

# Nature and environment in Finland's and Lapland's tourism strategies

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**Abstract** — Nature is regarded as one of the main tourism attractions in Finland as well as in many other destinations. This makes tourism especially important for rural areas, such as Lapland. Rural communities in sparsely populated areas have to deal with environmental changes caused by the increase in the use of natural resources and also by global issues, e.g. climate change. Anticipation and adaptation are important for the strategic tourism planning. Strategic development work is part of the planning system at many geographical levels. The purpose of this study is to evaluate how recent national and regional tourism strategy documents take into account issues related to those natural surroundings where tourism takes place in Finland. What is the role of national parks and other protected areas in tourism planning, which natural features are emphasised, and how such environmental issues as climate change are anticipated? The results of the textual analysis of three tourism strategy documents show that tourism development is often discussed only in economic and marketing terms and not much from the point of view of environmental or socio-cultural issues. For example, strategy documents refer to climate change in a very cursory way. National parks and other protected areas are noticed as attractions but their role has not been developed further. Forests are seldom mentioned which is especially interesting in the case of Finland where the use of forests has caused conflicts between tourism and forestry in Northern Finland. The concept of wilderness, which was present in the earlier tourism strategy of Lapland, has almost disappeared from the latest strategy document.

**Index Terms** — Climate change, nature tourism, rural development, textual analysis, tourism strategy.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In regional development, tourism is often seen as a mechanism for the economic survival of peripheral communities [1], [2], [3], and this is also the policy target in Finland at both the national and regional levels. Government regards tourism as a mechanism for implementing their redistribution policy.

Tourism is the biggest promise in the areas where nature has remained relatively untouched which means especially remote rural areas. However, the benefits of the growth of tourism are seldom questioned in policy documents although the local resi-

dents will gain unequally, if they gain at all, and for some may even be harmed [4].

In the present paper, three tourism development strategy documents from the 2000s are analysed in order to determine how they deal with issues concerning nature and rural environment, and how they anticipate changes, such as climate change, in their operating environment. Firstly, I analyse how the environmental and natural are features referred to in the strategy documents, secondly, I evaluate the role of national parks and protected areas in the documents and, thirdly, I discuss the anticipatory dimensions of the documents.

In the case of Finland, Lapland is the most important tourism region although Helsinki and some other cities are more visited. Also, tourism is more important for the development of Lapland than other more central regions

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[5]. The biggest and the most visited national parks are situated in Lapland as well.

## 2 DATA AND METHODS

The three documents that are used here as main data are 1) Finland's Tourism Strategy to 2020 (Ministry of Trade and Industry), 2) Lapland Tourism Strategy 1 (2003-2006) (Regional Council of Lapland) and 3) Lapland Tourism Strategy 2 (2007-2010) (Regional Council of Lapland). The fourth document, I also pay attention to the draft version for the Lapland Tourism Strategy 2, and here especially interesting is the process of transformation from the draft version to the final version.

The importance of analysing such documentary texts lies in the nature of these documents. Documents such as tourism strategies are 'social facts' in that they are produced, shared, and used in socially organized ways. They constitute specific types of representation that apply their own conventions. Documents are often used to create a certain kind of predictability and uniformity out of a wide variety of events and social arrangements, and thus they do not simply describe classes and systems, but are actually active in creating and shaping them. This view is close to the social constructionist idea of society as a human product, in the sense that textual products can be seen as actions that change the world and consist of many kinds of choice [6, [7] Thus, analysis is needed to show what kinds of choice have been made and how the documents claim whatever authority may be attributed to them. We should ask what are the premises for the argumentation in the documents. The analysis should both examine the text as a whole and also reveal the choices made using specific linguistic means.

The validity of the documents is based on the declaration that a large number of parties were involved in the preparatory process. The audiences can be regarded as the "nation" or "region" for which the strategy demonstrates that tourism is an important part of the economic life. The documents also include the

statement that the purpose is to appeal to the financers [8]. The most important underlying assumption both in the national and the Lapland Tourism Strategies is that they present the positive impacts of tourism on regional development in a powerfully emphasized manner, and tourism is regarded as a blessing for remote and peripheral areas.

In this paper, I focus on the contents of the documents. What kind of issues is chosen to the strategies and what is the role given to the questions regarding nature and environment? Qualitative content analysis is used to describe the choices made in the texts. In the beginning of the analysis I also made a quantitative content analysis of the texts to show the amounts of the different topics related to nature and environment. Please, pay attention to this detailed submission guidelines for MMV4 conference. All authors are responsible for understanding these guidelines before submitting their manuscript. Submission of a manuscript is not required for participation in a conference whereas the payment of the conference fee is required for including one's own paper in the proceedings volume. In case you have submitted an abstract for poster presentation you can both choose to write again a short paper following this template or not.

## 3 THE ROLE OF NATURE IN THE DOCUMENTS

Nature as such is frequently mentioned in the strategies – in the national strategy 61 times and in the regional strategies about 50 times in each text. However, what is meant by "nature" remains somewhat open. Nature is related to such adjectives as *clean*, *varied*, *silent* and *peaceful*. In the Lapland Strategy the adjectives "Arctic" and "northern" are often related to nature. Cleanliness is the feature most strongly emphasized in both the national and regional strategies. Nature-based activities are regarded as an important development branch in tourism.

From the point of view of rhetoric, "nature" is a useful concept: there is such a univer-

sal agreement that nature is good and is a thing that tourists look for, that the different actors can agree on the idea that clean, unique nature is what Finland – and especially Lapland - can offer to tourists [9]. However, when it comes to the question of “real” nature and its features, it is not so easy to write about it.

