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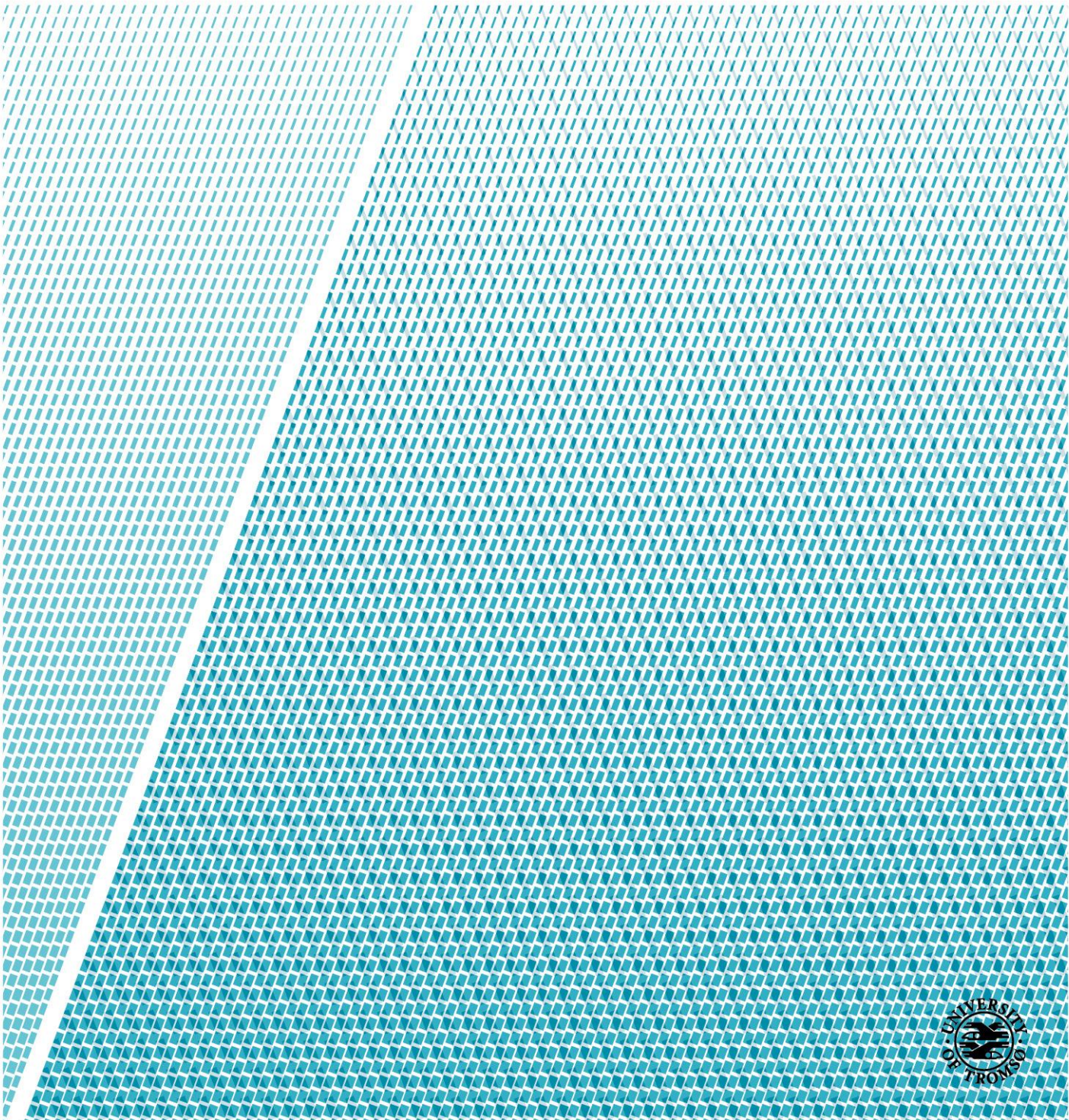
“There is no other arrangement, which is bigger”

A qualitative case study of event meanings for local communities in rural areas

—

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Master's thesis in Tourism Studies, November 2018



Abstract

Events are significantly influenced by their host places. Simultaneously, events affect geographical locations as well. This dynamic can lead to both positive and negative outcomes for host places and their inhabitants. These outcomes may be especially difficult to describe when dealing with events that take place in broad geographical locations, such as is the case with the long distance sled dog race *Finnmarksløpet*. In this Master's thesis project I use the case of *Finnmarksløpet* sled dog race to explore meanings of a regional-scale event for local people living in Finnmark County, in Northern Norway. Via its race trails, this event covers several municipalities in the county. In addition to start and finish line in Alta town there are 12 checkpoints along the route. Many of these checkpoints have their own festivities and entertainments which are timed to coincide with *Finnmarksløpet*. It means that even though the event is regional, it becomes truly local in every locality it crosses. In order to explore the meaning of *Finnmarksløpet* to local inhabitants, I conducted in-depth interviews with 13 informants regarding how they understand *Finnmarksløpet* as an event, in particular related to the place in which they live. The informants' reflections were analyzed and translated into five main topics: *Finnmarksløpet* as the event to unite; *Finnmarksløpet* as a matter for pride; *Finnmarksløpet* as a source of information; *Finnmarksløpet* and its role for the tourism industry in the region; *Finnmarksløpet* is more than just a race. The research enriches our understanding of how residents of rural places and remote regions perceive and relate to event. The knowledge produced in the project is also relevant to the development of events and tourism in such regions and places.

Key words: event, *Finnmarksløpet*, place identity, residents' understandings, rural place

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and motivation for the study

For the first time, in 2014, I heard about a sled dog race called the *Finnmarksløpet*. It happened during a conference, where I was lucky enough to attend a speech by Inger-Marie Haaland, the first female and twice in total winner of the main trail race leg of 1,000 km. At that time, I did not imagine that just one year later I would be following *Finnmarksløpet* both as a spectator and as a volunteer.

Finnmarksløpet literally means “the Finnmark race”. It is the world’s northernmost and Europe’s longest sled dog race. Each year, it is held during the first half of March. The routes of the race go through the territory of Finnmark, the northernmost and the easternmost county of Norway. With the benefit of the largest area among other Norwegian counties (48,649 km²), Finnmark has the smallest population (76,167 inhabitants as at 1 January 2018), which means approximately two inhabitants per km² (Statistics Norway, 2018). The county has a rich and complicated heritage, both historical and cultural, combined with strong place identity (Finnmark.no;). These factors combined with the wild and unspoiled nature make the Finnmark county an excellent natural arena for such sport events as the *Finnmarksløpet*.

Originally, the race was established by a group of local dog mushers in 1981 (Arctander, 2005). From that time the race has shown significant growth, as well as developed from an amateur race to a rather more professionalized and commercialized event. To successfully fulfill all the organizational needs, a limited company “Finnmarksløpet AS” was established in 2001 (Finnmarksløpet website). The company’s role is to coordinate all issues related to the race. Highlights of the race are streamed by NRK – the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, in the form of half hour broadcasts during evening hours. These TV shows gather around 400,000 viewers (Aarskog, 2016). Over its 37 year history, the *Finnmarksløpet* has grown from a small sports event, established by a group of local enthusiasts, to the today’s professionalized and commercialized international sports event with a range of organizers, sponsors and volunteers involved in its successful running every year (Arctander, 2005). Indeed, *Finnmarksløpet* has also become a big community festival throughout the whole Finnmark county. It now includes different organized activities for participants, visitors and locals (Finnmarksløpet website; Visit Northern Norway website). *Finnmarksløpet* is often called “the winter’s most beautiful adventure” (Norw. “vinterens vakreste eventyr”). It has

become a unique puzzle in a range of important brands for Northern Norway. Over 90 % of Norwegians are aware of the race (Aarskog, 2016).

The race includes three types of routes: a 200 km (junior), a 500 km (limited class), and a 1,200 km (open class, 1,000 km until 2018) route. The routes cover a huge area of the Finnmarksvidda plateau, reaching from Alta town to Kirkenes town and back. Usually, the race lasts usually around one week and is over when the last participant completes the 1,200 km distance by arriving back in Alta. In addition to the starting and finishing points being in Alta, in total, there are 12 checkpoints for all three distances. Most of these are in rural locations (Finnmarksløpet website). Within the scope of festivals, in the Finnmark county, *Finnmarksløpet* clocks in as one of the very few events that utilizes virtually the entire county as a festival location (Jaeger & Mykletun, 2009).

