



Nordic Council  
of Ministers

# Indigenous tourism in the European Arctic

Reclaiming pasts and strengthening futures



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# Indigenous tourism in the European Arctic: Reclaiming pasts and strengthening futures

Summary and reflections from the European Indigenous Tourism Conference EITC 2025, Inari 20–22 May 2025

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This environmental and spatial artwork named *Guldalit, Čatnasit, Ciekkadit*, that is 'to listen, to be bound, to drive in' is located on the University of Lapland campus in Rovaniemi, Finland. The photographs [in this report] show how the piece transforms with the seasons, co-existing with its surroundings. Inside the lávvu a layer of forest floor is placed, cut off from the land that sustains it. Deprived of its connection to the earth, it withers and dies – yet, at the same time, it lays the foundation for new forms of life, new plants rise inside the lávvu. The glass lávvu can both destroy and protect. It tells a story that parallels the relationship between museums and the Sámi People – how cultural heritage, when placed behind glass, is preserved but also prevented from engaging with the networks of relationships to which it belongs

as argued by Áile Aikio, Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Lapland, Finland in her keynote presentation *Čiktit firpmiid, čuoldit hearvvaid. Rethinking Museums* at the Indigenous Tourism Research Symposium of the European Indigenous Tourism Conference EITC 2025 in May 2025.

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1. University of Lapland, Finland  
2. Aalborg University, Denmark  
3. UiT the Arctic University of Norway, Norway  
4. Umeå University, Sweden



FIGURE 1: Glass luvvu. Artist: Stina Aletta Aikio. Photo: Sanna Valkonen. Published with the permission of Stina Aletta Aikio and Sanna Valkonen.

# Foreword

The initiative to organise the first-ever [European Indigenous Tourism Conference EITC 2025](#) came from the late director of the World Indigenous Tourism Alliance (WINTA), Johnny Edmonds in 2019. WINTA is an Indigenous-led non-profit organisation promoting the rights of Indigenous peoples in tourism on a global level. Before 2019 it had organised conferences in Australia, Canada and New Zealand to gain visibility for and raise awareness of Indigenous issues in tourism and wished to do the same in Europe. At the time, WINTA was a partner in the *Culturally Sensitive Tourism in the Arctic* (ARCTISEN) project funded by the European Union through the Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic programme and led by the University of Lapland, Finland. An agreement was reached that the conference would be organised in Inari in Finland as a collaboration between WINTA, the University of Lapland and the Sámi Parliament in Finland. The Sámi Parliament was also a partner in the ARCTISEN project. The initial conference date was 2024. However, due to the corona pandemic, the conference had to be postponed to 2025. It was decided that the conference would focus on sustainable Indigenous tourism in the European Arctic, including the European side of the Russian Arctic. Unfortunately, because of the war in Ukraine, it was not possible to invite Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs from the Russian Arctic to the conference. Nevertheless, the conference was unique because for the first time Sámi tourism entrepreneurs living within the borders of three countries and Inuit tourism entrepreneurs from Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland) gathered together at a joint conference.

The Sámi Parliament in Finland has run several Sámi tourism development projects since 2017 where it has created [ethical guidelines for Sámi tourism](#), [responsible visitors' guidance](#) and, still in making, a certification programme for responsible, ethically sustainable Sámi tourism companies (see Sections 4 and 5). On the Norwegian side of Sápmi, the Sámi Parliament in Norway has initiated programmes to build capacity and networks around Sámi tourism. The latest programme, *Johtit*, ran for 3 years (2018–2021) (see more <https://samicultures.com/Welcome>). The Sámi Parliament in Norway is in the process of developing a platform for sustainable tourism among Indigenous peoples. The strategy will implement measures in consultation with tourist providers in Sápmi – serving as a guide for tourism's interaction with Sámi culture, branding and storytelling. It will also strengthen networks and foster closer ties with creative industries and the food industry in Sámi tourism. The strategy will be linked to the national tourism strategy to ensure that Sámi areas gain a larger share of national initiatives in tourism and infrastructure. The project will span three years and is recommended in the National Tourism Strategy 2030. The Sámi

Council organizes KulturSápmi on a yearly basis. [KulturSápmi](#) is a gathering place for the cultural and artistic communities in Sápmi to discuss current topics, projects in progress, and more. The main objective is to build cross-border networks, unify the cultural field, and foster better cooperation within Sápmi.

Similar attempts are also seen in Kalaallit Nunaat where Visit Greenland is contracted by Nalaakkersuisut (the Government of Greenland) to market and manage the nation as a tourist destination. Since 2009, Nalaakkersuisut has operated as a self-rule Government under the Danish Kingdom, governing the country in which 89% of residents are of Inuit origin (Statistics Greenland, 2025). All activities are based on the national tourism sector plan for 2025–2035 and the Visit Greenland 2025–2035 tourism strategy '[Kalaallit Nunaat and all that we share](#)' to unite tourism companies and other actors within the sector in deliberations about how to develop tourism for 'all of Greenland'. Leading up to that, two national gatherings, '*Towards More Tourism*' in 2018 and '[Towards Better Tourism](#)' in 2023 brought together participants in co-creating [11 recommendations](#) for politicians (in 2018) and a [Pledge](#) for tourism companies (see Section 4). Moving forward, even more effort will be put into anchoring tourism value locally and securing local social license to operate, for instance through community meetings and a new tourism law (Nalaakkersuisut, 2024). Another key initiative has been to secure Greenlandic tourism ownership by demanding a 2/3 Greenlandic (defined as people having lived 5 years or longer in Greenland) ownership of tourism companies operating in the country to be in place by 2027 (hotels excepted).

# About this report

This report is based on presentations, panel debates and input from participants from the conference. It gathers overarching conference themes and shares the insights of speakers and participants who have kindly contributed by summarising their main take-aways for the purpose of this report after the conference.

The conference was funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, whereas this report is funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers' Arctic Cooperation programme. The report has been written in the Sustainable Indigenous Tourism in the Nordic Arctic project which invited Inuit and Sámi tourism entrepreneurs from Kalaallit Nunaat, Norway and Sweden to the conference. The project partners were the University of Lapland, Umeå University, UiT the Arctic University of Norway, Aalborg University, the Sámi Parliament in Norway and Innovation South Greenland/Visit South Greenland. The project strengthened sustainable Indigenous tourism development in the Nordic Arctic through networking and co-operation between Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs in Finland, Kalaallit Nunaat, Norway, Sweden and other countries, the Sámi Parliaments in Finland, Norway and Sweden, universities, destination management organisations (DMOs), the national tourism organisation Visit Greenland and WINTA. This report contributes to strengthening cross-Arctic collaborative knowledge co-creation and capacity building and supporting DMOs and private entrepreneurs in their strategic goals regarding just and sustainable business solutions.

## **Warm thanks to all the conference speakers and participants who have contributed to this report (in alphabetical order):**

Áile Aikio, Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Lapland, Finland

Taija Aikio, Audience Manager, Sámi Museum Siida, Finland

Frank Antoine, Chief, Bonaparte First Nation, Canada; Co-founder, Moccasin Trails, Canada; Chair, World Indigenous Tourism Alliance

John Barrett, Chairman, Kapiti Island Nature Tours, New Zealand; Member, Leadership Council, World Indigenous Tourism Alliance

Ann-Kristin Blind, Svaipa sameby, Arjeplog, Sweden

Ann-Kristine Bongo, Entrepreneur, Sámi Siida, Norway

Sébastien Desnoyers-Picard, CEO and President, Destination Original Indigenous Tourism, Canada

Herminia Din, Professor Emerita, University of Alaska Anchorage, USA

Dorthe Eide, Professor, Nord University Business School, Norway  
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Aviaja Jensen, Visitor Centre Leader, Great Greenland, Greenland  
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Rune Opdahl, Assistant Professor, Nord University Business School, Norway  
Lennart Pittja, Entrepreneur, Sápmi Nature, Sweden; Member, Leadership Council, World Indigenous Tourism Alliance  
Ellinor Guttorm Utsi, Entrepreneur, Davvi Siida, Norway  
Sofiánguak Kristiansen, Entrepreneur, Sermeq Pottery, Greenland  
Emma Krupula, Entrepreneur, Emma's Reindeer, Finland  
Heikki Paltto, Entrepreneur, Paltto Elämysretket/Paltto Adventures, Finland  
Maud A.J. van Soest, Postdoctoral Researcher, UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, United Kingdom  
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Per-Henrik Tornensis, Reindeer Herder, Entrepreneur, Yläperän Safarit Oy/Kilpisjärvi Reindeer, Finland  
Niila-Juhán Valkeapää, Working Chair, Youth Council, Sámi Parliament, Finland  
Ann-Kristine Vinka, Coordinator and Executive Director, Biosphere Reserve Vindelälven-Juhhtáhkka, Sweden; Entrepreneur, Geunja Sámi Eco Lodge, Sweden  
Suvi West, Film-maker and Novelist, Finland  
Zoë Wright, Doctoral Candidate, UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, United Kingdom

*In memory of WINTA's late director Johnny Edmonds and late chair Ben Sherman who both participated in the planning of the conference as well as Sarah Woodall, destination manager from our project partner Visit South Greenland, who tragically passed away shortly after the conference.*

# Summary

The purpose of this report is to strengthen cross-Arctic collaborative knowledge co-creation and capacity building by summarising and reflecting on the main discussion topics and conclusions of the first-ever European Indigenous Tourism Conference EITC 2025 and sharing them to a wider circle of tourism professionals, policymakers, researchers and students than those that were present at the conference. The report analyses good practices, new approaches, opportunities and challenges for Indigenous tourism in the European Arctic (Sápmi and Kalaallit Nunaat/Greenland) and beyond based on presentations and input from the conference. It identifies four main, interconnected and strongly overlapping pillars central to fostering, supporting and strengthening Indigenous tourism: the relation of Indigenous tourism to place and land; storytelling as a vital part of decolonisation; certifications and trademarks as tools for self-determination and business development; and collaboration and community inclusion as necessary steps to move forward. Moreover, the potential to connect tourism with crafts, art and design is discussed. The report includes take-aways written by Indigenous and non-Indigenous conference speakers and participants providing thus multiple perspectives and recommendations from the rights-holders and other actors in the field. It contributes to supporting destination management organisations and private entrepreneurs in their strategic goals regarding just and sustainable business solutions. Finally, it assists policymakers in enabling decolonial and Indigenous tourism futures to flourish in the Arctic.

# SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ON INDIGENOUS LANDS: REPRESENTING AND PRESERVING LIVING HERITAGE

Tourism can both protect and destroy. When done correctly, it can protect Indigenous land, culture and future generations. - *Suvi West, Sámi filmmaker and novelist*

Cultural sustainability is not about preserving the past — it's about creating space for Indigenous cultures to thrive on their own terms. - *Taija Aikio, Audience Manager, Sámi Museum Siida*

Sustainability means that our land is still there for our grandchildren. That our languages are still spoken. That we are not only remembered in museums or travel brochures — but that we are thriving, innovating, and shaping the Arctic future ourselves. - *Niila-Juhán Valkeapää, Working Chair, Youth Council, Sámi Parliament in Finland*

## NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US.

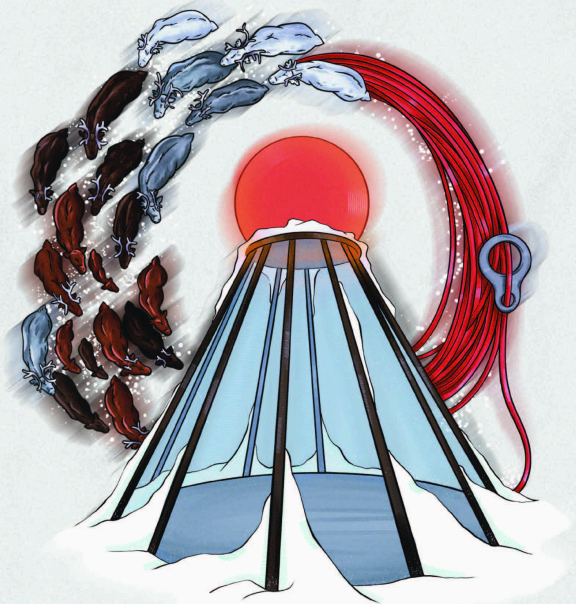
The Indigenous community should participate in development projects right from the outset and also be the decision-maker. - *Taija Aikio, Audience Manager, Sámi Museum Siida*

If you are not Indigenous, don't tell our story. Let us tell it ourselves. - *Sébastien Desnoyers-Picard, President and CEO, Destination Original Indigenous Tourism*

Indigenous-created certifications, such as Sámi Duodji and Sámi Made, maintain Indigenous Peoples' right to control and represent their own culture and heritage. - *Christina Hætta, Head of Cultural Unit, Sámi Council*

*This poster is based on the European Indigenous Tourism Conference EITC 2025. It was created by the Sustainable Indigenous Tourism in the Nordic Arctic project financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers Arctic Cooperation Programme.*

*Poster designed by Ellen-Maarit Juuso*



**FIGURE 2:** An executive summary of the main points of this report, downloadable in poster-format here: <https://matkailu.samediggi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/EITC25-juliste.pdf>. Graphic design: Ellen-Maarit Juuso.

# 1 Introduction



**FIGURE 3:** The glass lávvu that both protects and destroys life. Artist: Stina Aletta Aikio. Photo: Sanna Valkonen. Published with the permission of Stina Aletta Aikio and Sanna Valkonen.

Is it possible to consider 'Indigenous tourism' as something that unites tourism efforts and activities across Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland) and Sápmi? Does it make sense, in spite of many obvious and more subtle differences in languages, cultural practices and heritage and experiences with colonial history to claim similarity, or even communality? Following this, can the current unfolding of Indigenous led tourism in Kalaallit Nunaat and Sápmi become the starting point of a joint conversation and more learning on Indigenous tourism in the Nordics?

In this report, and based on the experiences from the 1st European Indigenous Tourism Conference EITC 2025 held in Inari in May 2025, we will try to answer this question by illustrating and discussing how Indigenous tourism across the globe and within the Nordics shares similarities and affinities that can teach, inspire and guide the future development at this moment in time when interest and demand for Indigenous tourism are growing and Indigenous peoples in many countries are increasingly taking tourism development into their own hands.

We fully recognise and acknowledge cultural diversity across and also within Sámi and Kalaallit Inuit (Greenlandic Inuit) communities. But we also argue that in spite of differences as well as variegated prior experiences with tourism, customer base and scale, many similarities exist in the ways tourism is perceived and developed among Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs. What this report seeks to explore is how beyond differences, Indigenous tourism actors may inspire and learn from each

other, and just as importantly, inspire others by how tourism is envisioned and carried out more sustainably by Indigenous peoples, in Sápmi, in Kalaallit Nunaat and beyond.

The conference focused on ethically, culturally and socially sustainable Indigenous tourism in the European Arctic and beyond. The main topics of the conference were certifications in Indigenous tourism, sustainable tourism, and selling Indigenous tourism globally and locally. Moreover, the conference included an Indigenous Tourism Research Symposium on the topic of Tourism and Indigenous cultural heritage.

Link to the full conference programme: <https://matkailu.samediggi.fi/en/eitc-2025/#ohjelma> Links to the conference recordings with English subtitles are available here: <https://matkailu.samediggi.fi/en/eitc-2025/#info>

What you will find in the following is an attempt to share and synthesise the conference speakers' and participants' voices and experiences and expand the knowledge of the many valuable insights that they demonstrate whether from Indigenous tourism associations and organisations, companies, cultural institutions and museums or from research.

## 1.1 What is in this report?

All of the stories shared during the conference point to a close connection between land, culture, heritage, nature and ways of connecting to and honouring these in everyday tourism practices. However, and in order to synthesise valuable insights, we have attempted to draw out some of the main characteristics that stood out across the narratives and discussions to understand and learn from Indigenous tourism. These highlights include a profound *rootedness in place* and everything that connects to it ([Section 2](#)) and a very central focus on *storytelling as a way to give voice to, share, represent, empower and decolonise* Indigenous existence and experience in and through tourism ([Section 3](#)). *Formal certification and trademark* procedures and systems in which Indigenous tourism can be recognised, protected and strengthened were also central to the conversations ([Section 4](#)) as were discussions on how to *organise, build alliances and include community* into its future development ([Section 5](#)). The report also includes reflection on the connections between tourism, crafts, art and design as a potential direction for future development as these elements were all present at the conference ([Section 6](#)). We finish by discussing where Indigenous tourism is going and what should be done, according especially to younger generations, who will take over in the future, to secure responsible and just pathways for Indigenous tourism and its many entrepreneurs ([Section 7](#)).

Before going deeper into the knowledge building that took place during and after the conference, we will first introduce the colonial background and present reality of tourism where Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs across the world operate. It is a context that needs to be understood and taken into account when working in/with Indigenous tourism.

## 1.2 The colonial context of Indigenous tourism

“Colonialism is not a uniform experience [among Indigenous peoples], but it has common patterns, such as the dispossession of land, cultural suppression, imposition of foreign governance structures, and denial of self-determination” (Kuokkanen et al., 2025, p. 2). This is also the case in the Nordic countries, where many Sámi see wind energy as a new form of colonialism. As pointed out by Ellinor Guttorm Utsi at the conference, wind power plants disrupt Sámi reindeer herding and culture, and threaten the next Sámi generations. While colonialism and its detrimental impacts were mentioned by many of the conference speakers, many also pointed to the revitalization of the Indigenous cultural heritage that colonialism has destroyed, and this revitalisation can be supported and enabled by tourism.

The earliest written records of Sápmi were crafted by European explorers, whose ventures were driven by the imperatives of expansion, fuelled by capitalism, technological advancements, and religious zeal. These records, as argued by Said (1985), were not grounded in the empirical realities of the lands these explorers encountered. Instead, they should be understood as reflections of European aspirations, desires, repressions, and projections. The “others” served as mirror images for the European elite, with the Sámi people – like other Indigenous populations – portrayed as wild, unruly, and uncivilized. Nordic colonial history is a history of dispossession and cultural erasure that has shaped and continues to shape Indigenous communities and Indigenous-state relations in the Nordic countries. This is the politics of loss, restitution, repatriation and appropriation; but also, the rich life of Indigenous knowledge that has survived the dark colonial night and which is the knowledge, stories and memories that contemporary tourism is built upon.

The Western fascination with Indigenous peoples, encapsulated in the concept of the “noble savage” is deeply entwined with the project of modernity. The West, having lost its sense of an authentic self due to modernity’s fragmenting effects, sought to reclaim this authenticity through a nostalgic vision of the past, projected onto encounters with Indigenous “others”. This duality of “otherness” became a cornerstone of colonial endeavours, justifying the disciplining of the Sámi people through law, religion, politics and the possibility to participate on equal terms in developing the Sámi societies. Even today, Indigenous entrepreneurs recount how they remain entangled in these colonial narratives, which continue to shape the

expectations of travellers and inform national political and administrative frameworks surrounding the Indigenous tourism industry. However, these dynamics are gradually evolving, creating opportunities to decolonise tourism (i.e., to dismantle its colonial structures) and rebuild it on the foundation of Indigenous philosophies and values.

For Kalaallit Nunaat, the transition into Self-Government in 2009 marked an important milestone on a trajectory towards statehood. It had until then transitioned from a colony into a municipality in 1953 and into home rule in 1979. While the Greenlandic nation has come a long way in securing independence, the past colonialism has taken its toll in a plethora of ways that are only slowly and painfully unravelling in public through a truth and reconciliation process and through media and research exposure.

Indigenous peoples are asserting their right to participate equally in the economic arena, including the right to narrate their own stories. Yet, market pressures to commodify their "otherness" evoke painful memories of colonial tourism practices in the Arctic. Decisions about which elements of Sámi cultural heritage can be commercialised must be grounded in local dialogue involving Sámi institutions. At the same time, Sámi actors emphasise the importance of cultural sustainability, recognising that not everything can – or should – be sold. Tourism operators must also balance the cultural integrity of their offerings with customer expectations and satisfaction, a tension that is not always easily reconciled and something which is also recognizable in Kalaallit Nunaat.

Decolonising efforts may not be directly connected to tourism marketing and development efforts in Kalaallit Nunaat at first sight. Yet, close ties exist between efforts of branding, marketing and 'selling' of people and places in tourism and questions of identity, ownership, just distribution and narrative sovereignty (Ren, 2024; Ren & Abildgaard, 2021). From that perspective, being able to control who tells what stories and sells what products to which guests is key.

Decolonisation, understood as an ongoing process, offers a framework for fostering respectful and sustainable Indigenous enterprises. It invites us to envision innovative programmes rooted in Indigenous knowledge and to navigate the delicate balance between avoiding exotification and advancing autonomy. Achieving the political aspirations articulated by Indigenous leaders requires systematic efforts, expertise at all levels, and institutional anchoring. The right to self-determination for Indigenous peoples encompasses the right to be heard, included, and actively involved in decision-making processes that affect their lives and lands. These rights are enshrined in instruments such as the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (UNDRIP) and the [International Labour Organization's Convention No. 169](#), ratified by the Norwegian and Danish government, but not by the Finnish or Swedish government. Article 31.1 of UNDRIP underscores the importance of respecting all forms of Indigenous knowledge

production and transmission, whether rooted in traditional, Indigenous, or Western scientific methods. This respect extends to the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples in defining and maintaining their own institutions across all sectors of society.

