

## 4.4 Tourism development in Saami communities in Finland

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### Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to give first a short theoretical background about the situation of tourism as a livelihood in Saami communities and after that to present the challenges Saami tourism entrepreneurs are facing in the Saami communities in Finland. It is based on work and interviews with Petteri Valle, a Saami tourist entrepreneur and chairman of the Saami tourism and entrepreneur association.

Saami communities' economic development and modern livelihoods have not been researched very much. Communities are facing modernization and globalization, which means also the coexistence of traditional and modern livelihoods. Reindeer herding, fishing, and hunting are not anymore the main livelihoods for the majority of Saamis, but they still have very important roles in Saami communities. The Saamis are an Indigenous people living in the region called Sápmi, which is located in the area formed by parts of four countries: Finland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden.

Saami tourism is a modern livelihood, using Saami culture as a basis of tourism products. On the one hand, tourism has a long tradition in some Saami regions, and nowadays you can find tourist destinations referring to Saami culture in all of Sápmi, and even wider. In Finland, Saami culture is also commodified in tourism by non-Saamis and the souvenir industry. This has not been seen as very acceptable among Saamis, especially when the traditional Saami costumes used in tourism businesses are not authentic and they are being worn the wrong way (such as the women wearing pieces that belong to the men's Saami costume). As well, the use of traditional Saami symbols in hotels and products has been under critical public discussion. This has also affected some Saami entrepreneurs who felt it is not acceptable to use their own Saami costumes in the tourism business, where they present their own culture for others.



Utsjoki is the only municipality in Finland where the Saami people are the majority. It is traditional a Saami living area, where reindeer herding, fishing, and hunting have still important roles for local inhabitants and in the local economy. The Teno River, which is a border river with Norway, has had a dividing and uniting roles in the history. The effect on the local culture can be seen easily. Tourism has over 100 years of tradition in the Teno River area, mostly based on salmon tourism during the short summer season. At the moment, tourism is seen as the only livelihood which has some potential to develop in Utsjoki, at the same time when traditional livelihoods are giving less and less income to the local population. This chapter discusses the challenges that Saami tourism is facing in Utsjoki. This will be discussed through the transformation of the tourist destination and the role of innovations in tourism development.

### **Transformation of a tourist destination**

Tourists seek experiences and they have various channels to find information about possible tourist destinations. After reading the destination webpages, brochures, or guide books and tourism literature, tourists have expectations when they are going to the tourist destination. Perhaps they have also seen movies or documents dealing with the destination, or heard from friends or from social media about the destination. When they come to the tourist destination, the tourism experience is formed from different services (including accommodation, food, transportation, attractions, program services etc.) which are independently provided in that same location (Asworth 1991, in Gordon and Goodall 2000). This should match the expectations the tourist has created before she or he comes to the destination.

The described “discourse of region”, together with “discourse of development”, together form the identity of a tourist destination (Saarinen, 2001). The discourse of region includes the information the tourist gets from the material produced for marketing or other purposes, but also from other tourists. Saami culture and Saami people has been widely commodified when marketing Finland, or Lapland, or individual tourist destinations. It has created expectations that Saami culture can be seen and experienced in the tourist destination. This is not always the reality. The discourse of development includes institutional practices and policies that are affecting how the destination will be developed and how tourism is seen as part of the development. Saarinen based his theory on the idea of the region (Sack, 1992), which does not



tie the region to artificial boundaries. This makes it possible to think of the destination as geographically flexible, but also to research destinations from different time perspectives, including the future. In this chapter, I discuss how the discourse of development has affected the tourism development in the Finnish part of Sápmi.

### **Saami tourism as Indigenous tourism**

Saami tourism is usually included as Indigenous tourism, which has been researched quite widely. Indigenous tourism has been seen both as a possibility for Indigenous people and their economies, but also as a threat to them and their culture. Butler and Hinch (1996) have defined Indigenous tourism as an activity in which Indigenous people are directly involved. This involvement can be in two very different ways: either through direct control, and where their culture serves as the focal point of the activity or attraction. For example a woman, in a dress that looks like a Saami costume, dancing with Santa Claus in the Arctic Circle, is classified as “Culture Disposed” tourism, where the Saami have a low degree of control but where the Indigenous theme is present ([www.visitrovaniemi/...](http://www.visitrovaniemi/...)). We can also talk about “Culture Controlled” tourism, where the Saami have both control and the Indigenous theme is present, like in some reindeer herding farms.