In this big picture, local residents of the county play different roles. They participate as entrants and volunteers; they actively support the participants; they produce cultural events under the race and enjoy the program as a part of the audience. They also represent the tourism and hospitality sector and benefit from the race directly and indirectly. They support the event as the main sponsors or even protest against it and change the route. Such was the case in the beginning of 2000s, when reindeer owners in Kautokeino were totally against the race because reindeers were scared of the running sled dogs (Lindi & Mortensen, 2014). Fortunately, in 2017 the issue was resolved, and Kautokeino finally appeared on the race's map for the first time since 2002 (Lieungh, 2017). The trails used by *Finnmarksløpet*'s until 2018 and since this year are presented in Figures 1.1 and 1.2.

Before my experience with *Finnmarksløpet*, I had never encountered an event, which basically is a regional one. Although its organization simultaneously requires multiple resources to succeed, human and geographic, at the local level at each checkpoint during the race, the event virtually becomes a local one too.

Official notions of *Finnmarksløpet* describe the race as a strong brand, which is important as a tool to make the region and its local nature visible. It is, also an important brand for the tourism industry in the region. The event is described as a big community festival (Finnmarksløpet website). In one of its articles, NRK Finnmark named *Finnmarksløpet* as “the Alta town's pride” (Schanche, 2016).

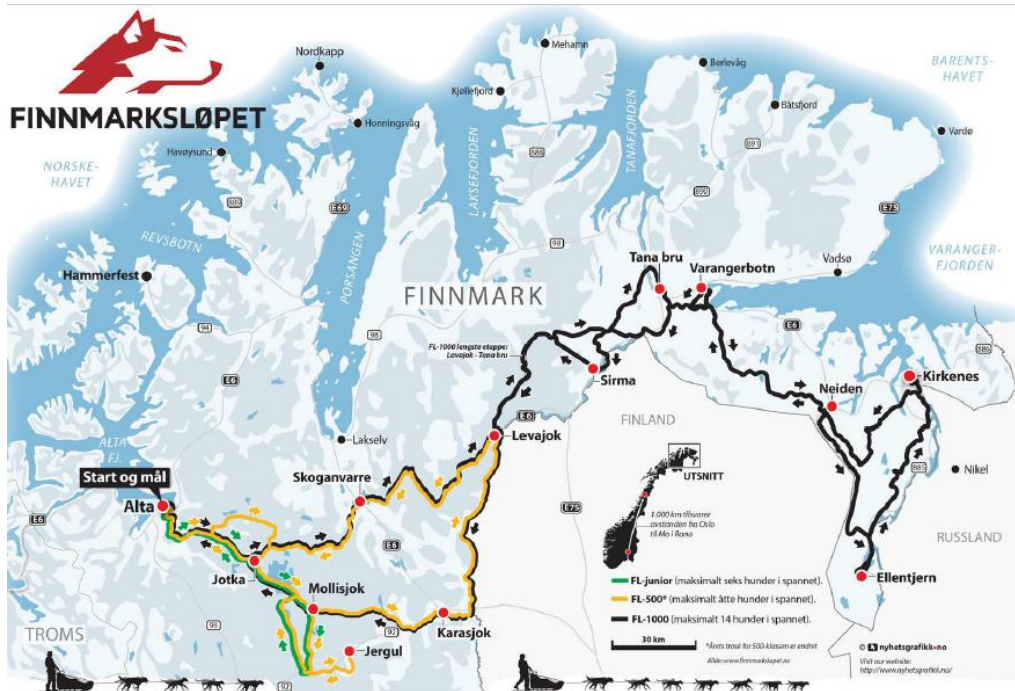


Figure 1.1 – Trail map of Finnmarksløpet as it was until 2018¹



Figure 1.2 – Current trail map of Finnmarksløpet²

¹ Image source: <http://www.finnmarksløpet.no/page.jsp?ref=f1-map&lang=en> (retrieved 25 September, 2016)

² Image source: <http://www.finnmarksløpet.no/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Finnmarks1%C3%B8pet-nytt-kart-2018-01-01.jpg> (retrieved 12 October, 2018)

To gain more academic knowledge about *Finnmarksløpet*, I delved deeper into previous research, which concentrated on the race.

The phenomenon of *Finnmarksløpet* has been studied by several scholars. The sports side of *Finnmarksløpet* and the challenges that athletes experience during the race is discussed in the works of Calogiuri, Weydahl & Roveda (2011), Calogiuri and Weydahl (2011, 2017), Torheim (2012). With regard to the festival side of *Finnmarksløpet*, volunteers' experiences were studied by Jæger and Olsen (2017). There are several studies related to destination promotion and development as well as the influence the race has on the latter (Jaeger & Mykletun, 2009; Jæger & Viken, 2012, 2014; Mathisen & Prebensen, 2013; Granås, 2018). As yet, there has not been any clearly articulated research into research meanings of *Finnmarksløpet* for the local people in Finnmark county.

The impact of mega events, such as World Football championships and Olympic Games, on host nations has been studied widely, see for example Meng & Li (2011) on the 2008 Beijing Olympic games; Nobre (2016) on the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil; Andrews (2011) on the FIFA World Cup 2010 in South Africa. Similarly, the impact of some other events that could be described as 'one occasion only' for their host places have been widely studied. There are also studies on how events hosted in rural localities impact on those localities. These have been primarily produced by Australian scholars, e.g. Moscardo (2007, 2008). Yet, there is limited research on how events that are regularly and simultaneously hosted by more than one locality influence both the whole region and the smaller localities in which they are arranged. This motivated me to look at *Finnmarksløpet* through the eyes of a different stakeholder – the local people living in the Finnmark county of Norway and in those places through which *Finnmarksløpet*'s trails cross.

1.2 Research question

As mentioned previously, the exotic location of *Finnmarksløpet* and its inseparability from the landscapes in which the race takes place make this sports event an important magnet attracting attention to Finnmark as a tourist destination at least all over Norway.

Through its coverage in media, such as TV-streaming, promotional video clips, professionally made photos, *Finnmarksløpet* presents winter Finnmark as mostly a picturesque snow desert, where both two- and four-footed courageous athletes compete with other teams and with the severe nature conditions in which they are surrounded. Such presentations scarcely ever mention any residents in the area: the presentations present the place as a completely empty space. Given this media representation, one can commonly see local people participating in the event as brave athletes, supportive volunteers or cheering audience.

As with any other tourist attraction, an event implies that a destination becomes a stage at to some degree (Bruner, 2005). Producing events often involves some common inconveniences for people living in the area, for example, construction of new venues, closed roads or substantive noise during the days of the event. Sometimes, these displeased voices are heard, as was demonstrated in the previously mentioned case of Kautokeino. But what if there exist other voices that probably are not so loud but also want to be heard and should not be neglected and should be taken into consideration? In light of this, for me, it seemed to be an important issue to ask local people to express their personal opinions concerning this topic.

Subsequently, the aim of this Master's thesis was to search for answers to the following research question:

How do local residents of Finnmark County understand Finnmarksløpet as an event?

In order to address this broad question, I had three sub-questions:

- How do local residents link *Finnmarksløpet* to themselves and the place in which they live?
- What positive aspects do local residents see *Finnmarksløpet* bringing about for the place in which they live?
- What challenges do local residents see *Finnmarksløpet* bringing about for the place in which they live?

To find the answers to these questions, I preferred to explore individual perceptions to large-scale public opinion. This is, because I see the goal of my research as looking at *Finnmarksløpet* and its meanings for the Finnmark county through the eyes of locals. Thus, I expected the study to be a curious journey into a diversity of meanings and thoughts created by the informants rather than filtering their thoughts through my own mindset.

Impacts of events on places are plain to see and virtually lie on the surface when a host place is relatively compact in a geographic sense, like a city or a village. However, the influences that events have on huge host places, such as the Finnmark county, are often not as easy and clear to see. Thus, I hope the findings of my study could be useful to help other scholars interested in place perspectives and tourism studies to enrich their knowledge of how people relate to events and how they are affected by events through their direct and strong relations to place arrangements.

1.3 Structure of the Master's thesis

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the study. It presents both background for the research and the case, and highlights the aim of the study.

Further, in chapter 2, existing theoretical perspectives on the topic of the study are presented. These are divided between those concerning the event and those concerning the place as a focus of the study. Partly, issues related to the concept of sustainability are used here as well, as a bridge between perspectives on place and perspectives on event.

Chapter 3 explains methodological issues raised during the complicated process of organizing and conducting the research for this Master's thesis.

Chapter 4 presents topics developed in the course of my qualitative analysis of the collected data and provides a discussion of the findings.

Chapter 5 summarizes and concludes the study as well as suggests possible ways to use the results of the study.

2 Theoretical perspectives

The main and only sports venue for *Finnmarksløpet* is the Finnmark county. In this chapter, due to the irreversible bond between the race and the county, it is important to consider various theoretical lenses and to review existing perspectives with regard to place and events.

