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ABSTRACT

Sustainable tourism has become, for many, a buzzword and a tool for greenwashing. Often its ethical principles are developed in institutional and commercial tourism outlets with insufficient efforts to meaningfully implement such principles. Within this context, our study examines the transition from sustainable tourism policies driven by economic growth to sustainability approaches embedded in regenerative, non-hierarchical ecologies. We analyse the potential for this shift as framed by Norwegian (national) and Sámi (indigenous) tourism stakeholders. To do so, we compare the official Norwegian tourism strategy, and the sub-strategy commissioned to the Sámi parliament. The study adopts a multi-method approach consisting of critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the Norwegian and Sámi tourism documents and semi-structured interviews with tourism policy-makers. This approach sheds light on the issue of power inherent in tourism discourses, particularly by examining how language sustains or exacerbates dominant political, economic, and social roles and relations. Findings highlight a significant gap between the sustainability discourses that inform the official tourism policy and the regenerative perspectives underpinning the indigenous approach to tourism. The study reveals that embracing Sámi insights, which embody regenerative principles through deep ecological connections and community-focused values, could offer a valuable, inclusive and meaningful path for Norway's tourism development.

Introduction

For many, sustainable tourism has become a buzzword and a tool for greenwashing (Lazic and Della Lucia, 2024) and it is often used by the industry to conceal the wrongdoing of tourism. Despite the relevance and popularity of sustainable approaches, tourism remains too focused on growth, exploitation (Sheller, 2024) and overreliance on local resources extraction (Milano et al., 2023). Existing tourism practices and knowledges are predominantly shaped by neoliberal Western and colonial perspectives (Dredge, 2022) that are the root causes of the socio-political, economic and ecological crises of our time. As a result, they are not adequate to address such crises. In acknowledging the structural and conceptual limitations of sustainability, we focus on the potential transition to regenerative tourism as a tool to integrate ontologies rooted in indigenous knowledge and non-Western philosophies (Bellato et al., 2024). This epistemic shift can foster a fairer and more equitable tourism for humans and non-humans through the inclusion of diverse tourism knowledges (Boluk et al., 2019).

Regenerative tourism emerges as a critical response to the destructive trajectory of contemporary sustainable tourism. The latter aims to minimise harm while still pursuing infinite economic growth (Bellato et al., 2024), whereas regenerative tourism seeks to balance the wellbeing of ecosystems, economies and communities through the adoption of bottom-up and co-creative approaches. The concept of regenerative tourism draws mainly on transdisciplinary methodologies and non-Western knowledge systems, challenging the dominant capitalist and colonial frameworks that drive contemporary tourism developments (Bellato & Pollock, 2025). Based on an ecological worldview and living systems theory, the regenerative paradigm recognises the planet as a self-organising system where humans along with all living beings are interconnected and mutually responsible for sustaining the life of the entire system. The transformative potential

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of regenerative tourism is, however, exposed to Western interpretations of the concept. These can oversimplify the term 'regeneration' by associating it to sustainability, despite the continued focus on economic growth of the latter (Bellato & Pollock, 2025).

This study draws on the conceptualisation of regenerative tourism proposed by Bellato et al. (2024, p. 1042) which frames it as 'tourism living systems that facilitate encounters, create connections and develop reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationships through travel practices and experiences, uniquely reflecting tourism places'. We adopt Bellato et al.'s (2024, p. 1042) understanding of regenerative tourism as both a 'niche concept and transformative practice' through its application to the context of Norway. Tourism in Norway is very diverse including experiences of urban, adventure and nature tourism, whale safaris, and midnight sun. In Northern Norway, Sami tourism has primarily evolved through museums, cultural festivals, outdoor heritage site visits, and venues selling traditional Sami handicrafts (Olsen, 2006). In the context of this study, Norway is chosen for two main reasons. First, Norway is known for its longtime commitment to position sustainability at the core of national policies on tourism development (Aall, 2018). Yet, despite tourism being a significant contributor to Norway's economy, its current trajectory poses substantial environmental and social risks. Post-pandemic recovery has seen a resurgence in tourism activities whereby success is still measured with economic growth (Visit Norway, 2021) rather than considering the destination's wellbeing. As a response to this, Norway aims towards a 'paradigm shift' that focuses on environmental and socio-cultural sustainability (Visit Norway, 2021), and regenerative tourism has entered the political discourse. Second, Norway is home of the Sámi, the only recognised indigenous People of Europe. The inclusion of Sámi knowledges and values in the tourism policy-making process presents a unique opportunity to steer Norway's tourism industry towards a regenerative model. However, given existing power hierarchies and the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge systems within dominant Western paradigms, this transition is challenging.

