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Treading Lightly

Understanding Tourism Dynamics and Sustainability in Inari and Ivalo

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Abstract:

This thesis examines perceptions of sustainable tourism among local residents and other stakeholders in the Municipality of Inari, located in Sápmi, or Finnish Lapland. Set against a backdrop of rapid tourism growth, the study investigates how different groups define and experience sustainable tourism in this region of profound cultural and ecological significance, situated within the vulnerable Arctic landscape. The research explores the challenges and opportunities inherent in balancing tourism development with the need for environmental stewardship and cultural preservation. Employing a qualitative methodology, the study draws on semi-structured interviews with a diverse range of participants, participant observation, and an analysis of various materials like websites and guidelines. Key findings reveal that while tourism is a significant economic driver, providing income and employment, it also presents considerable challenges. These include seasonality, cultural tensions, and environmental pressures from activities and transportation. Locals primarily define sustainable tourism through its environmental impacts, particularly concerning transportation, and its socio-economic benefits, such as local hiring and supporting local businesses. The commodification and representation of Sámi culture emerge as crucial issues, highlighting the need for cultural sensitivity and Sámi self-determination. The study underscores a significant need for enhanced cooperation and communication among stakeholders and discusses alternative models like ecotourism and community-based tourism as potential pathways for more responsible development. Ultimately, the thesis aims to contribute insights into how tourism can "tread lightly" while ensuring equitable benefits for the local community.

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1 Introduction

Tourism has become one of the defining socio-economic and cultural forces of the modern era. In 2024, international tourism rebounded from the pandemic's disruptions, with global tourist arrivals reaching 1.4 billion, surpassing pre-pandemic levels according to UNWTO (2025). While tourism contributes significantly to global GDP and employment, it also raises complex questions about its long-term impact on societies and ecosystems. As tourism continues to expand, the balance between growth and sustainability remains a critical concern.

The largest and northernmost region of Finland, known as Sápmi by Sámi and as Finnish Lapland by others and tourists, borders Sweden, Norway, and Russia. Being crossed by the Arctic Circle, the region is marketed as an Arctic escape, drawing visitors with its vast wilderness, Northern Lights, and Sámi "unique culture" (*Explore Finnish Lapland – Europe's Last Great Wilderness | Visit Finland*, n.d.). Over the past decade, tourism has surged, with registered overnight stays rising from 2.3 million in 2016 to 3.1 million in 2019 (*Facts & Figures | Business Lapland*, 2021), driven by international fascination with winter activities like husky safaris and luxury glass igloos (Kugapi et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic caused a sharp decline to 2.1 million stays in 2020, but domestic tourism rebounded in 2021, reaching a record 1.8 million overnight stays, before international travel surged again in 2022. This rapid growth has intensified discussions on sustainability, leading to significant investments, amounting to millions of euros between 2017 and 2020, to align Lapland's tourism sector with the European Commission's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (*Sustainable Tourism & Responsible Travel | Visit Finnish Lapland*, 2024).

This thesis examines perceptions of sustainable tourism among local residents and other stakeholders in the Municipality of Inari, located in Sápmi, or Finnish Lapland. As Finland's largest municipality by area, Inari is a region of profound cultural and ecological significance, with tourism serving as one of its major economic drivers. The municipality is home to Finland's largest Sámi population, comprising North Sámi, Inari Sámi, and Skolt Sámi communities, whose ways of life and knowledge are preserved and showcased at the Siida Museum and the Sajos Sámi Cultural Centre. Inari's natural landscapes further enhance its appeal as a tourist destination, with 72% of its land area designated as protected wilderness (Kull et al., 2020) such as the

Urho Kekkonen National Park, a popular destination for hiking enthusiasts; Lemmenjoki National Park, Finland's largest wilderness area; and the Vätsäri Wilderness Area, which caters to more experienced adventurers. Additionally, Ivalo, a key locality within Inari, serves as a gateway for travelers en route to the North Cape (Kull et al., 2020), further solidifying the region's status as a major international tourism hub.

As the area grows as a destination, tensions arise among stakeholders with differing interests, particularly regarding cultural preservation, economic opportunities, and environmental stewardship. While tourism can offer economic benefits, it often results in the commercialization of local cultural heritage and damage to the natural environment. Thus, given its location in the vulnerable Arctic landscape and the need for cultural preservation, sustainable tourism is a way for the Inari municipality to minimize the tourism's negative effects and maximize the positive ones.

On my first day of fieldwork in Inari, I found myself in the lobby of a hotel that seemed to embody the essence of Lapland's appeal. Its interiors, crafted from warm wood, were decorated with traditional Sámi crafts, shamanic drums, richly embroidered textiles, and other symbols of Sámi culture, each carefully placed to evoke a sense of cultural "authenticity". Families with children gathered in corners, senior travelers enjoyed quiet conversations, and small groups of adventure-seekers exchanged plans for guided activities.

I sat observing these surroundings, preparing to interview the hotel manager, and pondering how to approach questions about the lobby's design. Were these items purely decorative, a means to package local traditions for tourists, or did they hold deeper significance for those who curated the space? As I reflected, I couldn't help but wonder who the manager would be and how they would respond to inquiries about the Sámi identities represented within these walls.

The manager turned out to be Sámi, and our conversation unfolded naturally. This encounter set the tone for my fieldwork, illuminating not only the complexities of cultural display but also the vital role of local voices in shaping tourism policies. This moment crystallized the core questions driving my research: Which groups benefit most from tourism in this region? At what cost? And how can the region's future balance growth with sustainability?

To explore these questions, this thesis examines the dynamics of tourism in Inari and Ivalo by examining who visits the region, why they come, and how their presence shapes the local environment, culture, and economy. Through the perspectives of locals, tourists, and tourism operators, the study investigates the interplay between tourism development and sustainability, focusing on how tourism can be both a force for economic growth and a challenge to cultural and environmental preservation. By analysing the role of certifications, local entrepreneurship, and the region's marketing strategies, the research aims to uncover what makes tourism in the region sustainable or unsustainable and how local and tourist perceptions of sustainability influence practices. Ultimately, this study seeks to provide insights into how tourism can "tread lightly" on Inari and Ivalo's unique landscapes while fostering equitable benefits for the local community.

The main questions I ask here are:

- 1. How does tourism in Inari and Ivalo shape the region's environment, culture, and economy?*
- 2. How do locals perceive "sustainable tourism", and what do they identify as its key elements?*
- 3. What are the challenges and opportunities for achieving sustainable tourism in Inari and Ivalo, and how can they be addressed?*

The analytical chapter is organised into three sub-chapters, each addressing a core dimension of tourism in Inari and Ivalo:

The first sub-chapter seeks to provide an overview of tourism in the region, including the forms of tourism and how they have evolved. It also examines the impacts of tourism on the environment, culture, and economy. By understanding these dynamics, the question aims to uncover how tourism both benefits and challenges the region, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of sustainability.

The second sub-chapter centres on local residents' perspectives, including Sámi community members, tourism operators, and long-term residents, to understand how they define and experience sustainable tourism in Inari and Ivalo. While discussions with tourists and foreign workers will provide comparative context, the primary aim is to amplify local voices and their interpretations of sustainability.

The third and final sub-chapter shifts the focus to the practical and structural aspects of sustainable tourism. It examines the challenges and opportunities for achieving sustainability. It also explores potential solutions, such as guidelines, certifications, or policies that could help tourism "tread lightly" on the region's resources. By addressing this question, the research aims to propose actionable pathways for sustainable tourism development in the region.

2 Contextual Background: Inari municipality and tourism

2.1 Geographical and Historical Snapshot

Inari, Finland's largest municipality by area, is sparsely populated, with a population density of 0.5 inhabitants per square kilometer (Statistics Finland, 2023). Inari is situated in Northern Finland, neighboring four municipalities: Enontekiö, Kittilä, Sodankylä, and Utsjoki. It also shares international borders with Russia and Norway.

Inari's position within the Arctic Circle makes it an ideal hub for travelers joining the Classic North Cape Bus Tour, a well-known route that links the region to the North Cape, Europe's northernmost point accessible by road. This makes Inari a key stopover for tourists exploring the Arctic landscapes.

The main settlements in Inari Municipality are Inari, Ivalo, and Saariselkä. Ivalo, home to two-thirds of the municipality's population, serves as the administrative center and is a key transportation hub, with its international airport welcoming around 250,000 visitors annually and providing fast connections to global destinations (Information - INARI.FI/EN, n.d.). Inari is a prime destination for tourists seeking to explore its vast wilderness, including Lake Inari, Otsamo Fell, Ukko Island, and the surrounding national parks and wilderness areas. It also offers rich cultural experiences, such as the Sajos Cultural Center, which houses the Finnish Sámi Parliament, and the Siida Museum, a center for Sámi culture and nature. Saariselkä, a renowned ski resort, is partially located within the Urho Kekkonen National Park, Finland's second-largest national park. It serves as a gateway to the park's pristine landscapes, making it a popular base for outdoor enthusiasts.

2.2 Demographics and Livelihoods

As of 2019, the total population of Inari municipality was 6,899, of which 2,141 (31%) were registered Sámi, including Inari Sámi, Skolt Sámi, and North Sámi communities (Statistics - INARI.FI/EN, n.d.). According to the 2023 census, there are 492 Sámi speakers in Inari, out of 2,051 in all of Finland (Statistics Finland, 2023). The Sámi have their own parliament, located in Inari, which governs matters related to livelihoods, justice, environment, education, cultural preservation, and Sámi languages.

Inari's population has fluctuated over the years. After a decline in the late 2000s, net migration turned positive in 2012, contributing to a gradual increase in population. Mayor Toni K. Laine attributes this growth to migration from neighboring municipalities and the return of former residents (Kull et al., 2020). By 2018, the population had risen to 6,908, and as of 2023, it stands at 7,127.

2.3 Tourism in Action: Attractions, Activities, and Flows

Inari Municipality has long been a sought-after destination for tourists. As early as the 1900s, English nobles travelled to the region for fly fishing in the Paatsjoki and Juutua rivers, marking the beginning of summer tourism in the area. Winter tourism, now thriving from November to March, initially developed around Saariselkä, where Finnish companies built hotels and cottages to cater to visitors seeking skiing and other winter activities (Kull et al., 2020).

Large-scale tourism in Finnish Lapland took off in the 1920s when Petsamo became part of Finland. Since then, the Sámi have been a central feature of Lapland's tourism imagery. After World War II, Finnish tourism companies began incorporating Sámi cultural elements into their marketing to distinguish Lapland from other nature-based destinations. However, this often involved creating commercialised versions of Sámi culture to meet tourist expectations (Saari et al., 2020).

The mid-2000s economic crisis, exacerbated by changes in Finland's tax policies, led to a decline in domestic tourism. However, by 2010, the sector rebounded, becoming increasingly international and transforming the region's tourism landscape according to the study *Attractive Rural Municipalities in the Nordic countries* by Kull et al. (2020). The study provides an analysis of 14 rural municipalities in the Nordic Region, including Inari Municipality, and is based on interviews with public sector representatives, business owners, and local residents. It reveals that some of the target municipalities are better at deploying resources, attracting people, and creating jobs. Inari was selected as a case study precisely because its population and employment numbers had increased in recent years, and tourism plays a crucial role in this positive trend.

In contemporary tourism, Inari's natural landscape and Sámi cultural heritage serve as central elements in appealing to national and international audiences. Tourism has become a key driver of social and economic development, reshaping the region's

physical and social environment while providing income and employment opportunities (Saarinen, 2003).

In his article Saarinen (2003) examines the socio-economic impacts of recent tourism development in northern Finland and explores future possibilities for regional development by integrating tourism with other local industries. Inari serves as a relevant case study throughout the article, illustrating various aspects of tourism development, its economic and social impacts, seasonality, and challenges in a rural Northern Finnish context. The paper highlights the importance of tourism to the regional economy, especially in peripheral areas, and discusses the use of the "Nordic Model" for evaluating its economic and employment effects. It concludes by emphasising the need for a more integrated approach to tourism planning that leverages local resources and knowledge for the long-term benefit of communities.

In 2014, direct tourism income for Inari Municipality reached €108.7 million (Statistics - INARI.FI/EN, n.d.). According to the 2023 census, employment in travel agencies, tour operations, and related services has grown significantly, from 73 workers in 2013 to 151 in 2023, peaking at 204 in 2018 before dropping to 97 in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, tourism is a double-edged sword, bringing both opportunities and challenges. While it generates economic benefits, these are not always equitably distributed, as a portion of revenue often leaves the region through large tourism companies (Saarinen, 2003). The seasonal nature of tourism means that many jobs are available only during the winter months. (Saarinen, 2003; Kull et al., 2020). At the same time, every year, hundreds of seasonal workers from abroad arrive to fill roles in hotels, restaurants, transportation, and guided tours, contributing to the vibrant winter tourism season (Working in the Tourism Sector - INARI.FI/EN). Additionally, rising living costs, particularly in housing, have impacted the quality of life for locals (Trifanova, 2019; Kull et al., 2020).

3 Theories and Concepts

3.1 Tourism as a Cultural Encounter

From an anthropological perspective, tourism is more than just a leisure activity, it is a mechanism of cultural exchange, identity negotiation, and economic interaction (Nash & Smith, 1991; MacCannell, 1976). The anthropology of tourism began to emerge as a distinct area of study in the 1960s and 1970s, as anthropologists recognized tourism as a significant global phenomenon with profound cultural, social, and economic implications.

