

## **Book chapter IV**

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## **The connection between nature and Sámi identity: the role of ecotourism**

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### **Abstract**

As the importance of nature conservation is more stressed in the public discourse, ecotourism can be a valuable tool to spread information about nature conservation. The indigenous Sámi tourism entrepreneurs mostly operate in nature-based contexts, both in tourism and otherwise. This study is based on 16 semi-structured interviews with entrepreneurs and other stakeholders involved in Sámi and local tourism in northern Sweden and Norway. The analysis of the interviews revealed several foci connected to ecotourism. The respondents talked about nature and sustainability related to Sámi and other local tourism. The role of certifications was also mentioned. The interviews have been analysed based on previously conceptualised themes that are present in Sámi tourism marketing as well as previous research, mainly related to indigenous tourism and authenticity. The comparison between the themes that were previously identified, and the interview data, revealed the presence of all of the themes in the interviews, in addition to four new themes focusing on nature, sustainability, ‘fake’ Sámi culture and education or information conveyed to the tourists. These themes show how Sámi culture and identity are connected to nature and the role of ecotourism and certifications in supporting the protection of nature and Sámi culture, while, at the same time, educating the tourists visiting northern Scandinavia.

## Introduction

As the concern for human-induced climate change is gaining attention with tourism at the forefront of the debate, the role of ecotourism gains new relevancy. For small companies in northern Sweden, tourism can be a good way to make a living or to integrate another occupation, such as for Sámi tourism entrepreneurs and one of their main occupations, which is reindeer herding (Leu, Eriksson, & Müller, 2018; Müller & Viken, 2017).

The Sámi are an indigenous population of Europe, who have been traditionally living in an area called Sápmi. This region stretches from Norway to Russia (Om Sápmi - Samer.se, n.d.). Sámi people speak different languages (De samiska språken - Samer.se, n.d.) and the exact size of the population is not known; an estimation is about 100 000 Sámi people in the whole of Sápmi (Samerna i siffror - Samer.se, n.d.). The Sámi have operated in tourism differently depending on the country of residence. For instance, from the late 1970s in Sweden and Finland, the recognition of Sámi culture and the establishment of Sámi institutions favoured funding and the support for creating tourism enterprises (Winsa, 2007).

Treatment of Sámi culture in the context of tourism has not been uniform, for example Finland is usually considered to be a negative example, where cultural exploitation has been particularly negative and prolonged (e.g. Pettersson, 2006; Saarinen, 1999). Recently, the Finnish Sámi parliament published some ethical guidelines for the use of Sámi culture in tourism (Heith, 2019; Samediggi, n.d.). Other guidelines and certifications have been previously mapped by the Swedish Sámi Parliament (Sametinget, 2010) and the current situation has been charted by Olsen et al. (2019). The Sámi have been engaged in different activities for substance, some examples are fishing and reindeer herding (Näringar - Samer.se, n.d.). The latter is an exclusive right of the Sámi population in both Sweden and Norway, but not in Finland (Müller & Viken, 2017; Pettersson, 2006). As previously mentioned, there is a Sámi parliament and this institution is present in each of the Nordic countries. There are also other institutions that are specifically connected to Sámi matters (Organisationer - Samer.se, n.d.).

Tourism development can bring different issues related to marketing representations (e.g. de Bernardi, 2019), linking indigenous populations to nature and primitivism (Fonneland, 2013; Olsen, 2006), and to a traditional identity (Pashkevich & Keskitalo, 2017). Another connection is nature stewardship (Koot, 2018) depending on the context. This link between Indigenous populations, such as the Sámi, and nature has been influenced by discourses on the North (Pashkevich & Keskitalo, 2017) and by a romantic view on how Indigenous peoples live

(Condevaux, 2009; Stasch, 2014), and through strong historical dimensions (Valkonen & Valkonen, 2014).