Following the call for critical approaches to sustainable tourism (Boluk et al., 2019), our research interrogates the meaning that the Norwegian government attributes to it and we compare this to the insights provided by the Sámi. We ponder how institutional approaches to sustainable tourism – which often remain on an ideological level – can shift to more meaningful regenerative paths. We explore this potential by examining the values underpinning Norwegian and Sámi approaches to tourism policies as well as conceptualisations of sustainability and regeneration in their respective tourism discourses. By critically analysing the Norwegian tourism policy-making dynamics, the study investigates how Sámi's values and their knowledge systems align with or challenge mainstream understandings of tourism sustainability and regeneration. This requires the recognition of the power relationships that shape tourism policies and practices that hinder the inclusion of Sámi perspectives.

To address our aim, we employ a multi-method approach, integrating critical discourse analysis (CDA) of tourism documents and semi-structured interviews with key informants. Our CDA focuses on two documents: the official Norwegian Tourism Strategy (2021) and the sub-strategy document (2022) commissioned by the Norwegian government to the Sámi parliament. Although the latter is still a working document, given the absence of an official Sámi tourism policy, we have considered it as a pre-policy document.

The CDA is supplemented with 10 semi-structured interviews with Norwegian and Sámi tourism stakeholders. By critically examining the underlying values in Norwegian and Sámi perspectives on tourism along with their conceptualisations of sustainability, this research aims to unpack the limitations of (institutionalised) sustainable tourism and its transformative potential through regenerative tourism as advocated by Bellato et al. (2024). To this end, we also consider the challenges and power dynamics that influence the integration of Sámi knowledges (or lack thereof) into Norway's tourism industry.

Thus, the paper is structured as follows. First, we provide a brief overview of theoretical perspectives on regenerative tourism. Second, we discuss the power of knowledge (production) and discourses focusing on the National Tourism Strategy and the Sámi sub-strategy of tourism development. Subsequently, we position the study within the Norwegian context, before discussing the findings and their relevance for scholars and practitioners operating in sustainable and regenerative tourism.

Reframing sustainability: the regenerative tourism paradigm

Drawing on indigenous knowledge, eastern philosophies and experimental ways of knowing, regenerative thinking is not new (Bellato & Pollock, 2025). Its modern paradigm, however, emerged together with the

sustainability agenda in the 1990s in fields such as regenerative building design, agriculture, community development, ecological, cultural (Duignan, 2013) and urban planning (Leonard, 2016). Underpinned by ecological thinking these disciplines build on living systems theory and the understanding of nature and society as interdependent and interconnected (Gibbons, 2020). Following the inherent principles of nature as a living adaptive system that is constantly changing, the goal 'is to create conditions for all life to renew and restore itself' (Dredge, 2022, p. 270).

In contrast to sustainability thinking, regeneration is not simply an end goal to be achieved but an ongoing process in the continual evolution of life (Camrass, 2020). Sustainable and regenerative paradigms differ in their underlying worldviews and in their notion of human-nature relationships. Measurement frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) typical of Western approaches to sustainability tend to oversimplify complex ecological, social, and cultural challenges considered in isolation, rather than in relation to one another (Becken & Kaur, 2021). Furthermore, while the ecological worldview places humans within the same ecosystem as all living species, the sustainable paradigm positions humans above, and in control of nature for their own interests and profits.

As an emerging academic trend, there is no unified definition of regenerative tourism in the literature (Bellato et al., 2022). Yet, there is broad consensus that regenerative tourism is underpinned by the ecological worldview whereby tourism is a living system interconnected with other complex natural systems (Bellato & Pollock, 2025). By recognising and valuing the unique characteristics of place and deepening the sense of belonging through nurturing relationships with self, others and nature, regenerative tourism has a transformative potential for destinations. Arguably, regenerative tourism aims to increase 'the regenerative capacity of human societies and ecosystems' (Bellato et al., 2022, p. 1034) by supporting life rather than simply minimising harm.

Sustainability and regeneration: the power of knowledge and discourse

With its pluriversal perspective, weaving together ancient wisdoms and knowledge with modern Western science, the regenerative paradigm recognises that there are multiple ways of knowing, being and doing, and that the transformational power lies in integrating these. This approach not only highlights the limitations of Western reductionist methods in approaching complex issues but also questions its construction and valuation of knowledge. These issues become clear when comparing Norwegian and Sámi tourism discourses.

The role of language, and how it adds meaning to our experiences through concepts and linguistic structures, is central in social constructivism (Saunders et al., 2023). Discourse, comprising language patterns and shared assumptions, is inherently biased and serves as a powerful tool in constructing social realities. Dominating discourses, typically those associated with institutions of power, naturalise certain ways of understanding and communicating while systematically excluding alternative perspectives (Grimwood et al., 2014). This reveals the ideological functions of discourse and its capacity to both entrench and challenge dominant meanings.

The power of discourse as an ideological tool is frequently evident in tourism policy documents, whereby sustainability often occupies a centre stage position (Torkington et al., 2020). While many such documents praise the adoption of sustainable practices, only few include actions to address the climate crisis, unmanageable growth, increasing inequality, and other challenges of our time (Torkington et al., 2020). Sustainability and growth are often considered as part of the same (allegedly harmonious) continuum to achieve social, economic and environmental benefits for destinations. Nevertheless, balancing sustainability and growth proves challenging given their inherently contrasting meanings.