One of the earliest and most influential works in the field is Smith's edited volume *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism* (1989), first published in 1977. This collection of 14 scholarly papers explored the relationships between tourists and host communities, emphasizing the social and cultural impacts of tourism. Historically, the anthropology of tourism has predominantly focused on the dynamics of tourists from the Global North traveling to the Global South, reflecting concerns about the 'imposition' of tourism on preindustrial or Third World societies (Nash et al., 1981).

This focus was driven by the recognition of power imbalances, cultural and natural commodification, and the multifaceted impacts of tourism on local communities in the Global South. However, even in its early stages, works like *Hosts and Guests* included accounts of tourism in regions such as the Alaskan Arctic and European resorts like Catalonia, demonstrating that tourism's impacts are not confined to the Global South. As Oriol Pi-Sunyer notes in his contribution to *Hosts and Guests*, the impact model approach used in studying tourism in developing countries can also be applied to other regions, provided researchers account for the dynamic nature of tourism, such as changes in tourist types, forms of tourism, and the political and economic contexts within which tourism policies are developed (Pi-Sunyer, 1989).

During the 1980s and 1990s, the anthropology of tourism expanded significantly, addressing themes such as authenticity, commodification, and the political economy of tourism. MacCannell's influential book *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (1976) introduced the concept of "staged authenticity," arguing that tourists seek authentic experiences but often encounter staged or commodified versions of culture. Similarly, Urry's *The Tourist Gaze* first published in 1990 (2011) explored how tourism shapes and is shaped by visual culture, arguing that tourists consume

places through a socially constructed "gaze" mediated by images, advertisements, and cultural expectations.

The anthropology of tourism has evolved significantly over time, reflecting shifts in societal concerns and academic priorities (Nash et al., 1981; Nash & Smith, 1991). Dennison Nash's article, "Tourism as an Anthropological Subject" (1981), argued that tourism is a significant cultural phenomenon involving complex interactions between tourists and hosts, shaping identities, social structures, and power dynamics. By framing tourism as a form of cultural exchange and, at times, imperialism, Nash legitimized it as a critical subject for anthropological study. His work bridges anthropology with other disciplines, such as sociology, economics, and geography, as seen in his book *Anthropology of Tourism* (1996), which focuses on the political economy of tourism and examines how tourism development is often driven by global economic forces and power imbalances.

Nash and Smith's (1991) article, "Anthropology and Tourism," further emphasized the interdisciplinary nature of the field while highlighting key themes such as the tourist-host relationship, the commodification of culture, and the impacts of tourism on local communities. They advocated for a critical and ethical approach to tourism research, underscoring the need to address the power dynamics and inequalities inherent in tourism development. This evolution in the anthropology of tourism reflects a growing recognition of tourism's complexity and its profound implications for societies and cultures worldwide.

3.2 Sustainability: Balancing People, Planet, and Profit

In the 1980s and 1990s, scholars and practitioners began critiquing the negative impacts of mass tourism, leading to the emergence of research focused on more sustainable and ethical forms of travel (Saarinen, 2020; 2021). One of the earliest critiques was presented in Krippendorf's **The Holiday Makers: Understanding the Impact of Leisure and Travel** (1988), which advocated for a more responsible approach to tourism by addressing its environmental and social implications. During this period, anthropological research into alternative tourism, including ecotourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism, and volunteer tourism, explored the intersections of these practices with local cultures, economies, and environments, contributing to broader discussions on sustainable development. Cohen's (1972) work

on tourist typologies and the impacts of tourism on local cultures provided essential groundwork for understanding these alternative tourism forms.

The concept of sustainable tourism developed gradually, reflecting broader societal concerns. The UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm (1972) emphasised worries about industrial growth's strain on the environment, including tourism's impact. The Brundtland Report (1987) introduced the term "sustainable development," defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to fulfil their own needs. This report shifted the focus from purely environmental issues to recognising tourism as a potential tool for economic development.

The 1990s marked the institutionalisation of sustainable tourism principles, with organisations like the United Nations World Tourism Organisation and the International Ecotourism Society (TIES) promoting sustainable practices and defining key concepts. Sustainable tourism was defined as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities” (UNWTO). This definition has remained unchanged since then. As an umbrella term, sustainable tourism encompasses all forms of tourism aligned with sustainable development principles.

The term “ecotourism” began to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s, gaining formal recognition in the early 1980s when Ceballos-Lascuráin provided a definition in 1987. He described ecotourism as “traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any cultural manifestations found in these areas” (Cobbinah, 2015). This definition has since evolved, placing greater emphasis on sustainability and conservation (Milla, 2022).

In the early 1990s, "ecotourism" became a widely used term. As a subset of sustainable tourism, TIES defines ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of local people, and involves interpretation and education” for both staff and guests (TIES, 2015). Ecotourism often intertwines with other nature-based tourism forms, such as wildlife and adventure tourism, but it distinguishes itself by prioritizing benefits for local

communities and environmental preservation rather than merely catering to tourist activities. Furthermore, it emphasizes education for both visitors and hosts to minimize negative impacts on sensitive environments and cultures (Honey, 2008).

While ecotourism and sustainable tourism are distinct concepts, they are often interconnected in anthropological studies, particularly in the fields of environmental and ecological anthropology. These studies examine tourism's potential to promote positive social change while also addressing its associated challenges (West & Carrier, 2004; Carrier & Macleod, 2005). Honey's *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development: Who Owns Paradise?* (2008), first published in 1999, serves as a cornerstone for sustainable tourism research. This work provides a comprehensive framework for understanding ecotourism as a tool for both economic development and environmental protection, particularly in developing countries. Amanda Stronza's extensive research demonstrates that ecotourism is not merely an economic "tool" for conservation but also a catalyst for new values and social relationships (Stronza, 2007; Stronza et al., 2019).

Stronza's work on community-based ecotourism in the Amazon highlights the critical role of empowering local communities through participatory tourism initiatives (Stronza, 2001; 2005; 2008; 2009). Community-based tourism aligns closely with sustainable tourism principles by addressing the needs of host communities and actively involving them in tourism management and policymaking. This approach aims to amplify marginalised voices and foster grassroots initiatives, rather than selectively incorporating voices for business-oriented purposes (Partanen et al., 2023). Duffy (2006) underscores the importance of considering power dynamics within communities when studying community-based ecotourism, a sentiment echoed by Partanen et al. (2023) in their research on young adults' inclusion in tourism planning in Kemi, northern Finland. They propose strategies for transforming tourism towards sustainability, stressing the need to address existing power structures.

However, alternative types of tourism, including ecotourism, have faced criticism for often failing to meet their stated ideals. Issues such as greenwashing, inadequate conservation outcomes, misdirected economic benefits, cultural invasiveness, and insufficient inclusion of local communities in decision-making processes have been highlighted (Duffy, 2002; Duffy, 2006; Honey, 2008; Stronza, 2001; Stronza, 2008).

Furthermore, the phenomenon of "ecotourism lite," which refers to the marketing of conventional mass tourism under the guise of being ecotourism, poses an additional challenge (Honey, 2008). The title of this thesis, "Treading Lightly," is inspired by one of the marketing buzzwords used to promote ecotourism.

While alternative types of tourism are often promoted as politically neutral strategies, they are inherently political. Their marketing logic aligns with the concept of "sustainability-lite," where sustainability efforts are pursued within existing capitalist frameworks (Brockington et al., 2008). This situation is exacerbated by a lack of unified definitions, standards, and regulations concerning sustainable and alternative forms of tourism, both in Finland and globally (Tuohino & Hynönen, 2001; Honey, 2008; Duffy, 2006). This ambiguity results in confusion among consumers and tourism businesses, leading to varied interpretations of what constitutes "ecotourism" or another alternative type of tourism. Additionally, the boundaries between alternative forms of tourism and sustainable tourism are often indistinct. In Finland, terms like nature tourism, sustainable tourism, and environmentally friendly tourism are frequently used interchangeably with ecotourism, despite suggesting different meanings (Tuohino & Hynönen, 2001; Ikonen, 2012).

A crucial conceptual distinction exists between "sustainable tourism" and "responsible tourism". Sustainable tourism refers to systemic approaches adopted by destinations and businesses to balance environmental, economic, and cultural needs. In contrast, responsible tourism focuses specifically on individual traveler behavior. Responsible tourism (sometimes referred to as responsible travel) describes the conscious alignment of tourists' choices—such as transportation, accommodations, and activities—with sustainability principles (Rariel, 2025). Notably, responsible travelers can drive industry change by demanding and supporting sustainable business practices, thereby creating market incentives for broader transformation.

Although this study does not focus on analysing specific forms of tourism present in Inari, it aims to explore how sustainable tourism practices are defined. Nevertheless, alternative tourism models, such as ecotourism and community-based tourism, emerge as relevant themes in both the interview data and the concluding sub-chapter. These forms of tourism are examined in the context of recommendations and opportunities for advancing sustainable tourism development. Additionally, the sub-chapter discusses various "green" certification programmes, which were originally

developed within the ecotourism movement following the Rio Earth Summit, to assess the environmental and social impacts of tourism businesses (Honey, 2008).

3.3 The Arctic Paradox: Tourism in a Fragile Landscape

The Arctic provides a critical lens for examining the cultural, environmental, and political dimensions of tourism. Home to Indigenous communities like the Sámi, whose livelihoods are deeply intertwined with the region's landscapes, the Arctic's fragile ecosystems are highly sensitive to climate change and human activity. Tourism in the Arctic is shaped by global forces such as climate change, resource extraction, and geopolitical interests, while also profoundly impacting local communities.

Once a remote and inhospitable region, the Arctic has transformed into a high-profile tourism destination, attracting visitors through activities such as wildlife viewing, cultural tourism, and Arctic cruises (Hall & Saarinen, 2010). However, this growth brings both opportunities and challenges, including the risks of overtourism, cultural commodification, and environmental degradation (Jóhannesson et al., 2022).

Anthropological research in the Arctic has explored the complex interactions between tourism and local communities, emphasising the need for cultural sensitivity and sustainable practices (Viken & Müller, 2017; Olsen et al., 2019). While tourism can empower Indigenous communities by providing economic opportunities and revitalising cultural practices, it also risks reinforcing stereotypes and inequalities (Ioannides et al., 2024). For example, in Rovaniemi, Finland, the Arctic Circle is marketed as a gateway to the Arctic, yet tourists often perceive the Arctic as a nebulous region defined by winter-based experiences like snow and northern lights, rather than fixed geographical boundaries (Varnajot, 2020). This "cryospheric gaze," rooted in Urry's (1990) concept of the tourist gaze, reflects the commodification of Arctic imagery, which can overshadow the region's cultural and environmental diversity.

The Arctic is shaped by global-local dynamics, where global forces such as climate change, resource extraction, and geopolitical interests intersect with local realities. Jóhannesson et al. (2022) highlight that Arctic tourism development has been heavily growth-oriented, prioritizing international markets while often neglecting local contexts, climate change, and associated uncertainties. Hall & Saarinen (2010) emphasize that climate change raises critical issues for tourism, including its effects

on environmental resources, tourism's contribution to global emissions, and the impacts of mitigation policies. These challenges underscore the need for a multiscale approach that integrates local social, economic, and ecological systems with global sustainability frameworks. They argue that sustainable tourism must adopt a holistic and ethical approach, addressing broader global concerns while ensuring long-term resilience.

Jóhannesson et al. (2022) further stress the importance of tourism-community collaboration in addressing these challenges. They propose three key viewpoints for the future of Arctic tourism: (1) Normative tourism, defined by health security and increased regulation; (2) Increased interest in nature-based tourism, which emphasizes the value of Arctic environments; and (3) The role of local, regional, and domestic tourism, which shifts focus away from international markets. These approaches highlight the need to involve local communities, including non-human actors, in tourism development, ensuring that tourism benefits are equitably distributed and aligned with local values.

3.4 Indigenous Voices: Agency and Representation in Tourism

As discussed above, cultural sensitivity is a cornerstone of sustainable tourism involving Indigenous communities (Olsen et al., 2019; Kugapi et al., 2020). Research on culturally sensitive tourism in Finnish Lapland highlights key factors such as the number of Sámi entrepreneurs, the use of Sámi cultural symbols by non-Sámi businesses, collaboration between Sámi and non-Sámi enterprises, and the existence of guidelines for responsible and culturally sustainable tourism development (Kugapi et al., 2020). These elements underscore the importance of Sámi self-determination in tourism.

Tourists are often drawn to the Arctic by marketing materials promising "authentic" experiences tied to local traditions and nature (Viken, 2022). However, such marketing can perpetuate stereotypes, leading to the commodification and exoticization of Sámi culture. Authenticity, as de Bernardi (2019a; 2019b; 2020) argues, is not a fixed concept but a dynamic process that balances traditional representations with contemporary realities. This is particularly relevant in Sápmi, where perceptions of what constitutes "authentic Sámi" vary across regions.

The commodification of Sámi culture and its representation in tourism marketing is a central issue in research on "Sámi tourism." Studies explore two main dimensions: self-representation by Sámi enterprises (de Bernardi, 2019a; Cassel, 2019; Christensen, 2023) and portrayals of Sámi by non-Sámi businesses or national organizations (Fonneland, 2013; de Bernardi, 2019b, 2020, 2022; Olsen & Pashkevich, 2023). The commodification of Sámi culture often occurs because many tourism enterprises in Sápmi are managed by external actors rather than Sámi themselves, raising questions about the very concept of "Sámi tourism" (Viken, 2024).

