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THE YOUNG EYES ON DOG SLEDDING EVENTS –

Themes that contribute to the event experiences of young dog mushers attending *Finnmarksløpet* 2024

Written by

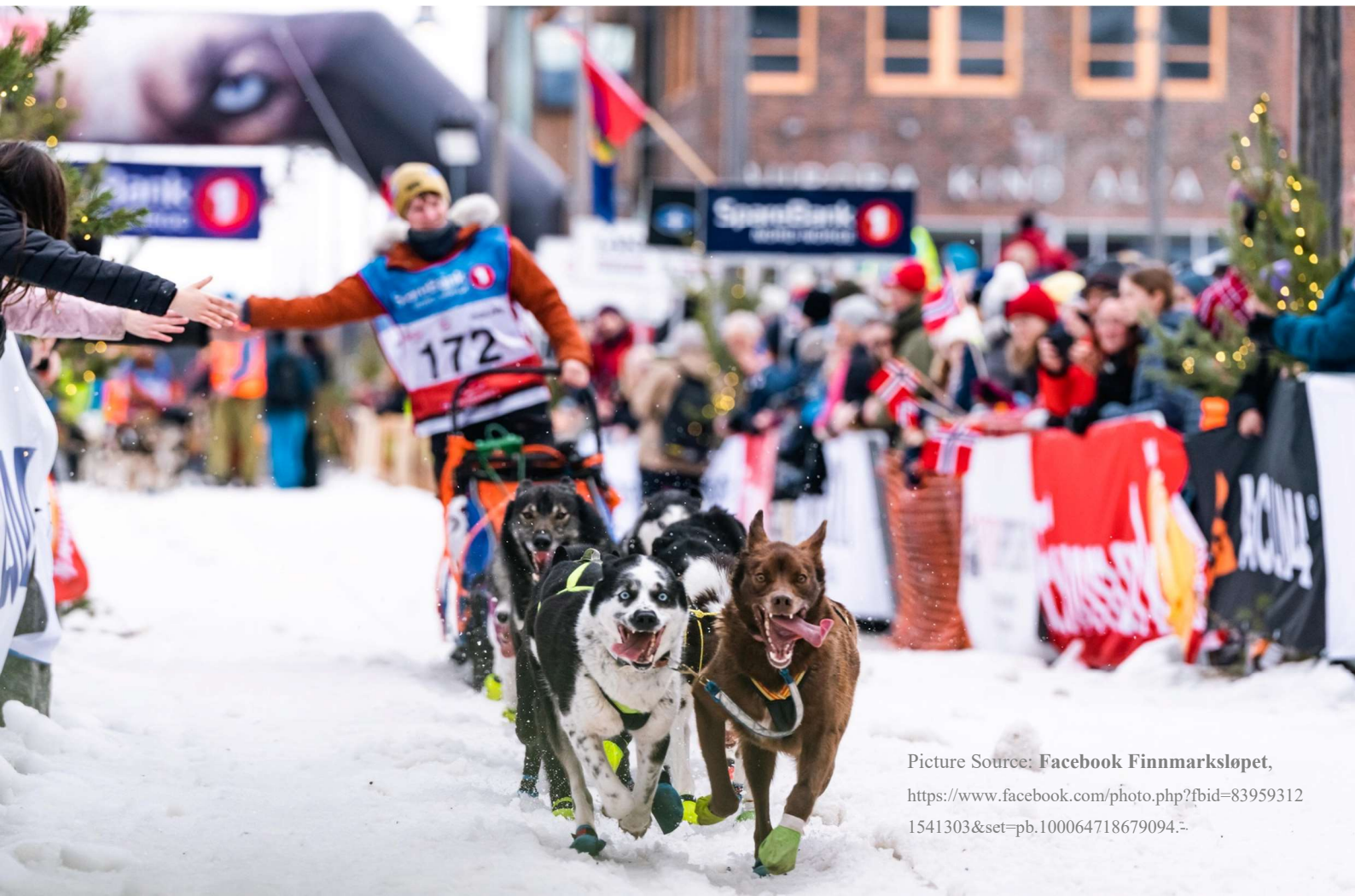
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Foreword

I have been interested in events and their significance for the economy and people for a long time. I started with a bachelor's in tourism management in Germany. I realized some essential aspects, including humanity, were missing during my study. The total focus on economics wasn't satisfying for me. I wanted to know more about its social dynamics and what people care for. This interest intensified after I took an exchange year in Alta. I felt a strong connection and fascination for the high North, as I've never experienced before. My roots are in a big city in Germany, so it was a huge contrast to experience a life so close to nature. My first touchpoints with dog mushing were through my job as a guide. The effect of the husky tours on the tourists amazed me. The Finnmark race has been one of the prominent topics during the visits, which made me curious. An event that combines nature, extreme sport and community sounded terrific. In early 2023, I had the opportunity to travel to Røros to see the Femund race, which is one of the two biggest dog-sled events in Norway. It was my first encounter with the dog mushing community and it was overwhelming. I felt the energy and amazement right away. *Femundløpet* was my research starting point and led me to where I am now. In March 2023, *Finnmarksløpet* took place here in Alta. The mood and energy during this event were indescribable. I have never experienced such a gathering of people in Alta accompanied by this positive energy. Due to my foreign background and different surroundings, the motivation to stand day and night on a sled while the coldness gets into the body wasn't within my grasp. Especially the young mushers fascinated me in this context. Hence, through my Master's thesis, I got to dig deeper into the meaning of such events and what defines a great experience for young attendees. I was finally able to focus my attention on the social dynamics and find out what such events mean to people in a deeper sense

I want to thank everyone who supported me with the process of my Master's thesis. My gratitude goes to my supervisor, Kari Jæger, who patiently guided me through the process. A big thank you goes to all my respondents who took the time to share their experiences with me. You made this Master's thesis possible! I would also like to thank and show my appreciation to my family and friends who stood by my side with sound advice and support. Thank you for the motivation and help that got me through this process.

