

**Indigenous Tourism Research Symposium**  
**Abstract Book**



## **The clash of ontologies: Sustainable tourism and indigeneity**

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**Keywords:** Sustainability, political ontology, indigeneity, sustainable tourism, Sápmi

What is at stake when we discuss the notion of sustainability? Why has the concept of sustainability become alienating – one that, instead of urging us to act, buzzes in our ears like an ill-tuned jingle in a hotel elevator? In this paper, we will visit these questions through attuning to Mario Blaser's (2025) recent work on political ontology, tending to what we call “the political ontology of sustainability”. The political ontology of sustainability refers to the ways in which different understandings of what constitutes reality shape how sustainability is conceptualized and pursued. Blaser helps us to see how sustainability is not a neutral or universally agreed-upon concept but is instead deeply intertwined with specific ontological assumptions that vary across cultures and political contexts. This perspective challenges the dominant Western or “modern” notions of sustainability, suggesting that what is considered sustainable can differ significantly according to diverse worldviews and knowledge systems. Thus, the political ontology of sustainability emphasizes the need to recognize and negotiate differing ontological commitments in order to address global environmental challenges that are connected to the social, economic, and political. Thus, the question of what is at stake when we discuss the notion of sustainability becomes a question of how to live together well (Blaser, 2025), in a world of many worlds (Cadena & Blaser, 2018), and of *situating* a notion of sustainability in order for it not to continue to merely “jingle”.

Along with our peers across the world, we advocate that to critically re-visit the notion of sustainability we need to acknowledge the indigenous knowledge systems that have for centuries cherished the profound inseparability of the human from the more-than-human world (Cadena & Blaser, 2018; Kimmerer, 2013; Mazzocchi, 2020; Todd, 2016). We will situate our work in Sápmi, where various infrastructures of displacement (Blaser, 2025) exist, demanding critical attention (Fjellheim, 2020; Fjellheim, 2023; Kramvig & Salmela, 2025a, 2025b). In practical terms, we will focus on the tensions that appear in the very practices of negotiation of sustainability in Sápmi that manifest as programs and strategies and create a tensioned relation between the Sámi DMO *Visit Sápmi* and the Norwegian national body *Visit Norway*. The potential of an alternative concept to sustainability, *birgejupmi*, as proposed by the Sámi Parliament (Sametinget, 2022), works for us as a practical and analytical space centered around political autonomy to foster different visions regarding the meaning of “good life”.

### **A summary statement of significance of the work to the symposium theme:**

This paper contributes to the globally expanding project of decolonizing tourism by creating space for indigenous peoples to narrate their own stories within tourism world-making practices and to actively shape the sustainability discourse.

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## **When indigenous culture experiences spur negative communication in SoMe: Reasons for stereotypes and implications for Sámi tourism**

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Sámi tourism offers valuable opportunities for preserving cultural heritage and promoting intercultural understanding. In Norway, Sámi culture now forms an integral part of national tourism strategies, by providing authentic experiences tied to the unique heritage of the Indigenous Sámi people. Differentiation is a central market strategy where firms offer unique products different from competitors. Sámi culture is diverse with large potentials to produce differentiated Sámi tourism offerings. However, observations shows that producers often are met with narrow stereotypes from DMO's, tour operators and even visitors, about what Sámi tourism should be, which hamper development of the sector and cultural sustainability. The paper explores reasons for, and consequences of, stereotypic perceptions and suggest implications for Sámi tourism.

A single case design is used, and a large large-scale event was selected to reveal perceptions of Sámi culture. The selected event is the opening ceremony of The European Capital of Culture 2024 in Bodø. It was a significant opportunity to promote Sámi culture on both national and international stages. However, the prominent inclusion of Sámi cultural elements sparked polarized reactions on social media (SoMe), ranging from appreciation to harassment, illustrating some of the challenges of making Indigenous culture visible in public arenas. The case was studied through observational netnography, stakeholder interviews, and mass media analysis.

