

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Leeds		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 27		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Establishing a culturally and environmentally sensitive Arctic tourism		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2013-16		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Professor Graham Huggan	Chair of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literatures	2004–present
Dr Roger Norum	Postdoctoral Research Assistant	2013–16
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2015-ongoing		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N</b>		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>A University of Leeds-led international collaborative research project on the development of culturally and environmentally sensitive Arctic tourism was consulted by national tourism providers, e.g. in Greenland, and prompted national-level discussion in the Norwegian parliament, where the Minister concluded that policy should be used to continue to encourage responsible tourism in the region. The research helped a range of tourism providers and users to develop greater cultural sensitivity and environmental responsibility through 'slow' (small-scale, low impact) travel and used the medium of the creative arts to raise public social and environmental awareness of the Arctic region. The findings directly influenced the marketing strategies of two project partner organisations, Yorkshire-based 'slow travel' company Intravel, and the national tourism board Visit Greenland. Several public-facing collaborations with international arts organisations and travel publishers raised awareness of highlighted environmental issues amongst mixed audiences.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>A large-scale international collaborative research project, 'Arctic Encounters: Contemporary Travel/Writing in the European High North', brought together eleven researchers from Denmark, Iceland, Norway and the UK to (i) investigate recent or emergent forms of tourism in the European Arctic, connecting these to the region's intertwined colonial histories, and (ii) contribute to developing more culturally sensitive, environmentally sustainable forms of tourism (whale watching, Northern Lights tourism, indigenous community tourism) that reflect the complex realities of the 'postcolonial High North'.</p> <p>The team's two Leeds-based members were PI Prof Graham <b>Huggan</b> and PDRA Dr Roger <b>Norum</b>. Drawing on an innovative suite of interdisciplinary methods designed by <b>Huggan</b>, the project combined postcolonial studies, environmental studies and tourism studies to generate up-to-the-minute insights into Arctic tourism, which is developing rapidly, but not always in sustainable ways that are sufficiently attuned to social and environmental change. Text-based research by <b>Huggan</b>, a postcolonial literary/cultural critic, resulted in a co-authored book <b>[1]</b> and two co-edited journal special issues <b>[2, 3]</b>, all organised around his pioneering work on the</p>		

'postcolonial Arctic'. **Huggan's** research demonstrated that while the Arctic is nominally a 'postcolonial' space today, colonial ways of seeing and interpreting the region linger. To some degree, these residually colonialist understandings persist in touristic representations of the region, and while the contemporary Arctic tourism industries are more socially and environmentally responsible than they used to be, some still tend to rely on tired travel stereotypes that bear the marks of the region's not always properly differentiated colonial past.

Fieldwork by **Norum**, a social anthropologist, further confirmed these findings, but also demonstrated new, emerging forms of tourism – especially ecotourism and indigenous tourism – which indicate a more socially inclusive, environmentally sustainable approach to the region, with cultural and economic benefits for the local communities concerned. **Norum's** work revealed that although community-based indigenous tourism is expanding profitably in different parts of Greenland, it is not always being pursued in line with a strategic national plan. It also furnished new insights into tourism on Svalbard, which now sits, at times uneasily, alongside the archipelago's established status as an international scientific research hub [5]. At the same time, **Norum's** field research informed a fully updated edition of a popular commercial guidebook on Svalbard, shedding light on important environmental changes there as well as covering the ongoing restoration of Barentsburg (a former Russian enclave) and the recent opening up to visitors of Svalbard's historic mine [6]. His broader insights into the geopolitics of the 'new North', complementing **Huggan's** politically oriented (anti-colonial) research [3], revealed a volatile frontier zone that is developing fast but remains vulnerable to exploitation, and for which sustainable (non-massified) forms of travel, and the informed narratives that support them, urgently need to be found [2].

