



Semi-external evaluation

ARCTISEN – Culturally Sensitive Tourism in the Arctic

Satu Mustonen

Helena Puhakka-Tarvainen





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The evaluation is based on five periods of project implementation out of a total of six periods.



1. Introduction

This is a semi-external evaluation report for the ARCTISEN – Culturally Sensitive Tourism in the Arctic project (1 September 2018–31 October 2021), funded by the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme 2014–2020 (Interreg-NPA). The evaluation has been undertaken as a cross-evaluation by another NPA project W-Power (Empowering women entrepreneurs in sparsely populated communities) and its project manager Helena Puhakka-Tarvainen and project coordinator Satu Mustonen during 2021. The ARCTISEN project team has evaluated the W-Power project and vice versa.

The evaluation process started with joint planning during autumn 2020. Steps and a schedule for the evaluation were defined jointly, as well as the template for the evaluation report, namely the key points to be considered during the process. The evaluation process included the following steps:

- Background data collection based on the project documentation (project reports and other materials, MS Teams group platform)
- Workshop for the ARCTISEN project team (5 May 2021), conducted by the project evaluator and implemented based on the findings of the background data collection
- Summarising the data as a report
- Discussions with the project manager and supporting team about the findings and clarifying unclear details
- Finalising, editing and publishing the report and offering advice to the project steering group

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism in the Arctic was growing quickly. There was and still is an increased demand for **new tourism products and services** that draw on the rich natural and cultural resources of the northern region. Simultaneously, **limited knowledge** of indigenous and other local cultures in northern communities calls for more open and sensitive dialogue among different tourism actors.

The ARCTISEN project has been working to increase knowledge of culturally sensitive tourism development and to create a network of entrepreneurs, communities, operators, organisations and researchers that supports responsible and innovative tourism business development.



The project has introduced **sensitivity** as a core value to be used as a guide in all the planned project activities, from benchmarking to test visits and from workshops to online courses. These activities help tourism start-ups and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to turn their place-based opportunities into economically viable tourism businesses.

The novelty of ARCTISEN lies in enabling and supporting entrepreneurs to craft culturally sensitive tourism products in close cooperation with a wide range of tourism practitioners and scholars across the programme area.

2. Background to the project

2.1 Project partnership and geographical/sectoral dimension

The project partnership is geographically unique in the NPA programme, as there are partners from Canada and New Zealand in addition to the partner regions in Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark/Greenland. The feature common to all partners is their knowledge and close collaboration with indigenous people of the regions as well as the tourism business. The partnership is also special in the sense that it does not include any partners from UK or Ireland, as they do not have indigenous people in their areas. The partners include the following organisations:

- The lead partner is the **University of Lapland**, Multidimensional Tourism Institute. ULapland is a provider of higher education and research, located in Rovaniemi, Finland.
- The **Arctic University of Norway (UiT)**, Department of Travel and Tourism, is a provider of higher education and research, located in Tromsø, Norway.
- The **University of Waterloo**, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, is a provider of higher education and research, located in Waterloo, Canada.
- The **Secretariat of World Indigenous Tourism Alliance (WINTA)** is a support organisation for indigenous people, located in Porirua, New Zealand.
- **Aalborg University**, Department of Culture and Global Studies/AAU Arctic, is a provider of higher education and research, located in Aalborg, Denmark.
- **Ájtte - Mountain and Sámi Museum**, is a national public authority located in Jokkmokk, Sweden.



- **Umeå University**, Department of Geography and Economic History, is a provider of higher education and research, located in Umeå, Sweden.
- **Northern Norway Tourist Board** is a public destination management organisation of Northern Norway, located in Alta, Norway.

The associated partners of the project include the key interest groups of indigenous peoples as well as tourism, e.g. the Sámi Parliament of Finland, Sámi Duodji (Finnish Sámi handicraft association), Arctic Circle Business (Greenland), Sermersooq Business Council (Greenland), Destination Jokkmokk economic association (Sweden) and many SMEs. Based on the evaluation, the associate partners seem to be very active in implementing the project, at least in Finland. In principle, it has been agreed in the partnership that each partner will take care of their regional associated partners contribution to the project activities. There are several stakeholders in Norway, which have cooperated with the Northern Norway Tourism Board but are not listed as official APs in the project application. The Tourism Board has, for example, run parallel to ARCTISEN a regional Sámi tourism project with 20 Sámi tourism SMEs.