2.1 Place studies

“Place” is a usual word in our everyday vocabulary. All everyday human activities, like working, eating, shopping, are basically tied to some places and actually need a place to be done. At the same time, since the latter half of the twentieth century, *place* as a part of *space* has presented a very complex notion for scholars.

Contemporary place theories find their roots in human geography. In the 1970s, Relph and Tuan introduced a conception of “sense of place”, where they looked at place as an experienced phenomenon. According to their points of view, a space becomes place when people form a relationship to the space and give meanings to the space (Berg & Dale, 2004:40; Berg, Dale, Førde, & Kramvig, 2013:12).

Later, Agnew (1987) described three main meanings of the concept of place. These meanings dominated the literature in geography until that period of time when it was suggested to consider them not as three meanings divided from each, but as complementary ones. Those meanings were “location”, “sense of place” and “locale” (Berg et al., 2013:13-14). *Location* depicts place as a background frame and highlights physical and material sides of place. Thus, a place as a *location* is seen from outside and evaluated mainly for its economic advantages (Berg & Dale, 2004:41). *Sense of place*, as it was previously meant, gives place subjectivity, generated from experience meanings, and concentrates on a scope of relationships between people and place. *Sense of place* also includes feelings people originally relate to a place, such as a feeling of connection to a place (Berg & Dale, 2004:42-43). The third meaning of space, *locale* concentrates on a place as a social context. Originally introduced by Giddens, the concept “locale” refers to “the use of space to provide the settings of interaction, the settings of interaction in turn being essential to specifying its contextuality” (Giddens 1984:118, cited in Berg & Dale, 2004:44). Place as *locale* is shaped through social practices, or in other words by everyday activities which fill human everyday lives and are regulated by a variety of

written and unwritten rules. Place then is seen not just as a static background for those activities, but also shapes and changes them. Thus, people and places influence each other mutually (Berg & Dale, 2004:44).

Massey developed the following approach in her works, and created a concept of “a global sense of place”. She looked at places as network based meeting points of material, social and cultural relations, which extended further away than just the local action (Berg & Dale, 2004:44). She suggested and developed a relative notion of place, a notion which has dominated research since the 1990s (Berg et al., 2013:15). From her point of view, understanding of place as a concept includes a notion “of place as a meeting-place, the location of the intersections of particular bundles of activity spaces, of connections and interrelations, of influences and movements” (Massey, 1995:59). As *place* presents a part of *space*, it seems important to refer here to Massey’s notion of *space*. Her idea was that *space* as conception is relative and constructed. She understood it “as constructed out of interrelations, as the simultaneous coexistence of social interrelations and interactions at all spatial scales, from the most local level to the most global” (Massey, 1992:80). Coming back to the notion of “a global sense of place”, she in 1994 formulated the idea of uncertainty which people experience while trying to understand their relation to place and exact meaning of *place* as a term. Clearly, people identify places by establishing relations to them. However, places do not have a single identity. They rather have a scope of identities which sometimes could stay in internal conflicts to each other (Massey, 1994).

Despite complex theoretical nature of the concept of *place*, places as physical locations are evident. A permanent existence in places defines everyday human reality. At the same time, for humans in all cultures and continents, it is usual to name, or *identify* things they face in their everyday lives. This means that even though flexibility and versatility of *place* through social interactions are place’s essential characteristics, places have to be identified by people, both by individuals and whole communities. Relph formulated this as “to be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have to know your place” (1976:1, cited in Rose, 1995:89). So, what is place identity and how do scholars defined it?

The concept of *place identity* describes relations between places and people. Human relations to places in the case of finding places’ identities could be divided into two ways: identity *with* place, when one wants to depict how individuals and communities relate themselves to places, or identity *of* place, when one wants to depict place’s distinctive character. This division

between two types of place identity was suggested by Relph in 1976 (Berg & Dale, 2013:23-24).

On the face of it, while identity with place could imply an idea of belonging to a place, Rose suggested another meaning of place identity – identifying *against* place. “People also establish their sense of place and of who they are by contrasting themselves with somewhere they feel is very different from them” (Rose, 1995:92). This means that strong *not* identifying with one place could paradoxically strengthen personal identifying with another place.

Nowadays, place identities are given to places not just by local people directly coming across them in their common lives, but also by media, political discourse and in no small measure research. This *overlocally* formulated place identity is also called a dominant representation of place. Dominant discourses about places could originate as overlocal contrasting narratives (Munkejord, 2011). This means that place identity could be also constructed as identity *of* place in comparison with other places.

2.2 Place transforms into destination

Any place does not exist in a bubble, and surrounded by other places. Naturally, people tend to distinguish and compare places, just as they do with other physical things and abstract notions. As formulated by Nigel et al. (2011), “[p]laces compete in attracting visitors, residents, and businesses” (p. 3). Place as attraction stops being just geographical location and transforms into destination. In other words, *a* place becomes *the* place which is worth visiting. It means that place gets a particular image sent outwards. Branding destinations has been studied widely. Academic literature provides a great number of examples how carefully designed marketing policy can change the image of a particular place. See, for example, well-known case of Malmö, Swedish city, which has succeed in shifting its image from post-industrial city to creative city by making changes in its urban planning and not least due to hosting a variety of events (e.g. Listerborn, 2017; Matic & Björlekvist, 2013; Weiss-Sussex & Bianchini, 2006). However, Kotler & Gertner think: “To be effective, the desired image must be close to reality, believable, simple, appealing, and distinctive.” (2011:42). It means that desired image of a place should not contrast sharply with actual state of the things in the place.

Nowadays, the most used channels to generate attention around destinations are digital channels. On a par with traditional media social media create firsthand visions for destinations. Since attention around destinations is generated to attract visitors to places, destinations are often presented in media *for* the eyes of potential visitors and *through* the eyes of the visitors (Buncle, 2011). Even though the image presented in media can be close to how local community sees its inhabited place, it can accentuate the place differently, depending on target audience for the image. Materials shared in media and related to *Finnmarksløpet* often place the emphasis on nature surroundings more than on humans inhabiting those surroundings.

In relation to *Finnmarksløpet* it means that the race just by its name creates and promotes a particular image for Finnmark county by emphasizing some special aspects of the region above the others.

2.3 Sustainability issues

To succeed for a long period of time and to develop in consonance with hos place, event needs to be sustainable. Concepts “sustainability” and “sustainable development” are often mentioned in the literature in the field of management. The discussions of the concepts and applying of these on practice have been frequently used in different spheres of business and everyday life. Sustainability as a concept is usually understood as consisting of three dimensions: economic success, environmental protection, and social responsibility.

Social dimension of sustainability is usually understood as a dimension which includes such great challenges the world faces as social and gender inequity, rapid population growth, a huge gap between developed, developing and undeveloped countries and societies, unequal distribution of resources and income, human rights, etc (Stead & Stead, 2009). This dimension of sustainability is the most challenging and the most promising at the same time. The social dimension of sustainability includes a broad spectrum of the challenges which have to be resolved and needs more fruitful working suggestions how to deal with these.

Tourism as one of the fields, where the concept of sustainability can be applied, is presented by sustainable tourism approach. Sustainable tourism as a theoretical approach is widely used

among researchers. See, for example, mentions in Tribe (2005), Pritchard et al. (2011), Franklin (2003). Speaking about event studies, Pernecky (2013) claims: “Sustainability and events research then should also extend to understanding the various roles and functions of events in societies” (p. 15).

Social phenomena are closely connected to cultural phenomena. Culture as one of the aspects of sustainability has been mentioned in the policy field as a part of social sustainability dimension and occasionally as a dimension of sustainability on its own. Culture as a part of sustainable development has begun to be discussed by scholars recently. Soini & Birkeland (2014) explain this increasing focus on cultural aspect of sustainability by “relatively recent acceptance of and openness to the geographical and cultural diversity of the world associated with globalization and localization” (p. 214). They also suggest that “cultural sustainability moves beyond social sustainability and that there can be important issues of sustainable development that are missed without a further examination of the role of culture” (p. 215).

The notion of cultural sustainability is complex and focuses on several issues. According to Soini & Birkeland (2014), one of these is cultural diversity. Cultural diversity includes different values and perceptions expressed by members of society. Cultural diversity is strongly related to the social and cultural acceptance of activities, which are able to cause changes in local milieu, and their impacts.

Cultural values can be personal and collective. According to Horlings, “[v]alues also influence the way we make sense of our environment in a symbolic way, as people attach meanings and assign value to their place” (2015:165). Thus, *sense of place* is closely linked to sustainability in this paradigm. Even though *Finnmarksløpet* does not promote directly its sustainability, it does build as a long living event on the values which are common for local residents of Finnmark county. In their turn, these values have their roots in cultural and historical heritage of Finnmark. Thus, one should be conscious of how sustainable are the interpretations of the values which are used while promoting *Finnmarksløpet*.

