

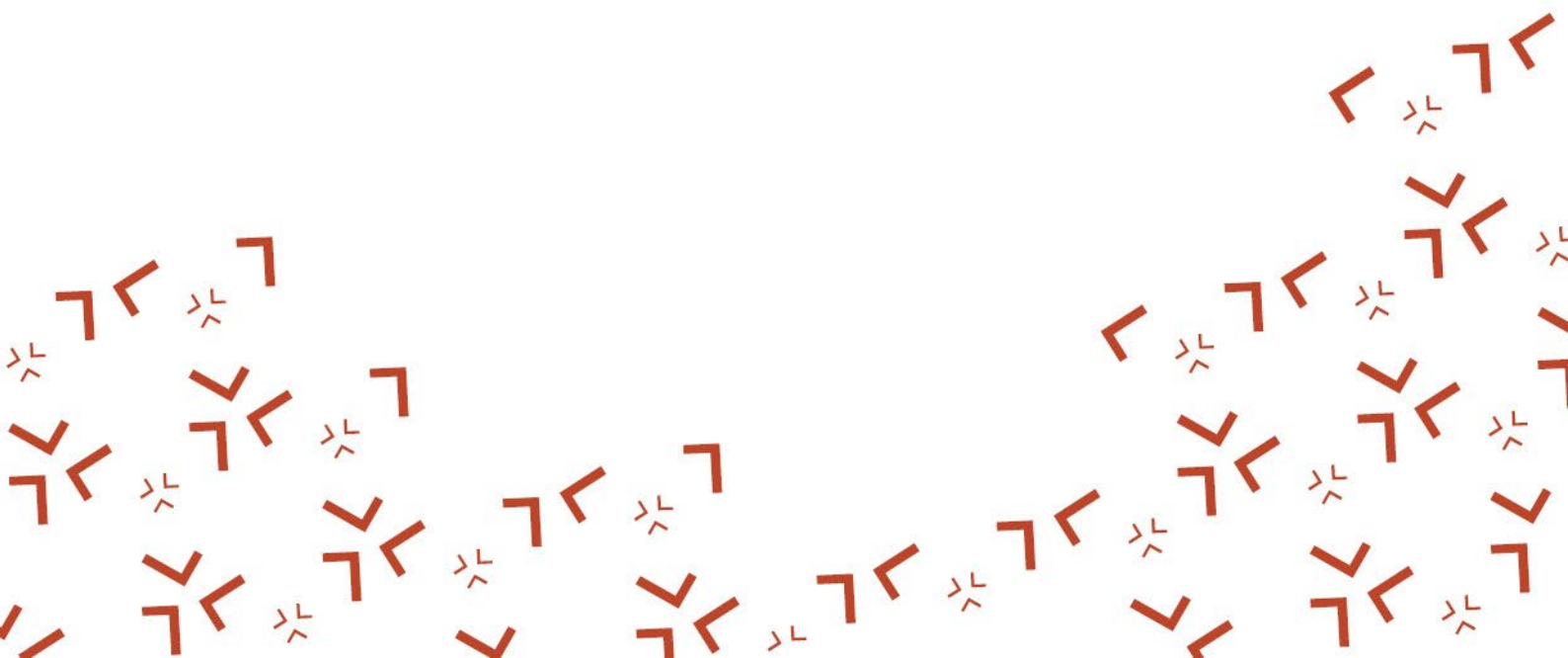
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Learning Sustainable Entrepreneurship Practices from Indigenous Communities in Lapland, Finland

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The background

Sustainable entrepreneurship refers to the practice of creating and managing a business in a way that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This type of entrepreneurship is characterized by a focus on environmental and social responsibility, as well as economic growth (Carroll 2016). One key aspect of sustainable entrepreneurship is the use of environmentally-friendly technologies and practices (Elkington 2018). Additionally, sustainable entrepreneurs often prioritize the use of sustainable materials and production processes or implementing recycling programmes in the factories (Terán-Yépez et al. 2020). Sustainable entrepreneurship has an important role in the circular economy - an economic model that aims to reduce waste and pollution by keeping resources in use for as long as possible, extracting the maximum value from them, and then recovering and regenerating them. According to UN report, indigenous people often have a deep connection to the land and natural resources and have long-standing practices of resource conservation and management (United Nations Development Programme 2019) and these practices serve as great examples for sustainable entrepreneurship.

A practical example of a sustainable and circular indigenous community business is Angeli reindeer farm and tourism company in Inari, Finland (Angeli reindeer farm 2023). As part of the Erasmus+ project Sustainable Entrepreneurship for Climate Action (SECA) there was conducted an interview with Anne Karhu-Angeli, the founder of the Angeli reindeer farm about

the sustainable practices in the company (Ylinampa 2022). The interview was conducted as a part of supportive research of the project that aimed to collect good sustainable entrepreneurship practices across partner countries – Finland, Latvia and Germany (SECA 2023). The farm is an example of a small scale sustainable company that has been awarded a Sustainable Travel certificate and Green Activities certificate in Finland.

