entrepreneurs never go to those areas where reindeer are having their calves, and sledge-dog companies plan their routes in cooperation with local reindeer herders. Nonetheless, reconciling reindeer herding and husky safaris in the same area is not without problems in Lapland. According to one interviewee, there are challenges especially in Inari where there are many reindeer and also many sledge-dog companies, and where each company wishes to keep its own routes.

At the same time, some non-Sámi tourism entrepreneurs argued that people are tired of the continuous conflicts over land use. In their view, Sámi reindeer herding prevents tourism development in Enontekiö. Their opinions boil down to the argument that there are too many reindeer that are allowed to overgraze the region. The interviewees describe local Arctic nature as something vulnerable that the Sámi reindeer herders should be more sensitive to.

One of the interviewees challenged the stereotypical assumption that conflicts

would always occur between Finns and the Sámi. For example, Kilpisjärvi is currently the stage of a 'cultural clash' between Finnish and Norwegian people, where 'the wild snowmobiling' of Norwegian tourists is seen as irritating to the local people, animals, and plants.

### **Ethical guidelines and quality certificates in tourism**

Several guidelines for sustainable tourism have been published recently in Finland. These guidelines consider different dimensions of sustainability (ecological, economic, social, and cultural). For instance, Metsähallitus\*\* (2016) and UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Finland published in 2016 their common '[Principles of sustainable tourism](#)', and Visit Finland in 2018 its '[Tips for Sustainability Communication](#)' and '[Tools for Sustainability and Communications](#)', and an updated version of '[Principles of Sustainable Tourism](#)' (in Finnish), in 2019.

While interviews for this report were being conducted, at least one big safari company in Finnish Lapland was preparing its own responsibility guidelines. Moreover, the Regional Council of Lapland and House

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\*\* Metsähallitus is a state-owned enterprise with the responsibility of managing one-third of Finland's surface area, which is state-owned land.

of Lapland\*\*\* have prepared '[Instructions for responsible tourism in Lapland](#)'. Also, a good example of these kinds of guidelines is [a leaflet](#) produced in Inari, which gives basic advice on how to travel safely and behave appropriately in the region. There also exists the Lapland's Responsible Tourism Network, which brings together tourism companies and organisations with an interest in responsible tourism development.

In 2016, the Sámi Parliament of Finland – in cooperation with House of Lapland – created 'Picture Guidelines' that advise companies and other organisations of respectful and ethically sound ways of using images of the Sámi<sup>34</sup>. Two years later, in 2018, the Sámi Parliament published a more overarching '[Principles of Responsible and Ethically Sustainable Sámi Tourism](#)' (in Finnish). These guidelines call for responsibility, culturally sustainable tourism development, and trust, underlining the self-determination of the Sámi in a tourism context. The latter guidelines consist of seven main principles.

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\*\*\* Lapland's biggest tourism marketing and co-operation organisation

### **Principles of Responsible and Ethically Sustainable Sámi Tourism by Sámi Parliament of Finland\*:**

- 1) Recognizing and respecting the value and the richness of Sámi cultural heritage
- 2) Safeguarding and maintaining the Sámi cultural heritage for future generations
- 3) Creating mutual understanding and cooperation that benefit all parties
- 4) Drawing attention to and correcting the problems in Sámi tourism
- 5) Enhancing positive effects of Sámi tourism on the Sámi, their culture and environment
- 6) Responsible and ethically sustainable marketing and tourism communication for Sámi tourism, and
- 7) Securing high quality tourist experiences.

\* Translated from the Finnish version of the document

During the interviews in February–April 2019, only some of the interviewees had familiarized themselves with the Sámi Parliament’s ethical tourism guidelines. In regard to other sustainable tourism guidelines, the interviewed tourism companies either were not aware of them or did not see them as relevant for their businesses. However, younger generations seemed, generally speaking, more positive towards the guidelines. Some of the interviewees pointed out that the Sámi Parliament’s new principles should be seen, most of all, as recommendations and goals rather than as rules and obligations.