Our analysis of the language used by the Norwegian government and Sámi parliament in their strategies, allows to unpack the different meanings given to the concept of sustainable tourism, the values that underpin such conceptualisations and how destinations can transition from sustainability to regeneration.

Context: positioning sámi within Norwegian tourism policy.

Tourism is an important industry for Norway (Visit Norway, 2021). Sustainability has become a core priority for the Norwegian government (Higham et al., 2016). However, while sustainability is embraced

conceptually, moving from intentions to appropriate actions, remains difficult, with previous research criticising Norway for being vague on how to balance sustainability and profitability (Aall, 2018). Indigenous worldviews assume that all human and non-human entities are interrelated, and they value both the physical and spiritual dimensions of these entities (Kramvig & Smedseng, 2022). Indigenous people treat the environment with respect and care not because of legal or moral compliance, but because harmony with nature and relation to land are essential to their existence. Sustainability is, therefore, an inherent knowledge, deeply embedded into all aspects of daily life.

The Sámi are the indigenous people who live in the area known as Sápmi that spans across Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. They have lived in these territories long before national borders were established. With a distinct cultural identity, languages, and way of life, the Sámi are set apart from the majority Norwegian population. Reindeer husbandry remains central, with tourism serving as a complementary livelihood. The Sámi have political voice through the Sámi parliament, a democratically elected body representing the Sámi people. It plays a key advisory role in Sámi interests and rights, though it lacks legislative power. Sámi political influence therefore remains limited. As opposed to countries such as New Zealand, where Maori values and participation play a central role (Becken & Kaur, 2021), the Sámi culture is still battling its recognition in Norway, which is evidenced by ongoing land disputes and marginalisation in national policy-making (Sámiráđđi, n.d.). The tourism domain is no exception. On the one hand, Sámi tourism is treated separately from Norwegian tourism, reflecting broader patterns of marginalisation. On the other hand, the commodification of Sámi culture as a tourism attraction risks reinforcing stereotypes and undermining their core principles.

This is in line with Bellato et al. (2024)'s critique that current tourism frameworks are rooted in Western neoliberal and colonial perspectives, neglecting indigenous values and aspirations. A more equitable and sustainable approach requires integrating Sámi perspectives into (national) tourism development, moving beyond market-driven narratives and expectations, to genuinely incorporate indigenous knowledge.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative methodology to examine how the concept of sustainable tourism is framed differently by Norwegian and Sámi stakeholders. We examine the potential to integrate different sets of values to transition from the rhetorics of sustainability to a meaningful regeneration path, whereby national and indigenous views co-exist. To this end, we conducted a CDA on the Norwegian policy document and the Sámi sub-strategy complemented by semi-structured interviews conducted with tourism stakeholders.

Critical discourse analysis

CDA covers a range of approaches (Saunders et al., 2023) which can be applied to 'critical studies of text and talk' (van Dijk, 2015, p. 1). While the intention is to find structures in the texts which can inform the objectives, in CDA this is an iterative process where new insights and questions emerge, evolve, and influence the analysis as the researcher moves back and forth between examining the text and consulting the literature to find plausible explanations. A central principle of CDA is that texts are interesting and powerful because of the role they play in society (Flick, 2023). All texts represent a version of reality constructed for specific purposes and audiences. These contextual features affect both the production of contents and its interpretation. Thus, to fully understand a text, the focus should be not only on content but also on its wider context (Flick, 2023).

Based on the belief that language is never neutral but always biased by a particular (ideological) perspective entailing how reality is and should be, CDA strives to describe how language portrays and sustains this constructed reality. Language can also reveal that taken for granted truths and power relations are historically, socially, and politically conditioned. Hence, research could also be motivated by power imbalances, as is the case of this study which centres on Norwegian and indigenous Sámi tourism. To investigate this imbalance, the latest tourism documents (one is the Norwegian tourism strategy, and one is the Sámi sub-strategy) setting priorities and ambitions for the future of Norwegian and Sámi tourism, were selected (see Table 1).

Table 1. Policy documents: national tourism strategy, 2030 & sub-strategy.

Policy-level	Document	Year	Authority and function	Discourse
National	**National Tourism Strategy** 2030. Big Impact, Small Footprint.	2021	– Current national tourism strategy for developing sustainable tourism in Norway. – Mandate: to enhance value creation within a sustainable framework. – Commissioned by the Ministry to the DMO (Innovation Norway)	Official, dominant
Indigenous Sámi	**Sub-strategy**: The future for Sámi tourism and creative industries	2022	– Follow-up measure from the National Tourism Strategy. – Mandate: to outline prerequisites for sustainable development of Sámi tourism based on Sámi values. – Commissioned by the Norwegian government to the Sámi parliament	Unofficial, alternative

Source: The authors.