Abstract

This qualitative study aims to highlight the themes that contribute to the event experiences of young dog mushers attending dog-sled events. *Finnmarksløpet*, the longest dog-sledding race in Europe, serves as the focus event and underpins the theory of event experience with real-life examples. Dog mushing is a popular sport in the Arctic, especially in Norway. The associated community is very close-knit and the dynamics of the sport can be complex for outsiders. So, to better understand this extreme sports event, its participants and dog mushing, it is crucial to have a closer look at the race. *Finnmarksløpet* runs under the category of leisure events. This form of event includes different notions like well-being and self-development and exhibits a high degree of involvement. All these aspects are also intricately linked to the core of an event, the event experience. Pine and Gilmore (1998) have been the pioneers in highlighting its importance and among others, brought Benckendorff and Pearce (2020) the psychological aspect into context. It became clear that the event experience is divided into three phases (pre-, on-site-, and post-event) and connected to several stakeholders. These aspects are put into context with the experiences of young dog mushers. This Master's thesis looks at the Finnmark race 2024 and its young participants, using mixed methods consisting of interviews and observations. The research clarified that specific themes contribute notably to the event experience. The young mushers are exceptionally interested in nature, the people and the dogs. These aspects present the motivation to participate and strongly influence the on-site event and the time afterward. The Arctic nature is fundamental to the young generation as it provides them with challenges and beautiful landscapes. The people stand for support and an exchange between like-minded people. The dogs, on the other hand, are the core. They connect all the mushers and make the event what it is. In particular, the dogs' health and caretaking play a special role in the event experience. Moreover, *Finnmarksløpet* stands for a great goal that the young generation is striving for and for ambition within the community. So, the race carries a lot more meaning and dynamics than is apparent at first glance. The event experiences of young mushers are highly personal and lay the foundation for a continuous repetition of the race.

Keywords: Events, Event experience, Dogsledding, Young generation, *Finnmarksløpet*, Motivation

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1 Introduction

“The event and its experiences motivate the people and are a big part of the dog sled community. I don’t think that so many would have done dog mushing, if it wouldn’t be for the big goal of *Finnmarksløpet*” (Participant 4, Finnmarksløpet 2024).

Dog mushing is a popular sport in the Scandinavian region. Many worldwide participate yearly in long-distance sled races in Norway and Alaska (Knudsen, 2019, p. 17; Waaler & Skjesol, 2019a, p. 10). Dogsledding has become more prominent in Norway since the beginning of the 20th century (Knudsen, 2019, p. 17). In particular, Northern Norway showed interest in the sport and developed a dog sled race called *Finnmarksløpet* in the 1980s (Knudsen, 2019, p. 34). Since then, the races’ attention and participant numbers immensely increased. Nowadays, *Finnmarksløpet* is known for being the longest dog sled race in Europe, attracting many dog sled enthusiasts and even some who don’t share an interest in this sport (Arctic Economic Council, 2020; Finnmarksløpet AS, 2024a). Especially amongst the dog mushing community, the Finnmark race plays an essential role. Here, it serves as one of dog mushers' most driving motivational aspects (Knudsen, 2019, p. 36). The setting of the sports event inside the Arctic landscape makes it an attractive challenge (Calogiuri & Weydahl, 2017, p. 1). Furthermore, the event carries many dynamics that contribute to such an event's experience. Here, aspects like community, relation to the dogs and the development process are in focus (Baldwin & Norris, 1999, pp. 7–8; Farrell et al., 2015, p. 65; Waaler & Thomassen, 2019, p. 57). Many people participate in this event in various roles, but the mushers and their dogs are the focus of this work.

At the core, *Finnmarksløpet* is as an event where dog mushers live out their hobby in a competitive format (Finnmarksløpet AS, 2023a). Generally, events are deeply rooted in the tourism sector. Their meaning and importance in people’s lives make them an integral part of culture, business, lifestyle and tourism (Gillespie et al., 2002, p. 287). Many have visited any event before. It could have been a concert, festival, football game or simply any business event. Often, such events are accompanied by a more profound meaning (Getz, 2020, p. 31) and their core are the experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, p. 99). Pine and Gilmore’s (1998) theory about the experience economy deepened the understanding of events and their meanings. They emphasized, that the companies’ marketing stages experiences for the

customers. They focus on a connection in a personal and memorable way (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, p. 99). Hence, the focal point lies on the consumers' event experience. Here, the social aspect of this study comes into context. According to Getz (2020, p. 31), an experience is unique and individual. It includes personal aspects like motivations, emotions, activities and more (Benckendorff & Pearce, 2020, pp. 230–231). These factors are particularly prominent in a sport like dog sled racing and contribute to the experience. Benckendorff and Pearce (2020, p. 230) developed a model that describes the different phases and includes components of the event experience in detail, as shown in Figure 1 (p.18). The different stakeholders, e.g. participants form the basis of the model. In addition, the experience is divided into pre-, on-site- and post-event experiences, which provides the reader with a better overview and clear structure. Using this model, one can cover the different phases of a dog sled race. Consequently, this Master's thesis refers to this model repeatedly and applies it to the Finnmark race.

Those two topics combined leads towards the aim of this thesis. The event experience of the participants is the core of the race's success. The dog mushing community and its events are not the most well-known ones in today's society (Gillespie et al., 2002, p. 287). Hence, little attention is paid to the actual event experience of dog mushers attending races. This Master's thesis focuses on this research gap and aims to bring more awareness and knowledge to this topic. Here, *Finnmarksløpet* intends to be a real-life example.

Researchers like Waaler and Skjesol (2019b), Farrell et al. (2015) as well as Jæger and Viken (2014) set their focus on dog mushing and the races before, but a particular lack of research on the young musher generation exists. Considering that this generation is the future (Skirstad et al., 2017, p. 1), focusing on them seems reasonable. Hence, this thesis aspires to define the topics that influence the event experience of young dog mushers partaking in long-distance races. Themes here refer to specific areas or topics that contribute to the experiences of young mushers. I argue that it is essential to broaden the knowledge about this area, create awareness for the sport and understand the dynamics of such an event in a broader sense.

This thesis is based on a theoretical framework comprising academic literature. The qualitative approach is used to deepen understanding. This provides a good insight into the subject area and highlights valuable real-life cases (Naz et al., 2022, p. 43). This thesis

explores the race experience from different perspectives while focusing on motivation, activities, emotions, meaning and satisfaction. Based on this, the following research questions have developed. The main one is as followed:

‘What are the main themes contributing to great and memorable event experiences for young dog mushers in a dog sledding race?’

The term event experience and what makes it great and memorable is explained in the course of the work. More precisely, in the theoretical framework.

Due to the broadness of the main question and to specify, the following sub-questions arose:

‘What motivates young dog mushers to participate in Finnmarksløpet?’

‘What meaning does Finnmarksløpet have for the young dog mushers?’

Those aspects are significant for the experience (Benckendorff & Pearce, 2020, pp. 231–232). The literature tells that the Finnmark race serves as a motivation, but what does the event mean for the young mushers and what drives them to participate. This is what this thesis aims to figure out.

The structure of this Master’s thesis orients towards answering those questions. The aim is to approach the topic slowly and become more specific as the thesis progresses. Therefore, it starts with a literature review in Chapter 2, which gives an overview of already existing research related to the focal topic. In particular, research gaps are presented here.

