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Dieter Müller – his legacies in Nordic tourism research

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ABSTRACT

In November 2025, Professor Dieter Müller of the University of Umeå suddenly passed away while returning from a work meeting in Norway. His unexpected death sent shockwaves through the Nordic tourism and geography communities to which he has long been a significant contributor. This paper celebrates his life and work, which linked theory development with empirical studies and his contributions to Nordic tourism research. Three main themes are identified: second home tourism, Sámi tourism, and Arctic tourism geography. The commonalities of the three areas are that Dieter saw tourism as a dynamic and modernising industrial and social field, significant for wellbeing, and important to regional development and the societal development of the Arctic region. In addition, there is an awareness of tourism's ethnopolitical significance and, more recently, geopolitical significance, viewing tourism as both a changing force in society and as a product of societal changes.

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Introduction

On November 20, 2025, Dieter Müller of Umeå University died on his way back from a work trip to Norway. There is a whole world of people missing him. He contributed to tourism knowledge in many ways, supervised many doctoral students, writing much on tourism, and particularly in relation to second home tourism, indigenous tourism, and the tourism geographies of the Arctic and the Nordic region (Hall et al., 2009). In this short tribute, we will note some of his many contributions, his significance for tourism studies, and the three fields where he collaborated with us. We all had the pleasure of writing and editing works with Dieter and loved to work with him. He was one of the academy's nice guys, positive, truly interested in the issues he was confronted with, and had a very significant base in tourism geography (Huijbens & Müller, 2022; Müller, 2014b, 2018, 2019; Müller & Hall, 2024; Müller & Więckowski, 2018; Wilson & Müller, 2025a).

His significant contribution to tourism research can be traced in several ways. At the time of writing his more than 200 publications account for almost 8000 citations in

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Google Scholar (https://scholar.google.co.nz/citations?user=eNwE438AAAAJ&hl=en&oi=sra), out of which more than a quarter were written by Dieter alone. Dieter wrote about 40 works on second home tourism, the first as an exchange student from Germany; about 25 on Sámi tourism; and more than 100 publications touching on the Arctic and sub-Arctic. The story is one of a scholar involved in many projects with many people. However, in addition to his teaching and research and being an elected member of the Swedish Academy of Sciences, he was also a great contributor to his discipline, e.g. as a chair and member of the International Geographical Union (IGU) Commission on Geographies of Tourism, Leisure and Global Change; his university, e.g. as a Dean and Deputy Vice-Chancellor research; and to national, European and disciplinary research in general through his membership of various research and editorial boards, including this journal. The following presents an overview of Dieter's work on second home tourism (Michael), Sami tourism (Arvid), and the wider Arctic and sub-Arctic tourism (Jarkko) to celebrate his contributions to tourism and Nordic tourism scholarship.

Second home tourism

Michael: Dieter and I first met at a conference on peripheral area tourism in Bornholm in 1997 and found much common ground to the point that I was invited to be the opponent for his doctoral thesis on German second-home owners in the Swedish countryside (Müller, 1999). This was memorable for two reasons. First, it was a very good thesis. Second, it was my introduction to a Swedish doctoral party. A little celebration, he said. So, I turned up in a pair of jeans with a bottle of wine in hand, thinking it was going to be a quiet party (it wasn't!); and found myself in a hired hall with some well-dressed people singing Swedish celebratory drinking songs while standing on chairs (which was somewhat of a surprise coming from the Antipodes). It was the start of a long academic collaboration of work and friendship, with the latter always being more important than the former.

In writing about the periphery and understanding how its various dimensions operate, it helps to be able to live in it; in Dieter's case, in northern Sweden; in mine, in southern New Zealand, for nearly all the time I've known Dieter or being a temporary Nordic resident. Such issues of place provided geographical comparisons that infused our work, and which he also brought to others, are important because of the perspectives they can bring on phenomena like peripherality and how regions respond (Müller & Jansson, 2006), e.g., through the development of second home tourism (Hall & Müller, 2004, 2018).