2.4 Event studies

Event studies, being a relatively young field of studies, has actively exist since the 1980's. During the last decades, due to dramatically increased interest from politicians and business for planned events and the impacts they bring, this field of studies has developed significantly. Getz defines event studies as “the academic field devoted to creating knowledge and theory about planned events” (2010:4). He expounded on three important discourses in event studies. These include “event management, event tourism, and the ‘classical’ study of events within various disciplines that shed light on the roles, importance and impacts of events in society and culture” (ibid.).

Within the different types of planned events, festivals appear to be the most commonly known. A classical definition of festival, formulated by Falassi, describes this type of events as “a periodically recurrent, social occasion in which, through a multiplicity of forms and a series of coordinated events, participate directly or indirectly and to various degrees, all members of a whole community, united by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical bonds, and sharing a worldview” (1987:2). He considered also that “the primary and most general function of the festival is to renounce and then to announce culture, to renew periodically the lifestream of a community by creating new energy, and to give sanction to its institutions” (Falassi, 1987:3).

Getz suggested that there were three discourses within festival studies: discourses on roles, meanings and impacts of festivals in society and culture, discourses on festival tourism and discourses on festival management (2010:5-6). He also noted that interdisciplinary research in festival studies is rather infrequent, although it is essential for the development of any field of study (Getz, 2010:22).

Back in the 2000s, possible social and economic impacts produced by events on host localities as well as ways to measure such impacts were studied thoroughly by a range of scholars. At the beginning of 2000's, the majority of research focused on economic impacts of planned events, probably “due to the fact that many events require assistance from government in order to be staged, and justification for assistance is often required in economic terms” (Jago et al., 2003:4). A study of ‘intangible’ economic impacts by Dwyer et al. (2000) was further developed by others, for example, by Wood (2005, 2006). Those authors suggested that the intangible social and economic benefits produced by local events

included civic pride, community development, long-term promotional benefits, and several others. A quantitative study by Wood (2006) showed that even in an example of a depressed industrial town the residents emphasized the intangible impacts of an event over economic impacts. In this case, the respondents choose as the most valuable of such impacts produced by the event as being a “good image” of the place, “something to look forward to”, “pride in the area”, and “community together” (p. 46-47).

Subsequently, an event can create an attitude towards both the event itself and the place or region it happens in. At the same time, the event vitally needs strong support from local communities to succeed. Basically, support from local communities can be named as the most important factor for an event with regard to its chances for general success and a long life. Active community involvement at every stage of planning, organizing and producing an event helps to create a sense of ownership and pride in the event among the community (Jago et al, 2003). Jago et al. commented that: “if local people see themselves as an integral part of the event and are interested in the event, their support will have a positive effect on the way that visitors view the event and the destination” (2003:8). They also mentioned importance of active community participation in organizing of events: “[c]ommunity involvement at every stage of planning was seen as vital to creating a sense of ownership and pride in the event among the community” (Jago et al., 2003:8). Thus, if local residents truly see themselves as an integral part of the event, they will support the event.

Recently, more research on social and cultural impacts has been undertaken, and for now it is one of the biggest discourses in events studies (Jepson & Clarke, 2016). Many studies were also conducted on visitors’ experiences and perceptions. But festivals are not only tourism attractions; they have important social, cultural, and symbolic meaning for local communities (Michelsen la Cour, 2015). And this meaning comes to be even more important in the case of rural communities. Despite such studies, a lack of research has been noticed particularly, with respect to inquiring into responses of residents where an event takes place (Jurd, 2015).

The role of tourism and events in rural and regional development has been of particular interest for Australian scholars (Getz & Page, 2016a, 2016b). For example, Moscardo (2007) in a study about the role of events in regional development argued that researchers are chiefly interested in the role, which “events and festivals play in tourism or destination development rather than the development of the region in general” (p.24). In her study, she identified 13

main themes on what roles events and festivals can play for regional development. Those themes are:

- 1) Level of community involvement in the event;
- 2) Building of networks in planning the event;
- 3) Support for non-tourism-related regional products and services;
- 4) Fun and entertainment for residents;
- 5) Opportunities for residents to socialize;
- 6) Celebration of achievements;
- 7) Event connections to a specific place;
- 8) Contribution to stronger shared local identity;
- 9) Opportunities for using tourism to maintain traditional culture and heritage sites;
- 10) Coordination and partnerships needed to run the event;
- 11) Leadership;
- 12) Opportunities for locals to develop skills;
- 13) Relevance to the local community (Moscardo, 2007:27).

These roles of events and festivals, identified and described by Moscardo (2007), can be expected to appear in findings for this research as well. They indeed seem descriptive in connection to *Finnmarksløpet* and the race's position to the host places.

In the case of Northern Norway, its festivalization is generally considered as a rather positive phenomenon. For instance, Viken & Jæger (2012) argue that even though worldwide festivalization is a tendency, which is done just because others do it. It also “reflects basic societal need, a need to do something and create meeting places, it is a form of community building” (214). The researchers looked at local festivals in Northern Norway not only as a celebration of traditions or entertaining, but also as a source for or to result in social and political motivation. They provided an example from one a Norwegian village, Lakselv, where a still popular regional music festival was arranged in 1984 as a local music event. Its purpose was “to earn money for a local boxing club which was founded to reduce tension between young guys from the village and soldiers” (Viken & Jæger, 2012:221).

3 Methods

3.1 Qualitative methods

Methodology is the combination of techniques used to inquire into a specific situation, or in other words, the framework within which the research is conducted, “a set of guidelines to conduct research” (Jennings, 2012:313). Then, method could be defined as a tool or an individual technique for data collection and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013:31; Easterby-Smith et al., 2012:2). The research for this Master’s thesis was conducted as a qualitative one. That corresponds with the aim of the study to get more information about meanings of *Finnmarksløpet* for people living in Finnmark county, and along with the fact that there was no purpose to seek a single answer or single truth (Braun & Clarke, 2013:20-21, 38). Obviously, qualitative research involves qualitative methods being used in all stages of the research from its design to data collection and analysis.

3.2 Case study approach as chosen research design

In this study, I used a case study approach. As a researcher, this study method allowed me to look ‘in depth at one, or a small number of, organizations, event or individuals’ (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012:54). While writing about qualitative case studies, Stake (2006) identified expressive studies. Expressive studies involve “investigating cases because of their unique features, which may, or may not, be generalizable to other contexts” (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012:55). In addition, according to Xiao and Smith (2006), case studies are increasingly recognized as a valuable research strategy for the study of tourism.

Thus, the choice of a case method for the study design was naturally determined, taking in account one of the aims of the study to mark the unique features of *Finnmarksløpet* first of all in the context of the Finnmark county.

3.3 Data collection

Simons (2009) writes, that there are three qualitative methods, which are often used in case study research in order to facilitate in-depth analysis and understanding. Those methods are interviews, observation and document analysis (p. 33). Kvale and Brinkmann also mentioned that interviews are often applied in case studies (2009:117). But what is an interview as a method of data collection? Braun and Clarke (2013) define interviewing as “a ‘professional conversation’ (Kvale, 2007), with the goal of getting a participant to talk about *their* experiences and perspectives, and to capture *their* language and concepts, in relation to a topic that you have determined (Rubin & Rubin, 1995)” (p. 77).

There are three generally recognized types of interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured (narrative). I chose semi-structured qualitative interviews to conduct this study. Semi-structured interviews are the most common type of interviews to use in qualitative research. The semi-structured form of interviewing means that an interviewer has an interview guide with a range of topics and subtopics to be discussed during an interview. The interviewer also has the ability to change the order of the topics during the interview, or to emphasize some topics more than others, or if necessary, to even add some other topics instead of the preliminary ones. To conduct semi-structured qualitative interviews, an interview guide should preferably contain open-ended questions. Since the aim of an interview is to capture the diversity of participants’ responses in ‘their own words’ (Braun & Clarke, 2013:79), an interview guide and prepared questions should give an opportunity for the researcher to be flexible and even spontaneous during an interview, to touch all the depth of the topics and subtopics to be discussed during an interview, and at the same time still suit the goals of the research. Thus, semi-structured interviews allow a researcher to be ‘a master[sic] of the situation’ and still have a roadmap to follow during an interview (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Interviews can be conducted with individuals or groups. Both types have their own pros and cons. Group interviews can help to achieve a variety of meanings, because this method of data gathering directly involves participants in and produces a discussion (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). But since I gathered data in quite small local communities, there was a danger that the participants could not say anything they wanted to due being surrounded by the people they know in their everyday life or due to natural shyness. Because of this I

preferred individual interviews. I tried to ‘provoke’ my respondents from time to time, when it felt natural and appropriate, as well as not being focused on only one point of view of the subject and asking them about other possible ‘puzzles’ in the whole picture.

