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In search of the authentic experience: Case of Sàmi Indigenous Adventure Tourism

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The global warming causes rapid environmental changes and the global COVID-19 pandemic have directly affected the tourism industry as well as the local communities in the Arctic. In northern Finland, for example, traditional reindeer herding practices have suffered from difficult winters and the pandemic prevented the visits of the international tourists. These developments posed a challenge to the sustainable development and community resilience. In the field of indigenous tourism, questions concerning authenticity have attracted attention for long time, not least because of the cases where indigenous cultures (including also Sàmi culture) have been misused when creating improper services to tourists. According to our understanding, the matching desires and expectations of both the supply (indigenous hosts) and demand side (visitors) are at the core of authentic tourism experiences and sustainability of the field.

This study examines the authentic experience through a case study focusing on Sàmi indigenous tourism in Inari region in Finland. We also clarify how the authentic experience relates to the sustainable indigenous tourism, not only economically, but culturally, environmentally, and most significantly, ethically. This research leans on the conceptual framework of Adventure Tourism (AT). AT has recently become a global trend within the huge international tourism market emphasizing visitors' desire for genuine experiences [1]. According to our understanding, the authentic Sàmi cultural experience should not only emphasize tradition but be fused with the contemporary and constantly evolving style of living that is carried on by future generations. Besides paying attention to Sàmi entrepreneurs and their visitors (most of whom come abroad), we are using the theory of value co-creation to understand and analyze the interaction between hosts and guests. [2]. Here, value is not created only from goods and services, but emphasis is in the value created by subjective experiences. Yet, the authentic experience is not simply considered as a subjective feeling of the visitor but as an entity co-created through respectful and open interaction between hosts and guests.

When trying to contribute to the development of sustainable tourism and community resilience, this study also inspects the potential domestic demand for indigenous AT experiences and services in Finland.

References

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