Decolonial practices in tourism demand a shift away from structures of domination towards equity in planning and decision-making. This includes the meaningful inclusion of Indigenous rights-holders in all decision-making processes related to the planning and funding of development programmes in the Arctic. The principle of “Nothing about us without us” has become a guiding ethos for Indigenous tourism, emphasizing the necessity of collaboration, respect, and shared authority in shaping the future of this industry. As Suvi West concluded at the conference, we [Sámi] don't need to do tourism in a Western way.

## 2 Indigenous tourism and place



**FIGURE 4:** Outi Pieski, *Rástegáisá lágalaš riektesubjektan II/Sacred Mountain Rástegáisá as a Legal Person II*, 2018, photo: Jussi Tiainen. Published with the permission of Outi Pieski.

In this section, we draw together insights from the conference that touch on the deep connection between culture, identity and place and how, as a consequence, Indigenous tourism is always to be understood and practiced as profoundly place and culture-based. This was emphasised by Chief Frank Antoine. In his talk, he voiced that "Indigenous tourism is not a sector, it is not a product. It's a place." As he explained and richly exemplified, Indigenous tourism is first and foremost a medium to tell and share stories of land, of relations to land and to the people and everything else inhabiting land. Tourism in this view is not an aim or a goal, economic or other, but purely one way, next to others, in which Indigenous culture, experiences and ways of life can unfold and continue.

The importance of place, space and the homelands are evident among Indigenous peoples throughout the world. In Sápmi, the connection to the land is central to most Sámi artists, and Sámi art produced today. In the album *ORDA – This Is my Land*, the Sámi artist Sofia Jannok joins the Sámi homeland entanglement with a sense of pride and of freedom. The visual artist Outi Pieski often incorporates traditional Sámi crafts, such as duodji (handicrafts), and materials like reindeer antlers, wool, and textiles. Pieski's work is deeply rooted in her heritage, in the decolonial practice of giving space to traditional objects and knowledge, as well as reflecting the landscapes and knowledge traditions of the Sámi people. In the title of the painting *The Sacred Mountain of Rástegáisá as a Legal Person II* (Figure 4), Pieski uses the 2008 Ecuadorian constitution, along with similar legal regulations from countries like New Zealand, which recognize certain rivers and mountains as holders of legal rights. For Pieski, this aligns with Indigenous perspective where land is seen as living rather than property.

In a similar way, the Kalaallit concept of Sila signifies both physical, abstract and cosmological forces around concepts typically understood as separate in Western

ontology, such as weather, a force of life and nature, life, wisdom. In an industry known for separating and commodifying tourism as products labelled as either 'cultural', nature-based or sustainable, Indigenous tourism challenges, dismisses and transgresses existing categories and the separation of country, land, nature, culture and practices in labelling and performing tourism.



**FIGURE 5 AND 6:** Juutua River, Inari, Finland. Photo: Håkan Appelblad.

The role and integration of place in thinking and acting was prominent in presentations by many presenters such as John Barrett, Sébastien Desnoyers-Picard and Chief Frank Antoine, who all initiated their presentations by thanking and paying respect to places and their peoples—those of one's own and of the land visited, in this case Inari. Paying tribute to the land also includes acknowledging those who have already passed-away, thus connecting the present time and place to ancestry.

Chief Frank Antoine paid tribute to the land at Inari by offering tobacco to the Juutua River (Figures 4 and 5) on his arrival as a sign of respect. He also celebrated encounters with a reindeer he saw in the surroundings and commented on the fact that "you have more land than people." In his talk, he highlighted the importance of healing and how the lifeblood of culture is the land and the water. He explained the origin of the name of his tourism company Moccasin Trails by referring to how he and his colleague literally followed in the footsteps of their ancestors. Indigenous tourism thus offers a way to reconnect to heritage sites, while giving visitors the possibility of joining the process of reconciliation.

John Barrett extends the power of Indigenous tourism to cultural restoration while reclaiming land and continuing the engagement with place. The last 30 years in New Zealand have been a period of strong cultural revival for the Māori, not least through tourism. Similar to elsewhere, Indigenous tourism companies in New Zealand are most often small family-businesses involving several generations. While the Māori are still disadvantaged in regard to aspects such as health and education in comparison to the white settler population, tourism has offered the

possibility to maintain and transmit culture to the next generations, live on ancestral land and continuously reconnect to and with important places. As John recalls: "Know where you come from, why you are here and whom you serve." His example demonstrates the transformative potential that tourism can have in Indigenous communities and families.

This was also very clear in the talk given by Ellinor Guttorm Utsi from Davvi Siida (Figure 7 and 8). Davvi Siida means "the land in the north where people and reindeer are together" and on the website of the tourism company, the connection is spelled out very clearly: 'Nature is our culture'. In her talk on land and place, Ellinor spoke of the emerging threats coming with the green transition. In her view, the establishment of windmills and related infrastructure becomes a "green colonialism" (Fjellheim, 2023), since it exploits large parts of their traditional lands and threatens their livelihood. This is in Ellinor's view not a green development, on the contrary it brings a "black and white" landscape, in sharp contrast to what she and her family value and cherish, namely the reindeer including what Ellinor recognise to be the most beautiful sound to be heard, the clattering hooves on the ground, the sounds from moving reindeer.

Her talk reminds us of how the largest biodiversity in the world is to be found on Indigenous lands and that confronting global climate and biodiversity challenges must happen in accordance with, and by learning from, Indigenous ways of living rather than through further marginalisation and injustice.



**FIGURE 7:** Davvi Siida, Kjøllefjord, Norway.  
Photo: Britt Kramvig.



**FIGURE 8:** Ellinor Guttorm Utsi and Áilu Utsi, Davvi Siida, Kjøllefjord, Norway. Photo: Britt Kramvig. Published with the permission of Ellinor Guttorm Utsi.

In tourism, a growing awareness is dawning on the need to foster more regenerative ways of developing places into destinations. Put simply, the mantra is to re-think tourism not as an industry or as an (economic) goal in itself but rather to see it as a tool to foster and serve more flourishing places. What characterizes regenerative tourism is thus its ability to provide nourishment for place, culture, communities and all living species in a destination. Indigenous tourism was regenerative long before the concept appeared in academic tourism research, and it could be that the broader tourist industry can learn from Indigenous tourist providers.

Looking at this way of thinking about tourism, it is striking that the practices, insights and visions from Indigenous tourism formulated during the conference are just that: regenerative. When developed in ways that pay tribute to and draw on Indigenous culture, tourism offers a way to heal, in the words of Chief Antoine. It offers new, and some would argue decolonising ways to reconnect to place, identity, heritage, past and present generations. This positions tourism not merely as an economic tool, but also – and more importantly – as a means for thriving. It is at that moment that tourism becomes a place.



**FIGURE 9:** Davvi Siida, Kjøllefjord, Norway. Photo: Davvi Siida. Published with the permission of Ellinor Guttorm Utsi.

## MAIN TAKE-AWAYS:

- Indigenous tourism is intrinsically place- or land based.
- Indigenous tourism companies are built to last through generations and built to care for the land, animals and people and can be a tool for healing and cultural empowerment
- Indigenous tourism has the power to culturally regenerate relations to land and heritage
- Indigenous lands remain threatened by extractive development. Indigenous tourism can serve to protect both Indigenous ways of knowing and the Indigenous landscape by using it for more sustainable purposes.

”

It was an honour to be asked to present at this conference. As a Māori, operating in the international tourism sector – I was comforted and also alarmed at the similarities/commonalities of issues confronting the Sámi tourism sector, and the Arctic tourism sector, and the Māori/NZ tourism. The issues of surging visitor volumes, alongside often inadequate numbers control and infrastructure development is an urgent concern along with the effects of climate change. The seeming lack of cultural consideration and protections by decision makers is also a great concern.

On the other hand, similar to the Māori experience, there is the opportunity for the Sámi to stay and grow the cultural connection to the land and place, through tourism that can and should be managed on their terms. Connection to land and nature can be a great support for language and cultural revival by enabling successive generations of people to live and learn on and from the land.

The other significant observation was the strong value in being able to come together [at the conference] in one place, as an Indigenous tourism community, and share the concerns and issues that impact the whole sector, the region and people. Through my involvement with the WINTA, I can say that this impact can be extremely valuable and can be demonstrated in other Indigenous communities around the world.”

John Barrett, Chairman, Kapiti Island Nature Tours, New Zealand

### 3 Telling our story

In her keynote, Áile Aikio touched upon the delicate balance between protecting and destroying cultural heritage by 'showcasing' it. Using museums as an example, she pointed to how Indigenous cultural heritage when 'put behind glass' was not only preserved, but also prevented from engaging with rich networks of relationships to which it belongs and is rooted. As explained by Aikio, museums have been and still often are colonial institutions:



**FIGURE 10:** The glass lávvu that both protects and destroys life. Artist: Stina Aletta Aikio. Photo: Áile Aikio. Published with the permission of Stina Aletta Aikio and Áile Aikio.

Čiktit firpmiid, čuoldit hearvvaid. Rethinking museums:

”

Museums are not neutral, universal, or apolitical institutions. They are European creations, grounded in European – white, middle- and upper-class – values, worldviews, and ways of knowing. More than that, museums as we know them were made *possible* by colonialism. As Denning puts it: *'Museums exist because colonization efforts allowed the plunder of natural and man-made artifacts.'* Ethnographic museums, in particular, played a key role in justifying and reinforcing colonial rule. They presented Indigenous peoples as the 'exotic other' – people frozen in time, passive, and incapable of progress. And hence, if Indigenous peoples were doomed to disappear anyway, taking their lands and resources was simply part of 'progress'. At the same time, collectors aimed to collect the last traces of these supposedly vanishing cultures – to preserve them in museums for study. While collecting there was little or no concern for the Indigenous communities themselves. Our traditions, languages, and heritage were being erased from our daily lives, even as our objects – and the bodies of our ancestors – were collected into various collections, far from their lands and out of reach of their living relatives.

(Áile Aikio, Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Lapland, Finland)

Similarly to museums, tourism can both protect and destroy. As Suvi West concluded at the end of the conference, when done correctly, tourism can protect Indigenous land, culture and future generations. It can, for example, be a way in which Indigenous peoples can continue their traditional livelihoods and live on their own land. Speakers emphasised throughout the conference that tourism can support the revitalisation of Indigenous cultures destroyed by colonialism and their transmission to the next generations. One central way in which to do so is by way of storytelling. Telling stories of co-existing in and with place, is fundamental to the ways in which most Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs work with tourism. Storytelling was in many ways an important topic at the conference, and it was highlighted that Indigenous people are not tourism products, but storytellers.

Many speakers underlined Indigenous tourism companies as disseminators of knowledge. By visiting Indigenous tourism companies, tourists learn about Indigenous peoples and nature and their attitudes towards both change. They bring new knowledge home with them and share it with their friends and relatives. In this way, the work done in Indigenous tourism companies is not “just tourism business” but has a deeper meaning that may often be ignored by those not involved in doing the work, even within the Indigenous community. As Suvi West concluded, Indigenous tourism

entrepreneurs tell the truth that is needed before reconciliation. Related to this, Chief Frank Antoine reminded that the land, water and animals do not have a voice – Indigenous people are their voice, and they should teach other humans to respect the land, water and animals.

