



arctic policy hackathon ²⁰²⁴

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

SHARING THE ARCTIC: A SUSTAINABLE
FUTURE FOR ARCTIC TOURISM

Arctic Policy Hackathon

In partnership with Global Affairs Canada and the Arctic Mayors' Forum, The Gordon Foundation ran the third Arctic Policy Hackathon in Reykjavik, Iceland. At this event, emerging leaders from across the circumpolar North developed policy recommendations to address the topic of Sharing the Arctic: A Sustainable Future for Arctic Tourism. Participants discussed, questioned, challenged, and brainstormed ideas about specific policy issues, leading to the development of creative policy recommendations. Hosting emerging leaders at the Hackathon allows Arctic states and stakeholders the opportunity to engage with the next generation, to bring new voices to the forefront, and listen with open minds to cutting edge policy recommendations on a crucial issue facing the entire Arctic. Outcomes for participants include a list of pan-Arctic recommendations developed and presented to key stakeholders; building policy skills; expanding their networks, leading to increased pan-Arctic collaboration; and gaining a new model for policy development that can be taken back to their communities and organizations.



Global Affairs
Canada





Opening Statement

SHARING THE ARCTIC: A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR ARCTIC TOURISM

We came together from Arctic Indigenous and local communities across Alaska, Canada, Greenland, Sápmi, Norway, Sweden, and Finland to share our own experiences and perspectives to inform policy recommendations on the sustainable development of Arctic tourism.

Arctic tourism, encompassing all types of visits from large tours to individual trips, is rapidly expanding, bringing both challenges and opportunities. While Arctic tourism offers a unique chance to showcase, preserve, and exchange knowledge about local practices and environments, there are a lack of adequate policies and regulations to ensure its sustainability. If managed well, tourism can enhance the lives of Indigenous and local communities with minimized impact on the environment in the Arctic.

For us, the Arctic is more than a tourist destination, it is our home. We live, create, exist, and thrive here, making it vital to acknowledge the injustices in Arctic tourism development, including unequal power dynamics, lack of understanding of Arctic Indigenous Peoples and their rights, and the legacies of colonization. **The principle of “Nothing about us, without us” should guide tourism practices, ensuring that Indigenous voices and local communities are accurately represented in policy-making.** Regulations must be informed locally, rather than imposed from afar, fostering genuine representation of the diverse lifestyles within these communities. Recognizing and respecting our unique way of life across the Arctic is essential to fostering a more equitable and sustainable approach to tourism.

Tourism in the Arctic must be based on mutually beneficial relationships, ensuring that local communities—not just tourists and companies—reap the rewards. Currently, not enough of the benefits stay in Arctic communities, highlighting the need for an approach that does not take more than necessary and strengthens communities socially, culturally, and economically.



Resources generated from tourism should prioritize local needs, supporting infrastructure, health services, and sustainable access to natural resources, while empowering locals in decision-making processes and increasing local employment opportunities.

Arctic ecosystems are facing increasing pressure from a range of environmental impacts, in particular climate change, and cannot afford additional stress from poorly managed tourism. With environmental changes, such as melting ice, new areas are also becoming accessible and attractive to tourism. **The paradox of Arctic tourism is clear: while visitors want to experience this environment before it is further altered, tourism itself accelerates that transformation.**

Arctic tourism should prioritize responsibility, holding operators and tourists accountable for both the environmental and societal impacts of their visits. Tourism must focus on meaningful engagement, driven by a genuine desire to learn and build relationships, rather than chasing fleeting trends like “last-chance tourism” or social media motives. Where Arctic tourism intentions are not in line with Arctic peoples’ priorities, a precautionary approach should be applied.

The following recommendations provide practical solutions for sustainable tourism in the Arctic, focused on four key themes—Indigenous Peoples, Environmental Stewardship, Community, and Infrastructure—ensuring benefits for the Arctic and its inhabitants. These recommendations are directed at policy- and decision-makers, as well as tourism organizations and operators, offering opportunities for collaboration and improvement. While this document provides a strong foundation, it is intended to serve as a catalyst for ongoing dialogue and action towards long-term sustainable Arctic tourism.



Glossary

ARCTIC INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Circumpolar Arctic Indigenous Peoples, communities and Nations, are the original inhabitants of a region or country with a history and/or continuous experience in colonialism. Arctic Indigenous Peoples have distinct knowledge systems, worldviews, and ways of thinking that are interconnected to their ancestral relation to their land, waters and surroundings. Arctic Indigenous Peoples therefore have certain juridical rights. This is a general and open definition of Arctic Indigenous Peoples and the specifics depend on each community.