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Huggan, Graham and Jensen, Lars (eds) (2016) *Postcolonial Perspectives on the European High North: Unscrambling the Arctic*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.
2. Huggan, Graham and Jensen, Lars (eds) (2016) 'New Narratives of the Arctic': special issue (20.3) of the journal *Studies in Travel Writing*.
3. Huggan, Graham and Norum, Roger (eds) (2015) *The Postcolonial Arctic*: special issue (15.2) of the journal *Moving Worlds*.
4. Huggan, Graham (2016) 'Introduction: Unscrambling the Arctic', in Huggan and Jensen (eds), *Postcolonial Perspectives on the European High North: Unscrambling the Arctic*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.1–29.
5. Norum, Roger (2016) 'Barentsburg and Beyond: Coal, Science, Tourism and Geopolitical Imaginaries of Svalbard's "New North"', in Huggan and Jensen (eds), pp.31–65.
6. Norum, Roger and Proctor, James (2018) *Svalbard*, Chalfont St. Peter, Bucks: Bradt Travel Guides.

#### Grants

'Arctic Encounters: Contemporary Travel/Writing in the European High North', 12-HERA-JRP-CE-FP-086, 15/09/2013–31/10/2016, EUR986,183

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

'Arctic Encounters' project research on the sustainability of Arctic tourism resulted in the establishment of new, less-frequented destinations, e.g. in Norway, while aspects of the research were discussed in the Norwegian parliament (11.5.16), opening up the question of sustainable tourism for debate [A]. **Huggan's** and **Norum's** research was intrinsic to the 'Arctic

Encounters' project's overall success, contributing to the strategic development of responsible tour operators, and helping to engage new audiences with cultural and environmental issues around tourism through documentary film and travel-writing activities and events.

**(i) Developing environmental and cultural responsibility through 'slow travel'**

During the course of the project, **Huggan** and **Norum** developed a strong collaboration with the Yorkshire-based 'slow travel' company, Inntravel, resulting in: (i) a re-assessment of, and consequent adjustment to, the environmental implications of their holiday portfolio in the European High North; (ii) a rise in passenger numbers choosing the Arctic as a holiday destination and subsequent economic uplift; and (iii) an opportunity to refresh text-based and visual promotional materials.

Founded in 1984 and having expanded into a mid-size 'slow travel' company (17,700 passengers in 2018), Inntravel offers bespoke activity holidays that promote social and environmental awareness [C]. The partnership with Inntravel provided reciprocal benefits. 'Arctic Encounters' drew on Inntravel's 30-year experience as an international tour operator, for example, by visiting some of its holiday hotspots in Iceland and Norway, while Inntravel used the 'Arctic Encounters' team's research, especially **Norum's** empirical work on Greenland and Svalbard, to expand, but also reconsider the environmental implications of, its holiday destinations in the European High North. Both parties were interested in developing responsible forms of tourism that give a genuine insight into the region while minimising the social and environmental disruption that such visits might cause. **Huggan's** historical work on stereotypical representations of the Arctic also benefited Inntravel, which is keenly aware of the need to move beyond touristic cliché, and to inform its clients more fully about recent social and economic developments in the region as well as its complex historical past.

In 2019, Inntravel's Head of Marketing observed that the company's partnership with 'Arctic Encounters' 'has provided us with access to a depth of knowledge and expertise which has impacted favourably upon our product offering' [J]. He confirmed that collaborations between the 'Arctic Encounters' team and Inntravel had 'undoubtedly increased interest in the Arctic as a destination, [with the company's] passenger levels [rising] by 26% between 2014 and 2017' [B], while overall turnover rose from GBP14,600,000 in 2013 to GBP21,000,000 in 2018 [C]. At the same time, team research (again involving **Huggan** and **Norum**) on the potentially harmful effects of mass tourism in certain areas of the European High North, especially Iceland and the Lofoten Islands (Norway), had led Inntravel to 'refocus [its] product portfolio in the region [in order] to continue to work ethically with local communities'. Establishing a holiday on the less frequented island of Senja in northern Norway was one recent result [B]. He added that 'Arctic Encounters' research emphasis on local dynamics in tourism had resulted in the company 'gaining valuable insights into both existing and new destinations. This [has helped us in turn] to define our product portfolio and to make well-informed strategic decisions. This is highly advantageous as it means we can expedite bringing a product to market or re-allocate R&D resource as appropriate' [J]. The relationship between Inntravel and 'Arctic Encounters' is ongoing, and the company is keenly interested in continuing its work with team members, for example in the area of tourism in Greenland. Meanwhile, articles and images created by the 'Arctic Encounters' team (including **Huggan** and **Norum**) are now regularly used in Inntravel promotional material including magazines, brochures and social media outlets [B].