This is followed by Chapter 3, which discusses the theoretical framework that sets the framework for this project. Here, important information related to the topic is discussed based on academic literature. In the beginning, events and their definition are described in detail to emphasize the basic principle. The event experience is discussed in the subchapter 3.2. A clear definition is given and the experience characteristics are explained. This section also introduces Benckendorff and Pearce's (2020, p. 230) model, which will accompany the further course of the thesis. The topic of experience is taken up repeatedly in the following chapters and gets applied to the current themes. Subchapter 3.3 deals with sports events, to which the Finnmark race belongs. Here, this type of event's unique dynamics and significance are described. Thereupon, this subject is applied to the young generation. As part of this, certain features are presented in the context of youth sports to get a picture of what young people care for and what their motivations are to partake in sports. The theory section is concluded by subchapter 3.4 about the main focal point, dog sled racing. Here, the general structure and

significance of these events are presented. At the very end, the case of *Finnmarksløpet*, with its structure and values, is discussed. Going from events in general to the particular case of the Finnmark race ranges the structure of the theoretical framework from broad to specific.

The methodology and methods follow this part in Chapter 4. Hither, the reader gets introduced to the methodology and used methods of this research project. The focus is on the methodological perspectives, the type of research in use, the research area and the data-gathering procedure. Themes like philosophical approaches, the nature of knowledge with its paradigms orientated on Guba and Lincoln (1994) and research designs and their methods are described. The chapter is closed with a description of the data-gathering process and its analysis of it. The limitations of the research project are also discussed.

Chapter 5 deals with the results and findings. Here, essential knowledge gathered from the collected data is presented. This part is divided into the different phases of the event experience, which covers the pre-event, on-site event and post-event experience. Within those areas, the relevant information related the research questions is discussed. The themes that are decisive for the event experience of young mushers are addressed and underpinned with precise examples.

Chapter 6 is the discussion, summarizing the most important findings from the previous section and applying them specifically to the research questions. Additionally, the research project is critically examined and its relevance is discussed. This part closes the main body of this paper.

Finally, the conclusion rounds off the entire work. Here, a clear statement is made about the answers to the research questions, as well as recommendations regarding future work on the topic are made.

2 Literature Review

This thesis starts with a literature review, to identify former research and existing research gaps in the field of dog sledding. The most relevant academic research is presented and connected to the topic of this project. The aim is to build new knowledge in connection with already existing research gaps. Furthermore, this chapter serves to underline the relevance and goal of the Master's thesis and to highlight its focus.

The Finnmark race takes place in Alta, Northern Norway and is one of this region's most significant events of the entire year. Hence, it plays a vital role in the touristic context and for destinations (Arctic Economic Council, 2020) as well as for the dog mushing community in Europe (Knudsen, 2019, p. 36), especially in Norway. Specifically, dog sport has been a popular focus of tourism research in Scandinavia. Various aspects of this topic have already been examined by different researchers and from several perspectives (Calogiuri & Weydahl, 2017; Calogiuri et al., 2011; Farrell et al., 2015; Jæger & Viken, 2014; Waaler & Skjesol, 2019b). In particular, Waaler and Skjesol (2019b) have looked deeper into the history and dynamics of dog sledding in Norway, laying a great basis for this topic.

So, the Finnmark race is an event. Events have been a research focus for decades. Their different forms, meanings and uniqueness are under detailed investigation. In particular, Getz (2012a, 2013, 2020) is a pioneer researcher who analyzes many aspects of events and their essence. As aforementioned, the core of an event is reflected by the experience (Connell & Page, 2020, p. 13). Pine and Gilmore (1998) underscored that the event experience varies, is highly personal and powerful. Benckendorff and Pearce (2020) applied psychological perspectives to the event experience to broaden the understanding of this. Considering that the focal study point of this Master's thesis relates to a long-distance dog mushing event, it becomes clear that non-humans contribute to the human event experience, as Dashper and Buchmann (2020) accentuated before. Among others, Kuhl (2011) interpreted the relationship between mushers and sled dogs. He emphasized many essential aspects of the relationship between people working with dogs and their furry friends. Here, points like trust, getting to know the dogs and more were presented concerning successful teamwork beyond human relations, affecting the event experience.

Generally, it is well known that dog mushing is an extreme sport (Gilbertson & Fischer, 2023, p. 443), which can also have an impact on the event experience. Therefore, different research has been done on health topics regarding humans and dogs, for example, by Calogiuri and Weydahl (2017; 2011; 2014). Their studies highlighted the significant risk of injuries, the extreme physical strain and the effects of sleep loss for humans during the race. Therefore, a focus on human's physical health was presented, which was important and connected to the motivation to partake in such an event. In addition, animal welfare activists have criticized the practice of dog mushing a lot by the claim of mistreatment of the dogs (St. Ours, 2020, p. 27), which brought attention to the research as well. Among others, Butz and Andreasen (2019) critically examined this sport's ethics.

Moreover, the tourism context of dog mushing is a relevant field of research. Dog sled tours have been under investigation and the different values for tourism and tourists were brought to light, for example, by Haanpää and García-Rosell (2020). They underlined how powerful interactions between dogs and humans can be regarding the tourist experience (Haanpää & García-Rosell, 2020, p. 237). Furthermore, Becker (2014), in her Master's thesis, discussed tourists visiting long-distance races such as the Iditarod and their motives.

Dog sled races have been researched in connection with different aspects for example the social one (Jæger, 2005; Kemp, 1999), the history and meaning of them (Jæger & Viken, 2014; Prebensen, 2007) as well as the value behind (Kemp, 1999). Nevertheless, the amount of former research is not grand and there is a particular lack of focus on the actual event experience. Here, considering the event experience as a core element (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), the importance of this Master's thesis gets accentuated. According to Connell and Page (2020, pp. 13–14), the participants are crucial in the event sphere. Some research has been done on dog mushers by St. Ours (2020) and Gillespie et al. (2002). Still, the group of long-distance dog mushers is not well-researched (Skjesol & Ulstad, 2019, p. 229), which in this sense represents a research gap. Former research focused on the life of a musher, their relation to the dogs (Baldwin & Norris, 1999, pp. 10–11) and their commitment to the sport. No erstwhile research exists that applied those aspects specifically to the Finnmark race. In addition, most of the research about dog mushers focused on the leading group, which people around the age of forty represent (Farrell et al., 2015, p. 68; Hultsman, 2013, p. 7; Waaler & Thomassen, 2019, p. 55). Hence, the young dog mushers are mostly set aside, again

underlining a research gap. Moreover, a lack of studies about the event experience of the mushers can be identified. This also applies to the study of Farrell et al. (2015), which focused on motivational patterns inside the pre-event experience of a dog mushing event. Here, the focal point was only on one part of the experience and again on the main group of mushers.

In summary, some research has been done on dog mushing races. Aspects like health challenges, history of the event, non-human relations, etc. have been reported in previous research. Still, there are many research gaps regarding this kind of event and its experience for the participants. Some of those aspects will be analyzed in this thesis. The researches' relevance is further underlined when considering the upcoming generation of dog mushers as the future of this sport. Hence, this Master's thesis aims to create great insights into the factors that will matter in the future while uncovering more details about the event experience for young dog mushers and what they care about.