Based on these interviews, the most controversial issue of these guidelines is the Sámi Parliament’s critique of the sledge-dog business. According to the guidelines, ‘Marketing touristic sledge-dog services in the Sámi homeland is both irresponsible and ethically unsustainable and should therefore be terminated’<sup>35</sup>. Many of the interviewees stated that the sledge-dogs do not belong to the area, while others had difficulty imagining tourism in Lapland without them. The latter group of actors called for a more flexible approach: instead of prohibiting certain products, the focus should be placed on marketing tourism services that build on real and authentic aspects of local cultures, such as reindeer rides.

The interviews indicate that most of the Finnish tourism actors recognize that sledge-dogs have the potential to cause serious harm to reindeer and reindeer herding. Quite a large number of the interviewees drew attention to the role of responsible sledge-dog companies who plan their routes in cooperation with local reindeer herders. Nevertheless, there are international so-called pop-up sledge-dog safari companies, who are not aware, or who do not care, how their actions impact reindeer herding, local communities, and the environment.

Among the interviewed tourism actors, there were companies especially in the Inari and Utsjoki regions who were concerned about the ways in which the Sámi Parliament’s guidelines might complicate their businesses. The companies face difficulties in employing Sámi people, as the guidelines require. Some of the interviewees said that in their experience the guidelines formed a part of the political agendas connected to the debate on who is Sámi and who is not<sup>36</sup>.

In general, both Sámi and non-Sámi entrepreneurs commented on the Sámi Parliament’s lack of attention to everyday practices. Successful implementation of the guidelines would require open cooper-



ation with local tourism actors. However, at the moment the guidelines were seen as top-down implemented strategy, without clarity about whom the guidelines actually concern. According to the interviewees, many of the conflicts could be solved if local actors could participate in finding fair ways to apply the guidelines in practice. This endeavour could be carried out in the near future, when the Sámi Parliament begins to launch the guidelines.

In addition to ethical guidelines, there are some quality certificates which the interviewees hoped would support responsible actors in developing and marketing their tourism businesses. One relevant example of a quality certificate in Lapland is the [Sámi Duodji label](#) (in Finnish), which is used to guarantee the authenticity of Sámi handicrafts. In the summer of 2019, Visit Finland launched a new quality certificate called [Sustainable Travel Finland](#) (in Finnish).

Some of the interviewed tourism entrepreneurs perceived quality certificates and labels as too expensive. One of the entrepreneurs stated:

*'We do not need any certificates – we do not need someone from outside to come here for two days and then say then that we are great.'*

In general, the interviewees saw enhancement of culturally sensitive Sámi tourism as something positive. They supported the idea of developing a quality label for authentic Sámi companies, if the criteria were created in close cooperation between politicians, local communities, and tourism companies. In this case, the certificates would build on socioeconomic dynamics instead of political interests.

The idea of certificates raised many thoughts among the respondents. A well-experienced Sámi entrepreneur wondered

*Would our services be enough to receive this kind of quality certificate? Are we 'Sámi enough'? – We do not want to offer our customers any circus tricks. We prefer to show old places and tell stories connected to these places.*

## Tourists

According to one of the interviewed hotel managers, 'the holy trinity' of tourism products in the Finnish Lapland consists of Santa, snowmobiles, and sledge-dogs. This list should probably be updated with a luxury type of glass igloos, which have become ever-more in demand because of the growth in northern lights tourism. Nevertheless, interviewees had noticed tourists' increas-

*'Would our services be enough to receive this kind of quality certificate? Are we 'Sámi enough'? – We prefer to show old places and tell stories connected to these places.'*

ing interest in local lifestyles. While not all the travellers necessarily know exactly where in Lapland (or the Nordic countries) they are staying, many find it important to receive correct information about the cultures, have personal experiences with the locals, and have authentic cultural experiences, for instance through home-visits.

There exists also an increased interest in Sámi handicrafts and other kinds of locally produced souvenirs. Entrepreneurs underlined the importance of offering culturally sensitive products and services in various price categories.