The deep relation between nature and Sámi traditional activities is also part of the tourism experiences offered and it is also expressed in the acquisition of tourism certifications and labels. One example is the Nature's Best label from Sweden (Natures Best – About, n.d.). Other examples are the previously mentioned guidelines for tourism operations recently created by the Finnish Sámi parliament (Heith, 2019) and the Sámi tourism label that was created in Sweden called Sápmi Experience. Labels have been identified as a good way to protect Sámi culture and to provide a direction in Sámi tourism (Sametinget, 2010). Labels can also potentially support the tourism operations of the Sámi (de Bernardi, Kugapi, & Lüthje, 2017). Sustainability has also been identified as an important aspect of Sámi-related labelling schemes (Sametinget, 2010; VisitSapmi – kriterierna, n.d.). Considering these factors, this chapter investigates the conceptualisation of nature and sustainability, together with other themes that emerged from the interviews with 16 entrepreneurs and other actors operating in both Sámi and other local tourism in Sweden and Norway. The aim is to understand the role of ecotourism and labels in Sámi tourism.

### **Ecotourism – a brief overview**

Positive aspects of ecotourism include the involvement of the locals, environmental protection, and profits remaining in the area (Gale & Hill, 2009). However, there are negative effects to ecotourism (Das & Chatterjee, 2015), such as damage and disturbances (Gale & Hill, 2009), land appropriation (Bluwstein, 2017) and frustration with how ecotourism is defined, implemented and managed (Cobbinah, 2015). Ecotourists do not always visit because of nature protection, but to inflate their ego. Furthermore, “ecotourism encourages increased use of natural areas and greater penetration into sensitive environments, thereby putting the very future of indigenous tourism industries at risk” (Mihalic 2000, as cited in Gale & Hill, 2009, p. 4). Despite these potential negative effects, ecotourism still has a strong potential, but this depends on how it is established and managed (Das & Chatterjee, 2015; Wang, Cater, & Low, 2016; Stronza, Hunt, & Fitzgerald, 2019). The concept has been debated for long and academic discourse may have contributed negatively to the formulation of an established definition (Fennell, 2001). On the other hand, ecotourism definitions seem to revolve around three main criteria (Weaver & Lawton, 2007, p. 170, as cited in Gale & Hill, 2009, p. 5):

- 1) Nature-based attractions
- 2) Focus on learning and education
- 3) Based on principles of economic, social and environmental sustainability

Furthermore, a definition of ecotourism should also focus on the values of the visitors (Gale & Hill, 2009). The role of ecotourism experiences in promoting sustainability-related values have been described as very important (Higham & Carr, 2002; Walker & Moscardo, 2014), and could also be used to segment visitors or to adapt activities (Zografos & Allcroft, 2007). People also consider social values important in relation to community-based ecotourism experiences, such as feeling special and making a good impression on others (Kim & Park, 2017). Ecotourism can also be an incentive for conservation for locals in certain areas (Boley & Green, 2016; Stronza, Hunt, & Fitzgerald, 2019) and a tool for cultural protection (Masud et al., 2017; Stronza, Hunt, & Fitzgerald, 2019). Jamrozny and Lawonk (2017) have shown that emotional values, novelty and knowledge are important motivations related to ecotourism. Ecotourism criteria are a tool that can render this form of tourism more beneficial (Gössling, 2006).

### **Labels and Ecotourism in Sámi tourism**

Sámi tourism entrepreneurs work in different contexts with tourism, some are more culture-related while other enterprises focus more on nature (Leu, Eriksson, & Müller, 2018). This is also related to the ACE framework (Adventure Culture Ecotourism), which implies that different companies operate in ecotourism to a higher or smaller degree, depending on the activities and how much these are related to either adventure or culture (Fennell, 2004, pp. 28-31). Considering these different dimensions of the ACE framework, it is important to discuss the role of labels to establish some criteria for ecotourism.