The distinction between self-representation and external portrayals of Sámi culture is crucial. Viken (2022, 109), drawing on Ruiz-Ballesteros and Hernández-Ramírez (2010), argues that tourism based on self-appropriation functions as a "circular economy," where cultural products can be repeatedly sold, empowering Indigenous communities. This discussion ties into broader questions about the meanings and practices of Sámi entrepreneurship. For example, Granås & Mathisen (2022) examine the transformative complexities of indigeneity through the case of the Sámi-run Arctic View restaurant in Norway, while Leu et al. (2018) use a sustainable livelihoods framework to study how Sámi entrepreneurs in Sweden balance economic and cultural goals.

Cultural commodification often intersects with cultural appropriation (Viken, 2022). Drawing on Lenard and Balint's (2020) framework, Viken (2024) argues that since cultural appropriation involves a "knowledge condition," and tourism often thrives on novelty and lack of knowledge, education should be a key component of tourism. In this context, ecotourism, with its emphasis on education, can promote cultural understanding among visitors while supporting Sámi cultural preservation. However, ecotourism also carries risks. Stam (2022) highlights its dual role as both a platform for Sámi political expression and a potential source of cultural exploitation. Similarly, de Bernardi (2021) explores how Sámi identity and nature interact in Northern Scandinavian ecotourism, emphasising the role of certification and tourist education in protecting cultural and environmental values.

4 Methodology and Ethics

This research adopts a qualitative methodology to explore the dynamics of tourism in Inari Municipality. The study employs a combination of semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and various informational materials analysis to capture the multifaceted nature of tourism and its impacts on the region and locals.

I acknowledge my position as a non-Indigenous researcher conducting fieldwork on Sámi land (Sápmi). This research takes place within a context shaped by historical and ongoing colonial structures that continue to influence how Sámi knowledge, culture, and land are represented and engaged with, particularly in tourism. As an outsider to the community, I remain critically aware of the power dynamics inherent in knowledge production and the potential implications of speaking about, rather than with, Indigenous communities.

The interviews for this study were conducted in English, which was not the first language of either the participants or myself. This might have created moments of linguistic and conceptual friction, particularly in relation to culturally specific or nuanced understandings of sustainability and place. I recognise that meaning-making in such contexts is shaped not only by language limitations but also by differing worldviews and cultural frames of reference.

Furthermore, I position myself not only as a researcher but also as a visitor to the region, engaging in tourism while simultaneously studying it. This dual role has shaped my reflections on tourism practices, sustainability discourses, and the ethical dimensions of mobility on Sápmi land. I have strived to make informed, respectful travel decisions and to remain reflexive about my own presence and its impact.

This thesis is therefore grounded in a commitment to critical self-awareness, cultural sensitivity, and an ethical approach to knowledge production that acknowledges the complexities of working within and across cultural and linguistic boundaries.

4.1 Field Sites and Evolving Research Focus

The initial inspiration for this research stemmed from themes related to ecotourism in protected areas, particularly within the Green Belt of Fennoscandia and cross-border tourism initiatives. The original aim was to focus on the Pasvik-Inari Trilateral Park, examining the roles of Sámi communities and Indigenous environmental

knowledge in conservation and ecotourism management across Finland, Russia, and Norway. Inari, located near the Vätsäri Wilderness Area, one of the components of the park, was a natural choice for fieldwork. Other potential field sites included Øvre Pasvik in Norway and the Pasvik Zapovednik and its surrounding areas on the Russian side of the border, each of which has distinct environmental management approaches. However, due to the current political climate in the region, securing approval for fieldwork on the Russian side of the border was not feasible.

This direction was influenced by several key works that explore the involvement of Indigenous communities in conservation management within protected areas. Among these, Vladimirova (2023) investigates how governance at international, national, and local levels shapes nature conservation practices in the Pasvik-Inari region. Additionally, Andersson et al. (2021) in their book *Bridging Cultural Concepts of Nature* advocate for the inclusion of Indigenous voices in environmental debates, challenging traditional conservation paradigms. Sevastiyarov et al. (2014) highlight the Green Belt of Fennoscandia as a network of protected areas that provide opportunities for cross-border tourism and enhance environmental protection.

While the inquiry for approval was still pending, a preliminary Zoom interview with a local tour guide was nevertheless conducted to gain initial insights into the dynamics of tourism in the Pasvik Zapovednik and the surrounding areas of the Kola Peninsula. The discussion covered several compelling aspects, including the varying statuses of different protected areas, the differing access for tourists and guides, the motivations behind tourism in the region, predominant forms of tourism, the prominent role of “ethno-tourism” or cultural tourism, the meanings associated with ecotourism, and the key actors responsible for tourism development in the area.

Upon arriving in Inari and engaging in conversations with local residents, I learned that the Vätsäri Wilderness Area, a part of the park on the Finnish side along the northeastern shore of Lake Inari, is intended for advanced travellers and sees minimal tourist activity. In fact, even locals rarely visit this area, prompting me to consider broadening the scope of my research to encompass something more accessible at this time.

Although the original focus of this research is currently hindered by geopolitical circumstances, it holds potential for future exploration. Such research could shed

light on how the development of tourism and local engagement in tourism and conservation management within the park are influenced by both geopolitical borders and borders between the realms of nature and culture.

4.2 The Field

My fieldwork began in Ivalo at the end of July 2024. The season chosen to conduct the fieldwork (the end of July – the beginning of August 2024) is explained by this period being the peak season in summer. I arrived in Ivalo by plane, a choice that immediately raised questions about the sustainability of my own travel. To offset this, I opted for a bus on my return journey, though this alternative also poses its own challenges. Interestingly, the topic of transportation emerged repeatedly in conversations with locals and tourists, underscoring its significance in discussions of sustainability.

From Ivalo Airport, I made my way to Inari, walking 20 minutes to the bus stop while other tourists boarded prearranged transfers. This walk offered my first glimpse into the spatial and environmental dynamics of the region. Encounters with reindeer on the road, changing weather, and the overwhelming sense of “wilderness”, even along a roadside, set the stage for deeper engagement with themes of that are yet to be discussed.

A total of 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse range of participants, including: locals and seasonal workers from abroad employed in the tourism industry; Sámi community members, as well as managers and staff of Sámi-run enterprises; a staff member of Metsähallitus, the state-owned enterprise managing Finland’s protected areas; tourists visiting the region.

Semi-structured interviews emerged as the ideal method for capturing the insights and voices of all participants. This flexible format allowed conversations to flow naturally, ensuring discussions were not rigidly confined to predefined topics or overly influenced by my own assumptions. It is important to note that the initial discussions were guided by the themes outlined in the research proposal, which included specific questions about ecotourism and protected areas. Among the questions posed were, for example: Is the local community’s voice heard in decisions regarding tourism in this area? How can incorporating local languages into tourism terminology and concepts contribute to the revitalisation of traditional ecological

knowledge and enhance its significance for visitors? Have there been any changes in local employment opportunities due to tourism development? What role do certifications, guidelines, or community-driven initiatives play in promoting sustainable tourism? What role can hotels play in promoting sustainable tourism practices? What are the key challenges in achieving sustainable tourism in the region, particularly in balancing economic growth with cultural and environmental preservation?

The interviews were conducted in English, and all research participants were informed of my status as a student working on my master's thesis at the University of Helsinki. At the beginning of each interview, I explained the topic, research questions, and objectives of my study. To maintain confidentiality, all names used in this thesis are pseudonyms.

Alongside interviews, the fieldwork was marked by extensive participant observation in various settings, including hotels, resorts, museums, cultural centers, and even on the streets where reindeer roamed freely. I was particularly curious to observe how tourists engaged with locals, the environment, and non-human agents like reindeer. Some of the questions that guided my observations: How do tourists allocate their time, do they wander around town, or do they venture into the wilderness through organized activities? How visible are tourists in cultural spaces like museums and cultural centers?

These observations were documented in field notes, which were produced throughout the research. The notes not only helped me make sense of the data later but also captured interactions and ideas that might have been forgotten or were not recorded during interviews.

To complement the insights gained from interviews and participant observations, this study incorporates an analysis of various materials, including websites, brochures, and promotional content from both Sámi and non-Sámi tourism companies. Additionally, it examines informational content on "sustainable tourism" from destination management organizations (DMOs) such as Visit Inari and Lapland North, along with the websites of the Inari Municipality. Other resources analyzed include informational materials produced by Metsähallitus, the Sajos Cultural Centre, and the Siida Sámi Museum. Furthermore, the study evaluates documents such as the

Ethical Guidelines for Sámi Tourism to juxtapose proposed notions of responsible tourism with local perceptions. These sources collectively illuminate how tourism in the Municipality of Inari is promoted and identify the key indicators deemed essential for it to be considered sustainable and responsible.

4.3 Making Sense of the Data

The audios were primarily transcribed by carefully listening to the complete recordings, while some were done using the "Transcribe" feature in Microsoft Word. However, those transcripts created this way required a thorough review because the software isn't sophisticated enough to accurately convert audio to text without errors.

The analysis of interview transcripts and field notes employed thematic analysis to identify, code, and interpret recurring themes. This method allowed me to systematically explore patterns in the data, such as seasonality, mass tourism, cultural tourism, nature and adventure tourism, sustainability definitions, economic benefits, culture commodification, and so on.

For the analysis of websites, brochures, promotional and visual materials, critical discourse analysis (CDA) and visual analysis were used to examine the language, imagery, and narratives employed. The focus was on: What forms of tourism and activities are primarily advertised? How are local nature and Sámi culture represented? How is sustainability framed, including references to certifications and guidelines?

To ensure the robustness of the findings, the study employed triangulation, integrating data from interviews, participant observation, and additional materials analysis. This multi-method approach not only enhanced the validity of the research but also provided a more holistic understanding of tourism dynamics in Inari and Ivalo.

5 Analysis

5.1 Tourism Dynamics in Inari and Ivalo

What Brings Tourists to Inari? Motivations in Transition

While travelling on the bus from Ivalo Airport to Inari, I struck up a conversation with two recent high school graduates, Sofia and Francesca, from Reggio Emilia, Italy. They had come to Finland to celebrate their graduation. Sofia, particularly fond of the North and Northern Europe, suggested visiting Finland to Francesca. Their travel itinerary included Inari, Helsinki, Kuopio, and Rovaniemi.

During my trip, I had only a few encounters with tourists. Many summer travelers choose to drive caravans, which often fill the parking lots. Tourists from all over Europe visit Inari Municipality in the summer, including some Finns. Among them were independent travelers Sofia and Francesca, as well as a biker I met at the Nature Centre Siida.

Other visitors come to Inari through packaged holidays and many travel by coach buses. For these travelers, Inari serves as a stop on the way to North Cape in Norway, as Inari and Ivalo are located along Finland's north-south route, the E75, which attracts year-round visitors. One reason there are relatively few independent tourists traveling without camper vans is that many places are inaccessible without a car.

Elle, a Sámi woman and hotel manager at one of the large hotel chains in Inari Municipality, commented that not having a car makes exploring the area "challenging." Inari is located in the northern part of Finland, more than 1,000 km from the capital and over 300 km from Rovaniemi, the capital of Finnish Lapland. This distance makes it difficult for tourists to choose independent travel over bus tours and more sustainable forms of transportation.

Among the European tourists visiting the Inari municipality, the largest groups come from the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and the UK. Since the COVID pandemic, the number of Asian and American tourists has been relatively low. However, those Asian tourists who do visit typically arrive by coach buses; they are predominantly from Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and, to a lesser extent, Mainland China. In contrast, Japanese tourists often travel as individuals.

There are several incentives for tourists to visit Inari municipality. According to Iida, a Sámi woman born in Inari and a staff member at one of Inari's souvenir shops, the region is widely marketed for attractions like the northern lights. Inari is frequently mentioned in numerous articles as one of the best places to see this natural phenomenon. Additionally, it is attractive for visitors due to its relatively low tourist traffic. Elle and other professionals in the tourism industry emphasized that the most popular and heavily promoted activities in the region include northern lights hunting, snowmobiling safaris, and husky rides.

Winter activities have become increasingly popular, making winter the peak season for tourism over the past decade. The winter season, which runs from November to April, attracts a steady flow of visitors throughout its duration, according to Elle. This shift from summer to winter as the main tourist season is puzzling. Locals recall that summer, and at times autumn, used to dominate the tourism landscape a decade ago. As Elle, the hotel manager, noted, "it started to slowly change, and then something happened, and winter became the main season." Lina, a receptionist at the same hotel, confirmed this trend, stating that since she started working there during the Covid pandemic, they have been hosting an increasing number of guests in the winter.

Some of the ideas about the popularity of winter tourism highlight branding and marketing strategies that portray the destination as the northernmost corner of the European Union, boasting vast Arctic nature and the best opportunities to see the Northern Lights. In this context, a couple of seasonal workers from Croatia, Veronica and Kristian, who have come to work and travel in the Inari Municipality for the fifth time since 2018, share a marketing-focused perspective on the region, citing their desire to see the Northern Lights as a primary incentive for their visits.

Over the past five years, they have had the opportunity to experience a variety of winter outdoor activities, including husky sledding, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, and ice fishing. This year marks their first summer in the area after previously visiting in December, January, February, and March. As photographers for hotels, they explained that they need to try every activity before capturing it on camera to market to future guests.

According to Veronica, Kristian, and Lina, a hotel receptionist at the same establishment, people are often looking for new experiences that they cannot find at home. Thus, visitors are drawn to a specific image of the area, and the activities they choose to engage in are influenced by this image. Veronica shared her thoughts on what they imagined the area would be like before arriving:

Well, we did, to be honest, we didn't heard so much. We knew... only about Husky ride or Husky sledging and Northern Lights and polar night and low temperatures, but nothing else... Actually, we found many, many things during this period in Finland... We didn't know about how are the people.