The interview guide used in the study is presented in the Appendix 1. The main topics discussed during each interview focused on the following:

- The informant’s thoughts about his/her local place of living and Finnmark county as a warm up at the beginning of the interview;
- Personal opinions about *Finnmarksløpet* and its relation(s) to the place the informant is living in, and to the county;
- Personal opinions about meanings *Finnmarksløpet* has or could have for the informant and for her/his place and the county;
- Personal opinions about how well the informant’s place of living and the county are represented by *Finnmarksløpet*;
- Personal opinions in what is good and what could be better in the picture the event produces for her/his respective place and the whole county;
- Other comments and thoughts.

As recommended by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:117), the interview guide was tested during two pilot interviews and adjusted in relation to how pilot interviewees reacted to the questions.

3.4 Finding the informants and going through interviewing process

The search for interviewees is probably the most difficult and unpredictable part of data collection. I used a ‘snowball’ method, while I kept in mind the goal of my research.

The goal of my research was to look at *Finnmarksløpet* and its meanings for the Finnmark county through the eyes of locals. Thus, I was seeking people living in Finnmark, originally, mostly local inhabitants and also those who had lived in Finnmark for some time (at least three years at the time of the interview). With this criteria, I determined that they would already have a whole picture of Finnmark as an insider and that they planned to live there in

their near observable future. Other requirements were the respective age of interviewee specifically, between 18 and 45 years, a relative diversity in professional occupations and active participation in the life of their respective local communities, and as mentioned before the time they had lived in a particular place, that was, at least 3 years in total.

Since it was virtually impossible to include all the places on the map of Finnmark county in the study, I chose to limit the case to the following three localities: the town of Alta, the municipality of Tana, and the town of Hammerfest (see Figure 3.1, highlighted in indigo color).

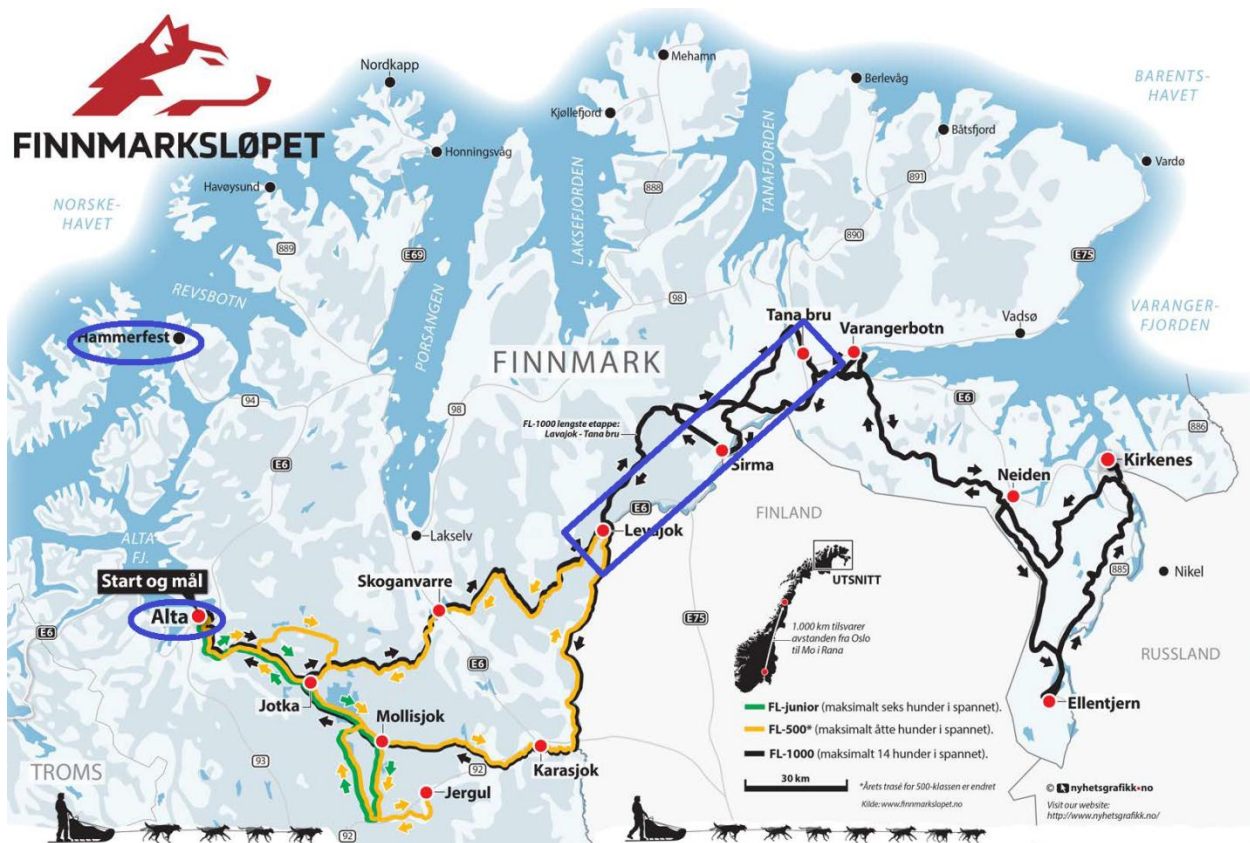


Figure 3.1 – Alta, Hammerfest and Tana on the map of Finnmarksløpet actual in 2016³

Alta and Tana are the event’s hosts. Alta could be named “the heart” of the race; it is the race start and finish line. Alta is also the home base for the administrative and media offices during

³ Based on the map from <http://www.finnmarksløpet.no/page.jsp?ref=fl-map&lang=en> (retrieved 25-09-2016)

the race as well as the home base for the Finnmarksløpet company and the organizing committee during the whole year. Tana municipality's administrative center, Tana bru, as well as localities Sirma (until 2018) and Levajok host checkpoints through the main route: 1,000 km long until 2018, and 1,200 km long beginning in 2018. Levajok hosted also a checkpoint under the trail race leg of 500 km until the route was changed in 2018. Tana Winter Festival (Norw. Tana vinterfestivalen) and Tana Winter Market (Norw. Tana vintermarked) are arranged annually in March and timed to coincide with *Finnmarksløpet* (Eira, 2012; Stock, 2018).

Hammerfest does not host any of *Finnmarksløpet* race routes. This town became of interest for me due to the discourse of tacit rivalry between two towns: Alta and Hammerfest. This discourse intermittently appears both in media and in anecdotes while speaking about range of common things. Thus, it was curious to explore how local people from Hammerfest in particular percept *Finnmarksløpet*. Although, until 2018, Hammerfest for many years had an ambassador in the field of dog sledding – Dag Torulf Olsen, who has twice won the *Finnmarksløpet*'s 500 km distance FL-500 (Limited class), and in 2016, was a participant in the famous Iditarod sled dog race in Alaska (Hammerfestspannet website; Finnmarksløpet website).

Interviews were conducted during spring and summer 2016. In total, I conducted 13 interviews with people from Alta, the Tana municipality and Hammerfest. By preliminary agreement, interviews were mostly organized as face-to-face meetings with the informants in one of the previously mentioned places. Some interviews were also conducted by phone or via Skype. The average time of each interview was about half an hour, and all of them were conducted in the informants' first language – Norwegian, and two interviews were conducted in Russian. All the participants became acquainted with the research through an inquiry letter sent in advance (Appendix 2).

In addition to the interview guide, I also used a questionnaire to collect some background data (presented in Appendix 3).

The first interviews in Tana and Hammerfest were conducted in the first half of March. This enabled me to gain an impression if there was any mood for the race in the localities on “hot scents”. To organize these meetings with the informants, there I booked meeting rooms in local hotels in Hammefest and in the Tana municipality's administrative center Tana bru. This

became possible by means of a scholarship provided by the NFR-project “WINTER: New turns in Arctic winter tourism: Adventuring, romanticizing and exoticising, and demasculinising nature?” conducted by UiT The Arctic University of Norway.

A short description of the informants is presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 – Characteristics of the study participants

#	Name (fictional)	Gender	Age range	Professional background	Place
1	Karl	M	25-34	University student	Alta
2	Maria	F	25-34	University student	Alta
3	Annika	F	25-34	CEO	Alta
4	Hanne	F	25-34	Cultural sector	Alta
5	Emma	F	35-42	Librarian	Alta
6	Antonina	F	25-34	University student	Alta
7	Liv	F	25-34	Catering industry	Alta
8	Nina	F	35-42	Business consulting	Alta
9	Sigrid	F	18-24	Tourism sector	Hammerfest
10	Randi	F	35-42	Tourism sector	Hammerfest
11	Bente	F	25-34	Project management	Hammerfest
12	Kirsten	F	35-42	Mass media	Tana
13	Andrea	F	18-24	School student	Tana

By agreement with the informants all the interviews were audio recorded. Afterwards, the interviews were transcribed. Several participants expressed a willingness to receive a transcript of their interviews. And, several transcripts were subsequently approved by the respective informants.