MODERNIZATION, GLOBALIZATION, CENTRALIZATION, AND INDUSTRIALIZATION

We acknowledge that these are all processes, factors, and structures that continuously oppress the Indigenous Peoples as well as minorities, as a legacy of colonization. Power inequalities come in different forms like discourses, knowledge hierarchies, etc.

INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

There are several existing policies, regulations, conventions and declarations about Indigenous Peoples that must be acknowledged and followed. Examples include: UNDRIP, ILO Convention 169, Ethical recommendations for Sámi tourism, and Circumpolar Inuit Protocols for Equitable and Ethical Engagement.

INDIGENOUS SUSTAINABILITY

Arctic Indigenous sustainability centres around Arctic Indigenous Peoples' knowledge systems, ways of thinking, and worldviews in equal living and balance. Every being and natural phenomenon has value and purpose, which is why Indigenous Peoples only take what they need and nothing more. There is no hierarchy between flora, fauna, and beings. Respecting all living and non-living beings ensures environmental, cultural, political, social, economic, and spiritual sustainability. Sustainability needs to be intergenerational. The Indigenous population is a small percentage of the global population but protects the majority of the world's biodiversity.

HOLISM

Holism is the way of thinking that parts of a whole are in intimate interconnection, such that they cannot exist independently of the whole, or cannot be understood without reference to the whole, which is thus regarded as greater than the sum of its parts. When looking at policy, it is important to understand that there are many contributing factors.

For Arctic Indigenous Peoples holism is not a lens, but a way of life that needs to be recognized and valued in policy making.

TOURISM

Tourism is an incredibly diverse and multifaceted global industry, encompassing a wide range of activities and purposes such as cultural exploration, eco-tourism, adventure travel, religious pilgrimages, medical treatments, wellness retreats, sports events, culinary experiences, business travel, and educational journeys. Each form of tourism appeals to different interests and motivations, offering a variety of experiences that reflect the uniqueness of both the traveller and the destination.

COMMUNITY

A community is a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common, often sharing common interests, social ties, and a sense of belonging. Communities are often bound by shared cultural heritage, norms, and values which enrich the social fabric and collective identity of the group.



Recommendations

Indigenous Peoples

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION & COLONIAL DOMINANCE

ISSUE

Indigenous cultures are exploited and taken advantage of in the tourism industry by non-Indigenous Peoples, often without their Free, Informed, and Prior Consent. This leads to misrepresentation and lack of self-determination due to power imbalance and imposed hierarchies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend:

- That policy makers highlight and actively implement existing Indigenous guidelines on tourism.
- That there should be regular mandated ethical tests and cultural sensitivity training for tour operators and guides to be able to work in the region (e.g., cultural sensitivity training that tour guide operators need to work in the Arctic).



EXCLUSION & INJUSTICE

ISSUE

Tourist companies, Institutions, Organizations, Governments, State Officials, Businesses, Municipalities, and other Authorities in and outside of the Arctic exclude the expertise, perspectives, and opinions of Arctic Indigenous Peoples.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend:

- That Arctic Indigenous Peoples must be included in every aspect of tourism, including, but not limited to:
 - Problem Identification,
 - Agenda Setting,
 - Policy Formulation,
 - Policy Legitimization (Decision-making),
 - Policy Implementation,
 - Policy Evaluation, and,
 - Policy Maintenance and Monitoring.
- That it is mandated that Arctic Indigenous guides and staff need to be prioritized in the hiring process.

RECONCILIATION & RECLAMATION

ISSUE

The relationship between the local Indigenous residents and tourists, states, and authorities needs to be repaired. Throughout history, there has been a lot of trauma inflicted by the colonization of Indigenous Peoples. Reconciliation needs to happen to repair the relationship to promote beneficial and safe tourism within Arctic communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend:

- That tourism can only happen in the region with consent from Arctic Indigenous communities.
- That the history of the role of Arctic Indigenous Peoples in tourism is taught in education systems.
- That all authorities and governments must return culturally significant objects and artifacts to the original Indigenous communities.

MONITORING, ACCOUNTABILITY, & RESPONSIBILITY

ISSUE

According to reports from various Indigenous communities and organizations, existing policies, rights and regulations are being violated. Occasionally, when reported, these incidences are ignored. Additionally, governmental and municipal promises and agreements with Arctic Indigenous Peoples are not being upheld and had grave consequences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend:

- That Indigenous rights, regulations and laws are upheld, and that those who violate them are held accountable through taxation and fines.
- Ensuring that Arctic Indigenous Peoples can easily report and submit incidences of violations.