Three main theoretical frameworks are combined. First, a multi-relational approach to meaning creation and the role of pre-knowledge. Second, a narrative approach to identity of self and place. Sami culture has long suffered suppression, concealment and stigmatization due to colonization and assimilation policies. Confronting a dominant, homogeneous identity narrative through increased visibility and diversity of Sámi culture has a potential to redefine pre-knowledge and identity views and foster more inclusive understanding of heritage. Third, Kriesberg's (1989) concept of intractable conflicts and his resolution model are used to analyze how SoMe amplifies and intensifies tensions and makes them highly visible and widespread. Findings indicate that the conflicts related to the opening ceremony progressed through three distinct stages: initiation (initial personal reaction or provocative remarks), active discussion phase (intensified debates escalating into the asking profound questions of "Who was here first"), and resolution phase (gradual acknowledgement of conflicting views, recognition of gaps in historical knowledge, and collective calls for understanding and respect).

Understanding such conflicts is crucial for Indigenous tourism as it reveals underlying societal tensions and historical grievances that can impact the authenticity and reception of Indigenous cultural expressions. The study enhances understanding of managing cultural representations and mitigating backlash. Implications for indigenous tourism will be suggested and discussed.

**Key words:** Indigenous tourism; Sámi culture; Social media and cultural tensions; Sámi identity in tourism; Sustainable tourism development.

# The ambiguous interface between Indigenous tourism and expanding 'wellness tourism' narratives: Weighing market and product opportunities against cultural appropriation risks

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**Keywords:** Indigenous tourism, product development, wellness tourism market, cultural appropriation

## **ABSTRACT**

The self-proclaimed and disparate 'wellness sector' has grown considerably in visibility and influence during the post-Covid years and appears to constitute a prominent market force reaching into tourism and deemed to create fresh product opportunities<sup>i</sup>. Destinations<sup>ii</sup> have been conjecturing whether attracting and supplying wellbeing tourist markets hold the potential to relaunch businesses and regions that had been particularly affected by the pandemic, including often remote First Nations culture-based enterprises<sup>iii</sup>. It is imperative to consider possible impacts on cultural, ethical and economic sustainability for Indigenous/Aboriginal Tourism (IAT) in general<sup>iv</sup>.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In the first half of 2024, a tender developed by Tourism Northern Territory (TNT) and overseen by its Aboriginal Tourism Committee (ATC) industry members sought to investigate potential opportunities and risks associated with the wellbeing travel market. This included undertaking a comprehensive critical literature review of the intersection between 'wellbeing' and 'Indigenous' tourism concentrating on a variety of impacts and recommendations regarding product opportunities (specifically connecting IAT food, culture and on-country experiences) and to produce several resources for the IAT industry in the NT<sup>v</sup>. This paper presents only useful public findings derived from the substantive part of the extensive review and excludes confidential or strategic findings owned by TNT.

## **REVIEW FINDINGS**

Relevant literature sources are usually fragmented and disjointed, rarely connecting wellbeing and IAT in ways allowing to establish whether wellbeing travellers motivations and IAT entrepreneurs' expectations regarding commercial viability, control over product elements (e.g. food, arts, performances and cultural narratives), impact minimisation and Indigenous economic empowerment are likely to meet<sup>vi</sup>. Yet recent narratives surrounding wellbeing travellers refer to quests for physical, psychological and transcendental (religious, spiritual or mystical)

pursuits<sup>vii</sup> sometimes allude to a connection between wellbeing motives and IAT destinations<sup>viii</sup>. In contrast, some media commentators question the likelihood of a harmonious match and anticipate negative impacts of wellness tourism practices on local cultures, rekindling the ever-resurgent topic of authenticity and alleging that wellness fads could constitute a new form of cultural assimilation<sup>ix</sup>.

#### ANALYSIS and IMPLICATIONS for diverse DESTINATIONS (with Australian examples)

Our analysis indicates that no natural 'fit' exists and that the diversity of wellbeing tourists motivations (ranging from 'restorative' to 'transformative' impulses affecting their propensity to partake in cultural activities) and the types of regions or destinations appraised (e.g. mainstream tourism versus Indigenous culture-integrated settings) affect the nature and distribution of both risks and opportunities<sup>x</sup>.

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<sup>i</sup> Global Wellness Institute. (2018b). *Global wellness tourism economy* (November 2018).

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<sup>v</sup> Tourism Northern Territory (2024) Northern Territory Aboriginal Tourism Cultural Tourism Framework.

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<sup>x</sup> Tourism Northern Territory (2024) Wellness tourism: Market opportunities for Aboriginal tourism businesses (2024) <https://www.tourismnt.com.au/system/files/uploads/files/2024/A4%20Booklet%20-%20Wellness%20Tourism.pdf>.