3 Theoretical Framework

This chapter elaborates on the most relevant knowledge about the research topic and is based on academic literature. The theoretical framework serves as a central element of this Master's thesis and lays the basis of it. Firstly, the topic of event theory is presented and deepened by a closer look at the event experience and its psychological principles. This serves the purpose of creating a sound basis for the topic. Secondly, the theme of events gets narrowed down to the type of sports events. The Finnmark race belongs to this typology of events and must therefore be described. Here, the general structure and importance of that specific event are addressed while focusing again on the experience part. Following that, the topic of youth sports gets addressed with a focus on various aspects that influence the event experience. Lastly, the most important information about dog sports events is in focus, including many motivational factors for attending such an event. In this part, the Finnmark race is thematized as well.

3.1 The event definition

The upcoming subchapter deals with the event definition, role, dynamics and forms. Further, the specific form of leisure events is thematized.

Events present an integrated and indispensable part of the world, as well as in this thesis. They accompany us throughout history, define cultures and shape places and society. Events are essential for the social identity (Gillespie et al., 2002, p. 286). According to the German internet economy dictionary *Gabler Wirtschaftslexikon*, an event can be defined as an organized, purposeful, time-limited event in which a group of people participates (Rück, 2023). Rück (2023) highlights aspects like temporality, reasoning, and planning. Getz (2012a) emphasized those points as well and added an "occurrence at a given place and time", "a special set of circumstances" and "a temporal phenomenon" (Getz, 2012a, p. 37) as crucial characteristics of events.

On the surface, most events serve a monetary purpose (Dashper & Buchmann, 2020, p. 294), while they usually contain a deeper meaning than is apparent at first glance. They fulfill a specific aspiration and work towards a goal. Ultimately, they are personal and unique (Getz, 2020, p. 31). What links events in the core is that the outcomes and experiences will differ each time. Responsible for this is the mix of people, settings (like weather conditions) or

situational forces (Getz, 2012a, p. 37). Further on, Rück (2023) accentuated more details by stating that events convey experience-oriented communication messages to the target group through staging, interaction between organizers, participants and service providers as well as multisensory appeal. Event experience is a vital part of an event, which is additionally highlighted by Connell and Page (2020, pp. 13–14), who emphasized that “Events not only add to and contribute meaning to the experience of a place but may constitute the entire ‘experience’ when visitors visit a location for the primary purpose of attending an event”. Here, the authors underpinned the power of events on the personal experience and how important that element is. Generally, events can be categorized (Getz, 2012a, pp. 37–38) and one type of event that focuses immensely on fulfilling people's desires, development, and experience is the so-called leisure event.

Leisure events

The combination of events and the leisure sector is a fundamental event form. Events are known for being a catalyst to satisfy multiple needs e.g. escape the daily grind, experience the unordinary (Cohen, 2010, p. 27) and broaden ones horizon (Crompton & McKay, 1997, pp. 425–426). Leisure includes several meanings and is often associated with notions of well-being, personal fulfillment and growth through activities (Page & Connell, 2010, p. 1). For it to become an actual ‘leisure’ experience, a certain sense of freedom, involvement, emotions, cognitive elements (beliefs, ideas, thoughts, ...) and a sense of control (Getz & Page, 2016a, p. 341) should be included. Typically, serious leisure participants dive into a vast social world and “a complex mosaic of ... events, networks, organizations, and social relationships” (Getz, 2012a, p. 154). All those aspects contribute immensely to the event experience, especially in the context of a leisure event like *Finnmarksløpet*.

Overall, this subchapter provided fundamental knowledge about the event definitions and categories. An event is important for tourism and has various meanings for different actors. It is characterized by its temporality, uniqueness and variety. The core of an event is the experience. The specification of leisure events deepened the basic meanings of events. Here, personal development, fulfillment and more personal values regarding an event were reported and connected to the event experience.

3.2 Event experience

The following subchapter deals with the event experience, the core of events and this Master's thesis. It serves to deepen the understanding of event experiences and to lay the basis for the further course of this thesis. The different dimensions from which the experience can be viewed are also presented. Those will be applied in the results and findings part. In addition, the psychology of event experience is used to do broaden the understanding of the topic. Here, the model of Benckendorff and Pearce (2020, p. 230) is introduced, which leads the results and findings part is.

The roots of the event experience can be traced back to the concept of using experiences for marketing and branding purposes. Pine and Gilmore (1998) pioneered the analysis of this phenomenon in their article *Welcome to the Experience Economy*. They underlined that a company or organization stages experiences for the customers while connecting with them in a personal and memorable way (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, p. 99). In particular, mental engagement is in focus. It is hard to activate, but physical engagement can be particularly supportive here (Getz, 2012a, p. 192). When people leave the passive role and become active while affecting their performance, the experience assumes significantly larger dimensions (Pine & Gilmore, 2020, p. 43). However, what does the term experience refer to in its core?

Much research dealt with the term experience and revealed that it can be used in numerous ways. According to O'Sullivan and Spangler (1999, p. 3) the term event experience involves:

- “Participation and involvement in the consumption;
- The state of being physically, mentally, socially, spiritually, or emotionally engaged;
- A change of knowledge, skill, memory or emotion; ...
- An effort directed at addressing a psychological or internal need”.

This definition highlights aspects like involvement, change of knowledge or emotion and the fulfillment of needs. Physical and emotional involvement can inspire better self-knowledge and *communitas* (Morgan, 2008, p. 83). Also, being social can lead to tremendously more authentic and fruitful experiences (Matheson, 2005, p. 159). An event experience should be memorable and in the best case positively associated. This can, among others, depend on the level of engagement and the values derived (Ryan, 2020, p. 369). Daspher and Buchmann (2020, p. 305) added, that experiences become memorable, when they are meaningful to the attendees. Overall, not all these aspects apply to every event equally. Some aren't supposed to

reach the emotional level (Ryan, 2020, p. 368) or to deepen knowledge. The level of involvement of distinct aspects is individual to each event, depending on the desired outcome. Ultimately, it is about the meaning for the individuals (Ryan, 2020, pp. 368–369).

As Getz and Page (2016a, p. 340) accentuated, experiences can be seen from several dimensions for example, the conative, cognitive and affective one. The conative dimension includes actual behavior, such as physical activity. Conversely, the cognitive dimension focuses on sense-making, awareness, memory, learning and understanding. The affective dimension refers to feelings, emotions, values and preferences. Values include being with trusted people and belonging to a community. Those dimensions indicate that the experience is a powerful tool that requires a certain degree of involvement and has a transformative effect on individuals. It can broaden knowledge but, at the same time, shape us as human beings. Experiences can influence attitudes, personalities and values (Getz, 2012a, p. 94).