One recent example of how Indigenous ways of life can become embedded in tourism storytelling is the brand video *Greenland Goggles 2.0. See Greenland through local eyes* produced in house by Visit Greenland (Figure 11). The video uses the traditional Inuit snow goggles to tell stories about Inuit ingenuity, heritage and connection to place as part of the tourism experience and [won bronze](#) at the prestigious Lovies Awards in 2025 for its digital creativity and innovation.



**FIGURE 11:** Image from the *Greenland Goggles 2.0. See Greenland through local eyes* brand video by Visit Greenland. Published with the permission of Visit Greenland.

There are however challenges with storytelling. While Suvi West argued in her keynote that ‘everything is storytelling’, she also pointed to the risk that stories told by a Sámi person may be interpreted as stories about *all Sámi*, while stories told by a person belonging to the majority population are not interpreted in the same way. A Sámi person may thus easily become responsible for the collective Sámi identity, while others have the freedom to only be responsible for themselves.

Suvi West elaborates on storytelling from an Indigenous perspective. A Sámi storyteller is not subject to the Western freedom the same way as a non-Sámi person is. A Sámi person, with long and deep connection to the land, heritage and

communities, must, in contrast to the non-Sámi, seek permission from others, nature or from inner voices. Not all stories are free to use. Sacred places might deserve more than just being seen with a respectful gaze. Rather, respect could imply not to be told about, not to be visited. Despite a story or a place being a rational choice to make use of from a Western or capitalist perspective; it might still not receive true permission to be told. Suvi West argues that being a Sámi is not enough to be able to decide which stories are to be told. To be able to accomplish such a quest, the Sámi must also actively decolonise their minds. According to her, Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs should be in control of the stories told about them, which has often not been, and still is not always, the case. As Suvi West concluded, Indigenous tourism is a way to take the power and stories back to Indigenous people. Sébastien Desnoyers-Picard recollected this clearly also in his talk: 'If you are not Indigenous, don't tell our story. Let us tell it ourselves.'

A learning from the conference has been to use these insights to rethink conference formats along Indigenous ways of thinking, for instance by incorporating place-based storytelling formats into this. As some asked along the days, how to connect with, learn from and pay tribute to land while placed within a conference venue for three days? And how to tell often difficult, sensitive and complex stories in front of a microphone and hundreds of audiences? Not many feel comfortable, seen or heard within such frameworks.

Fortunately, small pockets of 'resistance' emerged throughout the days. An example was a spontaneous Qulleq (Inuit oil lamp) ceremony arranged in the hotel bar by Sofiánguak Kristiansen, owner of Sermeq Pottery in South Greenland, who in her work with clay has been a vehicle to reintroduce the Inuit oil lamp for cultural, spiritual and ceremonial purposes. During the gathering, she explained about past and emerging roles and meaning of the qulleq. She encouraged participants to join after turn in keeping the small flame lit and think of something or someone dear to their hearts. Many looked deeply moved as they sat down to quietly nurture the flame (Figure 12).



**FIGURE 12:** The qulleq ceremony during the conference. Photo: Carina Ren.

The qulleq ceremony encourages us to be more sensitive, reflexive and experimental in designing Indigenous sharing and learning formats and spaces with an attention to how storytelling can be brought forward, but also how more quiet voices can speak out and be heard.

#### **MAIN TAKEAWAYS:**

- Storytelling conveys Indigenous culture and ways of life without 'freezing' them.
- Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs tell their own story.
- Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs should be in control of their own story.
- Storytelling is empowering but sharing stories is also a sensitive practice, that may require us to rethink the formats and frames around it to allow for everyone to find and raise their voice.

One of the papers presented at the Indigenous Tourism Research Symposium of the conference discussed stereotypes and how to counter them with storytelling:

*When Indigenous culture experiences spur negative communication in social media: reasons for stereotypes and implications for Sámi tourism*

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Indigenous tourism has potential for value impacts far beyond the economy. However, there are challenges related to stereotypes shown in marketing and as harassment on social media<sup>[5]</sup>. Our study explores the main reasons and consequences of stereotypical perceptions on social media related to Sámi cultural experiences. The case studied is the opening ceremony of the European Capital of Culture event, Bodø 2024. The main data analysed are social media comments, newspaper articles and a few interviews. The opening in the harbour involved about 20,000 visitors in addition to being shown on national and international TV. The show included different cultural performances, including two sequences with Sámi experiences. The latter triggered strong reactions such as “There was a bit too much joik,” or “We stand on Norwegian soil – not Sámi.” Many comments reflect stereotyping and denial of territorial belonging, creating conflicts and misunderstanding. One central reason is limited knowledge about the regional and local Sámi history. How can Sámi tourism prevent stereotypical expectations from visitors? Five practical implications are recommended to address these challenges: 1) inform and prepare visitors and marketing organizations, 2) highlight Sámi diversity, 3) use storytelling and guidance during, 4) create dialogue during, and 5) support Sámi-led tourism.”

Rune Opdahl, Assistant Professor, Dorthe Eide, Professor, and Anastasiya Henk, Associate Professor, Nord University Business School, Norway

Another experience from exposing Sami culture at a European Capital of Cultural event is to be found ten years earlier in Umeå, Sweden. The ECoC, Umeå 2014, included substantial Sami content, also asked for from the ECoC selection panel, and visible through a year-long programme that was thematically based on the eight seasons of the Sami calendar. But as in the case of Bodø 2024, the comment feed on the Umeå 2014 website revealed similar doubts regarding the representation of Umeå as a Sami place (Appelblad, 2020).

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5. Research done by Amnesty International Norge (2023) documents that 25% of posts on Sámi in social media are negative or harassments.

## 4 Guiding the way: certifications and trademarks



**FIGURE 13:** Details of the glass lávvu that both protects and destroys life. Artist: Stina Aletta Aikio. Photo: Áile Aikio. Published with the permission of Stina Aletta Aikio and Áile Aikio.

In his presentation, Sébastien Desnoyers-Picard said that there was much less interest in Indigenous tourism 15–20 years ago than now. Demand for Indigenous tourism is growing. Nevertheless, according to him, even today DMOs do not promote Indigenous tourism, and some tourists assume that Indigenous tourism is fake. For these reasons, Indigenous tourism certifications are needed and were one of the main topics of the conference. In this context, certification means that ‘an independent third-party has verified the conformity of an activity or product to a written standard’ (Spenceley, 2019, p. 180). Currently, only one “purely” Indigenous tourism certification is operational in the world, that is, a certification that is Indigenously designed, implemented and controlled and for Indigenous-owned tourism companies only. This certification is the Original Original run by the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC). Two other such certifications are in the making, Sello de Turismo Indígena in Chile and the certification of responsible, ethically sustainable Sámi tourism companies in Finland. A fourth one, Sápmi Experience in Sweden, is not operational any more due to insufficient funding.

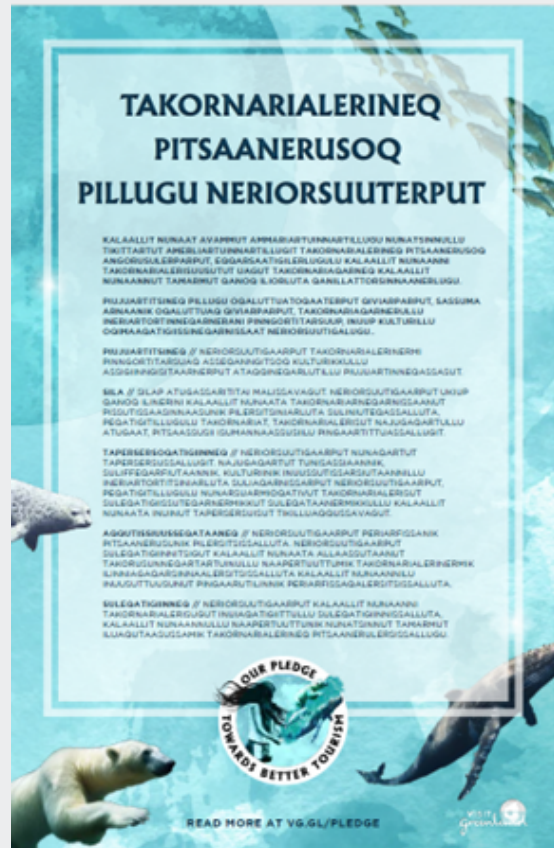
In contrast, there are over 200 sustainable tourism certifications (ECOTRANS, n.d.) worldwide that aim to minimise the negative impacts of tourism and maximise its positive impacts. Some of these certifications include Indigenous sub-certifications

to certify Indigenous-owned tourism companies (Nature's Best Sápmi in Sweden) or Indigenous- and non-Indigenous-owned tourism companies (Respecting Our Culture in Australia). Those and other certifications have criteria concerning how to recognise Indigenous communities, lands, waters and cultures in tourism business operations. These include Certificación para la Sostenibilidad Turística in Costa Rica and the criteria that the Global Sustainable Tourism Council uses to accredit sustainable tourism certifications.

Tourism certifications can be used to assure tourists, tour operators and other interested parties of the Indigeneity, authenticity or sustainability of tourism companies. An Indigenously designed, implemented and controlled certification can also strengthen Indigenous self-determination. Other potential benefits include identifying and spreading good practices and guiding business development in Indigenous-owned tourism companies (Akama et al., 2011; Spenceley, 2019). The last mentioned point was emphasised by several speakers at the conference. According to Heikki Paltto, young Indigenous entrepreneurs in particular need certifications to guide them in their tourism business. Furthermore, Aviaja Jensen saw Indigenous certifications as a tool to attract responsible tourists and give them a better understanding of Indigenous cultures. Nevertheless, John Barrett reminded the conference participants that certifications are just one tool. They can help to eliminate the unethical use of culture (i.e., cultural appropriation), but many tourists are not familiar with certifications.

Many sustainable tourism certifications have no Indigenous involvement in their design or decision-making bodies although the certified companies operate on Indigenous lands and waters. The standards of these certifications may differ from what Indigenous peoples see as important to include in a tourism certification, and thus may marginalise Indigenous peoples and concerns. These external standards may also displace Indigenous worldviews, norms and practices (Buultjens et al., 2010; Vivanco, 2007, 2012). Indigenous understandings of sustainability may also differ from the Western definitions of sustainability. For example, the Sámi principle of sustainability is "do not use more than you need." Ellinor Guttorm Utsi presented the 7 generations principle: Based on the wisdom of the last seven generations, make decisions that will sustain the next 7 generations, while Lennart Pittja had as his principle that if the reindeer thrive, humans thrive. That is why reindeer should be taken care of.