## **Preserving Heritage, Embracing Tourism: The Indigenous Museum Dilemma**

Sanna Valkonen & Áile Aikio, University of Lapland

The colonial legacy of the relationship between Indigenous peoples and museums is a widely recognized issue in the field of museology. In recent years, new practices have been developed to promote the decolonization of museums and enhance equality. A central question concerns the ownership of cultural heritage: where should valuable Indigenous cultural heritage be preserved, and who has the right to make decisions about it?

In response to these challenges, many Indigenous peoples, including the Sámi, have established their own museums. These institutions manage and present cultural heritage and history from Indigenous perspectives. Furthermore, the repatriation of cultural heritage has been a significant step toward addressing historical injustices. For example, the Sámi Museum Siida in Inari, Finland, has received the entire Sámi collection from the Finnish National Museum as part of a significant repatriation effort to return cultural heritage to Indigenous ownership.

At the same time, Indigenous museums increasingly serve as major tourist destinations. Sámi Museum Siida, which functions as the national museum of the Sámi people in Finland, broke visitor records in 2024, with over 82,000 exhibition visitors. Of these, 63% were international tourists representing 110 nationalities. This raises important questions about the role of Indigenous museums as both custodians of cultural heritage for their communities and attractions for international tourism.

In this presentation, we explore the multifaceted relationship between Indigenous museums and tourism. We examine the challenges that arise when a museum simultaneously serves two very different audiences: Indigenous community members and international tourists, each with distinct needs and expectations. Additionally, we discuss the opportunities Indigenous museums have to transform conventional museum practices when a significant portion of their funding depends on tourism revenue. Our aim is to highlight solutions and strategies that support the cultural sovereignty of Indigenous museums while accommodating a diverse and global visitor base.

## Colonial Land-use as Contaminant in Sámi Sacred Cultural Environments – The Cases of Äijih and Rástigáisá

Eleonora Alariesto, University of Lapland

In this presentation, I present the theory of contamination as a key to understanding the effects of colonial land-use in a more holistic way. In my 2021 research, *The Conflict of Sacred and Contaminant: The Impurifying Effects of Tourism in Sámi Sacred Sites*, I explored the different categories of contamination caused by tourism activities at the Inari Sámi sacred rock, *Äijih*, located in Lake Inari. I have since expanded the theory in my ongoing research “The Colonial Hegemony of Clean and Dirty: Wind Power as Contaminant in Sacred Sámi Cultural Environments”, focusing on the case of the Finnish energy company ST1’s pursuit of developing a wind industry park in the sacred fell area of Rástigáisá. The research seeks to find answers to questions about the hegemony of “clean” and “dirty” in Indigenous contexts, and how colonial land-use contaminates sacred Sámi cultural environments where various relational *meahcci* practices take place. These practices are essential in the everyday life of the Sámi people, holding generational knowledge, skills, and languages – as well as senses of collective identity, safety, and home.



## **Co-creating tourism knowledge: Relational ethics (accountability) and Indigenous methodologies in Sámi tourism research.**

Nina Smedseng, PhD fellow: Sustainable Sámi tourism,  
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What happens when we center traditional knowledge and relational values in Sámi tourism and tourism research? What unfolds when these elements are prioritized in our storytelling - both in tourism and in research? And how can we think of building relations through research practices that involve oiling a Sea Sámi wooden boat, rowing on Porsáנגgavuotna (Porsangerfjord), sharing apple cake and stories, walking the woods of Divtasvuotna (Tysfjord), working with tourism texts at Čorgaš (Nordkyn), or engaging in gáfestallan-talks on Zoom or by the campfire, as part of a research methodology?

In this presentation, I will share insight from a co-creational research project with the aim of decolonizing Sámi tourism and tourism research. Sámi tourism can contribute to the safeguarding of culture and nature, and in some cases, restore and “repair” knowledge and culture that has been lost because of Norwegianization. This positions the industry as a crucial player in cultural revitalization and local development. However, by addressing the impacts of colonization on Sámi tourism and tourism research, I seek to highlight the “invisible”, but crucial knowledge work, or “Indigenous storywork” (Archibald, 2008) that these partners have had to do in order to take control over own representations.