The interviewees agreed that foreign tourists are often interested in reindeer herding. Reindeer herding is perceived as a typical and authentic way of life and central part of local culture. Some stated that the reindeer might actually be more famous than the Sámi people. However, there are also tourists who wish to meet reindeer specifically in a Sámi context\*, and to learn about past and contemporary Sámi lifestyles.

Some of the travellers approach tourist information desks eager to find and see Sámi people. What can you answer to such a demand? This request is an awkward

\*Reindeer herding in Finland is not a Sámi-only livelihood, as in Sweden and Norway, but can be practiced by other local residents as well.

one, as the tourists tend to arrive with their own often stereotypical pre-conceptualizations of what the Sámi are like. Some of the tourists are unwilling to accept that Sáminess is something other than what they had imagined beforehand. One interviewee expressed the observation that non-Sámi tourism workers do not want to describe what Sáminess is, and neither do they see such an action as their role.

Tourists' interest in seeing and photographing the Sámi has led to many uncomfortable situations. Tourists enter people's backyards and photograph local homes. There are tourist buses that park in front of churches to wait for local people to exit the church in their traditional Sámi costumes.

*I have a personal experience of this from [a] funeral. It felt awful when the tourists came there to photograph us. The tourists must have thought that this was a real jackpot to get a picture of people in Sámi dress, but you sure do not want to have tourists present in these kinds of situations or events. Some people just do not think about these things.*

Another tangible and mundane demand has to do with trashcans and toilets. The lack of public toilets and trashcans is a sensitive matter for the local people, especially in Enontekiö and Inari. Interviewees were hoping for better infrastructure, as today

many tourists are knocking on their doors.

*Chinese tourists come to my home quite often to use the toilet. And we let them do it. However, isn't this also something that should be solved some other way? Isn't this also about sensitivity as well?*

The importance of a heightened cultural sensitivity needs to be stressed not only to tourism companies and developers, but to tourists as well. It is clear that responsible tourism behaviour requires developing basic infrastructure.





# Possibilities and challenges of culturally sensitive tourism



# Possibilities and challenges of culturally sensitive tourism

*'We want something else here than 'Winter-Wonderland and Christmas-Wonderland' products. However, for that we need innovative and capable companies.'*

This chapter presents the ideas, challenges, and opportunities in business and product development which were brought up in the interviews. Some of the ideas have been summarized in figure 2.

## On possibilities

The majority of the interviewees underlined the importance of sustainability, quality, calmness, and cultural products instead of expansive growth in tourism. A growing number of tourism enterprises are seeking to diversify their products, for instance by developing more accessible, year-round services and activities for families and older generations. Many found it important to embrace the calmness of their home area.

The interviews indicate how cultural knowledge and understanding have been increasing among tourism entrepreneurs. Something that was acceptable 10 years

ago is not so anymore. However, cultural exploitation has decreased, not vanished. Many seem to agree that the exploitation of Sámi cultures should be prohibited. Interviewees also called for more open discussion between the Sámi and the Finnish tourism actors in order to avoid the misuse of Sámi symbols and elements even more successfully than before.



Figure 2. Tourism stakeholders' ideas for tourism product and service development

Many interviewees mentioned that it is important for Sámi entrepreneurs to market Sámi cultures in their products and services. This would make the tourism market more culturally sustainable and sensitive. One tourism developer pointed out that whether to market such products is something that the entrepreneurs need to decide by themselves. The developer also suggested that if entrepreneurs start to offer cultural products, more tourists who are interested in them will start arriving in Lapland. Some interviewees also suggested that companies could test how culturally sensitive they are, and how to improve their sensitivity.

Storytelling is seen as an opportunity to share correct information about local cultures and land. It can also diversify the products so that companies are less dependent on unpredictable weather conditions and build more on their strengths. The interviewed companies wished to see more storytelling in touristic services and to see it become a part of the activities – not a separate activity. Most of the Sámi entrepreneurs emphasised their telling of their personal family histories to their customers, particularly in the reindeer safari and restaurant/hotel companies.