3.5 Ethical considerations

During the research, I collected personal data from my informants. According to the rules, the study was reported to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). Another important ethical aspect arose during the study, which was that the research was conducted in a small community. This aspect influenced all the steps of the research and made me more aware of properly encoding the data I collected from the informants during the study.

All the data collected from the informants were encoded. The informants were given the pseudonyms to be used during the research; their actual ages at the time of the interviews was hidden by the age interval. I also used general characteristics of their spheres of work activity instead of mentioning more precise ones. All the quotations used in the study are translated into English.

3.6 Reflections on embedding myself into being a researcher

Conducting the research in the Finnmark county generated several issues, which were dissimilar to situations that are discussed in the literature on conducting qualitative research.

First of all, during the periods of interviewing, it was hard to categorize the informants strictly in relation to the places they had been living. Finnmark's inhabitants tend to move from location to location, or sometimes even from one county of Northern Norway to another. This means that a person can be born and spend her/his childhood, for example, in Levajok, then live for several years in Alta while studying and after move to Hammerfest due to employment. That kind of movement could clearly influence the way an informant would assess the impact of the event on both the county and the place he/she lives in at the moment. This situation connected people to several geographical placements related to the race.

People I was trying to involve in the study were quite open and did not resist participating in it. However, from time to time, other important events in their lives took the stage. In the very beginning of data collection, this factor even changed the way the data was gathered. At first, I wanted to use a focus group discussion to get the data, but I had to change my mind when visiting the first place on my map, the Tana bru village. Initially, I had an agreement with a

sufficient amount of potential participants who were willing to participate in the study. Even though the schedule of activities in Tana bru for the day, the 7th March, was checked beforehand, that evening an extra screening of a newly released Norwegian documentary “Mannen fra Snåsa” (English title “Doing Good”) about the spiritual and faith healer Joralf Gjerstad was organized. The first screening of the movie on the preceding Saturday was a hit with the local community, so it was quickly decided to replay it once more on Monday evening. Coincidentally, this was planned for the same time as I was scheduled to conduct the focus-groups. Thus, that evening I had only one participant attend.

The Finnmark county is a territory of huge distances between geographical locations. Thus, another issue that affected the conduct of data collection processes was the necessity to first connect with potential informants without meeting them face-to-face. Because of this, I lost several potential interviewees in Hammerfest and Tana as well. This was because, on those dates, they could not come to the places for which interviews were planned. They were elsewhere due for example business travel. And since potential participants and I had never met each other, they did not trust me enough to agree to a long interview through Skype or by phone.

Of course, my own background also influenced the process of data collection. Being an outsider in Norway, I had studied and therefore lived for some time in all three Northern counties of Norway, for a total of three years: one semester in the city of Tromsø (the Troms county), one semester in the city of Bodø (the Nordland county), and one year and a half in Alta at the time I commenced interviewing. I was really interested in the individual character of local culture and used a whole range of available possibilities to get in touch with potential participants. I learned Norwegian so I could communicate with native speakers and even understand local dialects without significant difficulties. All this helped me to establish important contacts, which I was able to use further while conducting my research. Regardless, I still was not as native as my Norwegian informants. Sometimes, I could not understand them at the ‘in-between the words’ level, when a researcher can obtain extra information from an informant during an interview.

3.7 Limitations of the study

Due to the issues discussed in the previous section, I was unable to achieve a balanced set of informants even though I tried my best. As is evident in the Table 3.1, I did have not many interviewees from Tana and Hammerfest, and the interviewees were mostly women. Even though I tried to fix both these issues, the time limit to conduct the data collection affected the final picture of the informants' set. Additionally, due to limited time and resources, while designing the research I did not embrace local people of all available ages and chose instead the informants in those specific age intervals noted in Table 3.1.

This means the study could not be seen as providing a comprehensive study of meanings *Finnmarksløpet* generates for people living in Finnmark, but it does provide an insight into some of the opinions the local people held on the topic and offers a canvas for further research on the topic.

3.8 Thematic analysis as chosen analysis procedure

I chose thematic analysis as the method to analyze the data collected during interviews.

Thematic analysis is a method, which is commonly used in qualitative research. It allows a researcher to focus on examining and identifying themes and patterns within a set of data.

Braun and Clarke (2013) distinguish four forms of thematic analysis: inductive, theoretical, experiential and constructionist. Inductive analysis “[a]ims to generate an analysis from the bottom (the data) up; analysis is not shaped by existing theory (but analysis is always shaped to some extent by the researcher’s standpoint, disciplinary knowledge and epistemology” (p. 175).

In my research, I kept in mind, the existing theoretical knowledge of place and events while thinking about the research design and creating my interview guide. Conversely, during the interviews, I followed up my informants’ flow of thoughts, because I took into account the aim to look at the topic first of all from the informants’ perspective, not from my own.

Summing up, I chose an inductive thematic analysis to analyze the patterns across the set of

information I collected from the informants during interviews. This form of thematic analysis has given me the possibility to commence with individual meanings of each informant and to generate general patterns voiced by the majority of the informants coupled with the unique opinions that were not so clearly articulated in the existing theory.

4 Findings and discussion

As a result of thematic analysis of my interview data, five main topics were identified.

4.1 *Finnmarksløpet* as the event to unite

Finnmarksløpet was defined by the informants as an event, in which everybody wants to be involved. By ‘everybody’, they meant not just the local people, but also people from outside the county. *Finnmarksløpet* was described by the informants as a large fellowship, a bond which ties people and communities together.

For example, Emma noted the following:

“I believe also that Finnmarksløpet together with the Borealis winter festival is an event everyone has a relation to, because everybody can be involved in it.”

Karl mentioned:

“There are many people who usually are not very interested in dogs, but suddenly they are very involved in it these few days of Finnmarksløpet.”

Sigrid explained it in such a way:

“It has anyway become a big attraction, and everyone here gets a little piece of it. It is a big social joy, when it starts and finishes. It is important to get people to join and to enjoy. And it is really easy to get the whole Finnmark together at once.”

The thoughts voiced by the informants emphasize a very important feature of *Finnmarksløpet*: it is the event, which includes local inhabitants into its core audience. Moreover, the community supports the event. The thoughts provided by Sigrid show that the race is appreciated even by locations which are not crossed by its trails.

Due to the closeness of the community, some informants have relatives who has plans to participate in the event, or who are pretty interested in dogsledding. This becomes also a reason for them to get together with close ones when the race begins.

For example, Hanne told me:

“Right now I have a stepfather who keeps dogs, and he has been training for Finnmarksløpet. So, it has become a bit personal for us.”

Nina recalled her memories:

“Last year I was not in Alta during Finnmarksløpet. And my nephew, who was seven then, saw me following the race too much all the time. First thing to do in mornings was to check how the race was going during last night, how the participants were doing... So finally he became very interested in following it too.”

The latter comment shows that even those informants, who do not have somebody doing dogsledding at their homes, can feel a strong bond to *Finnmarksløpet* and perceive it as very personal thing. Thus, it is possible to say that the informants see themselves as an essential part of *Finnmarksløpet*. Establishing such relations to an event could lead, as explained by Jago et al. (2003) “to creating a sense of ownership and pride in the event among the community” (p. 8).

4.2 *Finnmarksløpet* as a matter for pride

The second theme flows naturally from the general pattern that *Finnmarksløpet* fits into the life values of the people of Finnmark. *Finnmarksløpet* becomes a matter for pride, both personal pride and pride in relation to places in which the people of Finnmark live.

For example, Kirsten recalls her own experience being involved in media production under the race:

“I’m a bit happy and proud that I was a part of it.”

While speaking of personal pride, *Finnmarksløpet* possibly produces this feeling through individuals' input into arranging the race as a volunteer or through their everyday work tasks when they are directly connected to *Finnmarksløpet*.

Pride of place was expressed by informants in the way they looked at the Finnmark county during the race as well as due to the race. They described their county as special in this period of time. For example, Randi described the pride created by *Finnmarksløpet* as “*enormous ... for the whole county*”.

Sigrid commented that the race shows also the specialness of Finnmark along with the best hospitality characteristics of the county with respect to literally everybody who comes up here to the North.

“It is a positive image, because it helps us to show what we have here, and it shows that Finnmark has something in itself. What is done here is really special... People are very involved in it, and it turns well. And of course it shows that everybody is welcome here, and that we work hard to make it in this way. And we should appreciate it.”