The Truth and Reconciliation report from 2023 highlights the widespread lack of knowledge about Sámi culture and history throughout society, including among the Sámi themselves. The report also points out, perhaps surprisingly, that colonization/Norwegianization is an ongoing process that continues to exist within hidden societal structures. Despite the loss of language, culture, and knowledge - and consequently the loss of ownership of one's own history and stories - colonization has not been sufficiently addressed in Sámi tourism and research.

This knowledge journey with Sámi partners has led me, as a non-Indigenous scholar, into the relational world and knowledge framework of Indigenous methodologies (Wilson, 2008). This experience has challenged my traditional understanding of knowledge creation, and transformed my understanding of what research can facilitate. By replacing critical distance with critical proximity, this approach emphasizes involvement and responsibility, seeking to build relations with partners to co-create new tourism knowledge to “repair” the erasures

attempted by colonial processes. This "walking-with" methodology helps center Indigenous knowledge within a research framework that reflects Indigenous ways of knowing (epistemologies), being (ontologies), and doing (methodologies). Relational accountability means taking responsibility in my research relationships, giving back, and being respectful to Indigenous knowledge systems and values.

**Summary statement – work significance:**

Indigenous methodologies and co-creational research to decolonize Sámi tourism and research. Centering traditional knowledge and fostering self-determination. Reclaiming culture and knowledge, ensuring respectful representations. Promoting ethical research practices.

**Key words:**

Indigenous tourism, Indigenous methodology, de-colonization, relational ethics

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# **Co-Producing Codes of Ethics for Visitors to Indigenous Communities: Adapting Research Practices for Responsible Tourism in the European Arctic**

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Maud A.J. van Soest, UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology

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## **Keywords**

Codes of ethics, Responsible tourism, Indigenous engagement, Co-production, Knowledge exchange

## **Abstract**

Researchers and tourists in Arctic Indigenous communities share the identity of “outsider visitors” and the associated social and environmental impacts. Increased research activities in social sciences, humanities, and physical sciences within Indigenous communities have raised concerns about unethical engagement, research fatigue, biased results, and insufficient contribution to the local economy. These concerns coupled with climate change impacts have prompted the development of Indigenous-led codes of ethics for researchers across all disciplines in the European Arctic. The Equitable and Ethical Engagement Protocols developed by the Inuit Circumpolar Council cover Greenland, and officially published principles for both Sámi research and tourism are also in place in Finland. However, ethical codes with detailed protocols are still not institutionalised in most European countries, and even though certain non-Indigenous tour operators have developed community specific guidelines, they are relatively simplistic and may not effectively mitigate the disturbance to Indigenous livelihoods and the environment. Indigenous-led, co-produced ethical codes for both researchers and tourists are therefore still limited in the European Arctic in terms of geographical coverage and efficacy.

To address these gaps, examining how ethical codes for researchers and tourists can be strengthened through co-production is urgent for promoting responsible research and tourism, decolonisation, Indigenous self-determination, and community sustainability. Through combining document and literature review, policy discourse analysis, workshops, and interviews, we examine the commonalities between research activities and tourism in their impacts on Indigenous communities, the limitations of current ethical codes for researchers and tourists in the European Arctic, and the transferability of these codes across groups and national borders.

We suggest that ethical codes for researchers that emphasise Indigenous engagement and reciprocity can well connect and translate to tourism, and these codes can be developed and strengthened through respectful and equitable co-production between researchers and tour operators with Indigenous communities, where Indigenous Peoples are empowered to take the lead in the process. We also encourage scientists to share success stories of

following ethical practices with various external stakeholders through public discourse and collaboration, including with tourists, private companies, and government agencies, especially in countries where ethical codes are not yet institutionalised. Overall, this research encourages active expansion and adaptation of co-produced ethical codes from research to tourism and other outside visits in Europe's Indigenous areas and beyond, promoting knowledge exchange for joint efforts towards responsible tourism, local economic development, cultural heritage preservation, and Indigenous community well-being.