Moreover, tourist services based on handicrafts were also seen as an economic opportunity and an opportunity to bring more variety to the products and services offered to tourists, for example, in souvenir shops. Nowadays souvenir shops in Finnish Lapland tend to have more fake products that have been made outside of Lapland.

Interviewees saw benchmarking as an excellent opportunity to develop business and to learn from good practices elsewhere. One interviewee argued that it might not even be necessary to travel far in order to learn – even being a tourist in one's own hometown can help one to learn something new.

The interviewees also brought up the need for creating leaflets and other kinds of information material on Sámi cultures, taking photographs, dressing up for the Arctic winter, and traffic rules. Today there are tour operators and individual tourists who stop their cars in unsafe places when chasing northern lights or spotting reindeer. The visitors do not seem to recognize the risks and dangers they cause to themselves and others in traffic. Also, the ways in which tourists take pictures were found to be problematic, and several interviewees called for ethical guidelines for using cameras.

The guidelines could be presented in empathetic and humorous ways, instead of 'preaching' and filling the destinations with 'Do not...' signs\*. This type of guidance would be easier to grasp and remember. It is also necessary to explore which situations and settings are best for offering informational material; that is, in which ways the guests can be encouraged to behave responsibly before their arrival and during their stay. In addition to tourists, non-local tourism workers also tend to need guidance (see also p. 26).

## On challenges

In Finnish Lapland, there are many fewer Sámi tourism entrepreneurs than Finnish entrepreneurs, which causes challenges both in cultural and land-use issues. There are different opinions about using Sámi cultural symbols – especially the Sámi costume – in tourism. While some tourism companies do not see using Sámi symbols as problematic, the majority want to do things responsibly, respecting local cultures.

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\*In fact, Sámi Parliament have launched the Principles of Responsible and Ethically Sustainable Sámi Tourism in the form of pictures to reach more audience.



**'What annoys me the most is that the Sámi culture is confused with dog-sledding.'**

Even though responsibility has been increasingly emphasized in tourism development, there are still cases in which the Sámi costume and other cultural symbols are misused. One Sámi entrepreneur remarked:

*'What annoys me the most is that the Sámi culture is confused with dog-sledding. Some dog-sledding companies use lávvu (Sámi tents) or gohti (Sámi huts) and some even wear the luhkka (Sámi cape) during the husky safari. Although some people say that dog-sleds have a long tradition here, I think that these kinds of services should not be offered here. There are many other tourist products that portray the history of the traditions in Lapland in completely wrong ways.'*

Foreign tourists can still request and purchase the highly controversial and culturally insensitive 'Lapland baptism' in different places around Finnish Lapland. These ceremonies are run by 'shamans' who, wearing a Sami costume, baptise tourists. This is a typical example of a Sámi figure that has been created and presented by the Finnish tourism industry. It gives a false image of the Sámi – as something mystic and primitive – to travellers who have limited previous knowledge of Sáminess (see pp. 17-18). 'Lapland baptism' is not part of the Sámi culture.

*It was only few years ago ... we visited this one place close to the Arctic Circle. I was shocked to see that there they had Enontekiö's traditional Sámi clothing – which was dirty and torn. It seemed like nobody else reacted to this. But I was very upset and pointed out that this was highly inappropriate.*

Another Sámi entrepreneur described some bigger tourism companies in Lapland, owned by non-Sámi, in following way:

*Well, they always talk about responsible tourism ... However, the practice differs often from what the managers say in lecture halls. ... They have huskies and reindeer, a non-Sámi person is 'jumping' there wearing a Sámi costume, and there is a lávvu (Sámi tent) pitched in an ugly way.*

One interviewee confessed that despite one's sincere wish to do things with respect, one can never be sure of doing things respectfully enough:

*I imagine that many are cautious and do not dare to utilize the Sámi cultures in their products. It is treated as something sacred that should not be touched. It would be good to have more open dialogue on how this can be done in correct and acceptable ways. We need information how 'Sáminess' should not be sold. But I understand that this is a very sensitive question; it is by no means easy for companies to develop products of these things.*