Interview with Veronica and Kristian, 2024

Another possible reason for winter becoming a peak season, although it wasn't the primary focus of the interviews, is the conversation surrounding climate change. Several participants, including Sofia and Francesca, who traveled from Italy to Inari, mentioned tourists from southern Europe visiting Inari to escape the summer heat. In this context, Iida recognized a connection between climate change and the motivations of tourists to visit Inari during the winter months:

And in the winter. It's harder to experience real winter. What Finnish people real winter... well, Finnish people think real winter is you have to have a lot of snow. So, it's harder to experience that even in Helsinki nowadays. So, imagine from other European countries, they come here, you need to experience that, right? Because there's no snow.

Interview with Iida, August 2024

In a similar vein, Lina, the hotel receptionist, shared her thoughts about the Finnish summer: “Well, the Finnish summer is amazing and this is not very hot,” she said, speculating about the influx of European tourists staying in local hotels during the summer. “So, what I've been thinking is that maybe because the summers in South Europe are at the moment like getting pretty hot.” Another possible reason for the large number of predominantly European tourists, as Lina mentioned, could be the hotel's affiliation with major travel agencies from Europe that promote the hotel among visitors from the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands.

Iida also explained that the summer was considered the high season as recently as a decade ago, partly due to the limited services available for winter activities in Inari in the past. Consequently, tourists tended to favour ski resorts like Saariselkä and

Rovaniemi, the capital of Lapland and a home for Santa Claus, for winter tourism. This shift resulted in a greater number of tourists opting for Inari during the summer months. Although tourists now visit almost year-round, their preferences vary by season. As Iida describes, the tourists who come in the summer are more diverse.

In summer we get... we always had a lot of German tourists with buses and some maybe other Europeans, like from Spain or France or some other places, but mostly German tourists. Then we have those people with caravans. They're from all over Europe and then we have Finnish people, but in the winter, we have no Finnish people.

Interview with Iida, August 2024

Hence, there are several types of tourists in each season. In summer, these include tourists visiting via bus tours and packaged holidays, like a French family I met in a souvenir shop in Ivalo, Europeans staying in hotels while engaging in guided tours, and independent European and domestic tourists traveling by campervans and bikes. In winter, two main categories of tourists prevail: Europeans staying in hotels and Asians visiting through bus tours. This pattern is typical for both winter and summer seasons. According to Iida: “I would say about 10 buses a day. On a long day. Slow day.” For most of these bus tours, Inari serves as a stopover en route to North Cape in Norway: “They might just use the toilet and go cause we have free toilets.”

The summer season, according to Iida, has always been particularly busy, as the souvenir shop she works in has consistently welcomed a high volume of guests during this time: “Our store was open 51 years ago. And even then, we have German tourists coming. It’s always been crazy busy. Maybe got a bit more diverse in the summer as well.” Summer 2024 is anticipated to be the busiest in recent years, as mentioned by Veronica. It is also the peak season for independent tourists, according to Lina and Julia, both of whom work in hotels in Inari and Ivalo. Camping, hiking, fishing, and other nature activities are primarily engaged in by tourists during the summer, as described by Iida.

Similarly, an independent biker tourist, whose conversation with the Nature Centre staff I overheard, was inquiring about bus connections in the area and the limited ferry services to Nellim. At the Nature Centre, I also had the opportunity to talk to Minna, one of the staff members who works there only in the summer. Minna shared that while they are not permitted to operate official statistics or disclose specific

numbers about tourist visits, the volume of inquiries is notably higher in the summer, which is logical given the nature of requests, with fishing licenses being the most popular.

While independent tourists consult the Nature Centre run by Metsähallitus before embarking on these activities, hotel guests typically opt for the guided tours offered by the hotels. Popular summer activities provided by hotels and tour operators include midnight sun hikes, fishing and boat trips, berry picking, and visiting husky farms.

Regardless of the season, outdoor nature activities appear to be overwhelmingly popular among tourists. Consequently, promoting nature is paramount for hotels and tour operators. Elle described: “we actually show people the nature (stressed)... I think that is maybe the key thing that is – actually bringing people to nature.” Throughout the interviews, it became clear that nature was a primary motivator for many individuals to travel, work, or move to Inari Municipality. Hailing from Rovaniemi, Lina relocated to Inari five years ago with her boyfriend after losing her job during COVID. Even with changing life circumstances, she chose to stay due to her love for “nature,” stating, it is “mostly the nature... what I love here.” Julia, who initially travelled from the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region in France to study in Finland, also explained her motivation to stay after a holiday in Lapland, saying:

I had been in Lapland for a holiday. I like the nature, empty spaces, few people, the weather, cold winter. So the night without night in summer and the green and everything... And the feeling when the polar night finished and... You know that sun is back and uh this is spring...

Interview with Julia, 2024

While according to Elle “nature activities” appear to be more popular than “cultural” ones, tourists are still encouraged to visit the Siida Saami Museum. The staff at hotels play a crucial role in providing information about the region and its culture. For instance, Lina explained that when tourists are unaware of the cultural significance of the region, she and her colleagues recommend certain activities to help them learn more about the Sámi people and their history. She said, “when they (tourists) are asking like what to do next day and we are recommending... the museum, then they get excited and they are asking more about it and most of them are going to visit... we

have the activities... which includes the visiting Sajos and Siida both... So kind of we are working with them like all the time also in the winter and then the summer yeah.”

Regarding the cultural aspect of tourist incentives, interlocutors noted that before coming to Inari, only a few people are aware of the Sámi. Cultural activities seem to be more popular with European tourists, as Elle mentioned, while they are less appealing to Asian tourists who visit primarily for the northern lights or travel with bus tours in winter heading to the North Cape, as Iida explained, unless they visit the Siida Museum. Furthermore, tourists show heightened interest in cultural activities during the winter season. Many interviewees, including Julia, noted: “So in winter, people are interested in the culture, the Sámi people. But sometimes they don't know so much... they discover sometimes.”

Sofia, one of the two high school graduates from Italy whom I met on the bus, had “read something about the Sámi” beforehand and learned that Inari is a centre of Sámi culture, which led her to travel here and visit the Sámi Siida Museum. A French family I met in a souvenir shop in Ivalo, consisting of Charlotte, Mathéo, and their two children, pointed out that they knew nothing about the Sámi when making their travel plans, but did some research once they knew they were coming here. Veronica and Kristian, while not stating it explicitly, indicated they were unaware of the cultural significance of the area before visiting, and throughout our conversation, the Sámi were mentioned only in the context of the hotel's interior design and the Sámi dresses worn by the staff. For instance, when asked about the activities that felt the most “authentic” to them, Veronica mentioned berry picking but did not connect it to the traditional Sámi livelihoods.

Lina, who moved to Inari from Rovaniemi, called Inari the “original area” in relation to “Sámi culture” when I inquired about the differences in cultural tourism between Rovaniemi and Inari. She explained that upon her arrival here, she learned a lot about the area's cultural context from the locals. Julia from France might be a slightly different example since she received her education in Finland before coming to Lapland and completed a six-month course on tourism in the Arctic at the University of Lapland, which made her more culturally aware.

This lack of awareness among tourists and newcomers to the area raises questions about destination branding. Iida expressed concern about the insufficient

information regarding the region and the Sámi community in the marketing materials, stating: “Some (tourists) are just ‘What? There’s the museum here? I didn’t know.’ And a lot of people don't know about Sámi people at all, if they come here... Maybe also in the marketing of everything here should be... That it's like a special kind of region.” Elle asserted that visiting the Siida Museum is considered a must for people visiting Inari, and Iida echoed this perspective: “We have one of the best museums here and the people come here: ‘Oh, there's a museum, huh?’ Like that should be like the main attraction.”

The Siida Sámi Museum serves as the primary venue for tourists to learn about the Sámi people. Its convenient location within the same building as the Northern Lapland Nature Centre, maintained by Metsähallitus (Nature Centre Siida’s Customer Service – SIIDA, n.d.), makes it visible to tourists who come for nature exploration. The Centre provides services and information on hiking and outdoor activities for those undertaking independent trips to various natural sites in Inari and Utsjoki.

Antti and Helmi, an older Finnish couple traveling to Norway in their campervan and returning to their hometown in Finland through Inari, have visited the Sámi Siida Museum several times, noting that “it’s usually not enough time to see everything.” This remark is indeed reasonable since the Museum boasts a vast collection of “the spiritual and material culture of the Finnish Sámi” (The Sámi Museum – Siida, n.d.) both inside the building and in the adjacent open-air museum. Both the museum and the Nature Centre underwent renovations and expansion from 2020 to 2022. When purchasing a ticket, the museum staff recommends reserving at least two hours for a visit.

Inari attracts tourists with several specific events throughout the year. According to Elle, the peak season for their hotel occurs in mid-August, coinciding with Ijahis Idja, a festival that has celebrated the music of Indigenous peoples since 2004 (FRONTPAGE - Ijahis Idja, 2024). Among the various cultural activities promoted on hotel and tourist agency websites are experiences such as fishing with local fishermen, visiting Sámi handicrafts studios and reindeer farms, enjoying Lappish dinners, boat tours around Ukko Island, and exploring the Siida Sámi museum.

Activities involving reindeer are particularly popular and are often viewed as closely tied to the “cultural” experience for tourists. While the cultural aspect varies depending on the specific content and provider, many of the respondents felt that visiting reindeer herder families offers an educational experience. As Elle pointed out, “Maybe visit the reindeer herders family and then you're learning a lot about the local culture and you're also getting to do some of the things,” which may include making jewelry from reindeer antlers or cooking together. Julia highlighted additional opportunities for tourists to learn more about Sámi culture, stating:

Sometimes they're going to the museum in Inari, you know, and get to know about it, but... Maybe reindeer activities or safari or reindeer farm. In some reindeer farms... if the reindeer herder is a Sámi family, then usually the tourists get to know about it...

Interview with Julia, 2024

Overall, it is evident that the motivations driving tourists to Inari have undergone a significant transformation over the past decade, resulting in a notable influx of visitors. Following the economic crisis of the mid-2000s, which led to a decline in Finnish tourists, the tourism sector rebounded by 2010, becoming increasingly international in scope (Kull et al., 2020). This surge can be attributed to a combination of improved accessibility, effective marketing strategies, and the region's inherent attractions.

In recent years, the winter months have emerged as the peak tourism season, thriving from November to March. This marks a shift from approximately a decade ago when summer was considered the high season. This change may be partially explained by the development of services catering specifically to winter activities, as well as a trend of southern European tourists visiting Inari in winter to escape the summer heat, hinting at a connection to climate change. Several key factors now motivate tourists to visit Inari. The allure of its pristine Arctic nature stands out as a primary draw. Notable attractions include the wilderness areas of Urho Kekkonen National Park and Lemmenjoki National Park, Lake Inari, and opportunities for adventurous excursions. Furthermore, Inari is widely promoted as one of the best places to witness the Northern Lights, while the spectacle of the Midnight Sun also attracts visitors.

The global rise of indigenous tourism coincides with an increasing interest in Sami culture among travellers (Pettersson, 2004). Significant cultural attractions include the Siida Sámi Museum and the Sajos Sámi Cultural Centre. As traditional livelihoods face decline, more Sami individuals are entering the tourism industry (Yli-Olli, 2021). Western tourists, in particular, are increasingly drawn to authentic traditions and cultural experiences. They often seek genuine interactions, even though these experiences are sometimes tailored to meet market demand. Additionally, some tourists express interest in participating in everyday activities offered by small-scale enterprises. The quest for "otherness" serves as a fundamental driver of this interest, closely linked to the notion of authenticity (Christensen, 2023).

Tourism challenges and implications

While tourism generates certain economic benefits, such as creating employment opportunities and enhancing infrastructure, the increasing influx of tourists also presents challenges. Although not the primary focus of this section, it is important to mention the implications of tourism on the local economy, society, and environment to provide a holistic overview of its impact in the region. A more in-depth discussion on these challenges and how they can potentially be addressed through sustainable tourism practices is covered in the third section of the thesis.

The favorable economic impact is often the first aspect highlighted when discussing the advantages that tourism brings to the regional economy, particularly in studies focusing on Finnish Lapland (Saarinen, 2003). Two main effects are frequently examined: direct income generated and indirect benefits in the form of employment opportunities created by the tourism sector.

Tourism serves as a cornerstone of Inari and Ivalo's economy, generating €108.7 million in direct income (2014, Statistics - INARI.FI/EN, n.d.) and providing jobs for a significant portion of the local workforce, as noted by many interviewees. However, this economic boost is uneven, largely due to seasonal dependence and concentrated revenue streams. While locals are "already fully employed," the winter peak necessitates additional foreign workers for hospitality roles (such as restaurants and housekeeping) and adventure tourism activities (like husky rides and snowmobiling). Lina observed that these seasonal workers come "from all over Europe," filling critical gaps in the labor market.

The housing crisis further exacerbates workforce challenges, with limited availability and rising prices affecting both locals and foreign seasonal workers. Although there are some municipal apartments available, long waitlists remain an issue. A growing concern involves locals converting properties solely for Airbnb rentals, which Iida criticized as unethical: "They're taking away... I think that's just like, that's really, really not good because people don't have places to live here." This practice not only strains housing access for residents and seasonal workers but also impacts traditional hotels.