In Sweden there are different institutions and labels dealing with ecotourism. The most important is the “Swedish Ecotourism Association” (Ekoturismföreningen in Swedish), which created one of the oldest ecotourism labels in the world: Nature’s Best (Naturturismföretagen – Nature’s Best, n.d.; Sametinget, 2010). Nature’s Best is also the basis for the Sámi tourism label Sápmi Experience (Olsen, 2016). The fact that Nature’s Best is so old and connected to a Sámi tourism label is the reason why it was chosen as the focus for this chapter. The Swedish Ecotourism Association has about 80 members (Naturturismföretagen – Medlemmar, n.d.) and around 50 companies are certified with Nature’s Best (Natures Best - Godkända företag, n.d.). The Ecotourism Association has recently changed structure and has become “Nature tourism companies” (Naturturismföretagaren in Swedish) (Redaktionen, 2018, July) to include a

broader spectrum of companies and highlight its collective structure (Naturturismföretagen – Om oss, n.d.). This means that nature-based companies may be confused with ecotourism companies (Stronza, Hunt, & Fitzgerald, 2019), potentially undermining the efforts of ecotourism companies; Nature's Best has a key role in highlighting this distinction.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) manages sustainable tourism criteria and certification bodies (GST council – about us, n.d.). In 2019, the GSTC made a revision of its criteria, which implied also a change in Nature's Best. For instance, a criterium for Sámi tourism was added (Naturturismföretagen – Nature's Best, n.d.). The label is based on the cooperation between a series of stakeholders: the tourism industry, landowners and other institutions and is based on six basic principles which are: to contribute to the economy of rural areas, the adaptation to the environment for the whole experience, to actively protect nature and culture, the quality of guiding, quality assurance, and hosting (Naturturismföretagen – Nature's Best, n.d.). The Nature's Best has been criticised for missing third-party auditing (Haaland & Aas, 2010), which also highlights the main difference between a 'certification' and a 'label' (FAO, n.d.). In this case, the focus will be on labels.

Labels can have an important role for Sámi culture and for other indigenous cultures (de Bernardi, Kugapi, & Lüthje, 2017) for instance as a way to renegotiate authenticity and indigeneity (Keskitalo et al., 2019). Labels are also used to distinguish indigenous handicrafts produced in a certain way (de Bernardi, Kugapi, & Lüthje, 2017; Dlaske, 2014; Keskitalo et al., 2019). On the other hand, this kind of scheme can also be a tool for a company to evaluate its operations in light of environmental sustainability and respect for nature, as discussed later in the chapter. Labels can also be used to show to potential tourists and ecotourists the work that is being done (Minoli, Goode, & Smith, 2015) and to promote awareness (Pencarelli, Splendiani, & Fraboni, 2016), even though the appeal is usually for a smaller niche of engaged tourists (Karlsson & Dolnicar, 2016). Certifications and labels can also be used as marketing tools (Suzer, 2019; Testa et al., 2015). On the other hand, 'best practice' approaches are dependent on local context and on the support of policy (Fletcher, Pforr, & Brueckner, 2016).

Labelling schemes involving indigenous culture should be flexible and relevant for the indigenous population, planning power should stay in their hands and certifications should be collaborative projects (Vivanco, 2007). Furthermore, education of visitors has been identified as an important factor in promoting sustainability through tourism in indigenous contexts (Walker & Moscardo, 2016).

## Methods

This study is based on the analysis of 16 interviews conducted with different actors operating in tourism in Sweden and Norway. The majority of the interviewees, 11, are women and half of the respondents were companies and the other half stakeholders such as DMOs. Companies and DMOs were interviewed with different interview guides. Due to several constraints, 7 interviews were completed by phone, 1 on Skype without video, 3 on Skype with video and 5 in person, 1 of which was completed by a senior researcher working for the ARCTISEN project (Culturally Sensitive Tourism in the Arctic). This one interview was of course different from the others, but the consistency of the data was a source of additional trustworthiness. The findings are also consistent with other project's findings (Olsen et al., 2019). The ARCTISEN project is funded through the EU's Northern Periphery and the Arctic Programme. The aim is to support local and indigenous companies in the creation of sustainable tourism products (ARCTISEN, n.d.). This research was not funded by ARCTISEN, but there has been a close cooperation.