One of the big challenges here is the question of Sámi identity, especially in situations where people have not been accepted for inclusion in the Sámi register. There are people who have been excluded from the register for whom the Sámi culture and being part of it have been a central part of their personal and family history. One tourism entrepreneur explains:

*My grandparents and I used to wear the traditional Sámi costume as part of everyday life. But now we have this question of the Sámi register – so I feel cautious. I have my costume, but I do not dare to use it as I am not in the Sámi register, although all this was part of my everyday life as a child. Back then it was not a touristic thing in any way.*

Another one experienced the situation in the following way:

*The history of Sáminess is so problematic here that many of us do not want to express being Sámi. For instance, I am also Sámi, but I do not bring it up in any context. Back in the day it was something that people were ashamed of and they tried to hide it. Therefore, people might not want to show it now either.*

One tourism developer stated that developing tourism products based on cultures is challenging. How can Sámis use their culture without having the feeling that they are

selling part of themselves? This question requires substantial sensitive consideration.

In Finnish Lapland, there are Finnish, Sámi, and foreign-owned companies. Many local companies share a concern that the presence of foreign actors can cause the deterioration of respect towards local cultures and nature. These companies might bring their own employees, food, and even Santa Claus with them. These actors do not always understand Finnish or English. They often lack the necessary knowledge of how to act in challenging weather conditions, and they do not necessarily know local values and habits. A Sámi tourism entrepreneur asked with disillusionment:

*What can they tell their guests if they themselves have arrived only one week before the tourists?*

Today, the foreign guides may gain their information about the Sámi culture from Wikipedia. Even in cases where guides take tourists to a Sámi community, they do not necessarily receive any kind of training. Therefore, it is necessary to develop good educational material about different places in Finnish Lapland, local cultures, and ways of life.

The use of handicrafts in tourism also comes with challenges. There are only a

few skilled crafters (Sámi or non-Sámi) interested in engaging in tourism. The interviewees described how the younger Sámi generations are showing less interest in doing handicrafts. For instance, in the Sámi Educational Centre in Inari, most of the students taking Sámi handicraft courses are Finnish. At the same time, the handicrafts taught at the local schools are from Finnish traditions.

One Sámi interviewee pointed out how the restrictive rules of Sámi duodji can be challenging even to Sámi handcrafters. This interviewee suggested that the Sámi duodji label could be complemented with a 'lighter' label for those products that fall outside the official definition of duodji at the moment. Without more inclusive labels, the Sámi might perceive that there is no freedom to create new Sámi products. Another person asked for a label for Sámi handicrafts that would be more inclusive and that could also accept as Sámi handicrafts the works done by those who are not Sámi but have married into the Sámi community.

While tourists are interested in visiting people's homes, many interviewees hesitate to consider the possibilities of turning home-visits into real tourism products. Today only a few companies welcome guests

in their homes as these kinds of visits are seen to disrupt family life and privacy. How to develop a well-functioning way of doing home-visits?

## Examples

One example of the process toward heightened cultural sensitivity in tourism is that hotels and safari companies in Enontekiö no longer welcome tourists with shamans, but often with Sámi yoiks. However, the local companies are having difficulty finding Sámi artists who are willing to perform yoiks in front of tourists. This is not surprising; interviewees at Sámi-owned companies explained that yoiking is a special cultural feature which brings together and positions the Sámi in their communities. Yoik includes cultural knowledge, and it is intertwined with history, places, and ancestors. A Sámi entrepreneur who is a yoiker pointed out that misusing a yoik is far worse than misusing Sámi clothing, as yoiks are so personal. The Sámi-owned tourist companies that perform yoiks often build their programme on their own family yoiks.