### **Innovation in Saami tourism**

Tourism business needs innovation to develop, but innovation in the tourism sector has not been researched much. Innovation is generally a new idea, product, or process of production that has been implemented. It has been innovation, for example, when Saami culture has been commodified for marketing tourist destinations, the souvenir industry, decoration, costumes, tourism products, etc. This is a kind of traditional way to look at innovation as giving information about how the Saami culture is commodified in tourism businesses, and how successfully, in economic terms, it has been done.

Innovations can also be researched from a wider perspective, when innovations are seen as reforms that improve social and economic capacity. This includes social innovations referring to changes which aim to support ecological sustainability, social cohesion, social equity, or balanced development of the region (Virkkala, 2008). This definition makes it possible to study



the commodification of Saami culture in the tourism industry from a Saami community perspective, or to discuss the role of tourism in Saami community development.

Nyseth and Aarsæther (2005) have studied innovations in the municipalities of Storfjord, Kåfjord, and Kautokeino with an aim to analyze whether ethnic context makes any difference to innovations in the local context. They found that while some of the innovations that were introduced were not especially remarkable, it was the introduction and focus upon an application of innovative processes that was making a difference. They also noted a wider impact on the local (and wider) Saami society from participation in the tourism sector. By helping to make Saami identity more visible, there was a growth in pride about both community and culture. Luthje (1995) also brings up the attitude around impacts of using Saami culture in tourism in Finland and has pointed out that in addition to the negative impacts, tourism has also positive impacts like forwarding knowledge about Saamis and their present position and culture, strengthening Saami identity, as well possibilities to develop culture, heritage, and livelihoods.

In Jokkmokk, Sweden, Müller and Huuva (2009) found some challenges to the growth and expansion of Sami tourism in Sweden. They focused their research among reindeer herding tourist entrepreneurs, and found that the stronger the culture was embedded, the more difficult it was to develop tourism as an alternative source of income.

It looks like that tourism is not clearly accepted as a Saami livelihood among Saamis. If we look at the tourism innovation theories, and Saami tourism and entrepreneurship research, it can be assumed that there are specific conditions both for innovations and social innovations in Saami tourism. This raises the question about whether tourism based on Saami culture could be that kind of reform for Saami society that improves Saami communities' social and economic capacity.

### **Saami tourism – a Saami livelihood?**

As mentioned earlier, the identity of a tourist destination is dependent on the policies and development activities targeted to that destination. If we look at how interpretation of the Finnish legislation and Saami parliament policy reflects the growing commodification of Saami



culture in tourism and Saami tourism entrepreneurs, it can be told that there is a discussion and change going on. This is related to the ongoing global discussion on the development of Indigenous cultures. According to Heinämäki (2010), minority cultures should have the possibility to change and develop. If the protection of culture in international law systems is tied too strongly to traditional livelihoods and ways of living, the change and development of culture are problematic for Indigenous peoples. Self-determination should mean peoples' right to decide their own development, according to the principles of international law.

It looks like the constitutional Law committee of Finland has widened the meaning of Saami livelihoods to include, in addition to traditional livelihoods, the livelihoods that have been derived from traditional Saami livelihoods (PeLV 38/2004). Also, the Finnish government has referred to this statement (HE 154/2004). The Saami parliament is acting according to Saami parliament law and the definitions and interpretations of Saami livelihoods in the law have meaning for its activities. Saami tourism as a livelihood is mentioned in the Saami parliament's work programs, as well as in the various statements parliament has given for authorities and projects. In the action plans, tourism has received more and more attention. It has been mostly mentioned as a combination livelihood together with traditional livelihoods. Parliament sees that modern industries give young people the opportunity to stay or return home. This requires, however, the possibility that Saamis self-manage their living conditions and support economic development policy through the essential elements of the Saami culture. (Saamelaiskäräjien toimintaohjelma 2004-2007, Saamelaiskäräjien toimintaohjelma 2008-2011).

In addition to statements and negotiations with authorities, the Saami parliament is preparing separate Saami sections to some of the regional development programs. For example, in the rural development program of Lapland is mentioned (Lapin liitto):

The aim is to develop Saami tourism livelihood according to the Saami sustainable development –program, based on Saamis' own culture and its traditional knowledge and know-how capital. Tourism is seen as a significant means to secure regions employment and economical development, as well to maintain and regenerate cultural destinations. The objective is to further tourism based on small volumes and when possible as supplementing traditional livelihoods. Additionally authentic and high-quality Saami nature and cultural tourism will



especially be supported. Saami tourism trademark will be created. Development of tourism offers livelihood and possibilities to live in home regions for many Saamis. (Freely translated by author).