The respondents were both Sámi and non-Sámi and almost all of the interviews were in Swedish except for 2 that were in English and 1 that was a mix between English and Swedish. The respondents chose the language. The typical interview for a company was close to 1 hour long and for stakeholders it was 40 minutes. The interviews are presented here as a numeric code and direct quotes have also been kept short (Davies, 2008, pp. 59-60; Hall, 2014), both measures are adopted to keep the participants anonymous. The interviews were semi-structured, and all were tape-recorded and, so far, partly transcribed.

In a previous study published by the author (de Bernardi, 2019a), different themes related to the tourism discourse and to how indigenous populations are framed in order to be interesting for the tourists (e.g. Pettersson, 2006) were identified (Table 1). The same themes were used as a coding matrix for the interviews with open coding for new themes to provide the author with a guide for interpretation and to see if the same themes would be also present in the interviews. New themes emerged as the respondents focused on nature and its importance for tourism as well as its protection. This included the role of labels and therefore ecotourism was used as a frame of interpretation for the interview data.

Table 1 The themes identified in marketing (from de Bernardi, 2019a)

<b>Theme 1:</b> Connection to nature/harmony with nature/peacefulness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connection to untouched nature</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 2:</b> Connection to reindeer
<b>Theme 3:</b> Connection to the past
<b>Theme 4:</b> The use of friendly language
<b>Theme 5:</b> <i>Authenticity</i> as a noun or adjective
<b>Theme 6:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Sámi costume</li> <li>• Sámi huts or tents</li> <li>• Traditional singing connected to indigenous populations or the traditional Sámi <i>yoik</i> chant</li> <li>• <i>Handicrafts</i></li> <li>• <i>Food</i></li> </ul>
<b>Theme 7:</b> Joining the Sámi
<b>Theme 8:</b> Modernity and useful information for tourists

The interview transcripts were analysed by thematic analysis informed by abduction, which implies a constant dialogue between a pre-existing theoretical framework and the data that is being analysed (Graneheim, Lindgren, & Lundman, 2017). This process was informed by an approach called Critical Realism, which is based on a single reality with multiple interpretations. The goal of an abductive approach is the ability to describe what is constitutive for a certain phenomenon (e.g. Danermark et al., 2002).

## Findings

During the coding process, the following codes were added (Table 2). The themes related to *handicrafts* and *food* were also added during the coding of the interviews and are therefore in italics in Table 1.

Table 2 The themes that emerged from the interview analysis

<b>Theme 9:</b> ‘fake’ Sámi culture
<b>Theme 10:</b> Sustainability
<b>Theme 11:</b> The size of the company
<b>Theme 12:</b> Education

Table 3 shows in which interviews the themes were identified, just to provide a sense of the themes’ frequency.



Themes 1-8 were previously identified (de Bernardi, 2019a) and there are a few differences with the interview data. Themes 4 and 7 were less prominent in the interviews, since both are more generally used as marketing tools (e.g. de Bernardi, 2019a). Theme 4 was mentioned while exemplifying how the tourists visit those areas “to meet us” (050108). Theme 8 relates to contemporary Sámi life, so it is very common when describing everyday operations.