The project's partnership with Visit Greenland achieved further impacts. In the summer of 2016, **Norum** conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Greenland and was featured as an 'onboard expert' on one of Silversea's regular expedition cruises from Iceland to Greenland. As part of this fieldwork, he held a number of meetings (19.8.16; 25.8.16; 26.8.16; 29.8.16) with leaders in

innovative forms of sustainable and responsible tourism in Nuuk and Kangerlussuaq, Greenland. These meetings discussed national (state and private) strategies around how to expand indigenous community tourism in a way that encourages both practices and representations in tourism that reflect the realities of Greenlandic society. Prominent among the organisations met was the national tourism board, Visit Greenland. With tourist numbers anticipated to double by 2030, Visit Greenland has recently refocused its strategy towards responsible forms of tourism that involve local people, preserve natural and cultural heritage, and reduce the risk of social and environmental damage. As its former Acting Director stated, ‘key insights from the project team [notably **Norum**] on Greenland’s developing market for adventure tourism, and the need to ensure the benefits of this for local people, fed more or less directly into Visit Greenland’s 2016–2019 revised strategy report’ [D]. She also asserted that her in-depth work with ‘Arctic Encounters’ had provided an ‘excellent basis’ for her to establish her own responsible travel company in 2019 [D].

### **(ii) Raising environmental awareness through creative arts**

In the creative industries sector, **Huggan**’s and **Norum**’s research findings, and the latter’s creative outputs, contributed to (i) a new performance venture for the Amsterdam-based interdisciplinary arts organisation Sonic Acts (2014–2016), and (ii) a new programme of events comprising films and public talks at the Leeds International Film Festival (2015). Mixed (academic and non-academic) audiences for both programmes were confronted with the realities of global environmental destruction – for which the Arctic is frequently seen as being on the frontline – and were invited to consider their own place within it. **Norum**’s dual role as an academic tourism researcher and a practising travel photographer and writer also provided the basis for a Leeds-based public workshop involving leading representatives from the international travel publishers Lonely Planet and Bradt.

The project’s collaboration with Sonic Acts resulted in a series of part-real part-imagined journeys on the Norwegian/Russian border, involving an international cast of academics and creative practitioners. The collaboration produced enriched – and for some participants, concerning – insights into the ‘dark ecology’ of a heavily industrialised region, which is one of the most polluted in the world. As one participant remarked, ‘Entering [the region], we saw and felt, but mostly smelt, the dystopia of the extraction of resources’, while another stated simply that ‘Facing this, there is no looking away’ [E].

A one-day travel writing workshop, hosted by **Norum** and held in conjunction with an international conference at Leeds (1.6.14), similarly focused on the deleterious material effects that have been produced by a long history of popular misperceptions of the Arctic. The 29 participants explored alternative understandings of the region that are attuned to recent social and environmental developments, and are more culturally sensitive and better informed. The workshop, involving speakers representing the well-known Bradt and Lonely Planet franchises, was primarily intended for the general public, and aimed to both increase popular understanding of the Arctic region and provide practical information on the travel-writing industry for first-time travel writers, including a step-by-step guide on how to pitch and publish an individual travel article or prepare a composite travel guide.

