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Laplanders must commercialise their Lapland themselves

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The added value of tourism in Lapland is well recognised. However, the contact between tourists and products from Lapland ceases with the end of the trip and it is almost impossible to buy authentic Lappish goods from outside the region. An authentic, durable, and high-quality product made in Lapland has the potential to be successfully marketed if it is available through modern sales channels. In fact, there is an active trade on international online platforms with Lapland-themed items but they are oftentimes not regionally produced.

Products made from reindeer should also be exported

Hides from slaughtered reindeer, about 75,000 per year, are the most significant by-product of reindeer husbandry. The market for reindeer hides collapsed a few years ago and primary producers have been having a hard time to find buyers for the raw skins. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the sluggish demand of processing firms because international travel restrictions led to a sharp decline in incoming international tourists, who are the main end customer of decorative reindeer hides. Hence, the reindeer hide marketplace, which is dominated by a few large industrial tanneries, desperately needs product innovations and a diversification of sales channels.

The global market economy can be harnessed in favour of for Lapland's traditional industries, such as reindeer husbandry. Global megatrends for the near future will focus on originality, naturalness, as well as on sustainable development. Primary production in Lapland represents these aspects already today. Megatrends will attract investments and consumption flows to the region if Lapland's actors are ready to respond to the demand of international customers in the same vein as the tourism sector. An international and conscious consumer is willing to pay for the origin and story because it adds value to the product and that in turn improves the profitability and vitality of traditional industries.

Self-processing brings value to the producer

Airdrying is the traditional way in reindeer husbandry to preserve reindeer hides and turn them into an article for daily use. The dried hide is an excellent sleeping pad. It is warm and resistant to moisture. It can be re-dried if it gets wet. Dried hides can also be processed in a traditional way through plant tanning. From the producer's point of view, airdrying reindeer hides is very attractive because it does not require large investments. With the help of a producer network, it is possible to create an industrial-scale good that can be produced annually. Branding airdried hides as a Lapland product for international sales adds value to the product and self-processing frees primary producers from the dependency on a few large reindeer skin tanneries.

In practice, dried hides are an item that can be marketed as a traditional reindeer husbandry product directly by the producer. However, for today's customer, the product is new and should therefore include instructions for use and maintenance. In a situation where the same product is sold in a multi-producer network, uniform production standards are also required to ensure consistent quality. If these issues are fulfilled, the dried hide can be commercialized as a product. Large-scale sales and marketing in Finland, and of course internationally, requires resources that reindeer herders need in order to support sales. Story of Lapland Oy is a company that aims to build a fair and safe international marketplace for products made in Lapland. A commercial online platform for people who pursue Lappish livelihoods, artisans, and other small-scale manufacturers is currently being built and will be launched under the address madeinlapland.com. Its goal is to bring authentic products made in Lapland to international customers or, in fact, right to the customer's door.

Lapland UAS's role in bringing Lappish reindeer hides on the market

As a training and development organisation, the University of Applied Sciences is able to widely support the development of Lapland's industries towards a more global market through its comprehensive project activities and the production of local lifestyle and cultural business experts. For example, the 'Taljat rahaksi' development project implemented by the Lapland UAS in cooperation with the Reindeer Herders' Association supports reindeer herders in building networks to increase the marketisation of reindeer hides. The project creates best practice guidelines and process descriptions for the production of a few potential reindeer hide products or and prototypes. The University of Applied Sciences' role as a link in bringing together dispersed actors across Lapland and as an expert in spurring product innovations creates new direct sources of income through the commercialisation of by-products.

If Lapland's small industries are able to build their own paths not only in tourism but also for international customers, then Lapland's export market, which rests on several pillars, creates wealth and security for even the smallest industries. Lapland is kept on the world map through the capacity of all Laplanders.



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