Table 3 Summary of the themes present in which interview

Theme	Interview
<b>Theme 1:</b> Connection to nature/harmony with nature/peacefulness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connection to untouched nature (e.g.,).</li> </ul>	030102; 030122; 050107; 050108; 050209; 050109; 050110; 050120; 050121; 050123; 060103; 060111; 060119
<b>Theme 2:</b> Connection to reindeer	030102; 030122; 040124; 050107; 050108; 050209; 050109; 050110; 050120; 050121; 050123; 050130; 060111; 060119
<b>Theme 3:</b> Connection to the past	030122; 040124; 050107; 050108; 050209; 050109; 050110; 050120; 050121; 050123; 050130; 060103; 060111; 060119
<b>Theme 4:</b> The use of friendly language	050108
<b>Theme 5:</b> Authenticity as a noun or adjective	030122; 040124; 050108; 050110; 050121; 050123; 050130; 060103; 060111; 060119
<b>Theme 6:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Sámi costume</li> <li>• Sámi huts or tents</li> <li>• Traditional singing connected to indigenous populations or the traditional Sámi <i>yoik</i> chant</li> <li>• Handicrafts</li> <li>• Food</li> </ul>	030122; 040124; 050107; 050108; 050209; 050109; 050110; 050120; 050121; 050123; 060111; 060119
<b>Theme 7:</b> Joining the Sámi	040124; 050120
<b>Theme 8:</b> Modernity and useful information for tourists	030102; 030122; 040124; 050107; 050108; 050209; 050109; 050110; 050120; 050121; 050123; 050130; 060103; 060111; 060119
<b>Theme 9:</b> ‘fake’ Sámi culture	030102; 030122; 040124; 050108; 050209; 050109; 050110; 050121; 050123; 050130; 060111
<b>Theme 10:</b> Sustainability	030122; 040124; 050108; 050209; 050109; 050120; 050123; 050130; 060111
<b>Theme 11:</b> The size of the company	030122; 040124; 050108; 050120; 050121; 050123; 050130; 060103; 060111
<b>Theme 12:</b> Education	030102; 040124; 050107; 050108; 050109; 050209; 050110; 050120; 050121; 050123; 060119

### *Sustainability, nature and the role of ecotourism*

Ecotourism is related to many topics touched on by the respondents. Nature is described as a connection to the surroundings, and this is also closely related to reindeer herding (Theme 2) which is described as “part of the nature” (Int 030122) and also that the tourism operations of the Sámi “build on nature, so herding, the animals, how they move” (Int 050209, author’s translation). Another example is that the use of the local environment is based on entrepreneurs being “out in nature [...] use it all the time. Animals and nature. The whole time. It is what is talked about, it is what is shown” (Int 050109, author’s translation). Interviewees also describe that nature is very close to Sámi culture as “it has of course always lived very close to [...] nature” (Int 050110, author’s translation). This connection to nature due to the way of life of the Sámi also connects to the theme of sustainability (Theme 11). For instance, one respondent thought that there was some positive tendency connected to being proud of Sámi culture and that entrepreneurs really want “to do Sámi tourism in a sustainable way and I think the sustainable is also very important” (Int 030122). Another respondent expressed that the way of living described for this particular company and family is “a sustainable way to live” (Int 050123, author’s translation). Sustainability is also something that reflects in how the operations are organised, and this respondent works “very much with sustainability and then it includes to meet at step one to be able to develop something” (Int 040124, author’s translation).

Sustainability is also connected to labels. For instance, one of the respondents answered on a question related to the labels saying that it is about “commercialising the right and sustainable way” (Int 030122). Another respondent expresses how the company is certified as “an ecological company” and the label is also a “tool to think right and steer which phases you should work with and how you do” (Int 050209, author’s translation). Many of the companies report to have acquired or to be working with Nature’s Best (Int 050209, author’s translation; Int 050110, author’s translation). Labels are described as a “guarantee that that company [...] makes an effort [and that] one cares for what the certification represents” (Int 050110, author’s translation). Another company has also gone through “a sustainability certification” (Int 050123, author’s translation). Labels are a way “to act in a very ethical way and to preserve environment” (Int 050130).