In Kalaallit Nunaat, most organised efforts to certify the tourism sector have centred on standardised international certifications. For instance, Nuuk became the first capital to be certified as an EarthCheck destination and many hotels have worked to receive the Green Key certification. One notable exception is a 2023-initiative Visit Greenland termed "Our Pledge Towards Better Tourism" (Figure 13). The pledge is organised around five pillars of sustainability, weather (Sila), support, creating better opportunities and collaboration.



## OUR PLEDGE TOWARDS BETTER TOURISM

We commit to working together to welcome tourism in a way that respects and preserves our unique nature and the diversity of our culture.

We commit to following the rules of the weather.

We commit to supporting the local.

We commit to creating better opportunities.

We commit to working together.

FIGURE 14: Our Pledge Towards Better Tourism. Photo: Visit Greenland. Published with the permission of Visit Greenland.

The Pledge has so far been signed by 70 Greenlandic tourism companies and organisations and is seen as a first step towards an actual national certificate.

In Sápmi, there are currently two pan-Sámi certification trademarks, the Sámi Duodji (Figure 15) for traditional Sámi handicrafts and Sámi Made (Figure 16) for any Sámi-made goods and services. Similarly, to the above tourism certifications, they guarantee that the certified goods and services fulfil standards set by the certifying body.



**FIGURE 15 AND 16:** The Sámi Duodji trademark and The Sámi Made trademark. Photo: Sámi Council. Published with the permission of the Sámi Council.

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The Sámi Duodji and Sámi Made trademarks are owned by the Sámi people and managed by the Sámi Council. They serve as a guarantee that the product is authentically Sámi-made. The trademark system helps implement the Sámi people's right to self-determination over their culture and traditional crafts, while also addressing the challenges of cultural appropriation. The Sámi trademarks are important because they protect and promote the cultural identity and self-determination of the Sámi people. They help to preserve traditional Sámi crafts. By using or purchasing products with these trademarks, people directly support the Sámi community and uphold their right to control and represent their own culture and heritage.

Christina Hætta, Head of Cultural Unit, Sámi Council, Norway

Christina Hætta argued in the conference that in the future, there could be a pan-Sámi trademark for Sámi Food and perhaps another one, Sámi Experience, for Sámi tourism experiences, following the model of the former Sápmi Experience certification in Sweden. According to Håkan Jonsson, the Sámi Parliament in Sweden also aims to bring in a quality label for Sámi tourism products, goods and services in Sweden. ITAC is interested in spreading the Original Original certification to other countries with Indigenous tourism businesses, also to Sápmi. Sébastien Desnoyers-Picard suggested in the conference that Sámi certificates could be parallel to the Original Original certification. The American Indigenous Tourism Association has decided to take into use the Original Original certification programme in the USA (American Indigenous ..., 2025), and New Zealand Māori Tourism is testing it (Miettunen, 2025). Among the Sámi, wishes have been expressed for a pan-Sámi tourism certification. Desnoyers-Picard noted that when tourists have a good experience of a certified Indigenous tourism company in one country, they want to have the same also elsewhere, which benefits all.

A major challenge with certifications is funding: the Sápmi Experience certification faded away due to lack of funding (and political support). The Sámi Parliament in Finland has applied for funding for several projects to create a certification system for responsible, ethically sustainable Sámi tourism companies in Finland, and the Sámi Council needs to apply for project funding to finance the trademarks it is running. The truth and reconciliation processes might help here, but at least in Finland, Norway or Kalaallit Nunaat, up to now this has not happened. In Canada, ITAC has created a fund to which tourists and non-Indigenous tourism companies can donate money to advance reconciliation by supporting Indigenous tourism development (ITAC, 2023). At the conference, Sébastien Desnoyers-Picard suggested that all tourists should pay a land stewardship fee that would be used to support local Indigenous tourism development (e.g., certifications).

## USEFUL LINKS:

The Original Original: <https://indigenoustourism.ca/programs-services/the-original-original-accreditation-program/>

Nature's Best Sápmi (in Swedish): <https://www.naturturismforetagen.se/natures-best-sapmi/>

Respecting Our Culture: <https://ecotourism.org.au/sustainability/businesses/respecting-our-culture-certification/>

Certificación para la Sostenibilidad Turística (in Spanish): <https://cst.turismo-sostenible.co.cr/>

Global Sustainable Tourism Council: <https://www.gstc.org/>

Sámi Duodji and Sámi Made: <https://samitrademarks.com/>

Visit Greenland "Our Pledge towards better tourism":  
<https://traveltrade.visitgreenland.com/da/pledge/>

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There were also several other entrepreneurs at the conference, and some of them presented their company activities on the stage. It was great to hear that also many others than us want to develop their products towards a more informative and ethically sustainable direction. The general opinion at the conference was that the best tourism products are produced by the persons who have a personal experience and knowledge of the Indigenous culture. If the products are produced by outsiders, they should be familiarised well with the culture to avoid misunderstandings.

The tourism certificate of the Indigenous peoples in Canada was presented at the conference. The focus of the presentation was on the value of the certificate in marketing and how the certificate helps the customer to find the right product. This is important, but I see a greater value in the certificate as a tool for the companies to develop their activities towards authenticity and cultural responsibility.

All we Sámi represent Sámi culture in our own ways. Family specific differences are part of the richness of the culture, and it is precisely the showcasing of this diversity that makes tourism products meaningful and authentic. Although the Sámi are a small group of people, trying to present their culture in a museum is not possible without leaving something out which is important to somebody in the group.

Per-Henrik Tornensis, Reindeer Herder, Owner, Yläperän Safarit Oy/Kilpisjärvi Reindeer, Finland)

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I have been running reindeer related activities like sleigh rides and different kinds of programmes for 4 years now. And the reason is because it is my passion. And I want to educate our guests on our beautiful culture, nature and about the shared issues Indigenous peoples have like climate change. Certification makes it easier for conscious guests to find authentic Indigenous made services. It builds more trust between the company, tourists and local Indigenous communities. The relationship with tourism and Indigenous peoples needs healing and maybe even its own truth and reconciliation process. When there is competition, certification gives us an advantage from non-Indigenous tourism operators. Also, the certification process educates companies on cultural sensitivity and how to do Indigenous tourism in a better or more ethical way. It is important that companies take the responsibility to spread truthful information about our cultures.

In both Indigenous tourism and mainstream tourism there is the need to focus on environmental sustainability. Environmentally we should be able to make NO-GO-ZONES to holy places and reindeer herding areas as well areas with fragile nature and also implement visitor caps in areas where there are too many tourists. Tourism itself is not very sustainable because of travelling and flying. But offering guests reasons like promoting activities to stay longer decreases the fly-in-fly-out tourism and also by spending more time here the guests learn more about our land and people.

But in Indigenous tourism you also have to think about how to protect our cultures from exploitation and misuse. We need to think about the context where we represent our culture and what to share and what not to, some things are just for us. Because people outside of our culture don't know much about it, you are their first-hand knowledge. You have the responsibility to share truthful information and break stereotypes. The culture is for us, so we don't need to change it to fit the needs of tourism.

Emma Krupula, Owner, Emma's Reindeer, Finland

## MAIN TAKEAWAYS:

- There is a growing interest among Indigenous peoples to create certifications for Indigenous-produced goods and services.
- Indigenous-created certifications, such as Sámi Duodji, Sámi-Made and The Original Original, maintain Indigenous peoples' right to control and represent their own culture and heritage.
- Selecting certified Indigenous goods and services is a direct support to Indigenous companies and communities.
- Sustainable tourism certifications should have Indigenous involvement in their design and decision-making bodies if the certified companies operate on Indigenous lands and waters – currently this Indigenous involvement is often lacking.

# 5 Building bridges – engaging people – collaborations and organisations



**FIGURE 17:** The glass lávvu that both protects and destroys life. Artist: Stina Aletta Aikio. Photo: Sanna Valkonen. Published with the permission of Stina Aletta Aikio and Sanna Valkonen.

## 5.1 Company-internal collaborations - the importance of community

Sámi entrepreneurs have different approaches to what their businesses are built upon. Still, it is reasonable to argue that many demonstrate a profound awareness of traditional Sámi knowledge, the importance and protection of the land, and ways of knowing, which are inherently collective, intergenerational, and deeply embedded in a landscape of memories. Entrepreneurs often seek inspiration from each other, meeting with entrepreneurs from other regions of the world, but also local historical archives. In addition, they often explore traditional Sámi knowledge practices, consult elders, and study ancestral techniques. Many reflect on how these techniques can be innovatively combined to create something new. Nature, in this context, can be viewed as a living archive – an ever-present source of learning from both the past and the present. Sámi knowledge is not static; it is performed, lived,

and expressed through practices. It is shared and preserved through storytelling, memorised and reimagined through movement, crafts, and narratives (Kramvig & Kvidal-Røvik, 2022).

To create authentic stories and products that reflect their heritage, many Sámi entrepreneurs invest time and collaborate closely with the kin and family members as well as in collaboration with the local communities. This collaborative process honours the idea that Sámi knowledge belongs to the Sámi communities/siidas, encompassing both past and future generations. The products and experiences they offer are carefully curated, with thoughtful consideration of what they wish to communicate, share, and sell. These elements form the philosophical foundation of their businesses. By designing Sámi-inspired experiences and products with care and intention, entrepreneurs can foster local pride, enhance cultural competence, and generate employment opportunities. However, identifying which aspects of Sámi culture can be transformed into experience-based products remains a challenge. Small businesses, in particular, often face difficulties accessing the necessary knowledge and tools to integrate Sámi cultural values into their operations and designs.

Indigenous relational sovereignty means that individual tourism entrepreneurs have autonomy in their activities but, simultaneously, responsibilities towards their Indigenous community (see Kuokkanen et al., 2025). Many Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs collaborate therefore with their community to ensure that their products and activities are appropriate from the community's perspective. For example, the ITAC Original Original certification requires that tourism business activities and the cultural content of tourism products are approved by the local Indigenous community (e.g., elders) (ITAC, 2021, p. 10). At the conference, Suvi West noted in her keynote that it is important to speak about your plans with your community in advance and to reflect on their consequences in advance.

Many Sámi and Inuit businesses are guided by a philosophy of place-based, long-term, intergenerational vision. Sámi enterprises are often built to endure, with deep respect, for instance, for the elders who first ventured into tourism and creative industries, often starting with modest efforts like selling handcrafted items from roadside sheds. Intergenerational business management creates space for honouring and involving elder generations, ensuring their knowledge and stories are integral to business decisions and the narratives shared with customers.

Despite this, the Sámi storytelling tradition has weakened over time. Elders today face challenges transferring their knowledge due to time constraints and the geographical distance between generations. Guides, for instance, often report feeling inadequately equipped with knowledge about Sámi place names and the stories embedded in the land when leading guests into nature. Many entrepreneurs express a desire for a deeper understanding of local Sámi knowledge, terms, and narratives that would make the landscapes they present distinctly Sámi (Omma, 2024).