Dieter's work on second homes was significant because of its coverage (Müller, 2007, 2013a, 2014a, 2021a, 2024), and because of the range of methods that he and colleagues brought to the subject. The spatial analysis tradition, which is so strong at Umeå and which brought a strong quantitative and spatial dimension to the regional planning and development issues that surround second homes (Marjavaara & Müller, 2007; Müller, 2006a; Müller & Marjavaara, 2012; Nouza et al., 2013), was well complimented by other methods such as surveys and interviews (Müller, 1999, 2002a), and its connections to other aspects of tourism (Müller, 2006b; Müller et al., 2024). This was important because Dieter's work was able to demonstrate that second homes are not always the planning problem that they are often portrayed as in the United Kingdom and other literature that dominated the research agenda when he started his research in the area

(Müller, 2011a, 2011b, 2013; Müller & Hoogendoorn, 2013). Instead, they can be extremely valuable for regional wellbeing (Müller, 2002b).

Second homes, therefore, must be understood in their context and with the second homes "problem" needing to be reframed as a housing provision problem in many cases; and with issues being understood as inherently dynamic and changing over time in response to internal and external forces (Müller, 2013b; Back et al., 2022). Such work led to a substantial amount of policy-relevant material being produced either directly by Dieter or being heavily influenced by him, not only in Sweden and the other Nordic countries (Åkerlund et al., 2015; Nouza et al., 2013), but elsewhere, especially in Europe (Abbasian & Müller, 2019; Hall & Müller, 2004, 2018; Ismail et al., 2023; Vágner et al., 2011).

Dieter's work helped to place second homes in the wider contexts of debates about migration and its interrelationships with tourism (Müller, 2002c, 2021; Müller & Marjavaara, 2026; Hall & Lundmark, 2026), as well as the importance of understanding human mobility and residence in terms of people's lifecourse rather than taking a relatively static view of residence (Müller, 2021b). This is important not only for understanding the notion of impact with respect to second homes (Larsson & Müller, 2019; Müller, 2024a), but also for ideas about multiple dwelling where people have more than one residence or "home" both at a given time and over time (Abbasian & Müller, 2019). Multiple dwelling is obviously of significance for second home owners and users' ideas of place, but also for government provision of services (Müller et al., 2024; Pitkänen et al., 2020; Vágner et al., 2011). This is especially the case in countries where local and regional government provision of services depends on financial transfers from central government on the basis of populations identified by a single place of residence, with regions with large numbers of extensively used second homes therefore being disadvantaged by the recognition of only one "permanent" residence (Müller & Hall, 2003).

Where would Dieter's interest in second homes have gone in the future? I don't know, but I suspect that it would have been an ongoing process of continuity and synthesis. Building on what has gone before and synthesising with his Arctic and peripheral area research. One of the ironies of his work in this area, and something that we frequently joked about, is that for nearly all of the time he researched second homes he never had one. However, he recently bought one, a beautiful house on the Baltic, perfect for weekends and for future stages of his lifecourse with his dear partner. It is therefore extremely sad that they were not able to enjoy it as long as they should have been able to.

Sámi tourism

Arvid: I met Dieter for the first time during the Nordic Symposium on Tourism and Hospitality Research in Åre in 1998, at an outdoor dinner in a location with *lavvoes* and reindeer. I think our talk also circled around this fact, that Sámi culture was used as an element in a tourism research gathering. We were tourists in an indigenous context, or in a modern context where indigenous people and culture were the "entertainment"? Was this something we could support? Dieter had already started wondering about what Sámi is in Sámi tourism (Müller & Pettersson, 2001). When we met a year later during the same yearly event, this time held in Alta, we agreed to create a project on Sámi tourism. We managed to finance a cross-national study, involving scholars from Sweden, Finland, and Norway. We had meetings which we combined with interviewing Sami tourism

providers in Karasjohka, Inari, and Jokkmokk. It resulted in a special issue of the *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, in 2005. In the following years, Dieter and I met on several occasions and decided to edit a book that was called *Tourism and Indigeneity in Arctic* (Viken & Müller, 2017). Since then, we came across each other on many occasions, and when we met in Bornholm September 2025, in the most recent Nordic Symposium on Tourism and Hospitality Research, we agreed again upon doing something together. Unfortunately, this is not going to happen.