Whilst the current National Tourism Strategy represents the dominant discourse within the Norwegian tourism policy-making context, the sub-strategy has not been formally recognised as a policy document yet. This allows for a critical examination of how Sámi perspectives on tourism development contrast with mainstream strategies.

The CDA was manually conducted through a deductive approach informed by the theoretical underpinning of the study. Based on the literature, we searched for the use of the following terms in each of the two documents: 'value', 'sustainable', 'sustainability', and 'regenerative'. Initially, we examined the frequencies of the keywords. All occurrences of the terms (including titles, footnotes and references) were counted (Table 2).

Whereas the terms 'regenerative' or 'regenerative tourism' were not mentioned in the documents, we subsequently explored them in the interviews.

Although frequency can indicate the importance of key terms within the documents, it says little about their meaning. Therefore, we complemented frequency analysis with a co-word analysis. As such, we examined the adjacent lexical word either preceding or following the key terms. By obtaining an overview of occurring clusters (keyword and its co-word), the aim was to find information about domains of usage and priorities within and across the discourses.

This clearly showed that the term 'value' was used differently in the two documents. The National Strategy mostly articulates it in economic terms, e.g. 'value creation', 'customer value', 'value for money'. Instead, in the Sami pre-study the term 'value' is frequently associated with cultural and relational aspects, such as 'Sámi values' and 'Sámi value-base', as well as 'values created in relations' and 'knowledge and values'. While the economic terms 'value creation' and 'growth' appear, they are often used in a non-economic context, such as 'value creation beyond economic growth' and to state that 'value creation and growth are cultural categories which not necessarily reflect a Sami worldview'.

Regarding 'sustainability' and 'sustainable', our analysis shows that the sub-strategy has a broader variety of co-words related to both the noun and the adjective, and thus a more diverse usage (Table 3).

The sub-strategy has four repetitions of clusters (marked with numbers in brackets), all occurring twice; 'definition of sustainability', 'innovation and sustainability', 'sustainable indigenous tourism' and 'sustainable way'. In the Strategy, 'The Sustainable Development Goals' and 'The Sustainable Destination Label' are repeated 34 times, showing a much narrower usage of the adjective. Finally, there are only three identical clusters across the documents; 'sustainable development', 'sustainable indigenous tourism' and 'sustainable tourism'.

Table 2. Key terms and their frequency in the strategy and sub-strategy.

Key terms	**The National Tourism Strategy** (87 pages)	**The Sami sub-strategy** (30 pages)
	Frequency	
Value	88	29
Sustainable (a)	49	17
Sustainability (n)	8	20
Regenerative	0	0

Source: The authors.

Table 3. Co-words of 'sustainable' and 'sustainability' in the strategy and sub-strategy.

The national tourism strategy		The Sami sub-strategy	
Sustainability (n = 8)	*Sustainable (n = 49)*	*Sustainability (n = 20)*	*Sustainable (n = 17)*
competitiveness …	… efforts	definition … (x2)	… sami tourism
considered …	… goals	innovation … (x2)	… design
pillars …	… network	rethinking …	… landscape management
exports …	… companies	… indigenous people	… principles
impact …	… destination (x4)	… .food production	… business model
work …	… development (x30)	… governing principle	… businesses
	… framework	… barometer	… cultural development
	… growth	… sami	… cultural tourism
	… indigenous tourism	… central	… development
	… policies	… principles	… governing
	… restructuring	ethics …	… guidelines
	… tourism	culture … .	… indigenous tourism (x2)
	… vision	product development …	… investments
			… marked adjustment
			… sami value base
			… tourism
			… way (x2)

Source: The authors.

Semi-structured interviews

Alongside the CDA, 10 individual interviews were conducted with tourism stakeholders. The Norwegian and Sámi informants represent both private and public sector.

Table 4. Overview of the participants. Source: The authors.

Pseudonyms	Tourism field	Professional area
David	Norwegian	Consultancy
Benjamin	Norwegian	Government
Eric	Norwegian	Government
Alice	Norwegian	Government
Claes	Norwegian	Trade association
Adrian	Sámi	Government
Birgit	Sámi	Researcher
Cecilie	Sámi	Researcher
Diana	Sámi	Consultancy
Ellen	Sámi	Consultancy

All informants were familiar with the two (pre)policy documents, and several had been directly involved in their development. Participants were not asked to clarify their indigenous status, however, there were five participants from each tourism field, whom in this study represent the voices of Sámi and Norwegian tourism respectively. A combination of purposive and convenience sampling within the time constraints of the research resulted in the Norwegian tourism participants being predominantly men, with only one female representative, whereas the opposite was true for the Sámi tourism representatives.