The topic of mass tourism continues to spark debate. While high prices may limit the number of visitors, as explained by Toni K. Laine, the former Mayor of Inari Municipality (Kull et al., 2020), packaged bus tours, particularly those catering to Asian markets, bring in large groups who often bypass local businesses. Iida remarked on their minimal engagement: "I would say about 10 buses a day... They might just use the toilet and leave." This trend provides little economic or cultural benefit to the community.

Cultural tensions have also emerged. Iida highlighted intrusive tourist behaviors: "People just come here...taking pictures of their (local) houses and inside." Such incidents reflect a "clash of cultures," where the rising number of visitors disrupts residents' sense of place: "...some people would find it hard to kind of feel it's the same place as it was 20 years ago, because there's so many people nowadays," Iida noted.

In summary, tourism in Inari serves as a significant economic driver, while also presenting numerous challenges across economic, socio-cultural, environmental, and operational dimensions.

While tourism generates substantial revenue, this income is not always equitably distributed within the region. A considerable portion often flows out through large tourism corporations (Saarinen, 2003). Certain types of tourism, particularly packaged bus tours aimed at Asian markets, tend to bypass local businesses, resulting in minimal engagement with the community and limited economic benefits.

The increasing number of visitors has led to cultural tensions, manifesting as a "clash of cultures." Although cultural tourism offers opportunities for meaningful exchange, it raises concerns about the commercialisation and misrepresentation of Sámi

traditions, with marketing sometimes relying on simplified or staged portrayals (Saari et al., 2020).

Adventure and nature-based activities, such as snowmobiling and dog sledding, exert significant pressure on fragile ecosystems. This environmental strain is particularly concerning in the vulnerable Arctic landscape, a situation further exacerbated by climate change (High Stakes: The Arctic Test of Sustainable Development, 2024). Additionally, tourism development can conflict with traditional economic activities, such as reindeer husbandry, creating competing land-use challenges (Viken, 2022).

Balancing tourism growth with sustainability is therefore a critical concern.

Addressing these challenges necessitates a comprehensive strategy that includes clear regulations, stakeholder cooperation, and widespread education aimed at promoting sustainable and responsible tourism. This complex tourism landscape sets the stage for examining how different stakeholders perceive sustainability, which will be explored in the next analytical section.

5.2 Perspectives on Tourism Sustainability

Local Definitions

Having established the dynamics of tourism, we now turn to the question of perspectives on tourism sustainability as a whole, specifically examining whether tourism in the region is sustainable. This inquiry focuses on local residents' viewpoints, including long-term residents, Sámi community members, and local workers, to gain insight into how they define and experience sustainable tourism in Inari Municipality.

As this thesis aims to amplify local voices and their interpretations of sustainability, the locals' views on the sustainability of tourism are juxtaposed with discussions from tourists and foreign workers. Additionally, local perspectives are compared with sustainability principles according to official definitions, DMOs, and local guideline statements.

According to the definition provided by the UNWTO, to ensure the long-term sustainability of tourism development, a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions: optimal use of environmental resources, respect for

socio-cultural authenticity, and viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits that are fairly distributed among all stakeholders.

While many interviewees found it challenging to define sustainable tourism, a prevailing focus on the environmental dimension emerged among the majority. Particularly, most participants identified transport as a leading factor in determining whether tourism can be labeled sustainable. As Elle highlighted, “of course one thing that we often cannot even we cannot you know do anything about is the way of traveling.” Iida supported this notion, stating, “I think like the act of flying itself is, if you're gonna fly somewhere and you're gonna stay for 3-4 days, that's not sustainable or ecotourism.”

Some interviewees justified the choice of flying to Ivalo, explaining that tourists opt for planes due to the area's remote location, where flying is typically cheaper and always faster. Iida noted, “Of course because Finland is a long country, it's it's weirdly shaped and long and there's nothing to see in between. So I understand why people... I fly!... I always use the plane... It's cheaper!” This discussion is particularly relevant given the heated debates around Finland's subsidies for domestic flights that have been prevalent in the news over the last three years¹.

As previously mentioned, transportation is a significant issue in the area. The challenge of getting around without a car leads tourists to rely on taxis and transfers from the airports. For instance, Lina, the hotel receptionist, admitted that defining the term “sustainable” was difficult for her. I suggested different sustainable tourist practices, including transportation, which had been a recurrent topic in earlier conversations. Consequently, her response was influenced by this suggestion: “When guests are coming here like, we are always like recommending our shared transfer from the airport ... It is, of course, always a better option to get one car and more people in there than like everyone's coming by separated taxis.” The issues surrounding transportation extend to one of the region's most popular winter activities – snowmobiling, leading Lina to identify the need to promote activities with a lower carbon footprint, such as winter hikes, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing.

¹ See <https://yle.fi/a/74-20033511>; <https://yle.fi/a/74-20077703>

Other environmental effects discussed included energy and water consumption, particularly regarding cleaning, taking showers, or changing towels. Elle emphasized how their hotel invests in various technologies to reduce energy consumption. Julia recounted the controversial requests from some tourists who, after expressing concern about their transportation choices to arrive in Ivalo, proceeded to ask for daily towel changes: “We don't change the towels every day of course. There's no laundry here and it has an impact on nature.”

Regarding waste management, Lina explained that when taking tourists on excursions into nature, hotel guides consistently inform visitors about the importance of not leaving trash behind. They provide “retkietiketti,” or “hiking etiquette,” developed by Metsähallitus and the Ministry of the Environment. This regulation states that by adopting hiking etiquette and adhering to specific guidelines for different hiking destinations, hikers can engage in responsible outdoor activities. Among other rules related to nature activities is the requirement to coordinate all activities “with the Metsähallitus and usually also with the reindeer herders” (Elle) to avoid disrupting the “grazing peace” (Ethical Guidelines for Sámi Tourism | the Sámi Parliament of Finland, 2018: 8).

Safeguarding nature is another important aspect mentioned in the interviews, as for many individuals, the natural environment serves as the primary incentive for visiting or relocating to the area. Elle stated that when practicing nature tourism or simply spending time in nature, one “shouldn't leave any marks.” Additionally, various hotel guidelines related to sustainable tourism carry an educational purpose for guests visiting from abroad, promoting rules that are quite common in Finland but may be unfamiliar to those from other countries: “Which are basic things in Finland... but those can be like really new things to some people... who are coming from abroad” (Lina).

The discussion around sustainability indicators often prioritizes environmental concerns, but economic and socio-economic benefits are frequently mentioned as well. These include employment opportunities for locals and income-generating possibilities for local businesses. As explored in the previous section, the employment opportunities created by tourism in the region remain one of the most cited advantages and the top indicator of sustainable tourism. Elle, the hotel manager, emphasized their commitment to hiring locals and sourcing from them. She

explained that exclusively using local or, at the very least, Finnish ingredients is crucial for their two hotel restaurants in Inari. This approach is advantageous from both local production perspectives and in reducing transportation emissions associated with sourcing products from distant locations: “And then... some foods we have decided that we don't use avocado for example because it's not from here and it has far away...”.

Supporting local production includes purchasing from local fishermen who harvest fish from Lake Inari and utilizing seasonal berries as ingredients. Elle was particularly enthusiastic about sharing details of how their renowned restaurant in the second hotel features a special menu that celebrates local nature: “It's like fine dining but only from like local foods and they are using a lot of this like herbs, lichen, you know that they think that the reindeer eat and a lot of those... also like the drink menu, and especially the cocktails and the mocktails”.

Winter tourism generates more revenue for the hotels, as many tourists in the summer travel with campervans and tents. Iida noted that there are three large hotels in Inari that are “completely full in the winter.” However, Elle expressed concern that a significant number of visitors during the summer come via bus tours or as independent travelers who do not stay overnight at the hotels and rarely shop in local stores, thus failing to contribute to revenue generation.

Another socio-economic benefit is the development and enhancement of tourism infrastructure and services, which serves as a crucial indicator of sustainable tourism. As Iida described, “a small village like this (Inari), we have very good services for a small village, cause, we have a lot of people coming and going.” In this context, Elle shared her hotel's commitment to providing social services to host communities through donations and investments:

What we also like to do is that we support these like local like youth... For example, we have like a local ice hockey team for youth... also volleyball and other like these activities. We like to support that and we like every year want to give them money that you know they can continue that and the families don't need to pay so much but we can support that.

Interview with Elle, 2024

The socio-economic impacts of tourism have become a focal point of recent discussions in the Inari municipality. In April 2025, a survey was designed to assess

and map the effects of tourism on local communities to inform decision-making and tourism development projects aimed at advancing responsible tourism in the area (Mäki, 2025). Concurrently, Arctic tourism and resource development present significant and often competing impacts on local communities and environments, which will be explored in the following section.

Next, we turn to the socio-cultural indicators of sustainability in tourism, as identified by locals, which are integral to the definition of sustainable tourism. This aspect primarily emphasizes the appropriate and respectful engagement with Sámi culture in tourism – an issue of cultural sensitivity that has gained increasing attention in recent research (Saari et al., 2020; Olsen et al., 2019). Cultural sensitivity encompasses several key principles, such as offering products "true to local cultures," recognition and respect for Sámi languages, Sámi ownership and management, respect for living cultures, and respect for cultural identity and symbols. These principles were widely discussed during interviews with locals.

The commitment to principles of culturally sensitive tourism could be better traced and analyzed using the Ethical Guidelines for Sámi Tourism, adopted by The Sámi Parliament in September 2018 (Ethical Guidelines for Sámi Tourism | the Sámi Parliament of Finland, 2018). These Guidelines comprise seven principles aimed at tourists and other tourism actors outside the Sámi community, advocating for culturally sustainable tourism development. While the disparity between the principles and the reality is discussed in the next section, this part focuses on the principles identified as crucial by interlocutors. In the Guidelines, the term ethically sustainable Sámi tourism refers to "tourism that is socially, culturally, ecologically, and economically sustainable but also takes into consideration social, cultural, ecological, and economic carrying capacity at local level" (Ethical Guidelines for Sámi Tourism | the Sámi Parliament of Finland, 2018: 3).

It is challenging to match indicators to certain principles in the Guidelines since these principles represent a comprehensive and complex idea intended to ensure that tourism supports the vitality of the Sámi community and culture. This cannot be broken down into simple rules, as the views of Sámi communities are not always unified and vary across regions, necessitating a thorough understanding and consideration. In the interviews, indicators are distributed into several key points raised by interlocutors, which are consistent with the Guidelines.

In addition to the recognized importance of authenticity in Sámi tourism products, the interviewees, particularly Sámi residents, emphasized the significance of learning about Sámi history and culture. Iida noted that engaging in local activities and purchasing from locals can somewhat mitigate the transportation emissions associated with tourists flying to Ivalo to access the area. She highlighted the need to support Sámi enterprises, arguing that backing local businesses could involve learning from Sámi individuals during tours and excursions, such as visiting Sámi reindeer families and cooking together. Similarly, Elle argued that experiences like visiting reindeer herder families, participating in handicrafts workshops, learning traditional fishing techniques with local fishermen, and engaging in berry picking are invaluable.

While working in a local souvenir shop, Elle also stressed the importance of tourists choosing locally made souvenirs, noting that these are not the only items available in stores and are generally more expensive:

Almost all of it is made in China, Pakistan or something. And if it's made in Finland, it's triple, quadruple the price you can see right away when it's a price like that like... When tourists ask me: "Where is this made?". I will never lie. I will say: "If it was made in Finland, it would be at least three times the price. It's obviously made somewhere else."

Interview with Iida, 2024

According to her, Sámi Duodji and Sámi Made trademarks (Sámi Trademarks, 2024) could assist in identifying genuine Sámi-made handicrafts. Elle also raised the importance of opting for local companies if one "want(s) to be... more conscious," as foreign companies may not sufficiently prioritize "these things," underscoring the value of supporting authentically local products.

Central to the discussion with Elle was the Siida Sámi Museum, which tourists are advised to visit, either as part of guided tours offered by hotels or individually: "... if we have guests arriving here in Inari, like actually in Inari village area, we have kind of this like our own rule that if you are in Inari you should visit Siida always."

The educational aspect was a focal point in discussions with locals. For example, Iida, while discussing the benefits and drawbacks of increasing tourism numbers, expressed that she appreciates the "global kind of atmosphere here sometimes because there's so many people from all around the world, which I think is a good

thing.” She elaborated that while “some people might disagree... I think that’s like a plus... to learn from other cultures even though we live in, like, you know, like the backside of Finland... It’s nice to meet all those people... not just the tourists, but the people who come to work here.”

In conclusion, when comparing local perceptions with the official UNWTO definition of sustainable tourism, locals clearly recognise and articulate aspects corresponding to all three pillars of the official definition: environmental responsibility, socio-cultural respect (especially concerning Sámi culture), and economic benefits for the community.

While all three pillars are present in local viewpoints, the environmental dimension, particularly concerning transportation, appears to be a particularly prevalent and often primary focus for locals when discussing sustainability. Local perspectives provide specific, tangible examples within each pillar, such as the importance of hiring locals, buying local food/souvenirs, adhering to hiking etiquette, respecting Sámi cultural guidelines, and supporting local community projects.

The official definition provides a broader framework, while local views articulate how these principles manifest or are experienced in their specific context. Locals acknowledge the complexity of applying sustainability principles, particularly regarding cultural aspects, noting that the views of Sámi communities are not always unified.