Arctic Outdoor, a project funded by the European Union in 2017–2019, produced a [leaflet](#) that includes basic information and instructions for travelling safely and behaving appropriately in Finnish Lapland. The

leaflet is prepared with visual drawings and a clear colour code: green for dos and red for don'ts. The municipality of Inari and the Inari Municipal Business & Development Nordica formed part of the project, and the leaflet has been distributed in the Inari region. The interviews made for the ARCTISEN project indicate how this kind of leaflet would be welcomed in other tourist locations in Lapland as well. The leaflet should include the idea of sensitivity towards local cultures and towards Sámi cultures in particular. In spring 2020, the [Instructions for responsible tourism in Lapland](#), by House of Lapland and Regional Council of Lapland, were published. These guidelines ask tourists to respect local cultures, local population and nature during their visit in Lapland.

The new ethical guidelines by the Sámi Parliament offer a much-needed support and framework for envisioning and creating new culturally sensitive tourism products and services. The interviewed Finnish companies had, generally speaking, the interest and the desire to do things right when developing tourism products which use elements of Sámi cultures. For example, DMOs (Destination Management Organisations) might not use Sámi cultures in their marketing, as doing so could potentially benefit the 'wrong' actors – that is, the non-

Sámi – and lead tourism to become insensitive and irresponsible. Most of all, today's tourism companies in Finnish Lapland appear to be aware about the inappropriateness of wearing Sámi costumes if you are not Sámi. Instead of choosing to tell about Sámi cultures by themselves, the non-Sámi entrepreneurs try to direct their customers to Sámi tourism entrepreneurs. While many non-Sámi companies are already cooperating closely with the Sámi, there exists an obvious demand to strengthen the possibilities of this kind of cooperation.

*'It would be good to have more open dialogue on how this can be done in correct and acceptable ways.'*



# Final reflections on future tourism development



## Final reflections on future tourism development

Based on the interviews, it can be said that the emphasis of tourism in Finland has been slowly moving toward more sustainable and sensitive approaches, building on local cultures and on what they genuinely have to offer. There is more interest and desire to recognize and respect local cultures than before. The concluding chapter presents some of the main anticipated challenges and successes in future tourism development in Finnish Lapland.

### Seasons and scale in tourism

A new challenge is the growing number of tourists in Finnish Lapland. In some parts of the area, tourism can already be described in terms of overtourism. As the tourist numbers grow, companies are seeking innovative ways of constructing new infrastructure and even building houses and roads inside the reindeer herding areas.

In Rovaniemi overtourism can be seen, among other ways, in rapidly increasing numbers of Airbnb accommodations<sup>37</sup>. Rovaniemi and Levi, in particular, are seen today as big, busy destinations that offer a wide range of 'Winter Wonderland and Christmas Wonderland' products (including huskies, igloos, and fake Sámi dresses).

In the Inari village, where tourism has increased significantly, some of the local interviewees feel that there are way too many guests, who even trespass on private backyards and try to see what is inside private homes. In the words of one interviewee, in Inari the number of visitors is 67 times that of the local population:

*Tourism infrastructure is growing ... but at the same time, children are in temporary school because of indoor air problems and it is not known whether a new school will be built ... that is, the local services suffer. Here the*

*tolerance of the locals has diminished so much because of home backyards constantly being violated. People are being photographed from windows as well as children on their way to school or nursery without parental permission. And while tourists walk in the middle of the road, people's tolerance is at a point that could explode. Littering is also starting to be a terrible problem. Inari Village has been lost to tourism.... The tourism infrastructure is grown here, but not the local infrastructure. It should be possible to influence what kind of tourism and how much there is.*

In the Enontekiö municipality, people emphasise their wish to avoid this kind of progress, and instead remain small and authentic, with quality instead of growth. A tourism entrepreneur in this region stated in the interview that despite their wishes, they might be also heading towards some heavy years of growth.

*We must learn from others' mistakes; like Iceland used to be a place where people went for silence and calmness and nature, and then it got packed with tourists.*

According to another interviewee, conflicts could be avoided by bringing together different kinds of experts in the planning phase of tourism development. It is also seen as important that the development should aim at tourism that is small-scale and not mass tourism, which would be disruptive to local social patterns and life.