Our interview questions centred on the themes of values, perceptions of sustainability and regeneration, and the role and impact of (pre)policy documents, with a focus on the Norwegian and Sámi ones. A total of 14 questions were developed as a guide; however, the interviews followed a flexible approach in line with the participants' responses. To uncover how the participants construct meaning around sustainability and regeneration, a thematic narrative analysis was applied. Like CDA, narrative analysis is not a single analytic technique but rather a collection of different approaches focusing on the study of narratives as a means of understanding and interpreting human experiences (Saunders et al., 2023).

As a non-indigenous researcher, the first author embarked on this study with caution, mindful of her limited experiences with Sámi tourism. Through the acknowledgement of multiple, subjective viewpoints and of ways histories of colonisation and oppression shape relational patterns and knowledge construction, she aimed to de-centre Western dominant discourses. As a white Western woman, she did so by bringing 'my awareness to the fact that there are realities and worldviews other than my own and I can learn to listen to other voices, but I cannot speak about experiences I have not had' (Aveling, 2013, p. 210). Her professional background from the fields of immigration and public service interpreting in Norway, has shaped

her commitment to diversity and inclusion. Thus, when providing an arena where the marginalised perspectives can be heard and seen, we have deliberately chosen to give these worldviews more space and attention in this paper.

Findings and discussion

The primary aim of the National Tourism Strategy is to steer the industry towards a more sustainable future (Visit Norway, 2021). As a response to becoming net zero carbon and to better balance sustainability and profitability, it suggests leaving the traditional growth paradigm and instead target high-yield-low-impact markets (Gössling et al., 2024). While purposely paying more attention to the socio-environmental aspects of sustainability, the limit of growth is not detailed. Rather, as outlined in the Strategy, the success of tourism is measured in volume and GDP while non-economic impacts remain unaccounted for (Becken & Kaur, 2021).

Aligned with a growing interest in indigenous tourism (Ren et al., 2020), the National Tourism Strategy identifies sustainable Sámi tourism as a market with significant potential of growth and an opportunity to 'assist with revitalisation, local pride, preservation and resumption of ancient traditions, increased awareness, greater value creation in Sámi settlement areas' (Visit Norway, 2021, p. 61). To realise this potential, and to ensure Sámi tourism develops on its own terms, the Sámi parliament was commissioned to create their strategy for Sámi tourism. As a result, the National Strategy was published including a specific (but still empty) section about the Sámi sub-strategy, leaving to the Sámi the freedom to articulate it ex-post. This shows an inclusive attempt to embed Sami's voice into the national tourism policy. Nevertheless, it remains limited to Sámi tourism only, instead of informing the overall National Strategy (Table 4).

Sustainability in national and indigenous discourses

After the preliminary identification of keywords' frequency, all sentences and passages containing 'sustainability' and 'sustainable' throughout the National Strategy and Sami Sub-strategy were analysed. In the search for patterns, an immediate observation is the distinction between the dominating use of passive constructions in the Strategy and active constructions in the sub-strategy. Passives are a discursive tactic which efficiently obscures responsibility allowing political discourse to speak about any topic without being explicit about who is doing what, for whom or what it takes (van Dijk, 2015).

The Strategy includes a range of hollow statements such as '*The SDGs are a prerequisite for the strategy*' *(p. 53)* or concerning actions that need to be taken in the future. Yet, there is only a handful of references to actual sustainability work. These are often vague and demonstrate a fragmented understanding of sustainability, typical of the neoliberal mindset (Boluk et al., 2019), as shown below:

> *A paradigm shift in perceptions is required across all levels of government and on behalf of all stakeholders, with a greater focus on environmental and socio-cultural pillars of sustainability. (p.29)*

Whilst responsibility (governmental, in particular) is downplayed throughout the Strategy, it is explicitly placed on the tourism industry via nominalisation and personification, which, as demonstrated in previous literature, involve attributing human traits to concepts (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). This linguistic approach, which is less prominent in the sub-strategy, contributes to build a positive, almost heroic image of a tourism industry which can help Norway achieve the SDGs, as illustrated in the quote below:

> *The tourist industry must also take responsibility for the future and help us to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals. (p.47)*

The combination between passive and personified constructions downplays responsibilities for negative aspects and highlights those for positive solutions.

While pondering sustainability and its practical implications beyond the SDGs is consistently avoided in the Strategy, the sub-strategy urges unpacking indigenous perspectives of the concept:

> *Traditional Sámi industries have [always] had built-in sustainability principles – and there is a need to make these explicit. (p.9)*

As illustrated below, in the sub-strategy, sustainability is not a peripheral end-goal, but a central value deeply anchored in the indigenous way of life and underpinned by an ecological worldview:

> *Sustainability among indigenous people is linked to land and relationships (…) it lies in education and upbringing (…) in language, life and health and recognition of the dependence one has on the other creatures with whom one lives on earth with. (p.9)*

Bellato et al. (2024) similarly emphasise the need to incorporate Indigenous worldviews and non-Western philosophies as a foundation for transitioning towards regenerative tourism.