Other important themes related to sustainability from a cultural viewpoint are about how Sámi culture is presented. Several of the respondents mention the importance of education (Theme 12) and of transmitting knowledge about the Sámi (Int 050110; 050121; 050221; 050123, 060119). Labels are also a way to “get inspiration” and to “act sustainably” (Int 060111,

author's translation) and to check one's operations (Int 050209; 050120; 050121; 050123; 060111). Labels are also a way to protect both tangible and intangible aspects of culture. Some respondents indicated that labels would be a good way to protect Sámi culture, for instance handicrafts (Int 050108).

### *Other themes*

Many respondents used the word 'authentic' or the synonym 'genuine' (both in Swedish and in English) to describe how they see an enterprise representing Sámi culture ethically (Table 3), even though there was no mention in the interview guide. Sámi culture is described as very old with a long history, yet modern. There are some recognisable markers such as the traditional Sámi costume, the reindeer and the traditional Sámi tent (Table 3). The new themes that emerged in the interview analysis are all intertwined. Many of the respondents referred to a 'fake' Sámi culture, which for them is embodied in the tourism industry of Rovaniemi, Finland, which has been often considered a bad example of how Sámi culture is treated in tourism (Pettersson, 2006; Saarinen, 1999; Olsen et al., 2019). An example is one respondent saying that people "want genuine and authentic experiences. Not, not like Rovaniemi Sámi" (Int 030102, author's translation). The connection to presenting what many of the respondents consider to be 'real' ('authentic') Sámi culture is connected to sustainability, to the information given and to the fact that tourists are educated in some way. The respondents also describe the operations as being usually small-scale, which in some cases are seen as a way in which the company can be authentic (Int 030102; 050123; 050130) and more sustainable (Int 040124; Sametinget, 2010).

## **Discussion**

The interviews are a way to gain knowledge on the indigenous peoples' viewpoint on ecotourism and conservation (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2009). As previously mentioned, the connection to nature is a prominent theme when it comes to Sámi tourism marketing (e.g. Olsen, 2006; Pashkevich & Keskitalo, 2017; Prestholdt & Nordbø, 2015). Valkonen and Valkonen (2014) have described how nature in Sámi context is connected to two dimensions, one discursive and more related to worldview and myths and one related to practices. Both of these dimensions are present in the interviews.

This connection is also related to the conceptualisation of wilderness, especially regarding the Arctic areas (e.g. Saarinen, 2005; Saarinen 2019) and the indigenous populations living there (Shultis & Heffner, 2016). For instance, the discourses of conservation and traditional use.

Furthermore, the Arctic is also described as a last frontier, far from civilisation where primitive populations live (Keskitalo, 2004) and this is also connected to a discourse of environmental protection (Haila, 1997; Shultis & Heffner, 2016). The ‘indigenous stewardship’ discourse is also common and is grounded in the fact that indigenous populations are caretakers of nature (Fennell, 2008; Pashkevich & Keskitalo, 2017). Wilderness is a conceptualisation of nature that can impede tourism conservation efforts by placing the focus on nature as separate from human activities, downplaying issues such as waste production or air travel (Brookes, 2001). On the other hand, there can be synergy between wilderness and conservation (Saarinen, 2005). Wilderness was also mentioned by two interviewees as something people expect (Int 050110), when in reality these areas are ‘bruksmark’ in Swedish, which means agricultural land (Int 060111). Another respondent instead described the wilderness issue by saying: “yeah yeah wilderness, but what is wilderness?” (Int 050209).

The connection to nature has been related to a creation of discourses from within the northern areas in which actors such as Sámi tourism entrepreneurs are active participants (Keskitalo, & Schilar, 2017). Even in the case of marketing representations, the Sámi exercise counter-discursive action by presenting their modernity for the potential tourists (de Bernardi, 2019a). The reason that certain elements of Sámi culture are emphasised in marketing is because such elements are part of Sámi culture (de Bernardi, 2019b) and not just a way to present Sámi culture that is in line with dominant discourses, as discussed by Heldt Cassel (2019). As previously mentioned, labels can protect both tangible and intangible elements of culture, and both examples are mentioned by respondents. Handicrafts and other cultural elements are examples. This implies that the connection to nature expressed by respondents is something that is closely connected to their identity and to Sámi identity (Valkonen & Valkonen, 2014). Nature is also the place where the Sámi have been living and operating for generations.

