

Nature above all

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Responsibility has become a key issue for both companies and individuals, and it has increased the need for assessing the environmental impacts of projects that involve the use of natural resources. People understand that the impacts of using nature must be examined in a way that also takes different interests into account. In recent years, many have voiced their concerns about the sustainability of nature use, for example in connection with the planning of new mines or wind farms. Today, the needs of different interests are highlighted alongside traditional nature use-related objectives, with the goal of strengthening the importance of these interests. In Lapland, the conflicts of interest between sectors that rely on the same natural environment have changed and morphed over the years as new issues have emerged, especially between the mining industry and nature conservation, or wind power production and local residents/tourism.

The impact that the natural environment has on individuals is reflected in their well-being and individual attempts to pursue it. The intrinsic value of Finnish nature consists of many factors, and their significance can be seen in different ways as part of our relationship with nature. This process ultimately defines the role that nature plays for each of us. For example, we can use modern technology to design virtual versions of natural environments, such as the ones created by the FrostBit Laboratory at Lapland University of Applied Sciences. According to studies, these virtual environments can have fairly similar impacts on human well-being as actually going outdoors ([Virtuaaliluonto tuo luonnon terveystvaikutukset sisätiloihin / Virtual nature brings the health benefits of the outdoors indoors | Natural Resources Institute Finland \(Luke\)](#), article available in Finnish). Seasonal variation, particularly in the northern parts of Finland, provides new experiences while also creating opportunities and restrictions for practical activities. For many of Lapland's long-standing livelihoods, this variation can bring benefits, even when it imposes limits that people must adapt to.

The allure of Finland's nature is reflected in the increasing number of visitors to the country's nature destinations, such as national parks. This creates new opportunities and demands for more services, which in turn creates new employment outside urban centres. In some cases, different industries can come together to form new synergies, especially in tourism – for example, reindeer husbandry can also provide nature-based tourism experiences.

Finland's natural environments have largely been shaped by us humans in our attempt to influence the development of both living and non-living nature. One consequence of these actions has been biodiversity loss, which is an increasingly serious threat to the functioning of our ecosystems. Finland has attempted to mitigate this risk in many ways, for example by highlighting the importance of protecting and improving biodiversity in all activities that affect nature. This approach has become one of the cornerstones of sustainable and responsible action worldwide. Lapland's actors are strongly involved in developing operating models for the sustainable use of nature, as they are particularly vital for the captivating yet sensitive natural landscapes in the northern parts of Finland.

Lapland University of Applied Sciences strives to promote the responsible use of natural resources in the region, for example in energy and food production, forestry, and the mining industry. The sustainable use of Finland's nature also enhances tourism and well-being services. In the expansive fields of art and digital experiences, Lapland's nature offers an endless bounty of inspirational stories, perspectives, and phenomena for various actors in these sectors.

The vitality that nature brings to tourism, well-being, and the bioeconomy

The authors of the Lumen Journal's 10-year anniversary issue (3/2025) were most inspired by the themes strongly highlighted in Lapland University of Applied Sciences' research and development activities, namely in the fields of tourism, well-being, and the bioeconomy. Their articles highlight fresh perspectives and concepts on traditional topics related to the significance and utilisation of nature.

To support the strong growth of tourism in Lapland, tourism companies are seeking more sustainable operating models that also incorporate the potential of digitalisation and AI. On the other hand, Lapland's sensitive nature requires extensive expertise when

it comes to nature trails and planning events. While we in Lapland are already familiar with these obligations, the increase in tourism demands even more responsibility and detailed planning processes.

The positive impact of nature on human well-being has been determined across several studies, which provides a strong foundation for planning different types of guided and independent nature experiences. The value of nature-based activities is also well established in care services, particularly for enhancing young people's well-being. These experiences can often be arranged close by, and even a short visit can have a positive impact.

The Social Licence to Operate, which applies to the natural resources sector, requires more detailed planning and careful implementation when using Finland's natural resources. Global warming has altered the sector's operating environment and resulted in both positive and negative changes. New innovations in the bioeconomy can be used to strengthen the sustainable development of Finland's agriculture and forestry. The exchange of information across various sectors produces new development solutions that can be tested to discover new ways of solving practical problems in working life.

As a multidisciplinary institution, Lapland University of Applied Sciences offers a variety of perspectives on this topic – as is to be expected. Over the course of its ten-year history, the Lumen Journal has been published three times a year, offering interesting articles on different topics from a diverse group of experts. These articles have primarily been written by Lapland University of Applied Sciences' staff, but external researchers and experts have also been invited to contribute joint publications, to increase the Journal's readership and diversify its contents. For the staff of Lapland University of Applied Sciences, writing articles provides an opportunity to publicise their research results or topical issues in their respective fields.

We wish to extend our warmest thanks to all of our authors and especially to Hannu Takkula, whose column provides a versatile look into the special importance of nature for Lapland.