Example: Abraham Ulrikab was an Inuk man from Northern Labrador who thought he would go to Europe for a tour, but ended up being put on a zoo display as an “animal” in the 1870’s. Ulrikab was used as a “tourist attraction.”

Example: Meteorites from Havighvik, one of the Northernmost settlements in Greenland, have been stolen by The Kingdom of Denmark and Arctic Explorers from the USA. These meteorites are deeply related to the identity, spirituality, culture, and being of the Havighvermiut (the iron/ meteorites people). The issue is that all cruise ships sail by the settlement, taking pictures from their boats, and if the meteorites and other artifacts get returned, cruise tourists would visit the people and contribute to the local economy.

Environmental Stewardship

SPATIAL MANAGEMENT: DISTRIBUTING TOURISM TO REDUCE ENVIRONMENTAL PRESSURE

ISSUE

Tourism is rapidly expanding in the Arctic, leading to concentrated pressures on certain locations, ecosystems, and infrastructure (e.g., wear and tear on trails, wildlife disturbance).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide tourism spatial management strategies tailored to the environmental needs of specific areas, as in some cases, it is beneficial to disperse visitors to less-visited locations, while in others, it is more sustainable to concentrate tourism in designated areas.

We recommend:

- Implementing visitor caps or quotas in the most vulnerable areas to prevent overcrowding the sensitive ecosystem of Arctic locations.
- Ensuring local governance structures have the power to create exclusion zones and temporary closures in sensitive areas.

EDUCATION AND APPRECIATION: BUILDING ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY AMONG TOURISTS AND GUIDES

ISSUE

Arctic ecosystems can be fragile, and both tourists and guides may lack awareness of how their activities will impact the environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen environmental education programs for both tourists and tourism professionals. Emphasise the importance of minimising their ecological footprint in the Arctic and promoting sustainable lifestyle choices.

We recommend:

- Mandating comprehensive training programs for guides, focusing on the local ecosystem, culture, location, and best practices to minimise environmental impact.

Example: Natural recovery in the Arctic is slow and the damage to flora caused by trampling can be visible for decades. If tourists or guides are not aware of this, they may not recognize the importance of staying on established paths.

- Developing educational campaigns targeting tourists before and during their trip to the Arctic.
- Encouraging tourists to stay longer to increase their knowledge and understanding and to make sustainable choices during and after their visit.

REGULATIONS AND GUIDELINES: INTEGRATING PAN-ARCTIC AND LOCATION- SPECIFIC BEST PRACTICES

ISSUE

There is a lack of consistent Pan-Arctic regulations and guidelines, and existing regulations do not cover all operators or regions. Currently, greenwashing is a significant problem and consumers aren't able to make informed choices about the environmental friendliness of the services they use.

There is no responsibility for ensuring current regulations are being followed; therefore, there are negative impacts to the environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Arctic countries should collaborate to create comprehensive, evidence-based and locally informed regulations that apply to all tourism operators across the Arctic. These must integrate Indigenous knowledge and local knowledge, be adaptable locally, and include specific regulations for different areas or times of the year.

We recommend:

- Developing and enforcing Pan-Arctic environmental standards for tourism operators, incorporating evidence-based, Indigenous, and local knowledge. When this knowledge is not currently available, standards should be based on a precautionary approach.
- That operators must be monitored and held accountable if not following these regulations and/or guidelines (see example).
- Designing educational efforts to genuinely limit environmental impacts and promote positive outcomes from tourism, rather than serve as a justification for increased tourism (*greenwashing*).



Example: Eclipse Sound, Nunavut, Canada, is a critical calving ground for narwhals, which are highly sensitive to noise from shipping. Ship traffic in the area has increased due to the expansion of the Mary River Mine and rising cruise tourism. To mitigate these impacts, new regulations have established no-go zones and speed limits. However, despite the clarity of these rules, Pond Inlet locals have reported cruise ships violating both the no-go zones and speed limits without facing consequences.

Community

LOCAL EMPOWERMENT: SHAPING TOURISM FROM THE GROUND UP

ISSUE

Tourism in many places creates conflicts between locals and tourists/tourism operators, which weakens the legitimacy of the industry.