Additionally, the sub-strategy addresses the practical and ritual implications of sustainability and how this knowledge is intergenerationally transmitted through stewardship:

> *New generations learn through narratives and stories, and they learn from the elders that they should only catch what they need. No more. Sustainable management is realised through this ongoing dissemination of knowledge. Taking nature, the river, fish and animals into account is part of the worldview that carries the Sámi culture. There are several practices and rituals, narratives and stories that make Sámi values, practices and worldviews present in everyday life. (p.26)*

Sustainability plays an important role in Norwegian and Sámi approaches to tourism, however, as the CDA shows, the concept is understood and treated differently. Hence, our findings demonstrate that a more cohesive approach to tourism requires collaboration throughout the development of strategies and policies. Such collaboration is essential to co-construct tourism experiences that reflect a hybrid Norwegian space where diverse cultures, lifestyles, and agendas can intersect and harmoniously coexist.

Values in policy-making discourses: national and indigenous perspectives.

Focusing on underlying values in Norwegian and Sámi tourism, in the next step of the CDA all units containing 'value' were extracted from the text. These were first categorised as economic, social, or environmental values, or a combination of these. While units from the Strategy neatly fit this framework, with most classified as economic, the units from the sub-strategy did not. Expanding the values framework with additional categories was therefore necessary. To this end, we built on the work of Becken and Kaur (2021) and Scheyvens et al. (2021) who emphasise knowledge, relational and cultural values as prominent aspect of indigenous sustainability. Based on the intention interpreted from the extracts, each unit was assigned one or more values, exemplified in Table 5.

There are significant differences in underlying values between Norwegian and Sámi tourism. Figure 1 showcases a consistent focus on cultural values in the sub-strategy and dominantly economic ones in the national Strategy. Although Sámi values span across all those in the framework, the Strategy's dominant themes reveal an emphasis on balancing sustainability with economic development. This echoes findings from previous studies, such as Boluk et al. (2019), that highlight the tendency of national tourism policies to favour market-oriented outcomes over other sustainable values.

The two documents address tourism in Norway through distinct discourses and narratives, employing different linguistic strategies. Embedded in an economic language focused on growth, the Strategy is anchored in neoliberalism while the sub-strategy employs a more organic language, reflecting a regenerative mindset, even without explicitly using the term. A key difference between the Norwegian and Sámi

Table 5. Example of categorisation of values.

| Document	Unit	Type of value
The National Tourism Strategy	(1) … the Norwegian tourist industry must build itself up far more strongly in areas where target groups with a low carbon footprint and high (economic) value can be identified when visiting Norway. … (*p.*44)	*Economic, environmental*
	(2) The aim is for the Norwegian tourist industry to increase its creation of value and jobs all over the country in a way that also enriches local communities (*p.*10)	*Socio-economic*
The Sámi sub-strategy	(1) Sámi businesses in tourism and creative industries do not only build businesses, for many it is important to also contribute to building a local Sámi society rooted in Sámi values and worldviews (*p.*29)	*Socio-economic, cultural, knowledge*
	(2) The goal should be to build knowledge about which narratives construct and support traditional knowledge and the values where relationships, community, society and the environment interact (*p.*28)	*Knowledge, relational, cultural, environmental*
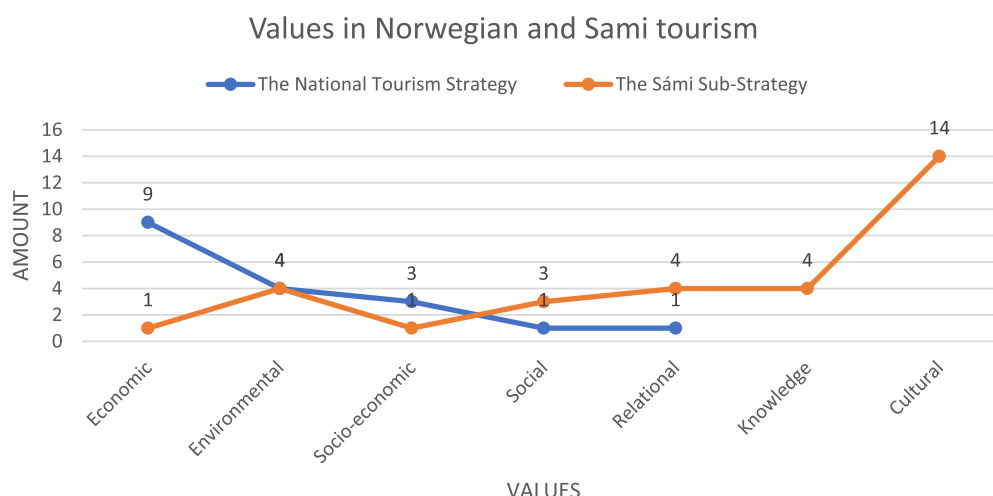
Figure 1. Values in Norwegian and Sámi tourism. Source: the authors.

discourses lies in their approach to and understanding of sustainability. The Norwegian discourse is characterised by sustainability jargon, often lacking critical reflections on its meanings (Torkington et al., 2020). In contrast, the Sámi sub-strategy emphasises the multifaceted connotations of sustainability as part of a human/non-human continuum framed and nurtured by sacred and ancestral indigenous knowledges. This latter interpretation paves the way to shift from the rhetoric of sustainability to a more holistic and inclusive regenerative paradigm. These results enable to rethink forms of economic prosperity and collective wellbeing beyond extractive tourism practices.