There have also been challenges in the partnership, as the **Secretariat of World Indigenous Tourism Alliance (WINTA)** has been changed to a **totally voluntary** organisation, and they are no longer able to recruit a workforce for the project. This is unfortunate, as their contribution at the start of the project was great. The original project aim was that through WINTA the project outputs could achieve a global contribution and visibility.

2.2 Project aims & goals

The project has aimed to address the demographic challenges related to sparse population and youth out-migration, peripherality, low economic diversity and impacts of climate change on local livelihoods, which are common challenges for the project area. More specifically, ARCTISEN has addressed the challenges and visions of tourism start-ups and existing SMEs across the project area.

ARCTISEN's approach has been to enhance transnational cooperation among a wide range of tourism stakeholders in the project area to support sustainable local tourism business development, economic diversity, self-determination and maintaining and recovering of cultural livelihoods. The support system created enables tourism start-ups and existing SMEs to learn from each other and to take advantage of expertise offered by scholars and practitioners specialised in culturally sensitive development of the tourism business.





Cultural sensitivity is a new concept in tourism development and the novelty of ARCTISEN lies in it. It is exactly what is needed when utilising northern indigenous and other local cultural resources in the tourism business. It enhances stakeholders' self-determination, intra- and intercultural understanding, respect, empowerment and inclusion together with economic development solutions.

The ARCTISEN project has managed to promote and clarify the term **cultural sensitivity** well and has raised it to the level of public discussion. The project has succeeded in bringing together research, practice and business to co-develop the concept definitions to be agreeable to all stakeholders. The representatives of all the stakeholder and target groups mentioned above have contributed equally to the project and co-created the outcome. Most importantly, all the voices have been heard, and the discussions have been respectful in all regions.

2.3 Project rationale in relation to the NPA programme goals

The NPA programme priority axis for the project is **entrepreneurship – improved support systems tailored to start-ups and existing SMEs in remote and sparsely populated areas**. The project goal has been to develop a support system for start-ups and existing SMEs offering innovative tourism products and services. The activities have targeted the development of more economically robust and versatile regions in the northern peripheries and Arctic, in terms of culturally sensitive Arctic tourism.

The transnational cooperation among project partners has produced a support system that consists of three components:

- 1) toolkits and online courses that enhance tourism companies' cultural sensitivity, product development and business innovation capacities
- 2) a cluster of culturally sensitive tourism enterprises across the programme area
- 3) the co-creation of new tourism products, services and business innovations.

Through a transnational tourism cluster, the project has contributed to a more positive business climate for tourism companies and to making the participating regions more economically robust and versatile in general. In terms of the NPA programme context, ARCTISEN is at the core of the programme to support the most vulnerable regions and cultures of the Arctic. **Knowledge transfer from other similar regions across the world has been critical to finding the best practices and success stories.**



There has been the withdrawal of a key project partner (WINTA), but in general the project results have been dispersed very well globally among researchers as well as among other stakeholders; e.g. the baseline reports were downloaded more than 1,900 times by April 2021, and the first four academic articles were viewed 1,150 times. The concept of sensitive tourism can be applied also in other contexts, not just among indigenous cultures, which widens the interested target group. It also helps that there are many accredited researchers working for the project. Thus, it can be said that the project has managed to raise awareness about the concept of sensitive tourism **over expectations**. One specific achievement to emphasise is the article published in *National Geographic*.

3. Project activities & outcome

3.1 Project management and internal communication

Project activities have been implemented jointly by all project partners. The University of Lapland as the lead partner has coordinated events so that everything has gone as planned and so that a 50 % project manager, Outi Kugapi, was recruited at the beginning of the project. In February 2021, the project manager changed, and now Monika Lühje will coordinate the project until its conclusion.

At the beginning of the project, the project manager had created very detailed instructions for partner reporting, which were introduced to the project team during the project kick-off (November 2018). Both project management team and steering committee meetings have been regular and have been recorded accurately with minutes. On average, at least 6/7 partners have attended the meetings. As a minor note, the full project implementation teams could have been engaged more actively in the joint project meetings and sharing information (e.g. internal newsletters).

Management team meetings have taken place as needed. In the meetings, the work package leaders have discussed and planned the implementation of the work packages (WP) together (WPM Ulapland (FI), WPT1 AAU (DE), WPT2 UiT (NO), WPT3 NNTB (NO)). Also, risk management has been discussed during the meetings, and all the detected risks have been listed in the **risk management log** on the project's online platform, MS Teams.