To summarise the information on selected issues in the documents, the number of references to different concepts in the four documents is calculated (Table 1).

#### 4 FORESTS, WILDERNESS AND NATIONAL PARKS

One important aspect of Finnish nature, the country's forests, are mentioned only a couple of times in each strategy. This is especially interesting because tourism entrepreneurs in Lapland have recently demanded that the forests in certain areas should not be used for forestry, but should instead be set aside for tourism and outdoor recreation use. The use and the nature of forests thus seem to be a contested issue, and one that is conveniently avoided in the strategy documents. However, there are some signs that the forestry issue is also entering the strategy speech: Lapland's Second Tourism Strategy deals with the more contested forestry issues and refers to the possibility of the trade in natural values [10], [11].

The Lapland Tourism Strategy 1 mentions forests only a few times, but the con-

cept of wilderness is frequently used and can be regarded as including forests, its main function being as a more attractive and romantic word for this type of natural surrounding. “Vast” and “clean” are adjectives used together with wilderness [12]. Somehow, however, the word “wilderness” has vanished from the latest version of the Lapland Tourism Strategy. Nor does it appear in Finland's Tourism Strategy. This may be due to the fact that the official wilderness nature protection areas were established in northern Lapland in 1991, and they were more actively discussed at the time when the first Lapland Tourism Strategy was formulated.

National parks are mentioned in both the national and regional tourism strategies, and they can be seen as referring to the sort of natural environment that will continue in the future in the form that it is in now. In Finland, and also in international marketing, Lapland with its many large national parks represents “high nature” and an exotic resource for tourism, whereas in Finland's Tourism Strategy both national parks and Lapland receive little mention.

#### 5 ANTICIPATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

Being *strategy* devices for the future of a livelihood, it is to be expected that the anticipation of changes in an operating environment is important. Indeed, each of the docu-

TABLE 1.  
CONCEPTS RELATED TO NATURE AND NATURE-USE IN THE STRATEGIES.

Strategy	Finland's Tourism Strategy	Lapland Tourism Strategy 1	Draft for Lapland Tourism Strategy 2	Lapland Tourism Strategy 2
Nature	61	48	23	49
Wilderness	-	11	-	-
Forest	2	1	3	3
Scenery	8	13	5	7
Natural value trade	-	-	1	1
National park	4	16	18	20
Protected area	2	6	7	7

ments includes a chapter on anticipation.

The anticipation of possible changes such as climate change is an interesting topic since it is dealt with very differently in the Finland's Tourism Strategy and in the Lapland Tourism Strategy. In the former, climate change is a part of a long list demonstrating the threats to the tourism industry. In the latter, Lapland Tourism Strategy 2, climate change is mainly understood as a positive factor, although the problems for Southern Lapland are mentioned. The final version of the Lapland Tourism Strategy 2 mentions climate change sixteen times, and in nine of these the message is that climate change will benefit tourism in Lapland. Three of the mentions see climate change as a possible threat (for tourism in Southern Lapland), and the rest are more or less neutral.

The ideal of sustainability is firmly integrated into the tourism strategies. Sustainability, sustainable development, and sustainable tourism are often mentioned and their principles are explained in chapters dedicated to this topic. Sustainability was about to be omitted from the Lapland Tourism Strategy 2: the draft version had only six mentions and they were mainly related to ecological issues. However, the final version of the strategy increased the number of mentions to the level of the previous strategy. Also, an entire chapter dedicated only

to sustainability was reinstated in the text. This shows how easily a text can address only a specific audience in a certain sector of life, whereas in actual fact the audience is usually far wider. A broader perspective was reinstated in the second Lapland Tourism Strategy in the course of circulating the draft version among stakeholders.

Sustainability and sustainable development are dealt with in the form of generalities with little concrete content. They are used in a very flexible manner to justify a wide range of issues. For example, the Lapland Tourism Strategy 2 states that "sustainable development is powerfully present in tourism in Eastern Lapland because of regional planning and the awarding of the international Pan Parks certificate." Here sustainable development is understood in a very narrow sense only in relation to national parks. To define sustainability in this way in a region that suffers from many drastic societal, economic, and ecological changes, and a lack of tourism investments compared to other parts of Lapland, diminishes the argumentative power of sustainability. In general, despite all the research done around these concepts, the use of the term sustainability and its different versions seems to remain at the level of abstract values, e.g. beauty or justice, but not as concrete values belonging to a specific being, object, or group [13].

TABLE 2.

THE NUMBER OF MENTIONS OF CONCEPTS RELATED TO THE ANTICIPATION OF CHANGES.

Strategy	Finland's Tourism Strategy	Lapland Tourism Strategy 1	Draft for Lapland Tourism Strategy 2	Lapland Tourism Strategy 2
Climate change				
- Negative	11	-	12	16
- Positive	2	-	2	3 *
- Neutral	-	-	8	9
	9	-	2	4
Sustainability	30	19	6	21
Safety, security	38	27	22	43

\* Two negative mentions indicate impacts on regions other than Lapland, but these are also transformed to the benefit of Lapland later on in the document

## 6 CONCLUSION

The importance of nature and natural attractions is emphasised in tourism marketing, planning and strategies. However, especially in national level the strategy document does not much develop the role of nature in tourism. Such important issues as forests and national parks are seldom dealt with.

Such issues as natural value trade and climate change are new, and relation to them is quite ambivalent. In the national level climate change is regarded more serious a problem than in regional level.

In future strategies, it would be important to discuss the totality of tourism, rural development and environment.

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