Seasonality is also often seen as a challenge, especially to acquiring an experienced work-force. Nevertheless, it also has its benefits. For example, in Enontekiö, many entrepreneurs take a break in February until mid-March to get some rest, and in other areas, the 'normal' holiday seasons are May and October. The high seasons are so busy that many want to take a complete break, enjoy the serenity and purity of Lapland, or maybe travel to warmer latitudes. This is also a time when the local nature can rest and recover.

## Local and other actors

One of the challenges is the growing number of foreign tourism companies and guides operating in the area. It is unclear what kind

of information they share with their customers about local cultures and customs. Generally speaking, seasonal guest employees often lack correct information about the local ways of life.

Many of the interviewed entrepreneurs found local employers and workers to both be important assets and provide an important opportunity to support local lifestyles and cultures. In their views, local staff could guarantee that local cultural traditions are being used in responsible, sensitive ways.

Moreover, the respondents emphasised the policy-makers' responsibility to help and support local SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises). Local companies are rooted in the area, which tends to lead to respectful and sensitive use of cultural and natural resources.

## Sámi cultural elements in tourism

The main challenge in the tourism business is the misuse of Sámi cultural markers by Finnish companies in their tourism business activities (see pp. 24-25). Most of the interviewees agreed that it is not appropriate to use Sámi cultural markers to advertise tourist services in which no Sámi is involved. Hence, they were hoping that local cultures would no longer be used in misleading and

disrespectful ways in tourism services, for instance by wearing fake Sámi clothing or using shaman drums.

On a positive note, there are more and more tourism companies who subcontract Sámi entrepreneurs to offer services based on Sámi cultures – instead of trying to provide those services by themselves. Non-Sámi tourism companies have decreased the use of Sámi cultural markers in their marketing, and on a more general level, the local tourism actors see sustainable, responsible, and culturally sensitive tourism as increasingly important. Also, the [Regional Tourism Strategy of Lapland for 2020–2023](#) (in Finnish) emphasises that it is important to take into account and follow the Sámi Parliament's guidelines for responsible and ethically sustainable Sámi tourism.

Many interviewed companies' representatives welcomed the idea of a common label for Sámi tourism. This label would indicate that the service has Sámi origins, or that it respects Sámi cultures. There is also a need for modern and up-to-date material (booklets, brochures in paper and online forms) about Sámi cultures that could be shared everywhere in Lapland.

One of the ongoing challenges is the struggle about who has – or has not – been accepted to the Sámi electoral roll (see

more on p. 13-14 and p. 25-26). There are people who, despite their official Sámi status, perceive themselves as being from a Sámi family. At a personal level this can be a difficult, even traumatic, situation, which can be a challenge when developing tourism services and products.

## Diverse tourism destinations in Lapland

Tourists seem to be increasingly interested in culture-based activities across Finnish Lapland. Hence, there are great possibilities for developing cultural tourism products throughout the region. Today, the Sámi and other local cultures are represented in diverse ways in different locations in Lapland.

In Inari, where the Sámi Parliament and other Sámi institutions are located, the Sámi cultures are a great attraction for tourists. The neighbouring municipality, Utsjoki, also seems to be profiling itself less through salmon fishing and more as a Sámi destination.

Sevettijärvi, which is situated in the Inari municipality, is tightly connected to the Skolt Sámi culture and to their Orthodox religion. In Sevettijärvi there are some small Sámi companies that offer snowmobile and reindeer safaris for smaller groups. In the vil-

lage of Nellim, there are both Skolt and Inari Sámi. The village is remotely located and has focused on nature-based tourism activities. However, after several decades, there is a new road to Nellim, which may bring more visitors to the area.

Enontekiö is seen as a nature destination, where travellers can experience quietness and peacefulness. It can be seen as a special region in that there are no ski resorts. Tourism actors in Enontekiö are interested in creating new tourism products and services based on local cultures.

Levi is a ski resort which has the potential for presenting Sámi cultures in sustainable and sensitive ways. For instance, the annual Alpine Ski World Cup could bring international visibility to Sámi cultures. However, today there are only two companies run by Sámi and no Sámi subcontractors. Hence it would be necessary to support Sámi tourism activities in Levi.