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## **Indigenous Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation in Indigenous Tourism Development in Northern Canada**

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Yvette Rasmussen, Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada

Dr. Wendy Cukier, Toronto Metropolitan University

**Keywords:** Indigenous Entrepreneurship, Social Innovation, Northern Canada, Sustainable Livelihoods, Tourism

### **Outline:**

This study sought to identify Northern Indigenous women's challenges in accessing the skills and resources needed to build sustainable livelihoods in tourism and co-create recommendations to support and stimulate social innovation within the tourism industry in Northern Canada. This study used the Two-Eyed Seeing approach, an Indigenist pedagogy that seeks common ground by drawing on the strengths of Indigenous and Western knowledge systems to streamline access to the right training and resources for Indigenous women entrepreneurs at all stages of tourism business development. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with Indigenous women entrepreneurs in the region and the organizations that serve them.

Systemic issues experienced by Indigenous women entrepreneurs in the North, such as discrimination, loss of culture, lateral violence, intergenerational trauma, and stress and mental health issues, affect the ability to maintain a business. The impact of intersectionality, such as being a woman, a caregiver and Indigenous, negatively affects the socioeconomic status of Indigenous women entrepreneurs in the North.

Due to the North's remoteness, there are limited services available to assist in business development. Indigenous women need opportunities that are not online and not in locations that require travel and overnight stays. The study discusses challenges with conducting business in the North, such as the need for reliable Internet and the cost of shipping.

The study identifies challenges of mastering the skills required to run a successful business in Canada. Women participants identified the need for financial literacy training in schools and free courses that provide entrepreneurs with the skills they need. There is a need for marketing and social media skills to run a business in the North, related to developing an authentic product, as well as pricing it properly and sharing their stories. Indigenous tourism businesses in the North are complex and need flexibility to respond to seasonal infrastructure deficits, as well as new and emerging challenges in the tourism sector. Limited support in completing "actionable" business plans leads to frustration caused by failed grant applications and loan requests.

This study identifies the need for culturally appropriate training led by Indigenous people. Participants cited the importance of having training programs that respond to their specific needs and recognize the realities of the North. Coordinated and flexible access to wraparound supports was identified which includes affordable child and elder care on an as-needed basis, access to quality food, health care services and affordable housing to facilitate equitable participation in programs.

Access to Indigenous women mentors with firsthand experience and expertise in tourism helps Indigenous women in the North enrich their hard and social-emotional business skills. Participants in the study identified the need to learn from elders, knowledge keepers, aunties and other community members to succeed. Supportive networks that allow women the flexibility to access and receive support when needed are critical in developing culturally safe and responsive ecosystems that build confidence.

This research aligns with the conference theme of Indigenous entrepreneurship and business development.

# **Connecting Culture, Land and Nature: Reimagining A New Model of Northern Tourism Program**

Dr. Herminia Din, University of Alaska

**Keywords:** Indigenous Knowledge, Art, Science, Souvenir

## **Abstract**

Traditionally, education via the tourism platform is delivered by tour operators. However, the sensitivity of the Arctic environment and the speed with which it is changing dictates that northern universities should become involved in the processes of indigenous knowledge transfer, raising public awareness of climate changes, and encouraging stewardship of the Arctic. Tourism including art and science are a possible mechanism for this effort. Developing a model for a sustainable tourism should include (1) indigenous ways of living, (2) citizen-engaged environmental observation, (3) place-based sustainable art, and (4) professional development of outdoor recreation and leadership. The concept is focused on knowledge co-production to provide tourism “packages” that raise awareness of the changing Arctic and encourage stewardship behavior on the part of participants. Interdisciplinary solutions are needed to increase knowledge and engagement about sustainable tourism in the Arctic.

As an art educator this presentation will provide a background introduction of the framework and focus on the design process on how to create a place-based sustainable souvenir (art) that brings visitors closer to places through positive memories. By using creative and hands-on approach, it provides a deeper connection and meaning to the experience compared to purchasing mostly imported tourist souvenir products. Making a “place-based souvenir” as a part of the tourism experience could promote a sense of appreciation for the Arctic’s natural environment, increase knowledge of indigenous culture and engagement of sustainable tourism in the Arctic, and most importantly including citizen science data collection, all will help participant to take ownership of the experience.

The major contribution of this presentation is to instigate a new conversation linking indigenous knowledge, connecting visitors to the land and nature, and participatory experience through storytelling, and souvenir making using local materials. Furthermore, the success of such model depends on how to build an effective partnership among indigenous communities, tourist providers, and academic researchers, and learning opportunities for students from different disciplines, for example art, natural science, environmental studies, outdoor leadership, recreation, and management, and more.