Local knowledge traditions persist through family networks and place-specific environments, such as historical societies, duojárat (craftspeople), and knowledge centres. These centres often function as museums, language hubs, cultural houses, and even facilities for research and business development. They represent valuable resources for advancing tourism industries. Start-up businesses, in particular, benefit from engaging with knowledgeable dialogue partners from the Sámi community or those well-versed in Sámi culture and values.

#### **KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR NEW BUSINESSES INCLUDE:**

**Location:** Where should the business be established?

**Focus:** What should the core activities and products be?

**Collaboration:** How can meaningful partnerships and knowledge exchanges be fostered?

**Frameworks:** How can predictability in agreements and operations be ensured?

The last point is especially critical. For example, are tourism activities integrated into regional and municipal plans? Are specific areas allocated for nature-based tourism, and are these areas accessible within the necessary timeframes? Such considerations often intersect with management plans, where many feel that Sámi values and knowledge about sustainable landscape management are overlooked. Addressing these gaps is essential for creating a tourism industry that respects and incorporates Sámi cultural and environmental perspectives.

In Sápmi, Sámi land is collective, and tourism must therefore be organised differently than elsewhere in Fenno-Scandinavia. The tourism industry operating in Sápmi needs to take this into account. The best way to do it is to let Sámi tourism companies take the lead and collaborate with them. Similarly, land cannot be owned in Greenland. Developing land-based and marine tourism activities, often through concessions, thus requires a thorough understanding and respect for traditional use of land for hunting, fishing and berry picking.

## 5.2 Engaging Indigenous communities in tourism development conversations

How to ensure that Indigenous tourism benefits its community, also in the future? In her presentation, Taija Aikio, Audience Manager of Sámi Museum Siida, Finland

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explored how Sámi Museum Siida integrates cultural sustainability into tourism through deep-rooted community collaboration. Cultural sustainability is not about preserving the past – it’s about creating space for Indigenous cultures to thrive on their own terms. At Siida, this means ensuring Sámi voices lead the way. Our recent exhibition renewal involved over 300 Sámi community members, whose knowledge and stories shaped the content. We prioritised Sámi languages, presented traditional knowledge alongside Western science, and highlighted duodji and art as vital forms of storytelling. These choices enabled us to create a truly decolonial exhibition – one shaped by the Sámi, for the Sámi. Beyond the museum, we actively support the tourism sector in ethical Sámi representation. We offer free tours and guidance to local guides and businesses, encouraging respectful storytelling rooted in community perspectives. Cultural sustainability requires genuine partnership. When Indigenous voices guide the experience, tourism becomes not just a visit – but a meaningful exchange.



FIGURE 18 AND 19: Sámi Museum Siida, Inari, Finland. Photo: Håkan Appelblad.

During her presentation, Aikio also noted that the community should participate in development projects right from the outset and also be the decision-maker. These are excellent guidelines for any tourism development project that aims at cultural sustainability, be it in a museum, tourism company, DMO, or municipality.

Similar to this experience, Visit Greenland has worked with developing national community guidelines to ensure that tourism development benefits all of the nation. There are currently many discussions ongoing about developing community guidelines further in Kalaallit Nunaat. The first [community specific guidelines](#) were developed by the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) in close collaboration with communities (usually through the municipal business association) and now cover most coastal communities. These guidelines are however only targeted at expedition cruise tourists, leaving a 'guideline gap' for conventional cruise guests and the growing number of land-based tourists, for instance coming into Kalaallit Nunaat from the new seasonal route from New York.

Participatory planning and development processes may, however, be challenging. Not all community groups necessarily participate in them (Mattila et al., 2022, Markussen & Ren, 2023), due to aspects such as lack of time, interest or motivation, and it is difficult to address power imbalances and conflicts in them (Miraftab, 2018). Local power imbalances may have lasted for generations and shape how locals interact with each other (Barton & Leonard, 2010; Ibañez, 2014). A crucial question is whether there are voices that remain unheard (e.g., children, youth, elderly people, women, minorities) and how they can be included in the process on an equal footing with other participants. Different people may find different but appropriate ways to participate. The diversity of perspectives is better captured if they can express their concerns and ideas in their own ways, like storytelling at a campfire or through crafts or art (Leikkilä et al., 2013; Li et al., 2023; Marques et al., 2021). This could encourage community groups who usually do not participate to join the planning and development process, and aligns well with what is suggested in [Section 3](#) about alternative decolonial, Indigenised conference formats.

At the Indigenous Tourism Research Symposium of the conference, one paper suggested that ethical guidelines created for researchers could also be utilised for tourists visiting Indigenous communities. The guidelines should be co-created with Indigenous organisations:

*Co-producing codes of ethics for visitors to Indigenous communities: adapting research practices for responsible tourism in the European Arctic*

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Outside visitors to Indigenous lands have various environmental, economic, and social impacts, some of which are negative or not beneficial to Indigenous communities. Different ethical codes of conduct and guidelines do exist for parts of the Arctic and sections of the tourism and research sectors, and are transferable due to the commonalities of their impacts. However, this maze of resources can be hard to navigate for early career researchers (ECRs) in particular, who often operate on quite an individual level but bear a profound responsibility to minimise the negative environmental and social impacts of their work. Through a workshop with ECRs based in the United Kingdom, we discussed institutional, national, and international guidelines in both Arctic and non-Arctic countries to help inform and support researchers and tourists to follow ethical principles, and how implementation needs to be enforced by entities across all these scales. As demonstrated by existing guidelines, co-production with Indigenous organisations such as the Sámi Council enhances the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of ethical codes. Knowledge-sharing between countries and sectors, such as between researchers, tour operators, and government agencies, can also facilitate the adoption of best practices, especially in countries and sectors where ethical codes are not yet institutionalised.

Ningning Sun, Doctoral Candidate, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom, Zoë Wright, Doctoral Candidate, and Maud A.J. van Soest, Postdoctoral Researcher, UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, United Kingdom

Currently, the only ethical guidelines for Indigenous tourism in Arctic Europe are the [\*Principles for responsible, ethically sustainable Sámi tourism\*](#) (Figure 20) created by the Sámi Parliament in Finland:

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The primary purpose of these ethical guidelines is to terminate tourism exploiting Sámi culture and to eliminate incorrect information about the Sámi distributed through tourism. The second priority is to safeguard the cultural practices and traditions of the Sámi population outside the travel industry. The ethical guidelines are primarily meant for tourism actors and operators outside the Sámi community who carry out touristic productisation, representation, marketing and communications of Sámi culture. Furthermore, the guidelines are for visitors arriving in the Sámi Homeland

Sámi Parliament, n.d.a). Sámi stakeholders were engaged in the guideline creation process through a survey and an invitation to comment on the guideline draft (Suomi, 2020).

The Sámi Parliament in Finland also has created a [\*Responsible visitors' guide\*](#) to protect the wellbeing of local communities. The guide is meant for tourists, non-local tourism entrepreneurs and employees as well as tourism students interested in Sámi tourism and visiting the Finnish side of Sápmi (Sámi Parliament, n.d.b).



**FIGURE 20:** Sámi comic artist Sunna Kittí's illustration for the *Principles for responsible, ethically sustainable Sámi tourism*, Sámi Cultural Centre Sajos, Inari, Finland. Photo: Håkan Appelblad.

## 5.3 Local-international collaborations

The global Indigenous rights movement and the Sámi cultural revival of the mid-20th century marked a transformative era for Indigenous tourism. This pivotal period witnessed the establishment of Sámi and Inuit political organisations, cultural institutions, and the revitalisation of Indigenous languages and traditions. It was during this time that Indigenous entrepreneurs began to carve out their own space in the tourism sector, creating businesses that authentically reflected their cultural heritage. In Sápmi, these initiatives often centred on traditional crafts (duodji), storytelling, reindeer herding, and Sámi cuisine, offering visitors a genuine connection to Sámi culture.

WINTA has emerged as a central force in promoting Sámi tourism as an integral part of the global Indigenous tourism movement. Through advocacy, capacity building, and international networking, WINTA supports Sámi entrepreneurs in dismantling the colonial legacies that have historically shaped Indigenous tourism. The organisation champions Sámi tourism as a vehicle for cultural pride, economic empowerment, and sustainable development. However, despite significant progress, Sámi tourism continues to grapple with persistent challenges, including cultural appropriation and misrepresentation. Cultural appropriation and identity appropriation (e.g., non-Sámi persons pretending to be Sámi by wearing the traditional Sámi dress *gákti*) have been more common in Finnish Lapland than in the Swedish and Norwegian sides of Sápmi (Olsen et al., 2019) but even there non-Sámi operators occasionally exploit Sámi symbols and narratives without consent, undermining efforts to build a tourism industry rooted in Indigenous values and authenticity. In the souvenir business, exploitation of Sámi symbols, such as the symbols on Sámi drums, is also common. This ongoing struggle highlights the need for greater protections and advocacy to ensure that Sámi culture is represented on its own terms. The Sámi Council encourages businesses that wish to use Sámi culture in commercial contexts to engage in dialogue with Sámi stakeholders and emphasises that the pan-Sámi cross-border community needs to discuss and agree upon how Indigenous cultural heritage should be utilised for commercial purposes. A recent report of the Sámi crafters' Sámi Duodji association in Finland suggests that if a non-Sámi wants to utilise Sámi cultural heritage commercially, they should ask for permission to do so (Nuorgam & Paadar, 2022). However, there is yet no agreed procedure for this.

Programmes initiated by the Sámi Parliaments and the Sámi Council, with the backing of funding agencies, have further bolstered these efforts. Sámi entrepreneurs now have opportunities to expand their networks and gain valuable insights from other Indigenous territories, organisations, and businesses. This exchange of knowledge has been instrumental in helping Sámi tourism operators reformulate their profiles and practices to align more closely with Indigenous values

and contemporary expectations. Additionally, research initiatives with ethical and co-productive frameworks have played a critical role in driving positive change within tourism and the broader cultural industries in Sápmi and, to some extent, Kalaallit Nunaat. These initiatives emphasise the importance of respecting and learning from Indigenous culture and traditions. In Sápmi, Sámi tourism operators and visitors alike are encouraged to promote the use of Sámi languages, place names, and narratives to ensure cultural authenticity while embedding entrepreneurship in local values. By doing so, Sámi tourism not only preserves its cultural heritage but also strengthens its identity in an increasingly globalised world.

An interesting new global initiative is Destination Original Indigenous Tourism (DO-IT) founded by ITAC, New Zealand Māori Tourism and American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (currently American Indian Tourism Association) in 2024. The new organisation will develop and market "truly authentic Indigenous tourism destinations across the world." It aims at improved visibility in the tourism market and a more powerful position vis-à-vis governments and the non-Indigenous tourism industry (MacGregor, 2024). According to Keith Henry, president and CEO of ITAC, global entities have tried to market Indigenous tourism too long on behalf of Indigenous peoples, but still many tourists do not know about Indigenous tourism companies and their importance in preserving Indigenous cultures and in reconciliation efforts. The ultimate goal is to have all Indigenous tourism marketing associations of the world join DO-IT (ITAC, 2024). DO-IT also wishes to set consistent global standards for Indigenous tourism, which is planned to happen on the basis of the Original Original certification (DO-IT, n.d.).