Rethinking sustainability for transformative regeneration

In the interviews the participants were asked to define sustainability. Several of the Norwegian stakeholders centred their explanation on the Sustainable Destination labelling scheme, a certification scheme containing 42 criteria and 104 indicators to measure the level of sustainability of Norwegian destinations (VisitNorway, n.d.). When discussing their engagement and commitment to sustainability, our informants tended to focus on measuring.

While this has its benefits, including transparency and accountability, existing literature shows that measurement often does not translate into actual progress towards sustainable outcomes (Miller & Torres-Delgado, 2023). As noted by Boluk et al. (2019), overemphasising measurement tends to fragment and oversimplify ecological, social, and cultural issues that are deeply intertwined. Instead, a meaningful rethinking of sustainability requires a systemic change which would lead to the transformative path of regeneration, whereby multiple human/non-human worldviews co-exist in a flat, non-hierarchical continuum. Among the Norwegian participants, only David sees sustainability as part of everything in life:

> We must move away from thinking of sustainability as something special, sustainability must become everything, if not, then it won't work, right? We must implement it in everything we do.

A different view on sustainability is provided by our Sámi informants, who highlight the Western conceptualisations of the term. For example, Ellen argues that:

> The terms used in the [Western] industry – regenerative, sustainable – do not exist in the Sámi vocabulary.

Instead, the participants consistently referred to the Sámi word '*birgejupmi*' that, in the indigenous Sámi philosophy, means that all living species have their own value and co-exist in reciprocal relationships to one another (Kramvig & Smedseng, 2022). Accordingly, when asked to define sustainability, Adrian says:

> We define it differently. I think 'birgejupmi' has more a local focus, right. This is something we are concerned with (…). We are maybe not so concerned with the SDGs and those big ambitions but rather our way of living, and to settle with what we have and what nature provides, and yes, how we treat it.

Indeed, our results show that sustainability is a holistic approach to life and neatly interwoven in Sámi thinking. The intentions of Sámi living are broader and planetary, thus aligned with living systems thinking. Thus, as shown by Scheyvens et al. (2021) in a diffent context, although many indigenous tourism enterprises do not explicitly refer to sustainability in their discourses, they do operate in accordance with the SDGs.

Scepticism about the concept of regenerative tourism is expressed by some participants, albeit for different reasons. Norwegian informants consider regenerative tourism as nothing new as they think these are already covered by the criteria in the Sustainable Destination Label. Therefore, in their view the introduction of a new concept risks creating confusion and hindering ongoing sustainability work. For example, Eric argues that:

> You know, if you bring back your garbage, you don't need a new term for that, so it is in a way already part of the concept of sustainability. […] we have spent like 10 years introducing it for the tourism industry, and one is beginning to understand what this is, and then one wants to add another layer that essentially says exactly the same thing, but perhaps academically is not the same. But in practice, I believe we are already there.

However, associating regenerative tourism with litter-picking demonstrates misunderstanding of the concept, and suggests that regenerative practices may not necessarily be embedded into current institutional approaches to sustainability. In turn, this requires regenerative practices to be more deeply rooted in local community values, as suggested by Becken and Kaur (2021).

The scepticism towards the concept among the Sámi tourism participants, albeit apparently similar, unveils a different perspective on regenerative practices. Drawing parallels to the concept of sustainability, Diana explains:

> Many [Sámi] took it as another insult, hyping a word among our people who feel they live in harmony with nature and have a circular approach to how to consume and not overconsume.

Our Sámi informants questioned whether regeneration is just '*a new fancy word*' for what they have practiced for generations. Regenerative thinking is not new to them, rather, as Diana says, '*it is in our DNA*'. Hence, despite the apparent scepticism towards the usefulness of the term 'regeneration', the concept of regenerative tourism is welcomed by all participants, who recognise its potential benefits for the health of the Sámi community and nature.

Our findings show that whereas the Norwegian understanding of regenerative tourism may be constrained by its current sustainability approaches, the Sámi worldview shows a greater potential to rethink sustainability by embedding it into actual regenerative practices and values. As such, whilst one of our Sámi informants, Birgit, even suggests that '*regenerative tourism goes beyond sustainability',* we argue for a new approach to sustainability. This would be underpinned by holistic, non-hierarchical, regenerative principles and praxis, as highlighted by Bellato and Pollock (2025), rather than extractive, colonial and dominant human-nature relationships.