Certifications

Another important aspect to discuss is whether locals consider sustainable tourism certification essential for local tourism services and accommodation providers, as well as how they measure sustainability. Elle explained that, in her opinion, certificates such as the Green Key certificate awarded to their hotel primarily focus on the environmental aspects of sustainable tourism. She emphasized that obtaining one is a lengthy and complex process that involves meeting a vast number of criteria, which “get more strict”, therefore, there is a need to “improve every year.”

Lina mentioned that, in her view, tourists do pay attention to the certifications held by hotels since they can see them “on our website also and in booking.com and everything, and it’s also here in our walls inside the hotels.” Conversely, Julia stated

that she had never been asked about the certifications by tourists and expressed doubts about whether travellers prioritize this aspect when selecting accommodations, speculating that European tourists might be “more aware of that.”

Exploring the marketing nature of sustainable tourism, it was intriguing to hear Julia question the value of sustainable tourism certifications. In her perspective, they might merely be a “marketing thing,” considering that many travel agencies in Europe are now promoting “more green” tourism by reducing, for instance, the aforementioned snowmobiling activities.

Thus, while certifications do not appear to be the most critical criteria for many, they hold significance for larger hotel chains that demonstrate a strong commitment to sustainability, both on their websites and in their marketing efforts. This is evident through interviews with Lina and Elle, who work in the same large hotel chain, in contrast to Julia, who is employed at a hotel that positions itself as a holiday village.

DMOs Sustainability Definitions

Given the results of both locals' and non-locals' perceptions of sustainable tourism analysis, which indicate a strong shift in views towards environmental and ecological dimensions, it is interesting to examine how local Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) perceive sustainable tourism.

The website Lapland Above Ordinary, managed by House of Lapland from 2015 to 2024 and currently maintained by the Lapland Regional Council, features a page dedicated to Sustainable Tourism in Lapland (Sustainable Tourism & Responsible Travel | Visit Finnish Lapland, 2024). On this page, they note that the sustainability goals in Finnish Lapland align with the European Commission's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development “at the broadest level” and emphasize that sustainability is central to Lapland tourism.

Among the actions undertaken for sustainable tourism development, there is a significant focus on its environmental dimension, particularly through environmentally responsible tourism practices. Listed actions include “compensated fuel emissions,” “no disposable tableware on safaris,” “safaris only on marked trails,” “electric snowmobiles,” “local food,” and “close connections from airports to resorts,” many of which were discussed in the interviews. Ironically, it is also stated that:

“Sustainable tourism is more comprehensive than just ecotourism, as it focuses only on environmental responsibility.” However, as was extensively discussed in previous chapters, these terms represent two completely different concepts, with sustainable tourism serving as an umbrella term that encompasses all types of tourism.

Furthermore, the definition of ecotourism is inclusive enough to cover all three dimensions of sustainable tourism and also includes an educational aspect.

It’s worth noting that the page scarcely mentions the Ethical Guidelines for Sámi tourism. In the “find out more” section, visitors can find links to the following pages:

- How to Travel Responsibly in Lapland – Sustainability Guide for Travelers: This page advises on options for authentic Sámi craftsmanship, emphasizes respect for local residents' privacy and private events, and suggests requesting permission before filming or photographing.
- Responsible Animal Tourism in Finnish Lapland.
- Visit unique nature destinations – Lapland's National Parks.

Lapland North Destinations is a website belonging to a destination management organization that collaborates with tour operators, the municipalities of Inari and Utsjoki, Metsähallitus, and other stakeholders. On the page dedicated to Sustainability (Lapland North, 2024), its importance is highlighted due to the area's “pristine nature” and “rich culture.” The region also participates in the Sustainable Travel Finland (STF) programme developed by Visit Finland. Specific aspects of sustainability related to the socio-cultural dimension mentioned include:

- Following outdoor etiquette, particularly in the homeland of the Sámi, and respecting traditional livelihoods.
- Supporting authentic Sámi cultural experiences offered by entrepreneurs and families with a Sámi background, as well as visits to the Sámi Museum and the Sámi Cultural Centre Sajos.

To explore whether the focus on the socio-cultural dimension is better represented among Inari Municipality affiliated DMOs, it is interesting to consider the website of the local family-owned business Visit Inari Oy (Visit Inari - Accommodation & Safaris, 2025), which provides both adventure services and accommodation.

Visit Inari's motivation for focusing on sustainability is "making sure both the current and coming generations have a clean and stable place to live in." They express that their entire team is committed to operating "responsibly, safely and with equality in mind," emphasizing that "the surrounding nature and culture deserves our respect." The page lists several concrete indicators of Visit Inari's commitment to sustainability, with socio-culturally focused actions that include:

- Welcoming people of all ethnicities, nationalities, and cultural backgrounds equally and with respect.
- Commitment to the use of local foods and goods.
- Following the ethical instructions of the Sámi Parliament of Finland regarding tourism in the Sámi region.

Outside Perspectives Outside Perspectives

Drawing on non-local perspectives enables a juxtaposition of their views with those of locals and facilitates an exploration of which dimensions of sustainable tourism are currently more represented on the websites of Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), service providers, and accommodation providers. This includes not only their websites but also local institutions such as the Siida Sámi Museum, Sajos Cultural Centre, and Nature Centre, as well as city spaces. It is assumed that perceptions may be shaped by these sources.

All the tourists interviewed define sustainable tourism as that which has less impact on the environment. Sofia and Francesca, high-school graduates I met on the bus to Inari, added that sustainable tourism should also benefit the local economy and offer "authentic" experiences. A French family on their packaged holiday—a couple with two children—whom I met in a souvenir shop in Ivalo was eager to share their thoughts on sustainable tourism. Mathéo, the father, works for a transport company focused on reducing carbon emissions. Thus, the central indicator of sustainability discussed was environmental, particularly in terms of transport choices. They mentioned traveling from a small town near Geneva and initially planned to take one flight directly from Geneva to Ivalo, bypassing Helsinki, but did not have the opportunity. Moreover, they considered undertaking independent travel instead of purchasing a packaged vacation, though this proved unfeasible with two kids.

When asked about sustainable tourism, Veronica and Kristian referred to the practices of the hotel where they work, highlighting its commitment to the optimal use of environmental resources:

They are very sustainable... they have these targets... saying like if you want to change your towel, please leave it on the floor. If you want to keep it, put it hanging. Also about the trash, so if it's possible recycle, we have recycle bins for the plastic for the glass and so on. And also about using different things for quick cleaning or so on... We have also like these cups, which are also recyclable... Like water, they want to also save water.

Interview with Veronica, 2024

At the same time, she emphasized what distinguishes this particular hotel from others they have worked in, thus highlighting the cultural dimension:

Well, I like because they are welcoming and supporting locals. Whatever they're making products either eatable or just interior, every hotel is near either a lake or river... they're unique... they have always had activities which are typical and traditional for Lapland.

Interview with Veronica, 2024

Julia, who has been living in Finland for almost a decade and most of that time in Lapland, although hesitant about the genuineness of sustainability certifications, explained her view on sustainability with a focus on cultural and economic dimensions, balancing all three aspects:

It's nice working with more really small and local companies like also with the Sámi people... like reindeer herders. They explain about their life, their culture. So I think this is sustainable. And it should be nice that the tourists know a bit better where when they are looking for activities this place, how they behave, if they are local, if they take care of in terms of employing people like... And in the Husky farm, how do they care about the dogs? What do they do with all the trash?

Interview with Julia, 2024

It is worth noting that Julia, like many locals, drew attention to the significance of sharing and accessing information about sustainable tourism in general and those providers committed to sustainability frameworks in particular:

Maybe it would be good... to give a bit more access to this kind of information... if we promote those kinds of small places or some people who really try to do something for the environment and for sustainable tourism... not like a marketing thing.

Interview with Julia, 2024

These observations highlight significant disparities among various definitions and perceptions of sustainable tourism. Official definitions, such as those from the UNWTO, emphasize a balanced approach that harmonizes environmental stewardship, socio-cultural respect, and economic viability. However, this theoretical framework often contrasts sharply with the realities faced by local residents, including Sámi community members and tourists.

Local residents, long-term inhabitants, and workers in Inari frequently struggle to articulate a precise, formal definition of sustainable tourism. Yet, they can readily identify key elements and indicators based on their lived experiences. While they generally align with the three pillars outlined in the official definition, locals place particular emphasis on environmental challenges such as transportation and local economic benefits. The Sámi community, in particular, focuses on cultural sustainability, self-determination, and the safeguarding of their livelihoods and well-being, alongside environmental and economic considerations.

Representatives from local businesses and staff view sustainable tourism certifications as valuable tools for evaluating operations. However, they also note that these certifications can pose challenges for small businesses in terms of financial and temporal resources. There is a concern that such certifications might take on an intrinsic value, leading to "greenwashing" rather than reflecting genuine sustainable practices. Tourists often have a limited understanding of sustainability, shaped by popular narratives or superficial definitions found on Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) websites. Consequently, their expectations and behaviors may not align with local realities, potentially undermining the very principles of sustainable tourism that officials advocate.

Different stakeholders in Inari perceive sustainable tourism through the lens of their unique experiences and concerns. Nonetheless, there is a shared understanding that tourism should ideally yield economic benefits that support and remain within the local community. Locals, the Sámi community (especially with respect to traditional livelihoods), and tourism businesses recognise the protection of the natural environment as essential for the long-term viability of tourism.

The practical implementation and balancing of these often-competing dimensions present key challenges, underscoring the need for improved communication and collaborative management involving all stakeholders. Additionally, the lack of tailored solutions in official guidelines often leads to the overlooking of local voices and concerns, resulting in a disconnect between idealized sustainability principles and the practicalities of tourism on the ground. This dissonance emphasizes the urgent need for a more cohesive dialogue that bridges these gaps. By fostering greater engagement among local communities, tourists, and official tourism bodies, a more effective model of sustainable tourism can be developed—one that genuinely reflects the values and aspirations of all stakeholders involved.

5.3 Sustainability in Practice: Hopes, Challenges, and Innovations

The challenges posed by tourism, as outlined in the first section of this chapter, include seasonality, the housing crisis, cultural clashes, commodification, and the rise of mass tourism. This section discusses these challenges from the perspectives of local residents and foreign workers. It also explores how these groups believe these challenges should be addressed to maintain sustainable tourism. Furthermore, it examines issues such as the lack of cooperation among different stakeholders and the existing gaps in policy. The section suggests specific types of tourism as potential alternatives to mass tourism, aiming to make tourism more sustainable. These approaches not only seek to benefit various stakeholders but also strive to provide sufficient educational value to encourage tourists to engage in responsible tourism.

Challenges

Seasonality has been a central focus in discussions with interlocutors within the tourism industry. It is an intrinsic characteristic of tourism, particularly pronounced in peripheral regions like Lapland and Inari, where tourism heavily relies on the holiday seasons of urban dwellers (Saarinen, 2003). According to Elle, their hotel chain experiences peak demand during Christmas and the broader winter holiday season, though they noted that they maintain "quite an even amount of people from... November until April."

In the summer months, the highest visitor numbers occur in July and the first week of August, coinciding with the typical holiday period for many European countries. This timeframe also aligns with the holiday season for Finns, who, as indicated by

interviews, predominantly travel to the region during the summer. Overall, seasonality does not currently seem to harm the tourism industry in Inari Municipality, at least not in terms of local employment, which remains stably high for non-seasonal positions.

While seasonality can contribute to employment instability, it also offers some advantages. As Elle mentioned, it allows nature a chance to rest and recuperate:

Most of the activities that we actually do... in like wintertime, which is maybe I would say even a bit better than doing it in the summertime, because you know there is a thick layer of snow. So, when you're walking it doesn't, you know, kind leave the ground looking like there have been people. So, most of the things that we actually do... are done in the winter when we have a lot of snow and ice. So that is one thing that like one part of this like sustainable tourism is trying to get the... the tourism work all year round... We are thinking that if we would have this actually like all year round that we would have quite many people all year round then what would happen because in the summertime when there is no snow or ice the nature is more vulnerable. And if there is a lot of people walking in these areas it will... It will leave some traces sometimes.

Interview with Elle, 2024

Seasonality does create local and regional repercussions in terms of employment, income, and services (Saarinen, 2003). Interlocutors explained that while nearly all locals are employed, the influx of tourists necessitates additional staff in the tourism sector, leading to a significant demand for foreign seasonal workers:

There are a lot of foreign workforces, a lot (stressed). If you cannot see it in the summer that much. But winter is a lot busier and then we have people from all over the world working here. Because honestly, like we don't have enough people to work. And everyone is already fully employed. There's a huge lack of workforce here and it's seasonal work. So a lot I would say locals wouldn't want to take work that you can do only for, you know, four months in the winter and then three months in the summer. In between your kind of lost so.

Interview with Iida, 2024

These seasonal positions are typically offered in hotels and tour companies, including roles such as cleaning staff, kitchen staff, and receptionists in hotels, as well as husky riders and snowmobile staff at tour companies. Additionally, a wilderness guide school program “brings a lot of Finnish people here,” according to Iida. In this context, Lina explained, “Most of the guides we have are locals or from Finland.”

For many companies, hiring foreign workers for seasonal jobs is often more manageable due to two primary factors: the reluctance of locals to accept seasonal work due to its precarious nature and the required foreign language skills. Lina noted, “People are coming from all around Europe mostly... we have people from Spain and Germany and the Netherlands, Greece, Italy, like all around.” Seasonal workers in the tourism sector are often drawn by the experiences available, and many share motivations akin to those of tourists. Iida remarked, “I think it's easier to kind of hire people that want to come here for the experience as well.” This sentiment was echoed in an interview with Veronica and Kristian, a couple from Croatia working in one of the hotels in Inari, when asked about the motivations of foreign workers:

Alina: Do you often meet people from other countries here who work for their hotels? What are their main motivations to come here?