The psychology of event experience

Many psychological factors guide participation in an event and the associated experience. The questions of who participates in events and what motivates these individuals are fundamental (Getz & Page, 2016b, p. 188). The fields of personality, personal values, motivation and involvement can help answer these questions (Benckendorff & Pearce, 2020, p. 231).

The upcoming Figure 1 by Benckendorff and Pearce (2020, p. 230) illustrates the different stages of an event and what psychological aspects contribute to which stage. The model is divided into pre-event experience, on-site experience and post-event experience and includes different stakeholders. The ones in focus here are the performers and participants. Generally, Figure 1 provides a great overview of the topic and summarizes the most crucial aspects concerning this project. Due to its details, this model is very well suited for repeated orientation throughout the work. It is a theoretical basis for this thesis, especially in the final part.

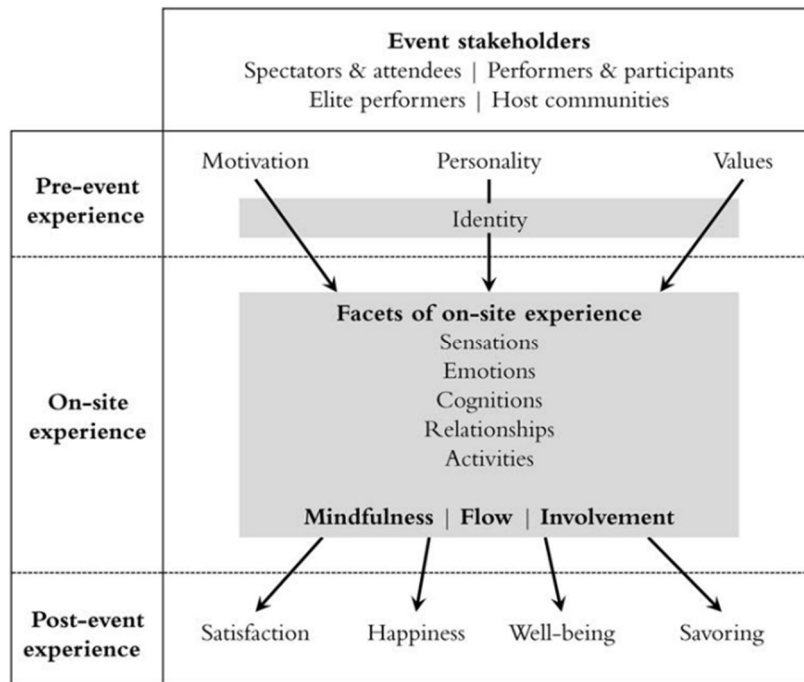


Figure 1: Psychology concepts applied to event
 Source: Benckendorff & Pearce, 2020, p.230

As the model shown in Figure 1 underlines, aspects like motivation and values are essential in the pre-event experience. The attendees' motivation has been of interest in research for a long while. The critical implication for motivation can be defined as a source for people's behavior development (Benckendorff & Pearce, 2020, p. 232; Mansfeld, 1992, p. 414). Due to the variety of events and people's individuality, it is hard to generalize motives but some motivational patterns are evident (Benckendorff & Pearce, 2020, p. 233). Furthermore, Li and Petrick (2005, pp. 242–243) identified the need for escape, excitement, identification and socialization as motivational motives to attend an event. Morgan (2008, p. 84) supported these patterns and added to it aspects like achievement (e.g. overcoming challenges) and broader symbolic meanings as shared values.

Regarding the on-site experience, Benckendorff and Pearce (2020, p. 230) stressed facets like emotions, relationships, and activities. These can be highly influential on the event outcome of participants (Benckendorff & Pearce, 2020, p. 242). As Pearce and Zare (2017, p. 58) stated, the different components work together and influence each other. Their combination is needed to establish experience. In particular, events can evoke various emotions (Ryan, 2020, p. 368).

Aspects like personal fulfillment, accomplishment or enhanced self-esteem are part of values and satisfaction, eventually influencing the post-event experience (Chen, 2006, p. 10). Satisfaction depends on certain expectations and whether they are met, exceeded, or not fulfilled during the on-site experience (Buttle, 1996, p. 11). Buttle (1996, pp. 24–25) underlined that satisfaction of the overall experience derives more from the cognitive dimension than the affective one. Hence, memory, understanding, and learning outcomes have a much more significant long-term impact than feelings and emotions. Moreover, the post-event experience can have a long-lasting effect and influence repeated participation (Benckendorff & Pearce, 2020, p. 245).

In summary, the importance of event experience is undeniable. It is highly personal and can be looked at from several dimension. Moreover, the experience lays the foundation inside the event industry and focuses on a close relationship between the organization and participants. Generally, the experience can be divided into pre-event, on-site and post-event experience. Every part carries a lot of meaning and is highly personal and unique. They are intertwined and influence each other. The individual parts of the experience, include among others values and active involvement inside the event environment and the people around. Specifically, the pre-event experience is driven by desires, expectations and motivations. Aspects like relationships, activities and emotions influence the on-site experience. A positive experience here leads to significant personal development, enhanced self-esteem and satisfaction, which are connected to the post-event experience. Hence, a particular cycle of experience is presented.

3.3 Sports Events

The following subchapter presents a special form of events called sport events. Dog-sled events belong to this category, which is why they are being addressed. Sports events lay a good foundation for understanding the focus event and lead us in the specific direction of this research. This subchapter describes the general structure of sports events, their meaning in tourism and for people, and the concerning experience.

Sports events and tourism are tied together and characterized as a match (Florek & Insch, 2011, p. 269). They are, by definition, gatherings where people meet to pursue sporting

activities (Getz, 2012a, p. 64). They are infinite in variety and are to be found worldwide (Getz, 2013, p. 212). According to Getz (2012a, p. 65), sports event can be categorized into

- Classes like amateur or professional,
- The location e.g., indoor or outdoor,
- And forms like local, regional, national and international.

They can also be classified in different formats, such as tournaments and championships, sports festivals, or multi-sport events like the Olympics. The variation is endless (Getz, 2012a, p. 65). The sports event in focus fulfills the international competitive aspect, takes place outdoors and includes both classes of attendees (Finnmarksløpet AS, 2023a).

The impacts of sports events range from economic to social. For the economic side, they are very fruitful. Such events attract many people worldwide and create awareness for destinations (Getz, 2012b, p. 50; Prebensen, 2010, p. 38). This returns in money and awareness for the venue's location.