Dieter was a human geographer. This gave direction to his research, which also concerning Sámi tourism. In a review article about Sámi tourism written in English from 2019 (Hägglund et al., 2019), Dieter was cited 34 times. He dealt with the outreach of Sámi tourism, its structures, its entrepreneurs, tourism's role as a provider of jobs within and instead of reindeer herding, and its significance for regional development and for Sámi society as such. He also took part in analyses of how Sámi culture was represented in festivals (Müller & Pettersson, 2001, 2006), experience production, and museums (Pettersson & Müller, 2023), and even in the representation of Sámi tourism in Swedish media (Zhang & Müller, 2018). Arguably, his major contribution concerning Sámi tourism was to demonstrate it as a modern industrial field, and how it was, in very different ways, an integrated and dynamic part of modern Swedish society. But he also wrote about how reindeer herding has been challenged by the Swedish authorities, operating with very strict categories that have forced many to leave reindeer herding (Zhang & Müller, 2018). As Dieter argued, tourism is a sort of bridge between traditional herding and modern existence that is not always acknowledged by the authorities. He saw tourism as an area for balancing modernity and traditions, and in this, creating new spheres of activities, but also frictions, and that it can be a sensitive matter (Müller & Bernardi, 2020). There are also discrepancies within Sámi society – like within most other regions, tourism is desired by some and rejected by others (Müller, 2015). Dieter was therefore very aware of the risk of writing in ways that did not consider the internal differences and tensions within Sámi society.

The Sámi represent several different ethnic groups in scattered locations. Sápmi, the homeland of the Sámi people, has often been treated as a homogenous region, but it is not. Dieter once wrote of Sámi tourism in northern Sweden that it was in an early stage of development (Müller & Huuva, 2009). This may be right, but its low political priority can also be due to more profitable alternatives, and national politics (Müller & Hoppstadius, 2017). Dieter emphasised that the Sámi society is not an indigenous reservation, but a viable modern society where tourism is a minor activity. As Dieter saw it, Sápmi is a destination but as such spread out and difficult to organise (Müller & Pettersson, 2001), also an issue today. Dieter saw adaptation to tourism as an opportunity, but realised that not all parts of Sápmi are embracing or furnished for tourism. This also has links to the ethnopolitical discourses about natural resource extraction by mining and tourism that compete with reindeer herding for land and natural resources (Müller & Hoppstadius, 2017; Müller & Huuva, 2009; Zhang & Müller, 2018).

Dieter regarded the Sámi as modern people living ordinary modern lives under harsh climatic conditions, supported by Nordic welfare states. Today, the Sámi are to be found in all sorts of occupations, and in urban as well as rural settings, and as colleagues in academia. We once were together at a tourism seminar in northern Canada, where a visit to an exoticised First Nations camp was on the programme. We agreed that if a similar event

should be held in Norway or Sweden, we would show a Sámi at work in an ordinary modern office, more typical of the contemporary Sámi people than the traditional particularities. Reindeer herding occupies less than ten per cent of the Sámi, and the traditional costumes are not a daily habit anymore. Thus, the ethics in the writings about the Sámi should be to show and analyse the traditions performed in modern contexts and manners – reindeer herding assisted by modern technology, including mobile phones, motorised vehicles, and drones. When old customs and traditions are exposed, it is for special events, or to fulfil the tourists' expectations.

Dieter acknowledged that to attract tourists, the Sámi need to emphasise their otherness. Their otherness, visualised through sustained traditions, has been used to attract tourists since the mid-1800s, mostly by actors from outside overseeing international and national tourism operations. More recently, this has also been part of Sámi self-representation. In displaying culture, tourism can be a challenge, related to stereotyping, appropriation, othering and exoticism (Müller & Viken, 2017; Viken & Müller, 2006). This takes place when the outer world depicts people in particular ways, for instance that Sámi are less modern than people in the surrounding society, which Dieter registered within marketing, in the public, and among politicians (Zhang & Müller, 2018). Dieter and his colleagues also presented some advice for tourism development: small-scale development, caring for nature and culture, built on traditions and heritage, include reindeer herding, highlight authenticity, professionalism, and income staying in the local areas (Müller & Pettersson, 2001). Dieter saw tourism as a prosperous opportunity, but not as a primary industry in the Sámi districts, to him it was secondary to reindeer herding.