Steering committee (SC) meetings have taken place at least twice a year. The SC has evaluated the progress of the project regularly and contributed to the technical, financial, le-



gal, administrative, ethical and external communication issues. The SC has also approved the risk management plan. At least one representative from each project partner has participated in the SC meetings. There have been more SC meetings than originally planned, as the Canadian and Swedish partners had no representatives at the management team meetings, and the lead partner wanted to give a space for more inclusive discussions, which has been a very commendable practice.

The SC meeting agendas have been sent in advance to the participants. The structure of the agenda supports a check-up of the project's deliverables; thus, it is easy to notice if there is still something which needs to be done. In addition, evaluation of the ongoing reporting period and risk evaluation have been included in each agenda. The minutes of the SC have not been separately agreed upon by the committee members but have been signed by the chair and the secretary.

The partners have used MS Teams for sharing and saving mutual documents. The platform has been used for open communication and, at times, for discussions with partners. There is also a folder for each WP. The platform includes also the guidelines for reporting and communications templates (e.g. document, picture, poster and roll-up templates with the ARCTISEN brand layout). The first project manager created several **effective templates** for project management purposes at the beginning of the project, but unfortunately all templates have not been fully employed by the project partners. For example, the evaluation folder contains the target group reach excel template, which has been updated only by Ulapland.

Every project partner has had access to the **risk management log**. Any risk factors identified should have also been communicated to the project manager in writing and the project manager has been responsible for logging the risks in the risk management log. The risk management Log has been discussed at each management team meeting if new risks have appeared.

The submitted reports folder in MS Teams includes a copy of all the partner and project reports as well as some photos taken from the project activities. From each reporting period, an **evaluation report** has been created and is visible in TEAMS. The report is based on the management and steering committee meetings held during the reporting period (minutes of those meetings are attached). The evaluation report states how the project is proceeding, whether activities are taking place on time, how the project is using the resources and whether there is something that needs to be changed. Also, the forecasting of future activities is one of the subjects in the report. **The evaluation report offers a well-functioning and effective tool** to support the work of the project manager, who is responsible for monitoring the whole project.



Though the process of arranging meetings and separating the tasks of management team and steering committee meetings, it seems that there has been a lack of regular joint meetings, a 'general assembly', which could have better ensured the information flow among all the project workers. Also, though all material and meeting documents have been available via Teams, the use of the online storage has gradually decreased throughout the course of the project's implementation. For further projects, such a process could be recommended.

3.2 Project work packages and main outputs

WPM (management) has been described in detail earlier in this report; see section 3.1.

WPC (communication) is to be discussed in section 4.1.

WP1 Building understanding of culturally sensitive tourism business environments

The work surrounding this topic started in the reporting period 2, when the project collected data from over 100 stakeholders and tourists, analysed the information and modified it to a readable format (reports). All the partner countries contributed reports about cultural sensitivity based on either desktop studies and/or interviews. As interviews were used, partners have been in touch with administrative officers in partner countries, and especially with the project's associated partners, who have served as important informants during WP1.

The main aims of the national baseline reports were to enhance the understanding of the current entrepreneurial environment among different kinds of tourism actors, such as start-ups, SMEs and destination management organisations (DMOs) across the project area and to find out the current development needs and possibilities, problems and challenges. This information can also be applied beyond the Arctic.

National baseline studies and reports and a mutual transnational baseline report are based on a literature review on cultural sensitivity and a questionnaire for visitor and stakeholder interviews, which have been conducted in four regions. The main output of this work package is the [transnational baseline report](#), the content of which aims to support an improved understanding of culturally sensitive tourism.



WP2 Enhancement of skills (implementation)

In the project plan, the idea was to organise local online courses with local teachers for small groups of entrepreneurs. With the lead of AAU, the project partners ended up making one open-access self-study course with several modules. This was done to achieve a wider reach among the ARCTISEN target groups than the courses in the project plan had achieved. The modules in this course can be studied either together or separately. Their topics follow the project plan so the deviation is foremost a structural and technical one. Unfortunately, the self-study format does not allow interaction and networking between the course participants to the same extent as the planned local courses would have allowed. Anyway, the course includes Padlets, where the course participants can share their thoughts and experiences with others taking the course, thus providing some interactivity during self-study.