As I have mentioned in Table 3.1, both Randi and Sigrid were residing in Hammerfest. Their comments clearly demonstrated that *Finnmarksløpet* has special, far from neutral, meanings even for those places in Finnmark which are outside the race trails.

Finnmarksløpet presents the Finnmark county in a way that the local residents see themselves and want to be seen by others outside the county. Consequently, the race fits well both socially and culturally into the local community and the community's geographical surroundings.

I argue that this statement is valid and fair also in relation to the local inhabitants themselves, especially when it entails such remote regions where feelings of local community and pride can work as a tool to create a willingness to continue living in a place by adding some sense of ‘vital spark’ in the place. Feeling of pride can help with establishment of both identity *with* place for local residents and identity *of* place. Renewed identity *of* place is constructed on genuine place values and strengthened by values added by the race.

The sense of pride supposes the existence of shared cultural values, which can be claimed as sustainable. Existence of such cultural values, both individual and collective, and their positive, supporting nature could lead to willingness to show these values outside the region.

4.3 *Finnmarksløpet* as a source of information

Finnmarksløpet's trails are long and cover a huge part of the Finnmark county. Subsequently, this feature helps the race to become synonymous with the territory.

Geographic and demographic characteristics of the Finnmark county make the county quite a remote location in relation to the rest of Norway. Thus, *Finnmarksløpet* plays an important role as an information tool.

Emma mentioned:

“We get our county really shown... It is something a bit special with us. Then, that's what we must present [to others], if we want to separate us out from any other county, which also has plateaux and reindeers.”

Her comment suggests a demand for getting more attention around Finnmark. *Finnmarksløpet* can be a good tool to achieve this.

An important meaning of *Finnmarksløpet* is its role as an awareness-raising tool. This was mentioned not just by the informants who descend from Finnmark, but also by those who moved to the county from the Southern parts of Norway. For example, Liv recalled her own experience of this:

“...I know that before in the southern part [of Norway Finnmarksløpet] was the only thing they heard about Finnmark. National news were almost saying ‘Oh! There is Finnmarksløpet in Alta again. Yes, this place exists.’ ”

Liv's thought demonstrates that *Finnmarksløpet* by getting attention from national media focuses national attention on Finnmark county. It is especially noticeable when official persons pay a visit to *Finnmarksløpet*. For example, this year the Prime Minister of Norway Erna Solberg paid her respects to the race and participated in a prize-giving ceremony (official website of the Government of Norway).

Such desirable, cherished by the informants attention to places of living transforms Finnmark county into destination Finnmark, with positive sides and challenges generated by this transformation.

4.4 *Finnmarksløpet* and its role for the tourism industry in the region

The informants named *Finnmarksløpet* as a big tourist attraction. Even though it was not directly mentioned in the interview guide or by the initiative of the interviewer, every informant paid much attention to the role *Finnmarksløpet* plays for tourism in the county when speaking about Finnmark as a destination.

Finnmarksløpet has a huge mission to be both a magnet for tourists and a waymark for local business. Kirsten is sure that:

“Finnmarksløpet is perceived as very exotic. There are many of those who want to experience it once in the future.”

Finnmarksløpet obviously shifts potential visitors’ attention on nature-based tourist experiences. Antonina similarly assented:

“Tourism in Finnmark develops with an accent on nature adventures, and then Finnmarksløpet suits well to this context.”

Thus, it is possible to say that persons with a desire for exotic experiences would like to visit Finnmark both during *Finnmarksløpet* and at other times of year.

For example, Kirsten confirmed this suggestion by her words:

“People come here in winter, and then they say: ‘Oh, it is fantastically good here! I must come back in summer!’ And then they travel hither again and again.”

Willingness of potential tourists to explore Finnmark by travelling leads to many different actors being included in the picture, both regional enterprises and local firms. As Andrea expressed it:

“[Finnmarksløpet] ties people together, and small enterprises as well.”

The enterprises could be involved in *Finnmarksløpet* directly as sponsors or partners, even if they are not compulsorily connected directly to the hospitality sector, or they could offer accommodation or catering. This means that *Finnmarksløpet* influences business activity in

the county. The informants first of all mentioned the increased income for hospitality and catering sectors during the race. Kirsten stated this in relation to:

“I don’t believe that it means something for those who are not involved. But for those who are involved, it means extra night stays, it gives increased capital.”

At the same time, the desire to get experience could also be expressed by tourists indirectly: tourists, visiting Finnmark at other times than when *Finnmarksløpet* is held, want to try dogsledding. Thus, there are also several firms who provide this opportunity to tourists. Mostly, current or former dog mushers have established such firms.

4.5 *Finnmarksløpet* is more than just a race

Interestingly, only the informants in Alta mentioned the challenges, which *Finnmarksløpet* provides is on par with the race’s positive sides. Alta’s inhabitants also raised *Finnmarksløpet*’s role in the presentation of Finnmark’s cultural heritage. While residents of Tana municipality and Hammerfest concentrated more on the sports side of the race and its straight connection to Finnmark’s nature.

Finnmarksløpet was genuinely established as a dog race, and it focuses mainly on sport, but as Randi said:

“It is great with its focus on sport... There is no other arrangement, which is bigger or more covered in the media. At the same time, it’s good that there are many things, which happen around [the race].”

Thus, *Finnmarksløpet* can offer more than just a race. Moreover, some respondents noted that if there was too much focus only on sport, it could generate much unwanted negative attention around it:

“Marketing [of the race] speaks slightly about competition; it speaks more about that spectacular part, about deeply emotional... If there were much focus just on sport, so probably it was much negative attention around it.” (Karl)

At the same time, some of the informants were overcautious about how visitors from outside could react to Finnmark when they come here with the picturesque expectations created by *Finnmarksløpet* in their minds. Following up, Karl continued to discuss his latter reflections:

“People already have an opinion about what Finnmark is when they arrive here, and somebody might be disappointed to come up here and to not see ... all these elements [of Northern nature] which are usually combined like it’s a film. And this feeling that all this is like everyday, while everyday is totally different.” (Karl)

Other informants are also worried by the ‘wavy’ nature of real life in Finnmark, which would not pass tourists’ expectations when they come here, and make them into disappointed tourists:

“There could be some tourists who feel huffy, because they can probably think that Alta is a town full of life, with many activities and much engagement... But then they arrive here and don’t find it this way. They should be there right in the moment, because it’s not like this all the time.” (Annika)

Some informants clearly mentioned local traditional culture, which could enrich the presentation of *Finnmarksløpet* as ‘more than a race’. Although, then it is crucial to think about how different aspects of local culture are presented during *Finnmarksløpet*. Finnmark is much associated with Sámi culture, and when outsiders come to the destination, they want to look closer into local culture too. They could expect to get to engage with this huge and important part of being in Finnmark. People from outside, especially those from Nordic countries, know what is *kofte*, a cardigan from traditional Sámi costume, and how it looks like, and they expect to distinguish Sámi culture from non-Sámi by just looking for someone wearing this traditional clothing in real life. For example, Maria said:

“Sámi means Finnmark. If they use their traditional clothes while participating [in such occasions as Finnmarksløpet], then everyone knows, that here are Sámi people”.

Subsequently, tourists’ expectations look at Finnmark as a stage and expect to meet reality there. As Emma perfectly described:

“If you’re a tourist who comes to Alta and would like to experience what Sámi actually is, so you come back home disappointed. And this is what I experience while working. People come

and ask: "Where is the Sámi culture, where are the Sámi people?" And I say: "Here, there, there, there." And of course they look just like anybody else."

Emma's thoughts reflect an importance of keeping balance between totally avoiding presentation of local culture values at stage and pure hiding of local culture values from outsiders. This complex issue is one of the issues linked to cultural sustainability, and there is no single answer to resolve this issue.

Along with all the mentioned issues, notwithstanding from where the informants came, the informants believed that the destination of Finnmark has much to offer to incoming tourists, and consider *Finnmarksløpet* as an important arena to present the best of destination Finnmark.

They felt positive in relation to the image the event produces for their places of living, and felt proud because of the event and its importance for the county. So far, the race produces accurate presentations of the localities and consolidates the genuine place identity instead of creating a totally new one. The local inhabitants feel natural in the picture in which they are set and this is reflected in *Finnmarksløpet*, which as a consequence is supported by the local inhabitants.

5 Conclusion

Events are significantly influenced by their host places. Simultaneously, events affect geographical locations as well. This collaboration can produce both positive and negative impacts on host places and their inhabitants. Such impacts are relatively easy to assess when a geographical location is compact. However, when we speak about broader geographical locations, such as districts and regions, assessment becomes less univocal and unclear.