In Sápmi, there are currently no similar Indigenous tourism industry-led organisations as in Canada, USA and New Zealand where, according to Lennart Pittja, Indigenous tourism has a stronger national position and therefore also a more secure governmental funding base than in the Nordic countries. For example, in Sweden there have been efforts to make the network of Sámi tourism companies more organised for a long time, but the problem has been a lack of continuous funding. Without steady funding it is difficult to create an organisation that can be sustained (Lennart Pittja, personal communication, November 10, 2025). In Finland and Norway, the Sámi Parliaments have been active through financing or running programmes supporting tourism development work, while in Sweden less so. Nevertheless, funding has been and is a problem also in Finland. On the Russian side of Sápmi, there is no Sámi Parliament or other Sámi organisations which would actively develop and promote Sámi tourism. The Sámi Parliament in Norway has initiated the development of a new platform and programme that will run for 3 years for sustainable tourism among Indigenous peoples. The goal is to ensure that Sámi culture and tourism continue to create value and that the strategy serves as a guide for the future development of the tourism industry. The

strategy will include measures such as guidance on engaging with Sámi culture, branding, storytelling, and strengthening networks between tourism, creative industries, and food.

In Kalaallit Nunaat, the national and regional destinations are funded by Naalakkersuisut (the Government of Greenland). Visit Greenland is in charge of national marketing campaigns and managing national destination and project initiatives, such as the Tourism Pledge and local community involvement. Regional destination marketing and management are run by regional DMOs within the municipal business associations.

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It [the conference] was a great journey, I learned a lot from other people. Most interesting is new thinking about tourism in the Arctic. That your language and culture means a lot. I think we must say stop to big cruises, and we must take care of our nature, and our water. If many tourists come it is not easy to take care of each tourist. We know that the climate will change and snow, reindeer, dark nights, and aurora borealis are fantastic. Tourism here must be realistic. Our people, Indigenous people, must decide themselves how much tourism they want. The government must help us to start up companies and own companies ourselves, and cooperate with other Indigenous companies. For me as Indigenous, I see that we [Indigenous people at the conference] think the same thoughts, we are proud of our traditions, we use what nature gives us, we take care of old people, we teach young people.

Ann-Kristin Blind, Svaipa sameby, Arjeplog, Sweden

#### MAIN TAKEAWAYS:

- Sámi entrepreneurs prioritise collaboration with their families, local communities, and elders to ensure their businesses authentically reflect and respect Sámi cultural heritage. This approach emphasises the collective and intergenerational nature of Sámi knowledge and traditions.
- Cultural sustainability emphasises the importance of preserving and innovatively integrating Sámi traditional knowledge, storytelling, crafts, and practices into tourism and business offerings. Nature is viewed as alive and Sámi knowledge is seen as dynamic and evolving.
- Sámi entrepreneurs face challenges determining which aspects of their culture can be ethically and sustainably transformed into tourism products. Issues such as cultural appropriation and the exploitation of Sámi symbols and narratives remain significant concerns.

- Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs balance autonomy with responsibility to their communities. Collaboration and approval from local Indigenous communities are essential to ensure that tourism activities align with cultural values and traditions.
- Local knowledge centres, historical societies, artists and duojars play a vital role in preserving Sámi traditions and supporting tourism development. Start-ups benefit from engaging with these resources to integrate Sámi cultural values into their operations.
- Ethical guidelines such as the Principles for Responsible, Ethically Sustainable Sámi Tourism, emphasise the importance of co-creating tourism practices with Indigenous communities to prevent exploitation and misrepresentation.

## 6 Tourism's connection to crafts, art and design in Sápmi



FIGURE 21: The glass lávvu that both protects and destroys life. Artist: Stina Aletta Aikio. Photo: Sanna Valkonen. Published with the permission of Stina Aletta Aikio and Sanna Valkonen.

### 6.1 How to develop a Sámi-rooted sustainable business model?

It is particularly interesting that the ongoing tourism development work seeks to preserve the "sharing culture and knowledge" which is an important principle within traditional knowledge and ensures that knowledge and culture are considered "common property". Many of the participants in the conference emphasised the importance of maintaining these considerations in their innovation and product development. This work will not only benefit Sámi tourism companies but also have transferable value to creative industries and future tourism development in the long term.

Actors from tourism and from the arts and creative industries have long recognised that they share many common reference points. Despite this, it has proven challenging to connect these two knowledge areas. There are several reasons for this. Importantly, these two interconnected fields have different institutional

frameworks of tools, requirements, and evaluation methods. For example, in Norway tourism is managed by Innovation Norway, while culture and cultural production are managed by the Arts Council Norway. These two institutions have different funding guidelines and criteria for measuring success.

The Arts Council Norway has a range of discipline-specific calls and professional committees with their own criteria within music, visual arts, literature, performing arts, museums and cultural heritage, venue development, creative industries, etc. These two areas primarily differ in their value systems—they assess quality and success differently, and their budgetary guidelines differ both at the national level and within the constraints of the European Economic Area regulations regarding which activities can be supported. It is evident how market values are central to the company and its products under development. Other values and collective societal considerations, which are important to many of the Sámi creative industry actors and tourism businesses and the community-building work they do on behalf of the Sámi population, are not visible.

Efforts should be made to ensure that business programmes targeting Sámi experience-based businesses and creative industries can integrate and model their programmes based on Sámi values and practices as they exist today. This will be a comprehensive task but also necessary for innovation and business establishment to occur on behalf of the Sámi community, where tourism can further develop into a stronger integrity as a learning and reconciliation arena.

## 6.2 The way forward

Innovation is about developing something valuable for both the entrepreneur and the customer. This is especially important in the Sámi context. This involves viewing tourism and creative industries as a potential arena for the creative use of Sámi knowledge traditions. Knowledge is at the heart of innovation. This means that it will be important for innovation and product development in Sámi tourism and creative industries to be based on Sámi values, narratives, and landscapes rather than “the other’s gaze” or what is believed the market expects. It is also important that national programmes adjust their expectations to ensure that such orientations form the foundation for product and market thinking.

In the Sámi community, the concept of “birgen” – the ability to manage and sustain oneself – remains a central value in most practices. This is clearly reflected in how people harvest berries, fish, and hunt. New generations learn through stories and narratives, and they learn from their elders to take only what they need – no more. Sustainable management is realised through this ongoing transmission of knowledge. Respect for nature, rivers, fish, and animals is embedded in the worldview that sustains Sámi culture. There are numerous practices and rituals,

stories, and narratives that make Sámi values, practices, and worldviews present in everyday Sámi life. These are concrete actions where the human perspective on connections and the reciprocity of these relationships should be acknowledged, as well as the respectful, knowledge-based relationships.

This requires, as Tore Johnsen (2022) argues, the establishment of a harmonious relationship with the invisible and not-so-obvious aspects of existence. He documents the Sámi practices of *jearrat lobi* – asking for permission – and *ráfi sihtat* – seeking peace – as fundamental relational and cosmological principles.



**FIGURE 22:** Connections. Photo: Britt Kramvig.

National investments, including those by the Sámi Parliaments, in creative industries must establish meaningful links between cultural heritage, artistic expression, *duodji*, and business activities. These investments must account for the preparatory work and research required to create tourist objects, experiences and stories that are meaningful to the Sámi community and uphold their values.

Certain aspects of the Sámi relationship with their culture and community are too valuable to be sacrificed for the sake of market appeal. At the same time, Sámi artists and tourism entrepreneurs recognise that launching and sustaining their businesses require navigating formalised financial systems, which often demand compromises and adjustments.

As an example of an innovation that connects Indigenous crafts and ecological concerns, one presentation at the Indigenous Tourism Research Symposium which was part of the EITC 2025 conference suggested that tourists could make their own sustainable souvenirs by learning local handicraft techniques from local guides and using as material, for example, plastic junk that can be found on the sea shore in the visited place:

*Connecting culture, land and nature: reimagining a new model of Northern tourism program*

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Traditionally, tour operators deliver education via the tourism platform. However, the sensitivity of the Arctic environment and the speed with which it is changing dictates that northern universities should become involved in Indigenous knowledge transfer, raising public awareness of climate change, and encouraging stewardship of the Arctic. Tourism including art and science is a possible mechanism for this effort. Developing a model for sustainable tourism should include: (1) indigenous ways of living, (2) citizen-engaged environmental observation, (3) place-based sustainable art, and (4) professional development of outdoor recreation and leadership. This concept is focused on knowledge co-production to provide tourism “packages” that raise awareness of the changing Arctic and encourage stewardship behaviour on the part of participants. Interdisciplinary solutions are needed to increase knowledge and engagement concerning sustainable tourism in the Arctic. This presentation provided a background of the framework and the design process to create a place-based sustainable souvenir (art) that brings visitors closer to places through positive memories. The major contribution was to instigate a new conversation linking Indigenous knowledge, connecting visitors to the land, and highlighting hands-on participatory experience through storytelling, and souvenir-making using sustainable materials. A creative approach provides a deeper connection and meaning to the experience.

Herminia Din, Professor Emerita, University of Alaska Anchorage, USA

## *Complementary Perspective on Sales: Decolonising Trade and Value Chain*

As well as the reflections presented in this report, the EITC 2025 conference highlighted sales as a central issue linked to ownership, storytelling, and cultural representation. It has been emphasised that Indigenous peoples should have control over how their culture is represented and offered on a tourism market. Hence certifications become a tool to safeguard authenticity and trust. Ann-Kristine Vinka proposes a complementary perspective that focuses on trade and the value chain, and in this way adopts a broader view of trade as a system that should be decolonised and Indigenised:

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*Why is this perspective needed?*

Tourism has historically functioned as a colonial structure – not only through narratives but also through economic systems. Today, tourism operates as a commodity within a global network of production, logistics, marketing, and sales. The discussion on decolonisation often focuses on narratives and ownership but overlooks that we are part of a larger trade structure.

We mostly talk about sales but forget that we are part of national and international trade. Trade is the overarching system for the exchange of goods and services, including production, logistics, marketing, and sales. Sales are only the actual transaction where our services are transferred for payment. Distribution concerns how our services are delivered to resellers or end customers.

Simply taking over sales and distribution from the majority society without changing the methods risks reproducing the same colonial logic. The current value chain is built for the needs and annual cycle of traditional tourism – not for Indigenous values or ecological conditions.

The trade and value chain perspective can contribute to a systemic shift.

*What needs to be done?*

We need to build an entirely new value chain for Indigenous tourism – where trade is included in a broader perspective than just sales and distribution. Together, we need to ensure that Indigenous resources are seen as sacred and worthy of protection, not exploitable. We need to contribute to a systemic shift where trade is not just an economic flow but primarily a protective mechanism where every step in the value chain strengthens nature, culture, and self-determination.