In his latest writings, Dieter was more occupied by the Arctic, than Sápmi, also building on his broader, longstanding, interest in issues of peripherality (Müller & Jansson, 2006). This is a change with ethnopolitical and geopolitical significance. The naming of a phenomenon or a challenge is not without significance. However, when something is strongly addressed, something else tends to lose its position, and it is interesting that Dieter was having this change of focus.

Arctic tourism geographies

Jarkko: Dieter and I met at one of those IGU or Nordic tourism meetings in the late 1990s; we did not have a 100% agreement on what was the first meeting ground. What can be agreed now is that we were the same age when we met, although later he did remind – when needed – who was the junior of us, as I was a few weeks younger. We also shared the same interests on tourism development and impacts in peripheral areas and communities (see Hall et al., 2009; Müller & Jansson, 2006). Based on my early memories he was a friendly and humble person from day one, and in contrast to the later stages of his career he had a bit of a shy appearance. All these were great assets and "selling points' for a Finn starting his international research collaborations. Since then we joined forces in research and supported each other in different international geographical and tourism studies organisations, and we communicated regularly till the very travel to Lofoten, Norway, of no return.

Dieter had a strong identity as a geographer; he was a human geographer by training and a tourism geographer by practice. Institutionally, the relationship between human and tourism geography has sometimes been problematic, as the publishing space of

human geographical journals has not always been appreciative and welcoming for tourism focused submissions. Dieter was worried about this and especially the future of tourism scholarship in geography (Müller, 2014b, 2019). For him there was a structural disinterest within the mother discipline towards tourism research. However, Dieter considered tourism geographies as a vibrant and bridging sub-discipline that has much to offer for both (human) geography and tourism studies (Müller & Hall, 2024), and he made continuous efforts to demonstrate that despite evolving institutional divides in the form of a marginalisation of tourism geographers within geography departments (Müller, 2014b), there is a strong emphasis on human geographical thinking in tourism geographies (see Müller, 2019; Müller & Hall, 2024; Müller & Wilson, 2025). Furthermore, he considered that an ongoing transition away from geography departments to other fields has exposed tourism geographers to inter-disciplinary approaches that may have more to offer for research on contemporary and future wicked societal challenges (Müller, 2018; Müller & Hall, 2024; Wilson & Müller, 2025b).

Against this backcloth, Dieter expressed a need to transform tourism geographies towards a direction we both agreed: "rather than studying tourism, research should study societal and environmental change and analyze the integrated role of tourism as an agent and outcome of that change" (Müller, 2018, p. 173; see also Müller, 2019). Indeed, tourism happens in places and spaces, which are in a constant flux transforming tourism and being transformed by tourism and related flows of ideas, people, capital, material, and knowledge. This call for socio-spatial and context-driven approach was evident in all his research fields, and it is firmly grounded on the origins of geographical studies on tourism and its fundamental connections with geographical core concepts (see Huijbens & Müller, 2022; Müller & Hall, 2024; Wilson & Müller, 2025b). For Dieter, one of the key societal and environmental contexts to study tourism was the Arctic (Grenier & Müller, 2011; Müller, 2011c; Müller, 2015; 2024b; Müller & Rantala, 2024), and in recent years he increasingly turned his focus to transforming Arctic tourism, and especially to the process of Arctification (Müller, 2021c, 2025; Müller & Viken, 2017).