[The course on cultural sensitivity in Arctic tourism](#) is targeted to tourism entrepreneurs and tourism workers. Secondary target groups are tourism developers, DMOs, guides, students, policymakers and the general public interested in the topic. Though lacking interactivity, the open online self-study course might reach wider audiences and have a more long-lasting outcome than a normal one-time course. By August 2021, 47 participants had completed the course, and in total over 270 people had registered on the

course platform. Of those numbers, the main target group, SME representatives, is estimated to be about one third. Many of the participants have been tourism students, which is a good target group, as most of them will later work in tourism companies. By the end of the project, there will be one more course to be published. Similar content is also partly available in the public project **toolkits**. It is unfortunate, however, that the majority of students who have passed the course are presently from Finland only. A goal is that 20 entrepreneurs will pass the course by the end of the project.

There had also been a plan to implement transnational tourism student internships in SMEs participating in the project, but unfortunately this has not taken place due to COVID-19. Instead, many students have undertaken regional training and completed theses for the project. Theses (bachelor's, master's and PhD level) have been completed in Finland, Norway and Denmark.

Other outputs of this WP include, for example, webinars. A webinar called 'Exploring the Meanings and Practices of Cultural Sensitivity in Tourism' was co-hosted by ARCTISEN in April 2021. Also, two webinars have been held in local languages with different themes, one in Sweden and one in Norway. Webinars have been an excellent way to share the in-



formation and reach target groups during the pandemic. **Webinars are also a very effective way to equalise the project activities in the peripheral regions after the pandemic.**

WP3 Development of a culturally sensitive tourism business cluster

The aim of this work package was to organise five benchmarking trips (each project country to be visited) and test visits to facilitate the co-creation of new culturally sensitive tourism products and service ideas and the formation of new culturally sensitive tourism business networks. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, only one benchmark visit was made to Greenland in late 2019. The visits have been replaced with **online benchmarking trips**, where the participants are introduced to local tourism companies online. The goal of these ARCTISEN online events has been to showcase examples of culturally sensitive tourism in Arctic and subarctic regions. Participation in these online benchmarking trips has been offered to a targeted group (mainly SMEs and DMOs) in Finland, Norway, Sweden, Greenland and Canada. A Canadian partner has made an exception and their online benchmarking trip was open to anyone interested in participating.

From an evaluator's viewpoint, opening the online benchmarks more widely to the public audience and interested stakeholders could have been considered. As COVID-19 changed the benchmark activities online, the motivation to participate of many associated partners also dropped, which decreased the number of participants. For many participating SMEs, the possibility for transnational live meetings with peers was the key driver for participation in the project. Nonetheless, the videos, blog posts and memories related to the online benchmarks will be shared openly with all in the project toolkit.

WP3 has suffered the most from the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions regarding face-to-face communication. One main aim of the project was **to create a transboundary cluster** for offering culturally sensitive tourism products and services, but the creation of trustful relationships between participating SMEs has become difficult due to the pandemic. In June 2021, the lead partner decided to organise more online events instead, the purpose of which was to bring together innovative tourism and handicraft entrepreneurs to discuss the creative potential of virtual handicraft workshops, with the aim of supporting the co-creation of transnational culturally sensitive tourism products and service ideas. These online meetings were planned to help establish new collaborative relationships and networks between stakeholders. A remaining goal is to create ideas for five transboundary products or services.

The main output of this WP has been [a roadmap for culturally sensitive tourism businesses](#), which functions as a replacement for the planned ethical guidelines for culturally



sensitive tourism. The map is based on the stakeholder testimonial videos that are part of the online course and have been co-created with the project partners and associated partners. The dissemination of the map will continue during the period 6 of the project and the NPA cluster project ETRAC, in which ARCTISEN is a partner.

In addition, the project has published a map of existing ethical guidelines that replaces the planned map and brochure of culturally sensitive tourism companies. This decision was made because the project partners felt that it was not appropriate that ARCTISEN judges which tourism companies are culturally sensitive. The map brings together existing guidelines for sustainable, responsible and ethical tourism, which the target groups can utilise in developing culturally sensitive tourism businesses.

The ARCTISEN project has successfully met the main outputs within the scheduled time frame. The number of enterprises receiving support and the number of enterprises supported to introduce new products to the market, however, has run behind schedule since period 4 of the project. The creation of new transboundary culturally sensitive tourism products and services offered together did not meet the target mostly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A collaborative transboundary network of engaged culturally sensitive tourism start-ups, SMEs and other actors suffered for the same reason. The project tried to overcome the challenge of not being able to arrange in-person events or meetings with online events. The project also offered inspiration for business innovation through ARCTISEN's free self-study online course.