Rovaniemi has a lot of potential to develop culture- and art-based tourism. A newly founded network aims to bring together different actors, to create new culture- and art-based products and services, and to disseminate knowledge about them. Lately the visibility of art and culture has been increasing in Rovaniemi.

Since hundreds of years ago, travellers in Lapland have been impressed by its ascetic, beautiful nature and by its people. Nature and local cultures continue to be interconnected in tourism in Finnish Lapland. Tourism actors in Lapland seem to understand responsibility and sustainability in terms of environmental and cultural wellbeing. The first steps toward cultural sensitivity have already been taken. How can the importance for respect for local cultures become as obvious as that of the fight against environmental change? Environmental and cultural wellbeing go hand in hand, even when it comes to tourism.







## Notes and references



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## Notes

1. Saari et al., in press.
2. Kugapi, 2014; Lüthje, 1995; 1998; Mällinen, 2014; Niskala & Ridanpää, 2016; Saari, 2017.
3. Aikio, 1987; Johansen-Lampsijärvi et al., 1991; Lehtola 1999; Saamelaiskomitean mietintö, 1973a; 1973b; see also Lüthje 1995; 1998, p. 37; Sámi Parliament, 2018; Varanka, 2001.
4. Olsen et al., 2019.
5. Niskala-Ridanpää, 2016; Saari, 2017.
6. Sámi Parliament, 2015.
7. Act on the Sámi Parliament, 1995.
8. See e.g., Aikio, 1985.
9. Ilola, 1997; Mäkinen, 1983; Partanen, 1992.
10. Markkanen, 1987.
11. Lüthje, 1995, pp. 25–26.
12. Lehtola, 1994; Mazzullo, 2017; Valkonen, 2009.
13. See Valkeapää, 1984.
14. Lehtola, 1994.
15. See Lüthje, 1995, pp. 25–30.
16. Niia, 1992; Niskala & Ridanpää, 2016.
17. See Lüthje, 1995; Varanka, 2001, p. 46; Viken, 2006.
18. See Lüthje, 1995.
19. Saamelaiskomitean Mietintö, 1973a; 1973b; Aikio, 1999; Niskala & Ridanpää, 2016.
20. Kugapi, 2014; Sámi Parliament, 2018.
21. Saamelaiskomitean Mietintö, 1973a; 1973b; Aikio, 1987; Johansen-Lampsijärvi et al., 1991; see Lüthje, 1998, p. 37; Sámi Parliament, 2018.
22. Niskala-Ridanpää, 2016; Saari, 2017.
23. See also Lehtola, 2015.
24. Valkonen, Valkonen & Koivurova, 2017.
25. Junka-Aikio, 2014, p. 11; see Valkonen et al., 2017, pp. 527–28.
26. See Junka-Aikio, 2014, pp. 15–16; Valkonen et al., 2017, p. 534.
27. Pääkkönen, 2008, pp. 216–221; see Valkonen et al., 2017.
28. Junka-Aikio, 2014, p. 17.
29. Junka-Aiko, 2014, pp. 17–20; Valkonen et al., 2017, p. 533.
30. Junka-Aikio, 2014, p. 11; Valkonen et al., 2017, pp. 537, 539–40.
31. Valkonen et al., 2017, pp. 531–32, 540.
32. Junka-Aikio, 2014, p. 19.
33. Nyssönen, 2007, pp. 52–53; Valkonen, 2014.
34. Sámi Parliament, 2016.
35. Sámi Parliament, 2018, p. 20.
36. See Sámi Parliament, 2018, pp. 13–14.
37. Jutila et al. 2020.

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## Toward culturally sensitive tourism

A report from Finnish Lapland

The report offers an overview of tourism development in Finnish Lapland with a focus on cultural sensitivity. What does cultural sensitivity mean? Why it is important to discuss culturally sensitive tourism in Finnish Lapland? How could cultural sensitivity be enhanced, and what kinds of challenges might it present? These questions are approached with a special emphasis on the Sámi cultures. The publication is based on 44 interviews with tourism actors across Finnish Lapland.