Arctification represents a novel idea in which Dieter was a key initiating architect. About 20 years ago, when the University of the Arctic's (UArctic) tourism studies focused Thematic Network (TN) was established, we did not foresee the emerging role and significance of the "wider idea" of the Arctic. Instead of Northern Tourism, as the TN is currently called, we would now most probably name it more relevantly Arctic Tourism TN. The member universities of Umeå and Oulu, for example, are (still) outside the various boundaries of the Arctic region, but nowadays these and many other UArctic member universities have gone through the Arctification process; e.g. the University of Oulu's slogan is "science with arctic attitude" and the University of Tromsø has even changed its name to the Arctic University of Norway (UiT). In general, Arctification refers to "a social process creating new geographical images of the North of Europe as part of the Arctic" (Müller & Viken, 2017, p. 288). The idea received immediate and highly positive attention among scholars focusing on transforming tourism spaces and places in the Arctic. Dieter and his colleagues developed the idea and its analysis further by highlighting how the process reimagined and marketed northern European regions and actors as "the Arctic" for tourism and place branding (Lundmark et al., 2020; Marjavaara et al., 2022). The process involves an intensified placing of "Arctic elements", such as snow, ice, darkness, and wilderness, and by promoting specific "Arctic activities", like dogsledding, ice

fishing, snowmobiling and Northern Lights tours, for areas geographically well south of the Arctic Circle (or any other pre-existing boundaries of the Arctic). For Dieter and colleagues Arctification is used for creating new economic opportunities and networks for local and regional economies, but it can also lead to a new kind of challenges for communities (Lundmark et al., 2020; Marjavaara et al., 2022; see Müller, 2015).

The emergence of the Arctification process is partly a result of accelerating climate change, as media news about melting ice and disappearing Arctic fauna have given global attention to the region as a destination for a so-called "last chance" to see tourism (Demiroglu et al., 2020; Demiroglu et al., 2024). Thus, paradoxically, Arctification is based on a human-induced process that may result in the disappearance of the Arctic as we have learned to know it. Instead of the environmental change per se, Dieter was concerned with the human dimension of a transforming Arctic (Müller, 2011c, 2015, 2024b, 2025), and like many other fields of his research, he was also interested in the empirical evidence of Arctification (see Lundmark et al., 2020; Marjavaara et al., 2022). Indeed, for Dieter a theory or conceptualisation needed to have an empirical operationalisation capacity in research. In this respect, for example, Dieter and his colleagues mapped the changing geographies of business names demonstrating a clear development of tourism businesses increasingly using Arctic terms in their firm names (Marjavaara et al., 2022).

Furthermore, Arctification is a result of increasing global geopolitical and geoeconomic interests on the region, and Dieter developed his focus on tourism in the Arctic based on these emerging interests (Müller, 2015, 2021c). He saw that "renewed interests in new transport routes and polar natural resources, both infused by geopolitical and military considerations" will change the Arctic (Müller, 2025, p. 873) and, thus, the context where Arctic tourism operates in the future. This wider focus on the Arctic may have resulted from his decade-long service as Deputy Vice-Chancellor at Umeå University and related active collaboration with the Arctic Six alliance of Nordic universities, which enabled Dieter to identify the emerging Arctification process and foresee how northern peripheries and tourism places will be transformed to a new Arctic. What we will miss is Dieter's nuanced and context-sensitive analysis of this new Arctic and Arctic tourism.

Final remarks

The commonalities of the three areas we have pointed to, are basically that Dieter saw tourism as a dynamic and modernising industrial and social field, significant for the well-being of modern people, and important to regional development and the societal development of the Arctic region. In all three areas Dieter had an awareness of tourism's ethnopolitical significance and, more recently, geopolitical significance, seeing tourism as both a changing force in society and as a product of societal changes. His ways of approaching the field are definitely a path to follow for future tourism scholars, especially the need to link theory with empirical evidence. He was humble, pragmatic, and looking for ways ahead for industry, universities, society, and tourism as a field for academic research. Also, his way of connecting with others was exemplary. We who worked with him know that he was caring for everybody and was involved in and contributed to a wide range of topics. In addition to his numerous research papers and themes, he made his mark in many other ways. For us the most memorable is Dieter as the person

he was, generous, interesting, interested, integrative, and collegial, and with high integrity. He was a good friend and is already missed.

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