3.3. Inclusion of the partners and stakeholders

The lead partner ULAP organised a kick-off event in Rovaniemi at the beginning of the project (November 2018). All project partners and associated partners were invited. Members of UiT, Ajtte and AAU participated in person, and NNTB, UW and WINTA participated via remote connection. UmU was not able to attend due to another assignment. Five associated partners attended the kick-off either in person or via remote access. Typically, the project kick-off is the key event for getting to know the project partners in person and creating team spirit; thus, the lack of in-person participation during kick-off might have caused some multiplicative effects on further project activity, especially since COVID-19 prevented most travel plans. Nonetheless, it seems that the project partners have been equally active despite not meeting in person.



During the first period, project partners started to interview companies and other stakeholders to find out their business development needs, challenges and opportunities in the area and knowledge about the existing guidelines and certificates. The main aim was to study stakeholders' opinions and knowledge about certificates, existing guidelines, cultural representations, challenges and opportunities in tourism in the project area, which the project partners then analysed. The interviews created a good baseline for cooperation during the project, as personal communication with the target groups is important.

The project **target groups have been reached very well** compared to the goals set in the project plan. Start-ups and SMEs are the main target group and have been directly involved as associated partners or activity participants. The main purpose of the project is to improve their opportunities to craft culturally sustainable and successful tourism products and businesses. Enterprises, such as hotel chains, tour operators, destination marketing or management organisations complete this coalition. Interest groups, such as indigenous groups and business associations have an interest in developing sustainable tourism and are also directly engaged in the project as partners and other stakeholders. Other target groups include public authorities, education organisations and the general public, all of which are also important target groups.

Instead, business support organisations have not been a main target group, although they can use the materials created in the project. Also, there is an associate partner in Greenland, which is a municipal development company, and the development company Strukturum is a part-owner of the Destination Jokkmokk (SE). In Finland, the project has created some materials to support the Sustainable Travel Finland path of the village of Inari with the development company Nordica.

In general, the Finnish partner has been the most active in dissemination and stakeholder engagement activities. As many of the project partners are universities and the project workers are mostly researchers, it may be possible that every partner does not have sufficient knowledge, experience and resources for communications.

3.4 Schedule and cost-efficiency

The project has been implemented effectively in terms of the schedule and budget. Due to the pandemic, budget spending during the first project periods was less than planned, but it will be increased towards the end of the project. Major changes to the budget have in-



cluded a decrease in travel expenses, as the benchmarking visits (except Greenland) have had to be cancelled. Instead, more effort has been exerted to create high-quality audio-visual materials, like online benchmarking videos. Also, the supported student trainings in companies have had to be cancelled.

The organisational change in WINTA caused underspending of their budget, and the other project partners have been forced to carry on the project activities without WINTA's contribution. This has not hindered any activities, but it has meant that the project has not been able to draw on WINTA's expertise in culturally sensitive tourism development or been able to reach WINTA's worldwide network of stakeholders to whom the project outputs and deliverables would most probably have been of interest.

3.5 Reactivity to COVID-19

Like many other NPA-funded projects, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced ARCTISEN to invent new, alternative ways to implement the project activities. The originally planned on-site benchmarking trips between the project countries have not been executed due to the pandemic, except the first one to Greenland. After first postponing them, in 2021 the project partners started to organise online benchmarking trips instead. One example of these replacements or substitutes was held on June 9, when the Canadian ARCTISEN partners coordinated a webinar with the theme [experiences of culturally sensitive tourism in the Canadian Arctic](#). The goal of the webinar was to showcase examples of culturally sensitive tourism in Arctic and subarctic Canada. The audience included members of ARCTISEN's international project team as well as other community representatives, entrepreneurs, researchers, students and Arctic tourism stakeholders. Undergraduate and graduate students, faculty and staff from the University of Waterloo and beyond were invited to attend. In the webinar, presenters and panellists from the different territories in Canada shared their experiences with tourism that respects culture and place.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected WP3 implementation the most as the majority of activities and deliverables in this WP were planned as physical events. Finding substitute activities was done at a quite late stage of the last project year. Considering that the travel business was very slow during the lockdown in many regions, perhaps online activities would have attracted tourism entrepreneurs to participate in mutual online events. There should have been more time spent on planning and innovating when tourists were not present. This opportunity could have been used more effectively for creating business clusters, even online, or co-developing new culturally sensitive tourism products and services.