From a social perspective, sports events contain various aspects that underline their importance and uniqueness. Terms like community, motivation and sense of feelings come up. Sports events are an intertwined network of independent actors that must rely on and influence each other. Those roles include spectators, athletes, organizers and more (Grohs et al., 2020, p. 69; Woratschek et al., 2014, p. 8). As Vargo and Lusch (2004, p. 12) underlined, for an event to become meaningful, valuable and successful, the different actors must interact and be influenced by each other. Applying this theory to the level of sports events shows that athletes are limited and influenced by the organization. Athletes create the main attraction through competition, spectators create an exciting atmosphere and the organization ensures the event's settings. The success of an event is dependent on all influential parts, even those behind the human sphere (Dashper & Buchmann, 2020, p. 306).

When asked about the meaning of a sports event or the motivation to attend, many referred to "a sense that is felt more than understood" (Chalip, 2006, p. 110). Sports events carry a specific dynamic and contain multi-sensory activities connected to lots of emotion and fantasy (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982, p. 136). It gets highlighted that the sporting itself might not even be the focus of the visit. Sports might be a catalyst or vehicle, but overall, it is about a specific energy and something beyond the sport experience (Chalip, 2006, p. 110).

3.3.1 The sports event experience

In particular the aforementioned psychological dimensions of experience are particularly important for sports events. The diversity of sports events ensures an almost infinite variety of experiences. Sports can be competitive and require strength, endurance, and more. Sport is generally a very social and highly personal construct (Getz, 2012a, pp. 205–206). As Bouchet et al. (2004, p. 129) stated, sports event experiences can encompass consideration of self-worth, the place or interpersonal variables like *communitas*. *Communitas* and subcultures ensure a safe space during an event, bond participants and release an energy that everyone can share and live (Chalip, 2006, pp. 110–111). For example, social support plays into those phenomena and is indispensable during sports events (McCarville, 2007, p. 168; Wallace et al., 2000, p. 503). Furthermore, Shipway and Jones (2007, p. 374) identified certain subcultures inside active sport event participants. People wear specific clothing or use particular equipment, which affords a sense of identity (McCarville, 2007, p. 168) and togetherness. Also, the behavior and values of people among such groups are identical. A group of like-minded people, where sport defines an integral part of their lives, gets created (Miller, 2012, p. 110). Structural differences like race, gender, or age faint. Sports events allow people an equal experience and fellowship with one another (V. Turner, 1974, pp. 233–234). Consequently, a foundation to connect with other attendees or non-humans is laid, which can go beyond the event sphere. So, even if the event might be a competition, the social part is remembered. Many athletes engage and support each other or share those intense moments in sports instead of working against each other (Bouchet et al., 2004, p. 131).

In addition, sports events include environmental or physical essences (Perić et al., 2018, p. 758). The values of an event for participants are in connection with those essences and vary in a wide range. For many sports eventgoers, the place is a crucial of the experience. Some venues offer an incredible landscape or a unique environment (Bull & Weed, 2012, p. 57). The importance of place depends on the kind of sports event, but especially in outdoor events, the natural environment is a crucial factor known for being highly influential (Bouchet et al., 2004, p. 131). This goes from nature itself over to relive it (Perić et al., 2018, p. 759). Such outdoor adventure experiences can benefit mental and physical health and self-determination. Successful participation promotes independence, competencies, and personal empowerment (Lieberman et al., 2023, p. 1), resulting in a fruitful post-event experience.

3.3.2 The youth in sports events

This subchapter focuses more on the primary analysis group of this Master's thesis. The aim is to highlight topic-specific aspects of young people in sports and their experiences. The focal point is the nation of Norway. It is important to stress that in this context, youth not only refers to the teenage group but also to people up to the age of twenty-eight, which counts in the context of dog sledding as still young.

The relationship between the youth and sport has been of long-standing interest. This is because young people serve specific purposes in the sports industry and vice versa. They are consumers of sports events (both as participants or observers) and are known for being “a pool of talent needed to maintain and expand domestic elite-level competition” (Skirstad et al., 2017, p. 1). In addition, young people are a resource for elite youth international sports competitions. Here, two questions become prominent. The first is ‘What can the sport do for young people?’ and the second refers to ‘What can young people do for sport?’ (Skirstad et al., 2017, pp. 1–2).

Sports are included in today's society and promoted in schools, at home, or in public life (Roberts, 2016b, p. 19). Usually, young people can compete in events of all ages from their early teen years (Roberts, 2016a, p. 16). They get encouraged by their family, teachers, or even sportsmen/sportswomen (Roberts, 2016b, p. 19). Hence, a lot of young people are motivated to attend sports. However, youth time is also a crossroads regarding active sports participation. Many other things in life, like friendships or other hobbies, become more important during those years, and the focus shifts, which can be seen as a handicap in youth sports (Roberts, 2016b, p. 21). This presents the sports industry with challenges in terms of long-term sports participation.

Another handicap for sports is that competitions are usually gender divided, especially when entering the teenage years (Roberts, 2016b, p. 21). Particularly in the last fifty years, the male gender (young or old) tended to be more prominent in sports (Green et al., 2015, p. 531). Nowadays, the rise of the female gender and equality in sport is visible, especially in Norway (Green et al., 2015, pp. 544–545). Attendance in lifestyle sports is particularly evident among young female Norwegians (Green et al., 2015, p. 536; Wheaton, 2010, p. 1061). Lifestyle events are characterized by identifying themselves “through recognizable styles, bodily dispositions, expressions and attitudes, which they design into a distinctive lifestyle, and a

particular social identity” (Wheaton, 2010, p. 1059). Green et al. (2015, p. 530) added less competition, more flexibility and individuality to lifestyle sports.

It is also important to mention that many young Norwegians often do outdoor sports (Green et al., 2015, pp. 534–535). This specific type of sport is categorized within the lifestyle sports. Changes in comparison with the traditional form of outdoor sports that might include aspects like exceedingly long tours, are visible in the youth sport. Young people attend alternative forms and especially a shift in why doing such outdoor sports is recognizable. The desire to develop their identity portfolio of activity plays an essential role in the shift away from the traditional forms and towards their lifestyle and preferences (Green et al., 2015, p. 541). The foundation for this desire is laid by the numerous alternatives that exist nowadays, which provide young people with various opportunities to develop themselves new and differently (Green et al., 2015, pp. 539–540). Specialized in outdoor sports, motivational aspects like pleasurable bodily sensations, pushing personal boundaries, socialization and the connection with the natural environment are merely in focus for the female gender (Kerr & Houge Mackenzie, 2012, p. 656).