In this Master's thesis, I explored how local residents could understand meanings of an event to their places of living. For my research, I used the case of the annually held *Finnmarksløpet*, a sled dog race, which has been running for the last 37 years in Finnmark county in Norway. A feature of this event is that it covers several municipalities in the county with its race trails. To succeed, the race needs close cooperation between its organizers and local communities in every municipality. It means that even though the event is regional, it becomes truly local in every locality it crosses. *Finnmarksløpet* attracts a lot of media attention, including national attention. The name of the race, *Finnmarksløpet*, incorporates the name of the region it uses as a venue, Finnmark. The event counts as a tool to represent Finnmark county to outside regions and the world. *Finnmarksløpet* creates a particular image of its host localities by promoting Finnmark as a remote and close to wild, unspoiled nature experienced on an everyday basis by locals. Not only does this image transform Finnmark county into destination Finnmark, but it also stages its residents, by promoting specific features an inhabitant has to survive in such severe surroundings.

As previously mentioned, I was curious to explore if residents of Finnmark themselves were satisfied by how this best known event, which is organized across their home grounds presents their home places and represents the residents. With this intent in mind, during my research, I attempted to answer the following question:

How do local residents of Finnmark County understand Finnmarksløpet as an event?

Along with this main research question, I also had three sub-questions to deepen my explorations:

- How do local residents link *Finnmarksløpet* to themselves and the place in which they live?

- What positive aspects do local residents see *Finnmarksløpet* bringing about for the place in which they live?
- What challenges do local residents see *Finnmarksløpet* bringing about for the place in which they live?

Before seeking the answers, I looked into theoretical perspectives, which could help me to understand a bond between events and places. Consequently, I learnt about the development of place theories; how places become destinations; the importance of cultural sustainability as a result of globalization processes; and finally, about the quite young and promising field of event studies. This knowledge enriched my understanding of connectedness between events and places, and helped me further with my research design.

I did not intend to explain the entire picture of the whole scope of different meanings residents held with regard to *Finnmarksløpet* and its role for Finnmark county. However, I did want to tap into possible existing opinions of local residents by exploring some of those opinions. To achieve this goal, I chose to conduct qualitative interviews with people living in three municipalities across Finnmark: Alta town, Hammerfest town and Tana municipality. This journey in search of meanings and opinions was not a smooth ride, but it resulted in collecting the voiced thoughts of 13 informants.

The informants' reflections were analyzed and translated into five main topics describing what *Finnmarksløpet* could mean for the people of Finnmark and their county. Those topics were:

- *Finnmarksløpet* as the event to unite;
- *Finnmarksløpet* as a matter for pride;
- *Finnmarksløpet* as a source of information;
- *Finnmarksløpet* and its role for the tourism industry in the region;
- *Finnmarksløpet* is more than just a race.

The most important finding was that the informants perceived *Finnmarksløpet* and its meanings for their places of living positively. They note an important role of *Finnmarksløpet* in presenting their places of living outside the region. Relatedly, *Finnmarksløpet* has an ambiguous meaning for the development of tourism in the county. At first sight, *Finnmarksløpet* appears to be a pure sports event, however, it provides a stage to present

much more than just the physical side and the natural landscapes of the destination Finnmark. Even though the informants generally liked the focus on outdoor sports activities promoted by the race, some of them were delighted with the cultural sides of life in Finnmark, which were highlighted during race days. Even the coincidence in the timing of the conduct of my data collection in Tana bru village with a cultural event demonstrated just by itself the importance of a range of cultural events conducted during the race.

The informants were proud of the image provided by Finnmarksløpet and perceived it positively. However, some of them worried that visitors could be disappointed and dissatisfied by meeting the reality, where not so many occasions happen during ordinary everyday life, in contrast to the rather hectic atmosphere in host places during the race.

Summing up, the informants believed that along with such ‘natural’ challenges they have much to offer to visitors. They emphasized that *Finnmarksløpet* naturally fits into the genuine values of people of Finnmark. They enjoyed the entertaining part of the race and surrounding events. They liked how *Finnmarksløpet* presents their county as a unique destination differing from other places in Norway. They were proud of the way their county was presented outside. However, reading between the lines, an important sub-text emerged with regard to maintaining balance between the positive sides of staging that the Finnmark county receives from *Finnmarksløpet* and the genuineness of everyday life in their local places to which the locals are used.

Even though the selected sets of data did not involve a large number of informants, the findings are in many aspects similar to the themes formulated by Moscardo (2007) in her research.

With all its limitations, this research provides a reference point from which to continue. The research findings contribute to the study of rural locations. Although this study cannot be used to assist in generalizing the impacts of events and tourism on rural locations, it does enrich understandings on how residents of rural places and remote regions perceive influences, which the development of events and tourism promotion can have on such regions and places.

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Appendix 1

Intervjuguide, Finnmarksløpet og sted (dybdeintervju)

Meninger om sted

- 1) For å begynne: Hva er den første assosiasjon som kommer til hjernen når du tenker om Hammerfest?
- 2) Hvordan vil du beskrive Hammerfest i forhold til andre steder i Finnmark?
- 3) Hvordan vil du beskrive Finnmark i forhold til andre fylker i Norge?

Personlige meninger om Finnmarksløpet, relasjon mellom Finnmarksløpet og sted

- 4) Hva kommer til hjernen først når du tenker om Finnmarksløpet?
- 5) Betyr noe Finnmarksløpet for deg personlig? Følger du med hva som skjer på Finnmarksløpet?
- 6) Hvilken betydning tror du Finnmarksløpet har for Finnmark?
- 7) Er det noen betydning for Hammerfest også?

Meninger om representasjon av sted gjort av Finnmarksløpet

- 8) Finnmarksløpet får relativt mye medieoppmerksomhet. Hvilket bilde på Finnmark bidrar Finnmarksløpet til å synliggjøre? Hvordan passer Hammerfest inn i dette bildet?
- 9) Er du enig om hvordan Finnmark presenteres gjennom Finnmarksløpet? (bildet som skapes) Hvorfor? Hvorfor ikke?
- 10) Ser du noen utfordringer med denne presentasjonen av Finnmark?

Spørsmål for avslutning:

- 11) Er det noen andre arrangementer som skjer i Hammerfest (eller i hele Finnmark) og som du mener er viktigere for å presentere Finnmark?
- 12) Helt avslutningsvis, er det noe du vil tilføye om som kan hjelpe oss forstå betydningen av Finnmarksløpet for Finnmark?

Appendix 2

Til potensielle medhjelpere og informanter

Dette brevet sendes til noen vi tror kan hjelpe oss med å finne gode informanter til vår undersøkelse. Vi er takknemlige hvis dere vil kan sette oss i kontakt med aktuelle personer. Vi er også glade om dere gir oss en tilbakemelding hvis dere kjenner aktuelle informanter. På forhånd takk!

Forespørsel om å delta i studie om betydning av Finnmarksløpet for steder i Finnmark

Jeg er masterstudent i reiseliv ved UiT – Norges arktiske universitet, campus Alta, og dette semesteret skriver jeg min masteroppgave. Problemstillingen min dreier seg om Betydning av Finnmarksløpet for steder i Finnmark. Studien er en del av UiTs prosjekt ”*Winter: New turns in Arctic winter tourism,*” finansiert av Norges forskningsråd.

For å finne svar på problemstillingen gjør vi intervjuer rundt i Finnmark. Vi søker derfor etter informanter som er opptatt av sitt sted og som vil **dele sine tanker om hvilken betydning Finnmarksløpet har eller ikke for deres bosted**. Vi er interesserte i meninger fra **mennesker med mange ulike bakgrunner**. Her kreves ingen forkunnskaper om Finnmarksløpet og her er ingen gale og riktige svar – det viktigste er at de som deltar synes det er greit å dele sine tanker med oss.

Studien er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS. All datainformasjon vil bli anonymisert og slettet når oppgaven er levert inn (planlagt dato 1. september 2016).

Det vil ta ca. 30 minutter å delta i et intervju.

Hvis du er interessert i å delta i undersøkelse eller det er noe du lurer på, kan du ringe meg på tlf. 450 03 851 eller sende e-post til ach028@post.uit.no. Du kan også kontakte min veileder Trine Kvidal-Røvik ved UiT – Norges arktiske universitet på tlf. 784 50 330 / 979 85 624 eller e-post trine.kvidal@uit.no.

Vennlig hilsen

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Appendix 3

SPØRRESKJEMA FOR DELTAKERE

For å lære mer om spekter av mennesker som deltar i denne fokusgruppen, ville vi være takknemlige, om du svarer de følgende spørsmålene. All informasjon er anonym og konfidensiell.

Vær så snill, skriv et svær eller marker et svar som passer best for deg.

Du er: Mann Kvinne

Hvor gammel er du? _____

Hvor lenge bor du i Tana kommune? _____

Hvis du ikke oppvokste i Tana kommune, har du flyttet hit fra et annet sted i Finnmark eller fra et annet fylke? _____