Many entrepreneurs in the tourism sector, however, were forced to find an income via other jobs, and thus they might not have had the spare time to develop the business anyway.

Due to COVID-19, the project has not been able to offer internships in tourism companies as planned. Instead, some of the partners (mostly universities) have offered internships in the project for students. Naturally, the COVID-19 pandemic caused some changes to partner budgets, as travelling was not possible, as described in earlier chapters. The shift to online for the course on sensitive tourism has probably increased the number of participants compared to the original plan of regional face-to-face courses. In addition, the online course is now open and valid for many years to reach new entrepreneurs, tourism workers, students and other interested persons.

4. Dissemination

4.1 Communication channels and open materials

Information about the project has been shared, for example, via [newsletters](#), [blogposts](#) and social media. All the partners and associated partners have been invited to share their stories on the [ARCTISEN Facebook page](#) and also in blogs to make the knowledge created available to the stakeholders and general public. The project has created a [public website](#), utilising the NPA programme template and [another wordpress-based site](#) for blogs and other materials. This is a bit confusing but understandable, as the NPA template is not very easy to modify. Moreover, the link on the mini website to the blog site could be more visible. In addition to Facebook, an Instagram account (@arctisen) and a Twitter account (@ArctisenTourism) have been used for both internal and external communications. In the blog, there are about 30 posts, and it has been proposed that the blog site will be viable and updated also following the completion of the project.

By summer 2021, altogether six scientific articles had been published and several are still in progress (some of these will be released post project as the peer review process usually takes several months' time). A chapter in a book dealing with tourism inclusion, a post in the online journal *Eye on the Arctic*, and an article in *National Geographic* have also been published. Most of the publications are open access. In addition, the project team members have participated in several (online) scientific conferences. The project baseline reports and two conference papers have been uploaded to both the ARCTISEN website and [ResearchGate](#).



Through the selected communication channels, the project has been able to reach target groups by various means. The published reports as an outcome of WP1 have inevitably increased knowledge of the Arctic's different capacities. According to the report for period 5, the ARCTISEN Facebook page had 613 followers, whereas the Instagram account had 242 followers, and Twitter had 133. The quarterly published public newsletter had over 120 subscribers, and it was also shared via social media. **A special newsletter was published for COVID recovery ideas in 2020.**

Numerous academic papers and articles have been published during the project, which has increased academia's knowledge about sensitive tourism. With respect to reaching the NPA programme's target groups, namely SMEs and start-ups, using these academic communication channels, it is impossible to say how well they have been reached.

Media releases and some publications via more popular channels have increased the accessibility of tourism practitioners and general public. To reach tourism sector workers and entrepreneurs, **disseminating information in seminars and events has played a key role in engagement.** The Finnish partner has been especially active in sharing information during events, but similar efforts have been lacking in other project regions. In Finland, both the regional level in Lapland and the national level have been reached by the Visit Finland organisation. Swedish and Norwegian partners have been active in organising webinars themselves. The Danish partner has also been presenting the project at many events.

While project is coming to its completion, an international final seminar will take place in English in October 2021. In addition, some regional final seminars have been planned in the host countries' native languages, something which is recommended for each region. A joint final report video will be created for wider dissemination in addition to a final academic report. The high level of audio-visual skills at ULapland has been a benefit in relation to versatile project communications. Also, students in participating universities have been contributing to the communications. Some joint efforts for communication and dissemination have also been accomplished by 'sister projects', e.g. by a project promoting Sámi tourism in Norway. Accessibility has been addressed well in all audio-visual materials (e.g. the use of English subtitles).

A surprising problem has been faced regarding project plan being 'translated to national languages.' At the project planning stage, insufficient consideration was given to the fact that in addition to Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian, there are **several Sámi languages** spoken in the project region. Thus, some compromises have been necessary, as the project budget does not allow for translations to ALL regional languages. Translations in Sámi languages have been used when possible, e.g. the project summary on the website. As the programme language is English, all the key project outcomes are available, or subtitled at least, in English.



Online communication with and between project stakeholders has been achieved mostly through the ARCTISEN webinars. Reaching the afore-mentioned target groups and encouraging them to participate in the webinars will increase the opportunities for cooperation and co-creation in product development and marketing as a cluster. During the pandemic, webinars have offered a modern way to overcome physical distances and a way to improve networks throughout the project area.