When it comes to presenting nature as wilderness, it has been shown that many people connect wilderness to something that is different from their everyday context (Conti, & Heldt Cassel, 2019), and is therefore worth visiting. Nature is not wild, because nature is exploited one way or another (Keskitalo, & Schilar, 2017; Keskitalo et al., 2019), which is why an approach based on ecotourism and certifications is important in this context. The protection of nature has been identified as an important priority in the context of Sámi tourism as well as a connection between tourism work and Sámi culture, which can be a good way to spread information (Sametinget, 2010). As previously mentioned, environmental values are important in the context of ecotourism (Higham & Carr, 2002; Walker & Moscardo, 2014). Values are then also

connected to tourists' ethical approach in the context of ecotourism (Fennell, 2004, pp. 171-188). There is also an aspect of learning and education connected to ecotourism, which was an important theme identified in the interviews and was also mentioned by other companies and stakeholders interviewed during the ARCTISEN project (Olsen et al., 2019). Social sustainability is also important (Weaver & Lawton, 2007, p. 170, as cited in Gale & Hill, 2009, p. 5), particularly in the context of indigenous tourism (Walker & Moscardo, 2016).

As previously mentioned, labels, especially related to ecotourism, do not mean that the tourists will choose a certified company rather than one that is not; it is important to concentrate on a specific segment (Hausmann et al., 2017) and to increase emotional ties and direct experience, especially with nature, in order to improve pro-environmental attitudes (Kazeminia, Hultman, & Mostaghel, 2016). Best practice approaches are also based on local context and on policy support (Fletcher, Pforr, & Brueckner, 2016) and should take into consideration several aspects related to indigenous values (Vivanco, 2007). Sámi identity could be more competitive, especially in ecotourism (Palomino, 2012, as cited in Häggglund, Schilar, & Keskitalo, 2019, p. 61). Labels can also be a way to ensure that certain criteria are met to support conservation, as argued by Stronza, Hunt, and Fitzgerald (2019), even though a third-party monitored certification would prove to be even a better tool to fulfil this purpose.

## **Conclusions**

To conclude, the connection to nature in the context of Sámi tourism is stressed both in marketing material as well as in how companies and other tourism actors describe their operations. For people operating in interdependence with nature, both in tourism and in other activities, its conservation is an important part of everyday operations. In the case of Sámi culture specifically, a connection to nature is an important constitutive aspect and it has a historical characteristic. Labels can be used to protect Sámi culture from unethical use (de Bernardi, Kugapi, & Lüthje, 2017), usually by tourism companies or other stakeholders.

In Sámi tourism operations it is important to ensure positive outcomes for the Sámi (Ween & Riseth, 2017) without undermining the cultural aspect with the natural one (Smed, 2017). In indigenous tourism, principles of sustainable development have been considered particularly relevant. Indigenous control and empowerment are very important, while education helps promoting sustainability through tourism in indigenous contexts (Walker & Moscardo, 2016).

The use of ecotourism labels or certifications can support these aspects and also spread information to tourists, both on Sámi culture and on nature conservation. Furthermore, labels

can also be a good tool for companies to ensure more sustainable tourism operations and a balance in a company's activities based on the previously mentioned ACE framework (Fennell, 2004). It has been previously argued that the development of indigenous-related ecotourism experiences would benefit both companies and visitors; the question is only how interested Sámi entrepreneurs are in such a development (Pettersson, 2006). The results of the interviews show that there is such an interest, but it needs backing by rigorous evaluation of ecotourism enterprises (Stronza, Hunt, & Fitzgerald, 2019).

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