**Norum**’s substantial guidebook work, along with his contributions to the workshop’s writing exercises, prompted Bradt to commission him to publish a commercial guidebook on Svalbard, drawing directly on his field research in the ‘Arctic Encounters’ project [6]. As Bradt’s Managing Director, one of the main contributors to the workshop, more recently remarked, ‘Dr Norum’s in-depth research on tourism in the European High North [resulted in him being] able to bring [our] readers valuable insights on alternative forms of tourism in the region, including ecotourism and

aboriginal tourism' [F]. He also confirmed that 'Bradt Guides are committed to the same principles of responsible tourism that the "Arctic Encounters" project upheld' [F]. The event also had a galvanising effect on its participants, most of whom had little or no experience of publishing their work. One participant said that it had opened her eyes to 'the processes and detail that go into producing a piece of travel writing', while another enthused that it had been 'fantastic to pick the brains of seasoned travel writers, and to get advice and feedback on our work' [G]. As Bradt's Managing Director added, 'some of [the workshop participants] confided in me [at the time] that they were planning to use their next trips abroad as opportunities for producing potentially publishable work. Bradt strongly encourages new writers, and my hope is that some of the budding writers I met will one day choose to publish with us.' [F]

Further creative work was produced in association with the Leeds International Film Festival (LIFF), a major annual event that attracts more than 40,000 visitors. In 2015, Huggan's and Norum's discussions with the festival committee resulted in a week-long series of Arctic-themed films and discussions held at the University of Leeds, effectively comprising a festival-within-a-festival, 'Arctic Cinema Week', that helped 'set [LIFF] apart from other film exhibitors and festivals that year' [H]. Highlights included the premiere of a Sámi documentary film (*Dreamland*) by 'Arctic Encounters' team member Britt Kramvig; further sessions on indigenous film led by 'Arctic Encounters' advisory board member Nelson Graburn and Greenlandic director Inuk Silis Høegh; and photography and short film competitions, both of them open to the public and the winners of which were announced at the end of the week. As the Programme Manager at LIFF remarked, 'Arctic Encounters' work with LIFF helped generate 'a new kind of collaboration with [in-depth] planning and sharing of ideas', with the Arctic festival-within-a-festival influencing 'much of our publicity for the entire festival that year [2015], including the choice of cover design for our catalogue'. The film screenings-cum-discussions, he further suggested, produced 'a new kind of hybrid event [that reached] new audiences, engaging them in a deeper way', while also leading to 'new partnerships and contacts as we have since collaborated with the [Leeds University venue], The Clothworkers Centenary Concert Hall' [H].

'Arctic Encounters' was widely praised at the time, prompting one of its end-of-project reviewers to state that its 'most exceptional outcome [was] the network of partnerships [it] created', and to see its engagement with a 'number of cultural actors in the Arctic' as well as its exploration of 'new areas of cultural tourism' as combining to produce 'a long-term asset for the humanities' as a whole [I].

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- A. Norwegian Parliament records, June 11, 2016.
- B. Letter from Head of Marketing, Inntravel, May 7, 2019.
- C. Supplementary information from Inntravel, February 26, 2020.
- D. Letter from former Senior Consultant & Acting Director, Visit Greenland and Deputy Director, Visit Greenland, November 14, 2019.
- E. Blog post by artist & researcher, Dark Ecology/Sonic Acts project, October 21, 2014.
- F. Letter from Managing Director, Bradt Guides, April 21, 2020.
- G. Responses to 'Arctic Encounters' travel writing workshop, November 18, 2020.
- H. Testimonial, Programme Manager, Leeds International Film Festival, April 16, 2019.
- I. 2016 HERA final evaluation report on 'Arctic Encounters'.
- J. Impact: Research and Innovation at the University of Leeds, Issue 9, 2015 (pp.18-23).