There is no one-size-fits-all on handling tourism, and regulations on a lot of areas need tailoring. Unfortunately, national legislation often impedes much needed local regulation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend:

- That national authorities empower local communities by granting them greater autonomy in decision-making. Some concrete decisions best left to local communities include but are not limited to: tourist taxation, Airbnb-regulation, regulation of cruise tourism, and use of natural resources (e.g., maintaining trails or harvesting).
- That there are local destination boards, either as part of existing structures or as new ones, with equitable representation from a wide range of stakeholders, including residents, Arctic Indigenous Peoples, tourism businesses, local governance structures and organizations. The board should have an advisory or decisive role in the regulations mentioned above, as well as in the certification of guides and businesses.
- That local communities work together in existing bodies such as the Arctic Mayors' Forum, Arctic Council working groups, Arctic Indigenous Peoples, and University of the Arctic to share best practices, develop guidelines and make coherent regulations.

Example: Turning apartments and houses into Airbnbs will take them off the long-term rental market, causing high accommodation prices.



LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY, REGULATIONS AND MONITORING

ISSUE

One of the pressing challenges in sustainable Arctic Tourism is the lack of effective accountability and monitoring for tourism businesses.

Tourism businesses, such as cruise ships and short-term rental platforms, operate with minimal oversight, allowing businesses to overstep crucial environmental, cultural, and social responsibilities.

Arctic regions are also seeing rapidly increasing non-sustainable tourism activities that disturb both traditional livelihoods and eco-tourism operators.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend:

- The establishment or implementation (of already existing) comprehensive systems/frameworks that have been co-developed with local communities and Arctic Indigenous Peoples to effectively monitor/audit tourism businesses to ensure regulations are being followed, such as the real-time movement of vessels.
- Increased penalties for non-compliance to ensure the protection of the community.
- That regulations for tourism activities are reviewed to ensure they are in line with Arctic Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and thus implemented. Such activities could even be prohibited in certain areas.

Example: An innovative marine monitoring pilot program is being undertaken by Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI) and the Regional Inuit Associations in partnership with the Government of Canada to use Inuit marine monitors and real-time vessel tracking technology to fill in the many data gaps.

Example: There are cumulative effects of disruptive tourism activities such as heli-skiing and snowmobiling on reindeer herding in Sápmi.





LOCAL OWNERSHIP ON DEVELOPMENT - LOCAL STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

ISSUE

Many local communities lack the control to develop a unified vision and strategy for their future, often being constrained by laws and regulations that are either poorly enforced or misaligned with their realities. Over-reliance on tourism can overshadow local residents' needs and lead to the suppression of local issues due to the community's dependence on tourism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend:

- That national governments provide support to ensure local strategies are created to help communities allocate resources effectively, fostering sustainable development and preserving local culture and identity.
- Providing resources directly to local municipalities or governance structures, ensuring these benefits reach the community. Aligning with the community's strategy and vision gives residents better oversight and influence over the economic flow in their region.

COMMUNICATION - PRESERVATION OF IDENTITY

ISSUE

Arctic tourism has surged in recent years, putting pressure on local communities and their identity. Tourism to a lot of Arctic destinations is based on the communities, their people, their story, their culture, and their identity; therefore, it is important to strengthen the focus on local communities' involvement and control to strengthen the ownership of the story told externally.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend:

- Allocating sufficient funds and resources to preserve the culture, stories, and identity of Arctic communities.



Infrastructure

ISSUE

Local tourism operators are “stuck” between bureaucracy when creating infrastructure for their businesses.