Veronica: Yes, yes. Oh well, I will set 50 money, 50 Northern Lights.

Interview with Veronica, 2024

Seasonal work has its own downsides, according to Veronica and Kristian. This marks their fifth year as foreign employees in Inari Municipality, and it is their first summer in this five-year span. Their initial job was at Kakslauttanen, an Arctic Resort East Village not far from Saariselkä, where they spent their first winter season. They remarked that it was not a “nice experience” for them at this resort. However, after changing workplaces and being hired by one of the hotels in a large hotel chain in Inari Municipality, they observed significant differences in employment conditions. Veronica shared her thoughts on the situation at the hotel in Inari: “We have been talking with the general manager... about some agreement, and it was actually... everything so easy... so simple that I was thinking “this is something weird”, like I don't know. And we were afraid actually. But no, everything was exactly how we agreed. She was very open... It's according to the law.”

This brings us to another critical issue – the unequal working conditions faced by foreign workers. Veronica pointed out, “As a foreigner, you get paid less than those who are here, who speak Finnish, who have experience, who know the area.” Iida highlighted the challenges and unfair regulations that foreign seasonal workers encounter: “And it's easy to kind of entice people to come here because the reputation of Finland as a safe country that follows rules is so strong.”

Working conditions remain a highly debated topic, regardless of the nature of seasonal work. Mass tourism not only attracts more tourists but also invites a greater number of companies into the market. Some of these companies are foreign, leading locals to express concern about their commitment to the area, their employees, and even the welfare of animals involved in various activities. Elle explained, “We also have here companies who are not from here, not local, or not from Finland, but from abroad. I'm not saying it's bad; of course, everyone is welcome here and such, but... Maybe have a thought, you know, are they taking care of this, you know... You know are they paying attention to these things?”. Iida, for example, shared insights from a recent news article published in *Lapin Kansa*²:

About a company in Inari who has quite horrible practices towards their foreign and Finnish workers and also their animals. So you can... there's good companies, there's bad companies, there's everything in between. Because the honestly the amount of people coming to Lapland at the moment is insane, especially in the winter so...

Interview with Iida, 2024

Although not extensively discussed with the interlocutors, the resource and infrastructure development induced by tourism in the region—often driven by actors from outside the Arctic—is another critical issue related to the influx of foreign investment. These development projects frequently involve the exploitation of natural assets like open waters, timber, and critical minerals, and are often characterized by a tendency to “excavate” without giving adequate consideration to local communities or ensuring that sufficient investments benefit them (*High Stakes: The Arctic Test of Sustainable Development*, 2024). To address these challenges and reconcile competing demands, EU-funded research projects such as ArcticHubs and JUSTNORTH have been investigating the viability and impacts of Arctic economic activities.

Another significant challenge pertains to companies in the tourism sector and their attitudes towards symbols of Sámi cultures and their representations. A glance at the design of hotels and resort villages highlights this issue—especially the luxury glass igloos, which have gained popularity due to the rise in northern lights tourism

² See the article <https://www.lapinkansa.fi/inarilaisen-koiravaljakkoyrityksen-tyontekijat-ker/11260434>

(Kugapi et al., 2020). As Iida noted, “Husky are not traditionally... it's not a traditional thing to do here. It is something that's been brought here because we have snow. Of course I understand. And it's a fun experience, but also a field that has a lot of problems.” The terms “Igloo” and “Husky Dogs” are marked as “negative words” in the Vocabulary of Responsible Tourism for Sámi Homeland (Saamelaiskäräjät, 2025).

It is also important to recognize the different ways accommodations are marketed across hotels' websites. For instance, the Wilderness hotel chain, operated by the Skolt Sámi family, promotes their accommodations as “Aurora cabins.” In contrast, the Kakslauttanen Arctic Resort brands these same types of lodgings as “glass igloos.” Indigenous Sámi activist and musician Petra Laiti addresses this issue in her blog article about “Lapland,” describing it as a problematic term: “Lapland is where you go to ski, to take husky rides, to sleep in ice hotels and glass igloos” (Laiti, 2025). She critiques the term “Lapland” as a colonial designation that reduces Sámi land to a location for various tourist activities, such as “wilderness,” “magical and authentic,” and “rare Arctic fauna,” which are all marketing gimmicks that fail to reflect the reality of Sámi people's experiences, particularly as their lands face threats from mining, power lines, wind turbines, climate change, and tourism.

Cultural commodification in tourism presents a significant yet complex challenge within the context of this thesis. This commodification is typically shaped by external perceptions, which directly influence local circumstances and the demand for specific activities. This dynamic often results in representations of the Sámi as a “living historical relic,” packaged through exoticism and offering inauthentic products that do not truly reflect local cultures (Saari et al., 2020). While “authentic Indigenous culture” in tourism experiences is not explicitly defined as a fixed entity, it encompasses “Indigenous people’s own vision and view of authenticity as well as what and how their own culture is wanted to be seen and presented, utilized, and commercialized,” according to the Vocabulary of Responsible Tourism for Sámi Homeland (Saamelaiskäräjät, 2025). This can lead to the commodification of Sámi culture, portraying them as a “living historical relic” or through exoticism and museumification (Saari et al., 2020).

Iida, who works at a local souvenir shop in Inari, criticized companies and stores for engaging in cultural appropriation and selling counterfeit items:

If people actually kind of thought about the stuff they buy and it's very hypocritical for me to say this because we sell it... From my perspective, it's made somewhere that's not even close to here and then... but of course, our owners want to sell what sells, hmm? So if people just bought a little less and just more quality. So you don't need 20 different magnets to be honest...

Interview with Iida, 2024

It is important to highlight that not only foreign companies are adjusting their business practices to align with tourism expectations; local enterprises, including those owned by the Sámi, are also adapting. Recent examinations into the representation of Sámi-owned businesses (Cassel, 2019; De Bernardi, 2019) have raised compelling questions about the ambivalence of this representation. This ambivalence is often characterised by the fact that it “paradoxically still draw(s) on specific articulations of Sámi place and culture” (Cassel, 2019), which can perpetuate stereotypes and the process of “othering.” Iida brought up a similar concern in the interview:

If it was my store, I would not. But it's not, and the owners are Sámi. It's their decision... There are some that are controversial, like for example they used to have this thing that you have, like the in Finnish "neljäntuulenhattu" – four-winds hat. That became a huge controversy in the Finnish media. And we don't sell that anymore. We used too. And there's still people who are asking where they can buy this product, but no one is [selling it]. Unless you go to ski resort... It's kind of like a very disrespectful to wear fake stuff. It's like a doll. It's just an imitation of the real thing... And it's just like a stereotype. Typical thing to buy and then you're like “Ha-ha funny”. It's actually like part of the culture and very important for people.

Interview with Iida, 2024

Opportunities and Recommendations

A key question that arises in analyzing sustainable tourism in Inari Municipality is how to effectively inform various stakeholders, including local communities, both local and foreign companies in the tourism industry, state-owned enterprises, cultural and administrative institutions, destination marketing organizations (DMOs), and tourists. How can sustainable tourism be better implemented while ensuring that the voices of all actors are heard? Furthermore, how and where should sustainable tourism be defined and promoted to encourage tourists to make choices that align with responsible travel practices?

One significant recommendation from the locals interviewed is the need for cooperation among different stakeholders. Iida highlighted the issue of local stores selling counterfeit souvenirs and tourism companies misappropriating Sámi cultural symbols. She suggested that a more collaborative approach to establishing rules and regulations regarding sustainable and ethical tourism could address these problems.

Iida: You know, the shaman drum... it's a very sacred thing to the Sámi people. And there's a lot of controversy on that. Like should it be replicated on like stuff at our store, for example? Like for T-shirts or stuff like that, and people call it the "witch drum", which is very disrespectful. So stuff like that like. There should be open conversation about like what is OK to sell and what is not OK to sell.

Alina: ... I mentioned that Sajos, where I was yesterday. There is like a huge exhibition, just like at the entrance where you can see all the pictures like what tourism should look like and what it shouldn't look like, right?

Iida: But I've never seen that... like I work here. I don't have any reason to go to Sajos. So, I don't think a lot of the companies that actually do work here, they don't know about... that there's even like something like that there. So maybe there should be a bit more cooperation on that part... on both our part and you know like.

Alina: Like cooperation between the, let's say, the Cultural Center and the (Sámi) Parliament and the business?

Iida: Yes, exactly. Like kind of like... cause it's beneficial for everyone to kind of work together. And so, businesses also know what is not OK and what is... In what direction we should go together so everyone is not just shouting different stuff.

Interview with Iida, 2024

What Iida was pointing out to further in our conversation was the significant lack of communication with the Sámi, whose voices need to be amplified to make informed decisions about tourism business. She expressed:

Sometimes I feel like the especially the voice of the Sámi people is kind of lost sometimes. But I think, for example, with the Sámi Parliament, it would be good to have more conversations about the tourism and what is OK and what is not?...I have never heard of their advertise (the display of Principles for Responsible and Ethically Sustainable Sámi Tourism at Sajos Cultural Center), so... I think if you got to Siida or Sajos, then you will see that but not in other places in this village. Well, sometimes. We, well, have a couple of posters up about like some Sámi families who take guests in and that's what I would consider... Yeah.. But otherwise no. I

don't think honestly like there's a bit of a... A bit of a problem with communication about these kinds of things with actual locals here.

Interview with Iida, 2024

In another part of our discussion, Julia stressed the need to make information about sustainable tourism more accessible to a wider audience, stating, “Maybe it would be good maybe to, but I don't know how it's possible to be a bit more clear and. To give a bit more access to this kind of information.”

Moreover, it is crucial to consider that different contexts often yield various outcomes in terms of what it means to be “authentic” Sámi within Sápmi (de Bernardi, 2019).

Iida emphasized the importance of recognizing the plurality of voices within the Sámi community regarding these issues:

Maybe some people don't care (about the culture commodification) even inside the Sámi. But like Sámi people... people, there are so many different opinions. You cannot just say that if the museum or the Cultural Center says something is right. Some people might disagree. And it's happened a lot... Very many different opinions... Look, it's not something we fight over or anything, but it's... not so black and white.

Interview with Iida, 2024

Though Elle had a more positive perspective on the relationship dynamics between tourism actors, she raised important questions about the significance of such cooperation:

I think it's like so rooted in the companies here... I think most companies are working quite a similar (in sustainable) way... because we are locals. It's important you know that everything is done like fairly... We are all the time like improving the communication between the local companies and the local people and with the municipality and with Metsähallitus.

Interview with Elle, 2024

Elle further explained that Metsähallitus plays a crucial role in regulating tourism activities in the area, ensuring that activities such as snowmobiling, snowshoeing, or hiking do not interfere with reindeer herding. In 2010, Metsähallitus became the world's first government agency to implement the Akwé: Kon guidelines concerning Indigenous traditions in a pilot project aimed at planning conservation and wilderness areas, natural resource planning, and individual projects impacting Sámi culture (Akwé: Kon Model | Metsähallitus, n.d.). Today, this collaborative framework

has been adopted across all Sámi territories, serving as an important mechanism for cooperation between Metsähallitus and the Sámi people (Sámi Culture Has Special Role in Metsähallitus Activities | Metsähallitus, 2020).

Cooperation between Metsähallitus and the institutions representing the Sámi people, specifically the Sámi Parliament and the Sámi Siida Museum, emphasizes the importance of recognizing the interconnectedness of nature and culture within Indigenous worldviews.

As Guttorm (2021) describes, in many Indigenous languages there is no word for "nature" or "culture." In the Western understanding, the concept of "nature" has a Cartesian genealogy, often creating a distinction between human and non-human entities. This implies that human beings and their ways of life exist outside of "nature." While the Sámi word *luondu* is now commonly used to mean "nature" in everyday language in Finland, some consider it a mistranslation because, originally, *luondu* referred to the character or essence of people, animals, or plants. The adoption of *luondu* as "nature" raises the question of whether this creates a division between nature and culture that did not previously exist.

In our discussion about the role of Sámi languages in tourism, Iida explained that, while they are rarely used today, it could be both educational and informative for tourists to learn more about Sámi worldviews and their homeland:

Not much. I would say that some stores, they have these signs that the school did... The school that we have here, which is like the Sámi area. Education Center... They have this whole event where they went to the stores and they put like "What is like bear in Sámi?" or something like that. They got permission from the stores to put like signs and like that, but otherwise not that much... Place names here also. When they've been translated into Finnish. They just took something that sounds a bit similar to the Sámi. They don't know the meaning, but they just translated... For example, the village over there is "Kapmas", it's "Kamannen" in Finnish, it doesn't... it just sounds similar. So that the person who went here and was like, OK, I need to get those... These places as Finnish names, you know. So they just like "What should we call this?". And they just thought of the nearest possible in Finnish without knowing the meaning of the actual. So they maybe if those places were actually named or translated into Finnish, that would be quite cool. Aanar or Inari doesn't really mean anything to my knowledge, but some places really do. So maybe even giving tourists information in English or something about the actual meaning of those place names... "Place with many trees", "place with many birch trees" or

something. There are probably some companies that do that and not the bigger ones because they know what sells and that's that doesn't.