Together, we need to transform trade from a colonial legacy into a regenerative system that strengthens nature, culture, and Indigenous self-determination.

This can serve as a basis for research and for follow-up actions related to Indigenous tourism.

Ann-Kristine Vinka, Coordinator and Executive Director, Biosphere Reserve Vindelälven-Juhhtátahkka, Sweden

## 6.3 The role of traditional knowledge and decolonial practices

As Finbog (2023) argues, *duojárs* (Sámi artisans) engage in a symbolic repatriation process, reclaiming both the material objects they create and the *árbediehtu* (traditional knowledge) embedded in their craftsmanship. Sámi designers operate in a complex space, balancing institutional frameworks with local knowledge and community expectations. This dynamic requires them to mediate and integrate diverse perspectives throughout their creative and research processes.

National political institutions, programmes, and funding bodies must recognise the multifaceted responsibilities of Sámi artists. The knowledge they need is not always readily accessible, largely due to the legacy of colonialism. These artists work not only for their own benefit but also for the future of Sámi society. The loss of local knowledge, coupled with the absence of traditional knowledge holders in some communities, has created an urgent need to cultivate creative spaces. These spaces would provide opportunities for the next generation to find inspiration and collaborate across cultural and artistic boundaries as well as with Sámi tourism entrepreneurs.

Sámi artists aspire to delve deeper into Sámi worldviews and ontologies, reclaiming their relationships with landscapes, memories, stories, and ancestral knowledge. Despite the significant losses caused by colonialism, many are actively engaging in decolonial practices to restore and preserve their cultural heritage.

## 6.4 Decolonial aesthetics and Indigenous sovereignty

Escobar (2007) highlights how decolonial aesthetics disrupt coloniality's reliance on hyper-individualism, instead fostering shared artistic processes that imagine "worlds otherwise." This approach creates new, radical subjectivities rooted in Indigenous survival and resurgence, mirroring the efforts of other communities engaged in decolonial struggles. A recent example of this movement is the establishment of NANU Sámi Art International, an Indigenous-led export office created through collaboration between the Sámi Artist Network (*Dáiddadállu*) and the Sámi Indigenous festival *Riddu Riđđu* in Norway. This initiative represents a significant step toward Indigenous sovereignty – a concept of self-determination that predates colonial states and is essential for upholding Indigenous rights and ensuring their cultural and physical survival. Sovereignty encompasses jurisdiction over lands, resources, and cultural practices.

During the opening of artist Máret Ánne Sára's [Hyundai Commission](#) at the Tate Modern, the Norwegian Ministry of Culture and Equality announced its support for NANU, providing start-up funding of one million NOK. This initiative is envisioned as a pathway for Sámi tourism providers, storytellers, and knowledge holders to engage within commercial frameworks while preserving their cultural integrity.



**FIGURE 23:** Connections. Photo: Britt Kramvig.

# 7 Where is Indigenous tourism going next? Moving forward

Among the highlights of the conference were the greetings from the Sámi Youth Council in Finland delivered by Niila-Juhán Valkeapää. In his speech he addressed the concerns from many young Sámi about the future for their communities, culture and lands. Young Sámi's concerns, and fears, about the future include how tourism takes place, not at least how to represent Sámi in tourism. He emphasised how choices and decisions made today affect the future. The youth especially will inevitably be facing the long-term consequences of these choices and decisions made in this time. These future consequences make it important to involve the young generation in the decision-making. With reference to the participants present at the EITC 2025 conference meeting Niila-Juhán asked, "How many young people are in this room?" He noted that the inclusion of young people might not be the priority. Still, Niila-Juhán Valkeapää stresses the importance of dealing with sustainability and tourism issues from a Sámi youth perspective:



**FIGURE 24:** The glass lávvu that both protects and destroys life. Artist: Stina Aletta Aikio. Photo: Sanna Valkonen. Published with the permission of Stina Aletta Aikio and Sanna Valkonen.

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What does sustainability really mean, when viewed from an Indigenous youth perspective? It is not only about carbon footprints or eco-labels. It's about respecting Indigenous decision-making, ensuring our cultures are not turned into performances, and making sure that the benefits of tourism stay in the community, not just with outside investors. Sustainability means that our land is still there for our grandchildren. That our languages are still spoken. That we are not only remembered in museums or travel brochures – but that we are thriving, innovating, and shaping the Arctic future ourselves. We need tourism models that are led by Indigenous people, shaped by our values, and grounded in real consent, not token consultation. Youth are already leading, organising projects, fighting for land rights, and keeping traditions alive in new ways. We are the bridge between the past and the future. We inherit histories of resilience and we are ready to build futures of our own design. But we need support not in the form of more speeches about how important youth are, but through access to funding, education, mentorship, and meaningful seats at decision-making tables. We are not too young to understand the stakes we are dealing with. And we are not too young to lead.

Niila-Juhán Valkeapää, working chair of the Youth Council, Sámi Parliament, Finland

Many speakers touched on collaboration between Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs and between Indigenous peoples more generally. Collaboration is needed across borders and between Indigenous peoples in order to solve the current challenges and to succeed in the market. As Ellinor Guttorm Utsi said, alone we are invisible, together we are visible. Gathering together at conferences is also important. As Ann-Kristine Vinka noted, only by gathering together and discussing issues can we move forward and see our common values. According to Heikki Paltto, it is good to see what has been done elsewhere. Ann-Kristine Bongo stated that the conference had opened her eyes to see that by working hard you can reach your goals. There was a wish to have Indigenous tourism conferences in the Nordic countries also in the future, but again funding is a challenge. Sponsors have been a solution in the previous WINTA conferences but how to find sponsors whose values align with those of Indigenous peoples?

Although the conference was decolonial in the sense of having a programme that was planned in an Indigenous-led manner and prioritising Indigenous speakers, the conference format in itself was Western-style. This raised different thoughts of more Indigenous conference formats – how to Indigenise the conference? These ideas were inspired by Áile Aikio's keynote on decolonising and Indigenising the

museum and conversations with attendees with less experience in larger conferences. Future conferences should allow more time and possibilities for dialogue and encounters between the participating Indigenous entrepreneurs, for example, in the form of Meet & Greet events in smaller groups, sharing circles, walk'n talks, or 'lávvu talks'. For the same reason we recommend having more breaks in the programme and excursions before, during or after the conference to allow people to get to know the land visited (see [Section 2](#)). It is also important to make the use of Indigenous languages possible. At the EITC 2025, although simultaneous interpretation was expensive, caused technical issues, delays and frustration, it made the use of Sámi languages possible and welcome (or at some points unwelcome because of the technical problems). The conference supported the use of Sámi languages also on its website, which after the conference provides language students with vocabulary related to Indigenous tourism. We would, however, have needed interpretation also for our Inuit guests (Kalaallisut or Danish).

## 7.1 Current trends in Sámi tourism

The current era of Sámi tourism is characterized by several promising trends:

### Enhanced local, regional, and international collaboration:

There is a growing emphasis on collaboration at all levels – local, regional, and international. Sámi tourism operators are increasingly engaging with Indigenous peoples from other territories, fostering cross-cultural exchanges and partnerships. Locally, small businesses and institutions have developed greater capacity to participate in international collaborations, enabling them to share their unique perspectives on a global stage.

### Cross-Border connections in the Nordic region:

Stronger cross-border collaborations within the Nordic countries have been facilitated by organizations such as the Sámi Council and other Nordic bodies. These initiatives are supported by numerous programmes that enhance competence and provide tangible benefits for small enterprises, museums, artists, and cultural institutions. These cross-border efforts not only strengthen Sámi tourism but also contribute to connect Sámi across territory as well as generations. The producer of this report, Sustainable Indigenous Tourism in the Nordic Arctic project, funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers Arctic Cooperation Programme is a good example of these initiatives. It brought together Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs from Finland, Kalaallit Nunaat, Norway and Sweden, fostering joint knowledge and capacity building.

## Partnerships between Sámi Parliaments, the Sámi Council, and academic institutions:

Collaboration between Sámi Parliaments, the Sámi Council, and universities or research institutions has become increasingly common. These partnerships are mutually beneficial, fostering innovation, cultural preservation, and sustainable development. Research initiatives, in particular, have provided valuable insights that inform tourism practices and policies.



FIGURE 25: A glimpse of the future. Photo: Britt Kramvig.

## 7.2 Challenges and the path forward

While these initiatives hold great promise, they require sustained political, practical, and financial support to reach their full potential. Investments in infrastructure, capacity building, and policy frameworks are essential to ensure that Sámi tourism continues to thrive as a tool for cultural resilience and economic empowerment. Moreover, ongoing efforts to combat cultural appropriation and promote ethical tourism practices remain critical to safeguarding the integrity of Sámi culture.



**FIGURE 26:** By the Juutua River. Photo: Håkan Appelblad.

Storytelling is a central part of Indigenous knowledge traditions, highlighting the need to craft and present stories that are locally embedded in Indigenous culture. Entrepreneurs are increasingly taking responsibility for reclaiming their own history and ownership of their own stories. They are active agents of change, managing their local knowledge in ways that benefit both the environment and people. They understand that their stories have significance beyond the space and time in which they are told – because stories travel, and in doing so, contribute to creating truths about who we are and how we live.

While stories have the potential to highlight and draw attention to the environmental challenges that we all face, they can also be an important part of the ongoing call for reconciliation. In the future, it will therefore be particularly important that local communities have the opportunity to tell their own stories, in their own way, and that Indigenous stories reflect diversity, vibrant culture, and values through narratives driven by a “we” rather than about the Indigenous person as “the exotic other”. This is a long-term and crucial effort where Indigenous tourism and creative industries can advantageously collaborate over time to ensure storytelling strategies that benefit communities.

Sápmi stretches across national borders and spans large areas from north to south. There is potential in building destination companies like [Destination Sápmi](#) across borders and connecting various locations and businesses, bringing artists, designers, traditional knowledge holders and researchers more closely together. Additionally, there is a need for shared meeting places for creative industry actors, art, and businesses from the experience tourism segment. These groups share some common challenges that can be addressed collectively. The various Indigenous regions will have different challenges. At the same time, there is more that unites these actors than divides them. They all want to tell stories that are important for the Indigenous future. They all ask what we can achieve together – and how we can agree on the issues that require common solutions (see more Kramvig & Smedseng, 2022).

For Kalaallit Nunaat, the ongoing work to develop tourism has explicitly been linked to a wish to secure independence for the Indigenous nation (Ren & Jóhannesson, 2025). Moving forward, the challenge will be to secure not only a just access to infrastructure and opportunities emerging from increasing tourism development (Ren & al., 2024, Markussen & Ren, 2023), but also that Inuit values, ways of life and heritage are embedded and strengthened within this development.

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