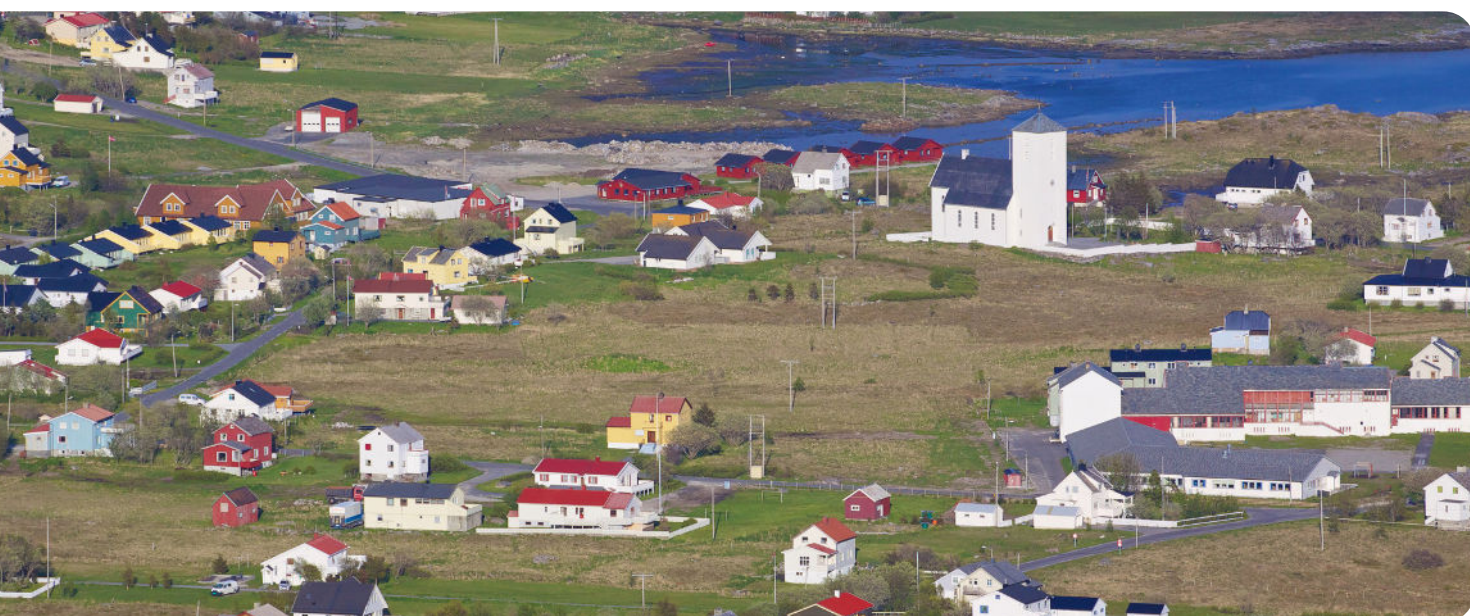
Local grassroots tourism operators can develop sustainable tourism infrastructure that benefit their communities, but they face significant barriers. Long timelines and high process costs put small tourism operators at a disadvantage compared to larger, well-resourced competitors. Lacking local input, current systems prioritize enforcement of these misaligned regulations over fostering innovation and sustainable growth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend:

- That local communities have influence on how existing infrastructure should be re-purposed for eco-tourism in the Arctic.
- That local operators and municipalities have a greater role in shaping development regulations, with ongoing, open dialogue to adapt policies to Arctic-specific building needs.
- Establishing efficient regulatory programs tailored for small- and medium-sized eco-tourism operators, prioritizing seasonal deadlines.
- Multi-year funding and cost-sharing initiatives to cover the upfront costs of regulatory compliance and infrastructure development.

Example: In Canada, a local operator is seeking to repurpose retired public infrastructure for local experiences and tourism activities. There is strong local support for this project, but federal regulations have restricted access to the platform.



ARCTIC MARKET PRICES AND COST ARE NOT BENEFITING LOCALS

ISSUE

Many Arctic communities are significantly impacted by increased prices of all services in their communities due in part to monopoly companies. For example, the current market for transportation and accommodation to access the Arctic is significantly higher than other tourist destinations of the world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend:

- An established price-recommendation that is in accordance with global market prices, with communities having the majority of influence in the operation of mass tourism to Arctic regions.
- That Arctic government transportation agencies develop a Memorandum of Understanding with small- to medium-sized business owners to offset costs of importing goods and services with a rebate program.
- That all Arctic governments provide and enforce regulations regarding pricing to ensure local community members are always receiving fair rates.

Example: In Kalaallit Nunaat, Greenland, people can't travel to their home villages in other parts of the country because of the prices of flights and boat tickets, which are impacted by the monopoly of the companies.



PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND EMERGENCY PLANNING

ISSUE

Communities in the Arctic lack public and private physical infrastructure. They have limited local emergency plans and resources that can meet the demand for the increase in tourism. When tourists access the Arctic communities, they put significant pressure on local services (e.g., electricity, wastewater management, roads, airports, grocery stores, and access to public services) where many communities do not have the basic facilities to meet this demand.

The Arctic is also a destination that has limited communication services in an environment that exposes tourists to extreme danger. When the local emergency services are not adequately equipped with training, updated communication towers/devices, and emergency action plans, it places everyone at risk.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend:

- To mandate that all tourists have specific community generated communication protocols in preparing for their arrival, needs, and expectations, which are liaised well in advance for local community preparedness.
- That tourism taxation goes to local communities to upkeep and develop local services (e.g., roads, maintenance equipment, wastewater, etc.).
- That Arctic governments provide funding and administrative support programs to work with public and private businesses to develop their own basic facilities where appropriate, such as meeting spaces and toilets, to minimize the stress on the local services.
- That Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response (EPPR) create a project that looks at how Arctic communities respond to tourism accidents.
- That Arctic governments provide funding to local Search and Rescue services to update their capacity and meet their resource needs.

Example: In Nunavut, Canada medical clients are forced to sleep in airports with their children due to no hotel availability.



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