Overall, it becomes clear that sports can do a lot for young people. Youth sports can be a catalyst to develop oneself, be social, gain new skills, be active, and broaden their horizon. Outdoor sports are prevalent and promote development. Those aspects severely influence the event experience. In general, the subchapter about sports events indicated their importance on an economic and personal level. Sports events were defined and their impacts were presented. They benefit the tourism industry by creating awareness of destinations and gathering people worldwide. On a personal level, those events carry specific dynamics that drive the interest in participation. The whole environment can even make the sport incidental during the involvement and shift the personal focus on other aspects such as nature or people. Furthermore, this subchapter intensified knowledge about the social aspects and outlined the sports event experience. Once again, a connection was made between some elements of the different phases of the event experience, as defined by Benckendorff and Pearce (2020, p. 230). Here, the landscape, *communitas* and personal achievements are great motivations and influential aspects of events and their experiences..

3.4 Dog sled events

After the basic knowledge about events was laid, the main ones are now in focus. Those events relate to leisure and competitive sports involving dogs. The upcoming subchapter deals with long-distance dog sled events' structure and general characteristics. Here, aspects like personal meaning, community, and dynamics of such an event are discussed. In particular, the unique role of dogs is emphasized. This deepens the understanding of the dog mushing environment and the structures and dynamics of the focus event.

Dog sled events are not necessarily the focus group inside the sport but happen regularly, especially during winter (Gillespie et al., 2002, p. 287). In particular, Norway, Finland and Alaska are popular venues for such races. They attract hundreds of teams every year to attend. The three biggest and longest dog sled races occur in Alaska, Iditarod and Norway, Finnmark and Røros (Knudsen, 2019, p. 17). Specifically in Norway, the *Femundløpet* in the South and the *Finnmarksløpet* in the North immensely impact the dog sled sport and function as a motivation for many mushers (Knudsen, 2019, p. 36). They are an international competition format and occasionally host the world championship in dog sledding (Finnmarksløpet AS, 2023a). Those long-distance races aim to test which musher and their dog team complete the race trail in the shortest time (Finnmarksløpet AS, 2023b; Iditarod Trail International Sled Dog Race, 2024). The general structure of dog sled races is characterized by being time-limited and consists of several competing teams (Calogiuri & Weydahl, 2017, p. 1).

The conditions of a dog sled race vary greatly but are mostly extreme and defined by challenging circumstances. Long distances marked with several checkpoints, cold temperatures and different tracks are typical. Mushers stand day and night on the sled, being pulled by their dog team and lack sleep while needing to stay in control (Calogiuri et al., 2011, p. 410). This is consequently both challenging for the mind and body. Even though the musher is primarily alone with their dogs, the team gets supported by their handlers. They consist of trusted people who keep track and lend a helping hand only at the checkpoints (Calogiuri & Weydahl, 2017, p. 1).

Moreover, this sport is costly and time consuming. Hence, for many dog mushers, it remains a part-time hobby. Only a few can include this sport daily (Gillespie et al., 2002, p. 287). However, what bonds all of them is their driving passion for dogs, the sport and the nature

(Farrell et al., 2015, p. 62; Non-Stop dogwear, 2018). Dog sport is a powerful tool to create cultures of commitment and a community on its own (Gillespie et al., 2002, pp. 287–288). The group of dog mushers can be described as heterogenous. Experience, age and motivation vary significantly within this complex community, but typical values are still visible. They share their experiences regarding training, treatment and other practical information concerning dogs while showing support. On the other hand, aspects like equipment, sled dog clubs, and general communication within this community weld people together. This sense of community is strengthened by the high degree of cooperation and support on the trail. Even though many mushers are known to be very competitive, everyone's backup and support is seen as an unwritten rule (Kemp, 1999, p. 90).

Regarding age, the main group of attending mushers who have passed the age of thirty is far more extensive than the younger generation (Waler & Thomassen, 2019, p. 54). The average age of dog mushers is around forty (Farrell et al., 2015, p. 68; Waler & Thomassen, 2019, p. 55), whereby the entire age range goes from fourteen to over seventy. An explanation for this high average age might be in connection with the experience. In dog sledding, the saying 'Practice makes perfect' is applicable. In many cases, age and experience can be connected to the degree of success in the race (Waler & Thomassen, 2019, p. 55), but this isn't the norm.

Back then, dog sledding was seen as a men's business (Strecker, 2018, p. 66). Nowadays, a shift in this regard is recognizable. Many women, especially young ones are active in dog sledding and participate successfully in long-distance races (Gillespie et al., 2002, p. 293). Today, gender equality is a big deal in this sport (Kemp, 1999, pp. 88–89). In addition to the gender, the transitions between age and experience merge in this event format. Beginners, also called rookies, compete against experienced participants (veterans) in one race. Here, different age groups are included. From the age of eighteen, one can find everyone competing in the longer distances classes. The chances in this sport are equal and even a rookie can outrun a veteran with a good dog team (Baldwin & Norris, 1999, p. 10; Kemp, 1999, p. 89). This makes the race unique.

So, in this event highly personal dynamics and a sense of *communitas* are recognizable. Baldwin and Norris (1999, pp. 7–9) underlined, that many dog mushers did not have a special event that led them to become seriously involved in this sport. It was more described as

something that evolved and as an addiction. The learning process is also a remarkable point in dog sledding. Many mushers noted that community led to continuous education and success in the competition. Beginners especially seek out other members of the dog society to ask for tips and support. Rookies can also be a source of new impulses and ways of doing things inside the dog sport (Baldwin & Norris, 1999, p. 9). For many mushers, the races and to attend year after year serve as a primary motivation (Knudsen, 2019, p. 36). Some care to reach the highest ranking and others are satisfied with just finishing the race (Kemp, 1999, p. 90). So, many motivational aspects that are attributable to the participation relate to dog mushing itself, the connection to the dogs and other attendees, enjoyment, physical activity both for humans and dogs, being outdoors, competition and accomplishment as well as the learning outcome (Farrell et al., 2015, p. 65; Waaler & Thomassen, 2019, p. 57). Considering all those aforementioned aspects, dog sled events run under the category of leisure events. They include a high degree of involvement, emotions and cognitive elements as defined by Getz and Page (2016a, p. 341).

Consequently, the personal benefits for attendees of a dog race are related to their relationship with dogs, self-development and the sense of community. In particular regarding *communitas*, the dogs are the bonding aspect (Kemp, 1999, p. 86). This relation gets intensified by the natural environment. Dog mushers talk about the solitude in nature and the beauty that accompanies it. The unpredictable experiences within the icy nature and its pureness amaze and simultaneously challenge many participants (Kemp, 1999, p. 89).