ULapland has participated in various online events disseminating the outputs of WPT1 and WPT2 and presenting the ARCTISEN project in general. Also, as the international conferences have mostly been held online, the project members have participated actively in them, e.g. Arctic Frontiers 2021 – Building Bridges Conference in February 2021. The aim was also to participate in the national travel fair in Finland, in which project manager had previously participated in 2019 as a guest speaker for tourism professionals, but it was cancelled due to the pandemic.

4.2 Engagement of stakeholders in dissemination

As described in the previous chapter, many stakeholders have been interested in the project activities and outcomes and have published the results both in publications and via media channels. The project has been promoted in seminars, events and in audio-visual media and has effectively engaged the partners in sharing the project's publications, which has caused a snowball effect in terms of sharing the posts further. The project has disseminated information successfully among academics and the public and has thus reached both researchers and practitioners.

4.3 Media coverage

As a project dissemination highlight, *National Geographic* published an article '[Stereotypes have fueled a tourism boom in Europe's icy North. Can things change?](#)' on 21 February 2021. In this article, the ARCTISEN project manager was quoted, the project received attention, and the concept of cultural sensitivity was also brought up. In addition, the project has produced various articles in tourism-sector publications, such as a discussion in the SmartCulTour blog, which talks about and proposes 'cultural sensitivity as a tool for sustainable tourism'. SmartCulTour is a Europe-wide research project that develops new tools



to support sustainable cultural tourism development. [Valpas-matkailumedia](#) shared the news about the online course. The local magazine from Saariselkä, Finland called *Kuukkeli* has published an article on the project. The Town of Rovaniemi is preparing a podcast which addresses entrepreneurship, and ARCTISEN has been asked to be interviewed in one of their episodes, which is targeted for high school students.

5. Impact and best practices

5.1 Good practices and innovative working methods

The digital **toolkits** of WPT2 will be incorporated into the free and **open online course**, which will enable and secure the project's afterlife. The online course itself brings together a huge amount of information collected during the project. Through the online course there is a good opportunity to reach and meet a larger group of end users even though it is intended primarily for Arctic tourism entrepreneurs and their employees. It is also well suited to anyone working in tourism, including tourism students who want to promote culturally sustainable tourism that respects indigenous peoples and other local cultures. The online course enhances the general understanding of cultural sensitivity.

One example of innovative working methods employed during pandemic is the special [blog post that zooms in on issues of cultural sensitivity in the context of tourism during the pandemic](#). The blog is also excellent in other ways, as it brings together different viewpoints about the concept of sensitive tourism. The blog and the open online course complement each other, and the post-project blog publications will also help to update the online course contents.

More online material like videos were produced than originally planned due to the pandemic. This is a good practice and reminds us to budget enough resources to create audio-visual material in addition to writings and physical activities during the project. **Good-quality audio-visual material** is very useful for project dissemination and remains useful for several years after the end of the project. On the other hand, the project team expressed in the evaluation workshop that the **on-site benchmark** in Greenland was excellent and that it was a pity that the concept could not be replicated during this project as had been planned. The visit made it possible to really see and touch the local culture and enabled real interaction on the part of the project team with true beneficiaries and stakeholders.



Also, the information gathered during the visit was shared among the stakeholders in home regions, making many of the target businesses very happy.

When it comes to project management practices, the **risk management log** seems to be a very useful tool; it is easy to use and supports the work of the project manager. We therefore find it to be a good practice. Furthermore, the templates created by the project manager for project reporting should have been used more actively during the project. In fact, one of the templates was shared with the W-Power project manager and was found to be very useful in that sister project.

Overall, the **ambitious and global project consortium** and stakeholder network is a good practice for planning all future projects in the NPA programme. It is not always necessary to select the most convenient and typical way to build up the consortium but the partnership should be selected based on the best team to solve the problem at hand. It is of great value that each of the partners has a direct link to the indigenous people in the regions. A good baseline has also ensured that the project has been respected by the stakeholders with respect to what they have been doing, and the project participants have been invited to tables which might normally be closed to 'outsiders.'