The tensions between these different perspectives becomes apparent in the broader policy-making process. From the Sámi perspective, being involved in the development of the national tourism policy is an opportunity to rediscover and reclaim their indigenous identity, as Cecilie asserts:

> Done in the right way, tourism can be used to recapture somehow their own narratives to repair all these wounds that still exist in the Sámi world.

Others view the strategy as a chance '*to lift indigenous tourism thinking into national tourism'* and align public economic measures with Sámi's concerns. While public interventions focus on short-term growth and market expansion, Sámi entrepreneurs often adopt a long term, intergenerational and inclusive approach to business development, as shown by Ren et al. (2020). Thus, today's measures hinder rather than enable a just and fair indigenous tourism development.

The overall aim of the National Strategy is to broaden the breath of Sámi tourism provision to reach wider markets and to increase growth (Visit Norway, 2021). Norwegian participants consider the inclusion of Sámi tourism in the National tourism strategy as an opportunity to move away from stereotypisation and commodification of indigenous tourism (Ren et al., 2020). Nevertheless, this effort towards social sustainability is articulated within the tourism paradigm of economic growth, reflecting poor insights of what Sámi values are. Despite broad support for a Sámi tourism strategy, the dilemma, as pointed out by participants

from both groups, is that instead of being included and allowed to influence national strategic processes, once again, the Sámi remain marginalised.

Conclusions

This study presents a number of limitations. Having conducted the analysis on a working document (the Sámi one), which may still evolve, could somewhat affect the implications of our critique. Moreover, our relatively small interview sample narrows the range and representativeness of the included perspectives. Also, the use of a traditional, Eurocentric data collection tool like interviews, is not necessarily the most effective tool to enable multiple perspectives (particularly marginalised ones) to be expressed. Therefore, we acknowledge the need for further multidisciplinary, participatory and more equal research on multi-perspective regenerative tourism. Additional empirical studies are needed to address the practical applications of regenerative principles, such as those highlighted by Becken and Kaur (2021), in the development of tourism policies across varied socio-political, economic and geographical contexts.

With regard to Norway, our study reveals significant discrepancies in the ways sustainable and regenerative tourism are framed by indigenous and non-indigenous stakeholders. The underlying values of Norwegian and Sámi perspectives on tourism highlight how these emerge from two distinct knowledge systems: the (prevailing) Western and the (marginalised) ecological indigenous one. Centred on the ambition of creating a more economically robust tourism industry by strengthening job and value creation, Norwegian tourism is underpinned by neoliberal values. In contrast, Sámi tourism is deeply embedded in indigenous knowledge, relations, and socio-cultural and ecological principles. Hence, Sámi tourism is described as more than an economic activity. Concerned with supporting and revitalising Sámi knowledge and culture, and regaining identity and pride, it reflects broader and more empowering purposes of tourism.

Underpinned by a belief system where humans and nature are connected and intertwined, for the Sámi, sustainability is a cultural cornerstone and deep relational value integrated into all aspects and practices of life, where tourism is no exception. With a complete lack of references to the SDGs and other mechanistic frameworks, the Sámi holistic approach to sustainability was evidenced by our CDA and further articulated throughout the interviews. Lacking the jargon and labels that often characterise the tourism industry discourses; Sámi narratives remain strongly aligned with sustainable and regenerative principles. Conversely, Norwegian tourism appears governed by a neoliberal mindset and a fragmented, managerial approach to sustainability. With its sustainable rhetoric and instrumental definitions, the National Strategy emphasises measuring frameworks and a market focus, but lacks the deeper, holistic pathway to sustainable outcomes, whose potential is evidenced by the Sámi proposal.

Operationalising the transformative ambitions of the Norwegian national tourism strategy, requires acknowledging the limitations of the current system (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). Despite the desire for change among those interviewed, underlying values of mainstream sustainability policy discourses are still tied to the prevailing growth paradigm. Moreover, as this study has identified, the tourism policy-making debate in Norway is limited by subtle, yet ongoing colonial mechanisms. Although a Sámi sub-strategy is welcome, it is commissioned ex-post without clarifying its formal status and relation to the National Strategy. This underlines a top down, paternalistic approach with limited interest in learning from Sámi knowledge. Empowering the Sámi to develop their own tourism strategy can be considered a respectful and non-intrusive attempt to avoid imposing Western perspectives. However, it also represents a missed opportunity to develop a fully inclusive tourism policy through mutual learning and co-creation by applying Sámi insights to the whole National Strategy.

Our study contributes to the debate on a more inclusive and transformative tourism by highlighting pathways for integrating regenerative principles into Norwegian tourism policy and practice. The analysis suggests the potential benefits of co-creating a cohesive approach to tourism in Norway, but progress in this direction will require equal partnership and a postcolonial awareness. Incorporating indigenous views can address inequality and power imbalances and thus create transformational change in and beyond tourism.

Disclosure statement

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