According to previous documentation, it looks like the discourse of development that is affecting Saami regions as tourist destinations will be more and more identified through Saami culture, or at least the institutional policies are giving more space for tourism activities based on Saami culture. If this livelihood is accepted within the Saami community, it is easier for Saami entrepreneurs to use their own culture in tourism business. Valkonen (2009) has written that traditions and unity, like 'one nation – one culture' grouping, were used to strengthen the nation and Indigenous nation building. This on the one hand can give self-confidence, but on the other hand may make those Saamis who are not working in traditional livelihoods feel like outsiders of their own culture. But this also gives opportunity to have discussions within the Saami community about the relations and acceptance of livelihoods, and thus Saamis are themselves creating their own future. These discussions and creation is going on.

There are also new actors in the development discourse, responding to discussions about Saami nation building, Saami community development, and creating a future for Saami communities. The Saami tourism and entrepreneurship association was established on 2009 in Utsjoki to further the rights of non-traditional Saami livelihoods in Saami living areas. The activity has been based around Saami tourism until now. Entrepreneurs felt that the policy of Utsjoki municipality and Saami parliament did not support tourism as a Saami livelihood. The association brings out alternative economic activities, in order to keep the Saami culture and living area alive. The association's activities include statements to ministries like Agriculture and Forestry Ministry, for legislative initiatives, and for the Saami parliament (Valle, 2010). Petteri Valle (2010) is very concerned about the preservation of Saami culture and its vitality, not only in Utsjoki, but also throughout the Sápmi. He suggests open discussion about what Saami people and communities really want: Saami culture should be a visible part of the region's business development activities, and thus keep the Saami culture alive, as well transfer traditional knowledge to young people. Traditional Saami handcrafts and knowhow is dying. For example, reindeer herders are no longer using traditional cloths, but Goretex. In this context, it is about ethics. If they offer tourists historical reindeer trips to the mountains, is it ethically right for tourists to wear Goretex? Using traditional Peski (reindeer fur coat) and shoes would



also give livelihoods to local craftsmen, but there is strong opinion that Saami handicrafts are not allowed to be sold for tourists or tourism purposes. So the debate should take place, if there is a need and willingness to have Saami tourism as a Saami livelihood.

### **Saami tourism and community development – between tradition and modernity**

If we think about Saami culture and tourism, there is a change going on. Traditionally non-Saami tourism entrepreneurs, as well regions and even the state have been innovative in using Saami culture in tourism marketing and in tourism business. At the same time, tourism has not been seen as an acceptable livelihood within Saami society in Finland. Until now, the Saami tourism has often been “Culture Disposed” tourism, where Saami culture has been used by non-Saami entrepreneurs. This has meant that Saami communities have not benefited.

Globally, interest towards tourist destinations with an Indigenous presence is growing, with demands for authenticity. This makes it possible to reconsider the commodification of Saami culture in the tourism industry within Saami society, but also wider. There are possibilities to take tourism as an accepted Saami livelihood and see it as a social innovation, which is supporting living possibilities in Saami regions and simultaneously supporting a living and developing Saami culture. It looks like that tourism will be more and more accepted as a Saami livelihood, at least among interpretations in legislation, Saami parliament policy, and among Saami tourism entrepreneurs.

Real acceptance of tourism as Saami livelihood would most probably change the identity of Saami culture-based tourism from “Culture Disposed” tourism to “Culture Controlled” tourism. But this would need the commitment both from policy makers within the Saami community and the Regional authorities to direct the policy and development strategies and means towards authenticity. When commodification of Saami culture is done by Saami tourism entrepreneurs, it is possible to define within the Saami community what to show and tell for tourists. As long as the Saami community is not accepting tourism, this defining will be done by others, because when there is a demand there are also those who want to respond to that demand.



As Butler and Hinch (1996) have argued, the pace, scale, speed, and form of development is generally determined by those exercising the greater degree of control. This is a big question for Saami society and it is good to remember that changes always take time and sometimes need generations. But this is also a big question for whole Finland, where commodification of Saami culture in tourism purposes has a long tradition.

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