5.2 Success stories and stakeholder satisfaction

The project has succeeded in finding and collaborating with relevant associate partners, such as the Sámi Parliament (the supreme political body of the Sámi in Finland, which represents the Sámi in national and international contexts) and with other indigenous communities around the world. Also, one of the most important associated partners, the Sámi Duodji handicraft association (NGO), luckily managed to participate in the only physical benchmarking trip. Both these organisations are highly valued representatives of the Sámi culture in Finland and such high-level, open cooperation is not self-evident in university-led projects. Collaboration with national and regional DMOs, such as Visit Finland, Visit Greenland and the Northern Norway Tourist Board, has increased the possibility of delivering durable outcomes and enhancing knowledge among policymakers.

As mentioned many times before, the article published in *National Geographic* is a success story, as it supports the dissemination of the themes throughout the world. Also, the collaboration with WINTA and the presence in their newsletter has helped the project to reach over 1,000 stakeholders globally, and project has received contact requests even from Africa.



The online course about cultural sensitivity in tourism ensures that the data collection which has been processed into the content of the course is available for the public in a usable format. Instead of developing tourism separately in each country, ARCTISEN has succeeded in enabling mutual learning and support among a wide range of tourism stakeholders through the webinars and online course.

A number of vast of higher education and research institutes have been reached in different project regions. The dissemination of aspects concerning Arctic tourism and responsible hospitality as well as the concept of cultural sensitivity in general can be easily disseminated through these institutes, especially to students. This is important, as the students of today are the future entrepreneurs or staff members of tourist-related enterprises or public institutions. The project has agreed to collaborate, for example, with Novia University of Applied Sciences, the University of Hokkaido and the University of Rotterdam on issues related to cultural sensitivity in tourism.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

The project has been factual overall with a research-oriented focus, and **a lot of new information** has been generated regarding the theme of culture sensitivity in tourism. Several publications make this project very valuable to the tourism research sector. While the project activities have been based on global perspectives through the transnational cooperation, project activities (i.e. online benchmarking visits, workshops, online course and learning material) have helped entrepreneurs to search, develop and test good practices in different settings.

ARCTISEN has been successful in its work to support the exchange of ideas, experiences and knowledge among tourism start-ups, SMEs, tourists and other stakeholders locally, regionally and transnationally. Furthermore, the project has **taken inspiration** from good examples of culturally sensitive tourism development that take place outside the project area.

Perhaps something more concrete than the interviews conducted for the WP1 reports could have been done to reach the local SMEs and start-ups with respect to the implementation of project outputs. Without a doubt, the **pandemic** posed a major obstacle for the project in the sense that only a few live gatherings or workshops could be organised. It was



raised at the workshop held with the project partners that maybe the SMEs could have been engaged better in the project planning stage.

Undeniably, the project has achieved its aim to transfer knowledge on culturally sensitive tourism between countries and regions via the project activities. However, considering the purpose of the NPA funding programme, we feel that there could have been an even greater focus on creating tools for the actual beneficiaries and stakeholders for developing, promoting and consuming culturally sensitive tourism.

The ARCTISEN project had a goal to develop a support system for start-ups and existing SMEs offering innovative tourism products and services. The **online course** is an excellent outcome, presenting a digital support system which provides new information to interested bodies. At the time that this report was being written, some deliverables were still in process and therefore were not able to be evaluated.

The face-to-face workshops, which originally had the purpose of facilitating the co-creation of new culturally sensitive tourism products and service ideas, were not organised due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been a great loss for the project in many ways. For example, it has negatively affected the main output of providing new transboundary culturally sensitive tourism products and services to the market together as a cluster. The excellent experience of the only on-site event in Greenland proves that had the concept been multiplied, the level of stakeholder engagement would have been raised even higher.

The **online benchmarking trips** were an innovative solution to replace the on-site events and have attracted the local participants to attend their own regional event, but unfortunately the events have not succeeded in engaging many participants from other countries. Replacing the physical workshops with online events, such as virtual handicraft tourism business workshop, obviously does not tempt entrepreneurs to participate as much as the live interaction would have done.

The project plans to interview the SMEs, start-ups and other participants who have been involved in the project in autumn 2021. It is a good way to gather **feedback** and further development needs. It is important to find out whether the stakeholders have been successful in creating new collaborative relationships and networks and what else they would like to get from development projects like ARCTISEN.

It should also be noted that the true target groups, namely the representatives of **indigenous people**, were strongly involved in the project partnership and cooperative enterprises in each of the participating countries, which is the principal good practice and key factor for the success of the ARCTISEN project. Thank you for implementing such a great project!