Interview with Iida, 2024

Luontoon.fi, a national outdoor recreation information service developed by Metsähallitus, features a page dedicated to Outdoor Etiquette For The Homeland Of The Sámi (Metsähallitus, n.d.). This page emphasizes the importance of respecting the Sámi homeland and its land-based livelihoods, which play a crucial role in sustaining Sámi culture. By maintaining the vitality of their homeland, language transmission, traditional knowledge, nature connection, community ties, and handicraft traditions are all preserved. Collaborative tourism guidelines give voice to the Sámi community and highlight the significance of sustainable and ethically-driven practices through widely-used channels.

The conversation with Elle underscored the importance of such guidelines and the need for the Sámi community to participate in decision-making regarding “nature tourism”:

It doesn't mean that we need to take people to like the deepest parts in the wilderness... I think people here think that you know we can keep the more like places that are deeper there for ourselves and for the locals... They (Visit Inari) also have this cruise on the lake. That goes around the Ukko island. The Ukko it's very like... Like special place have been for the Sámi people, so you would be able to see it from the boat. It used to be so that it's organized by another company in this area, but it used to stop at the island. But maybe 5 years ago we decided that we don't need to make it like they don't need to make any stop there. Because people got to walk there. But here... the locals and the Sámi community started to think that: “OK. It's enough that people can see it, but they don't need to actually walk on this island.”

Interview with Elle, 2024

Building on the discussion about sustainable tourism certifications, one consideration might be the development of a sustainable and ethical tourism certification in collaboration with the Sámi community. This certification is currently being developed by the Sámi Parliament as part of The Path of the Calf, or The Responsible Sámi Tourism Certificate: Development of a Model and Digital Application Platform project. The aim is to create a culturally sensitive responsible tourism certification system that promotes authenticity, responsibility, and ethical sustainability of Sámi tourism products and services (Saamelaiskäräjät, 2025). The

project will be presented and discussed during the European Indigenous Tourism Conference EITC 2025 by Kirsi Suomi, "Responsible Sámi Tourism Certificate" Project Coordinator, as part of the Certifications in Indigenous tourism session.

Sustainable Alternatives to Mass Tourism

Almost all interlocutors highlighted a significant surge in tourism in recent years. Julia, for example, noted that the number of tourists increases every year, indicating a return to pre-COVID levels:

Every year it's "Oh, this year we have more tourists than last." Year every was! Then there was the coronavirus covid corona, so it stopped. And I think what everybody was saying "Yeah, we will change." But to my point of view, nothing has changed. We are back.

Interview with Julia, 2024

Iida echoed these concerns about the rapid changes in tourism in the region and the growth of mass tourism: "It's changed so much. When I was younger, it was like only wind going through the village. No people. Nothing! Like freaking cold. Now it's like tourists everywhere."

While mass tourism bolsters local economies by creating jobs, generating financial revenues for tour operators, and enhancing infrastructure, it also presents a variety of challenges. "There's, I would say, really a lot of ups and downs on that as well, but pros and cons for everything," Iida explained. "Like employs me, but also, it's not... Mass tourism is on level, so it's not ideal for the planet." This highlights how mass tourism places a strain on the environment. Under mass tourism conditions, tourists often show less regard for cultural sensitivity and tend to buy less from locals: "Come here on a bus and stop for 30 minutes and then go to Norway to eat king crab. Drive back the same way you came. Stop on the second day as well. Just use the toilet and just eat or buy some magnets and go. It's just... and you come from Singapore and that's really far," Iida described the influx of tourists arriving in coach buses.

Mari Lappalainen, a Skolt Sámi and the owner of a large hotel chain named Wilderness Hotels, in a manner similar to Mayor Laine, the former Mayor of Inari Municipality, emphasized in an interview for the *Inari in Finland – Attractiveness and Arctic Advantage* project that "the area needs to develop a different type of greener and more sustainable tourism" (Kull et al., 2020).

There is an evident need for tourism approaches that promote responsible interactions with nature, contribute to the local economy, and are culturally sensitive. While responsible and sustainable tourism are overarching concepts that encompass these approaches, specific alternatives to mass tourism should be proposed. Recent research indicates that ecotourism and community-based tourism are viable alternatives. Although not without their own challenges, these forms aim to mitigate the negative effects of tourism and foster positive social, cultural, economic, and environmental developments (Duffy, 2002).

Ecotourism is frequently cited as a prominent type of alternative tourism and a potential pathway for environmentally sustainable development (Duffy, 2002). It is designed to be low-impact, educational, and ecologically and culturally sensitive (Honey, 2008). Ecotourism is fundamentally linked to environmental conservation. Ideally, tourists' non-consumptive use and appreciation of resources contribute to conservation efforts (Stronza, 2001). Furthermore, ecotourism should direct economic benefits to local communities, complementing rather than overwhelming traditional practices (Ibid.). This economic incentive can, in turn, enhance local support for conservation (Duffy, 2002).

Ecotourism aims to respect local cultures by providing opportunities for visitors to learn about the local culture, history, and environment (Stronza, 2001; Duffy, 2002). Proponents argue that it can challenge stereotypes and offer a more comprehensive understanding of cultural differences and the struggles of Indigenous peoples (Honey, 2008). Indigenous ecotourism, in particular, connects conservation with resource rights and the empowerment of Indigenous communities (de Bernardi, 2021).

While praised for its potential to revitalize cultural pride and empower local populations (Stronza, 2008), there are valid concerns. Ecotourism has been linked to neoliberal development strategies and can involve structural power dynamics between entities from the global North (tourists, international NGOs, funders) and destinations in the South (Duffy, 2006). Poorly managed ecotourism can still result in environmental damage and may work against the interests of local communities if not carefully implemented (Honey, 2008).

Another issue is the lack of clarity and confusion surrounding the definition of ecotourism, a challenge similar to that of sustainable tourism. Although the concepts of ecotourism and sustainability have existed for decades, the tourism industry in Finland still finds these definitions unclear, causing confusion for both consumers and businesses (Tuohino & Hynönen, 2001). This reflects a broader issue noted in other sources, which emphasizes that there is no single universally accepted definition of ecotourism (Duffy, 2002). The definition remains debated, and the term is sometimes seen as a "catch-all phrase" so expansive that it becomes "meaningless" due to its varied usage.

Community-based tourism often overlaps with or contributes to ecotourism (Stronza, 2001). A fundamental principle of community-based tourism is the active participation and involvement of local residents in the planning and management of tourism developments (Ibid.). This involvement can extend to control over eco-cultural sites (Saari et al., 2020) and includes participation in ownership and decision-making processes (Stronza, 2005). By granting local communities control and emphasizing their needs and initiatives, community-based tourism supports self-determination. It embodies the concept of developing tourism "from within" and "for the local community," which means recognizing diverse local perspectives and creating services that meet local needs rather than solely catering to visitors (Partanen et al., 2023).

In summary, ecotourism and community-based tourism are often discussed under the broader categories of alternative, responsible, or sustainable tourism. These approaches aim to shift away from mass tourism. They share the goals of integrating environmental conservation, providing economic benefits for local communities, and engaging ethically with local cultures, especially Indigenous cultures, through principles such as low impact, education, local participation, and cultural respect. The success of these approaches relies heavily on careful planning, implementation, and ensuring genuine local control and benefit.

6 Conclusions

This thesis set out to explore the multifaceted nature of tourism in the Municipality of Inari, a region of significant cultural and ecological importance in Finnish Lapland and Sápmi. By focusing on the perspectives of local residents and other stakeholders, the research aimed to understand the complex interplay between tourism growth and the imperative for sustainability in this unique Arctic context. The study sought answers to three core questions guiding this investigation: 1) How does tourism in Inari and Ivalo shape the region's environment, culture, and economy? 2) How do locals perceive "sustainable tourism", and what do they identify as its key elements? 3) What are the challenges and opportunities for achieving sustainable tourism in Inari and Ivalo, and how can they be addressed?

Tourism in Inari and Ivalo is a significant economic driver, contributing substantial income and creating employment opportunities. The region's appeal is rooted in its pristine Arctic nature, offering activities like Northern Lights viewing, husky safaris, snowmobiling, hiking, and fishing. Simultaneously, it draws visitors interested in Sámi cultural heritage, showcased primarily through the Siida Sámi Museum and the Sajos Sámi Cultural Centre.

However, this growth is not without its impacts. Economically, benefits are often unevenly distributed, with revenue leaving the region via large corporations. The seasonal nature of tourism, which has notably shifted from summer to winter as the peak period, creates a demand for foreign seasonal workers. This influx, combined with locals converting properties to rentals, exacerbates a housing crisis for residents and workers. The rise of mass tourism, particularly large bus tours, often results in visitors bypassing local businesses, offering minimal economic return to the community.

Environmentally, popular activities exert pressure on fragile Arctic ecosystems. Concerns exist regarding the environmental impact of transportation (especially flying), snowmobiling, and general visitor activity on vulnerable landscapes, particularly during snow-free periods. Culturally, tourism leads to the commodification and external portrayal of Sámi culture, sometimes through simplified or staged representations. Instances of cultural clashes arise from intrusive tourist behaviour, impacting locals' sense of place. While cultural tourism offers

opportunities for exchange, ensuring culturally sensitive engagement and respecting Sámi self-determination are critical ongoing issues.

When asked about sustainable tourism, locals often found providing a formal definition challenging. However, their perceptions align broadly with the three pillars of the UNWTO definition: environmental, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability. A strong emphasis was placed on the environmental dimension, with transportation (flying and vehicle use) being the most frequently cited factor determining sustainability. The importance of environmental responsibility also extends to waste management and minimising impact on nature through practices like following hiking etiquette. Socio-economic aspects are also key elements of the local perception of sustainable tourism, notably the creation of employment opportunities for locals and the importance of supporting local businesses by purchasing local food and authentic Sámi-made souvenirs. The development of tourism infrastructure is also recognised as a benefit.

Crucially, the socio-cultural dimension, particularly regarding respect for Sámi culture, was consistently highlighted. Local perceptions of sustainable tourism underscore the need for culturally sensitive engagement, respecting Sámi ownership and management, and supporting authentic cultural experiences. The educational aspect of tourism, where visitors learn about Sámi history and culture, is valued. Locals acknowledged the complexity of achieving cultural sustainability, noting the diversity of opinions within the Sámi community itself.

The path to achieving sustainable tourism in Inari and Ivalo is marked by significant challenges and requires a concerted effort to seize opportunities. Key challenges identified include the inherent seasonality of tourism (though it can allow nature to recover), issues surrounding the seasonal workforce including precarious working conditions, the impact on local housing, and managing the effects of mass tourism. Cultural challenges involve cultural commodification, appropriation of symbols, and the need for respectful representation and self-determination for the Sámi people. There is also a perceived lack of effective cooperation and communication among diverse stakeholders (businesses, Sámi Parliament, municipality, state enterprises) and a need for more tailored policies and guidelines. The focus on growth, sometimes driven by external actors and investments, can overlook local needs and environmental limits.

Addressing these challenges and fostering sustainability requires enhancing collaboration and communication across all stakeholder groups to ensure that local and Sámi voices are central to decision-making processes. Education is vital, both for tourists regarding responsible behaviour and cultural understanding, and for businesses regarding ethical practices. Promoting alternative tourism models like ecotourism and community-based tourism is seen as an opportunity to move away from the negative impacts of mass tourism, focusing instead on low impact, education, and direct benefits for local communities. Ensuring Sámi self-determination in tourism development, adhering to ethical guidelines, and supporting initiatives like the developing Sámi tourism certification are crucial. Supporting local entrepreneurship and addressing issues like fair working conditions and the housing crisis are also necessary components of a holistic approach. Making information about sustainable options more accessible to tourists and businesses is also an opportunity for positive change.

This thesis makes several contributions to existing research on tourism and sustainability, particularly in Arctic and Indigenous contexts. Firstly, it offers a detailed, qualitative case study of Inari and Ivalo, providing much-needed depth to the understanding of tourism dynamics and impacts in this specific region of Finnish Lapland and Sápmi. By amplifying local voices, including those of the Sámi community, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of sustainability from the perspective of those who live and work in the destination, moving beyond top-down definitions or external perspectives. The research specifically explores and applies the concept of cultural sensitivity within the Finnish Sámi context, adding to the theoretical and practical discourse on culturally responsible tourism involving Indigenous peoples. Through its qualitative, multi-method approach, the thesis provides a holistic view of sustainability, integrating environmental, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions as perceived and experienced by local stakeholders.

Building upon the findings of this thesis and incorporating insights from various sources, several future research directions emerge for this theme. First, additional research is needed to evaluate the practical implementation and effectiveness of cultural sensitivity guidelines and the new Sámi responsible tourism certification. It is essential to assess how these initiatives influence tourist behavior and business practices. Next, a deeper investigation is warranted into the mechanisms that can

enhance cooperation among diverse stakeholders involved in tourism planning and management in Arctic destinations. Furthermore, detailed studies focusing on the environmental carrying capacity of specific areas within Inari and Ivalo are necessary. These studies should also evaluate the effectiveness of measures designed to manage overtourism and protect sensitive ecosystems. Lastly, conducting comparative studies that examine various approaches to sustainable tourism development and cultural representation across different regions within Sápmi and other Arctic Indigenous territories would be highly beneficial.

In conclusion, tourism in Inari and Ivalo presents a complex picture of economic opportunity intertwined with significant environmental, socio-cultural, and economic challenges. While locals recognise the importance of sustainability across all dimensions, their perceptions are grounded in lived experiences, highlighting transportation and respect for Sámi culture as particularly salient issues. Achieving truly sustainable tourism requires active collaboration, education, a commitment to cultural sensitivity, and a shift towards models that empower local communities and allow development to genuinely "tread lightly" on the Arctic landscape.

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