The story by Sami business woman Anne Karhu-Angeli

Anne begins her story by telling how she came up with the idea of tourism business that is linked to her reindeer farm. “As a reindeer farm owner at some point I thought “why don’t I show the reindeer also to visitors?” and only to small groups. We don’t have tourist reindeer - the reindeer are never attached by leash to anything at all and we don’t train them to pull sleighs. They are reindeer living at home and we show our everyday life as reindeer herding family to visitors. We haven’t ever built anything just for tourists. They only see in our lives what is usual and normal everyday life.”

Asked what is sustainability in her opinion and view (this term is new to the Inari Sámi language) Anne explains, that when she has written business plan and shown that to the people, the base of it all has been sustainability. “So, we don’t do anything that wouldn’t be sustainable. And I have received all the sustainability certificates without any difficulties”, says Anne. She confirms that it was very easy to get the certificates for their company. Many bigger companies have not received any sustainability certificates although they have applied. There is always something missing in these companies and they can’t sort it out. Anne felt that she could go and teach these bigger companies how to get the certificates.

Anne is concerned about the sustainability in the tourism field, because flying is so shockingly unsustainable to her. To take a climate action Anne thinks that solution would be to get the visitors to have longer stays in Inari. “ This is very important! You shouldn’t travel by plane here and there - that has to be stopped”, says Anne. To enhance sustainability, the company usually operates so that when someone contacts her by email, Anne offers them - each and every guest - all the possibilities to have a longer stay in Inari. She markets services and activities, so that the tourists would decide to stay longer in Sami land instead of flying here and there and only staying in Inari for one or two nights. This is the idea behind the tourism services and such approach would help the whole sector according to Anne’s point of view.

When the tourists come to Inari they often leave with the tears in their eyes. Anne teaches them about global warming and how it affects the reindeer herding. Many times they go home with *open eyes*, and for sure start to consider these things in their own lives. Anne says: “I show them problems and issues in a relatable and understandable way. For example, this past winter when there was a lot of snow and the amount of snow was high already in January and the reindeer couldn’t find plants to eat under the snow. Then I asked the visitors to dig the snow and said to them: try to find a lichen!”

These experiences and the explanation by Anne about the global warming has certain affect on people. Anne says, many of tourists have sent years later an email or WhatsApp messages or photos of how they have moved away from the city and started growing vegetables by themselves. They have gained inspiration. It is difficult to say what the impact has been, but the toursits have told that they have changed something in their lives.

Anne considers all the actions possible for the reducing the climate impact in her business and to make her business as circular model. For example, she has a small souvenir shop for guests. They can’t buy any “made in China” reindeer toys from the shop, she has made all the hand made products, for example from reindeer leather. She has taken parts of pine trees and made them into hand made decorations. None of the materials or items have come a long way.

Anne has started her company right with the meaning of sustainability in her mind. She applied for the certificates and was able to demonstrate her sustainability ideas. At that time there was not much known about sustainable tourism. There was some Green tourism but it wasn’t really about sustainability. But luckily sustainability in Anne’s view became relevant soon after she started her own company. She was asking from Business Finland organisation directly: “Don’t you have any certificates I could apply?”. Anne and her company were amongst the first people that received the Sustainability certificate in 2018.

Anne thinks that one can always do more, for example, creating hand made products of recycled materials. But for people who are far from the nature it is difficult to understand - the meaning of sustainability. People could take some training courses, because anyone can learn in Anne’s opinion. Anne herself takes variety of “Green activities” courses and for those who have the certificates there is wide range of courses and webinars available out there. “You can get so many ideas and inspiration from these events. I wonder what prevents companies from getting these certificates. Should something be changed in the hotels to get them more energy efficient – may be even window glasses or something should be changed?”

Anne suggests to make tourism in Lapland more sustainable: “If you travel during summer time, and visit sacred Sámi places, there should be signs and routes, so that visitors don’t ruin the land and places. In the winter, on the other hand, there is snow and you can go wherever. My tourists come for visits during the winter time and because of that they don’t ruin our land”. There is a discussion about the tourism that should be focusing on all year round offerings. Anne questions: “But should it really? Does it have to be all year round?”. Anne dreams that maybe sometimes in the future, the smaller electric airplane would fly to Inari, at least from Helsinki. For now, Anne has many future plans for sustainable climate action.

About the project Erasmus+ Sustainable Entrepreneurship for Climate Action (SECA)

SECA is a two year project co-funded by EU Erasmus+ programme and it aims to address climate change challenges by fostering an increase in green skills and competencies in sustainability among current and aspiring entrepreneurs. Project creates digital learning tools, open-source digital handbook and training that helps entrepreneurs to build sustainable and climate-smart businesses. The partners implementing the project are Lapland University of Applied Sciences (Finland), Turība University (Latvia) and FH Aachen University of Applied Sciences (Germany).

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