3.4.1 The role of the dogs

The role of the dogs is an outstanding aspect inside the dog mushing community. Baldwin and Norris (1999, p. 10) underlined the importance of dogs by describing them as a source of positive effects. Participation in a race is known for being fun and enjoyable. Dogs can excite the musher and lay the foundation for a beautiful experience (Løken & Lyngstad, 2019, p. 108). For mushers, the furry companions are part of their family and simply more than just non-humans (Carr, 2015, p. 28; Kuhl, 2011, p. 33). Without them, participants would be unable to attend such races (Baldwin & Norris, 1999, p. 12). Therefore, the dogs can be seen as co-creators for the event experience (Dashper & Buchmann, 2020, p. 294). Such a challenging event and the long time spent together can intensify the relationship between the musher and their dogs and their feeling for companionship (Carr, 2015, p. 28). Hence,

teamwork is from high importance as well as the trust in the dogs (Kuhl, 2011, p. 30). The furry friends and the musher must work together and become one (Hultsman, 2015, p. 53). Here, the dogs are a cooperation partner (Løken & Lyngstad, 2019, p. 113), which might not always be easy. Kuhl (2011, p. 26) emphasized that mushers must get to know their dogs to create a working relationship. This is connected to the fact that every dog has an individual character. In general, the dogs are the athletes in this sport and the musher is hence a form of trainer that leads them (Hultsman, 2015, p. 54). Mushers show much appreciation for the dogs' work (Kuhl, 2011, p. 27). Generally, those non-humans are the main focus and their well-being is the top priority. The mushers and veterinarians of the race are tasked to keep track of the dog's health and form (Finnmarksløpet AS, 2023b; Iditarod Trail International Sled Dog Race, 2024, p. 11). Taking care of and working with dogs is closely related to learning outcomes for mushers, as Kuhl (2011, pp. 32–33) accentuated. Without the dogs, the overall race experience would not be the same. They are a certain catalyst for experiencing the event and its surroundings. This applies particularly to the natural environment, which gets intensified through the dogs (Løken & Lyngstad, 2019, p. 113).

3.4.2 Finnmarksløpet

This Master's thesis centers around the Finnmark race 2024, a significant event that warrants a brief description. While the general structure of a dog sled event has been previously outlined and will not be reiterated, it's crucial to delve into some key aspects of the race's history to grasp its dynamics and importance. This chapter also explores *Finnmarksløpets'* significance for the destination and the dog mushing community.

Finnmarksløpet is the longest dog sled race in Europe (Finnmarksløpet AS, 2024a) and represents, together with *Femundløpet* the most significant goal for dog mushers in Norway (Knudsen, 2019, p. 36). The race was held for the first time in 1981 in the Alta region (Jæger & Viken, 2014, p. 135). Since then, much development has happened regarding the event and its structure (Knudsen, 2019, p. 40). What started as a small race with a few participants, primarily dependent on volunteers (Jæger & Viken, 2014, p. 137), is now a big international competition that attracts a lot of dog mushers from all of Europe. The nation that is represented the most is Norway. However, there are also participants from Finland, Germany and other European regions. This year, 110 dog mushers participated in three classes (Finnmarksløpet AS, 2024c). Those classes differ in trail length and number of dogs inside

one team. The longest race distance is 1200 kilometers and includes a maximum of fourteen dogs at the starting line (Finnmarksløpet AS, 2024d). Most dog mushers participate in the 600-kilometer class with a maximum of eight dogs (Finnmarksløpet AS, 2024e) and even the youngest dog mushers who haven't passed the age of eighteen can participate in the Junior race. This is the shortest distance in *Finnmarksløpet*, 200 kilometers and includes a maximum of six dogs (Finnmarksløpet AS, 2023c). The youngest participant in this year's race was only fourteen years old and the oldest reached an age of seventy two, attending the 1200 kilometer race (Finnmarksløpet AS, 2024c). To complete the race, the 1200-kilometer participants need to cross the finish line with a minimum of six dogs (Finnmarksløpet AS, 2024d), the 600 class with a minimum of five (Finnmarksløpet AS, 2024e) and the Juniors with four dogs (Finnmarksløpet AS, 2023a). The number of dogs can decrease during the race due to health problems, like limping, stomach problems, or general health issues (Finnmarksløpet AS, 2024d).

In general, the Finnmark race is not only unique due to its length, but especially the Arctic conditions might be challenging for both participants and their dogs (Calogiuri & Weydahl, 2017, p. 1). The environment in the county of Finnmark is quite rough. It is marked by quickly changing weather conditions, freezing temperatures, down to minus forty degrees Celsius and its challenging landscape. At the same time, dog mushers experience the fantastic and unique Arctic environment with its Northern Lights, sunshine and excellent snow conditions (Finnmarksløpet AS, 2024a). As visible in Figure 2, the trail for all classes starts in Alta, leads through the Finnmark plateau and goes in the longest class even all the way East to the Russian border in Kirkenes.



Figure 2: Map of the Finnmark Race 2024
 Source: Finnmarksløpet AS, 2023d

This year's race presented the dog mushers with a more significant challenge. The organization extended the first lap of the 600 and 1200 class to a length of 168 kilometers to the Kautokeino checkpoint. Usually, the closest checkpoint to Alta is located in Maze, about half of this year's route, but due to military training, this part of the trail was adjusted (Finnmarksløpet AS, 2024b).

On a personal level, *Finnmarksløpet* aims to reach many in the dog mushing community due to the considerable media attention, its status and unique trail (Knudsen, 2019, p. 36). This event plays a crucial role in the dog mushing society and is an essential aspect of the region of Finnmark. The race doesn't only unite a lot of mushers and their handlers as well as dog teams, but many veterinarians, volunteers (Jæger & Viken, 2014, pp. 141–142) and people worldwide. It is an event, that brings attention to the Arctic County of Finnmark, awareness to the sport and represents an important catalyst for the dog sled sport (Arctic Economic Council, 2020).

Overall, it is evident that dog sled events offer a unique experience. They are outdoor sports that encapsulate the spirit of competition. However, for many attendees, the competition is

just a side factor. The natural circumstances during such a race are often arduous, with sleep deprivation, long distances, and challenging weather conditions. Yet, the allure of being outdoors in the Arctic conditions can be a strong motivator. The sense of community and, of course, the dogs themselves, are the most bonding, important and motivational aspects for people to attend dog sled races. *Finnmarksløpet*, as the longest race in Europe, holds a significant place in the dog mushing community. Its different classes provide opportunities for everyone to participate and its popularity and uniqueness make it an ultimate goal for many dog mushers. Lastly, the race as an event creates awareness of the destination and the sport.

3.5 Summary of the theoretical framework

The theoretical framework presented all the necessary information about the topic in focus based on academic literature. Chapter 3.1 focused on the general definition of events and their characteristics. They are time-limited and have a special set of circumstances. Events are important for the tourism context but are mostly a highly personal construct. Hence, the people are in focus. In particular, leisure events can satisfy the need of escapism, to experience the ordinary and to improve personal development. Already in the first subchapter, it became clear that the experience represents the core of an event.

This aspect was further discussed in Chapter 3.2. The roots of the event experience concept were thematized and a precise definition has been drawn up. Furthermore, the different dimension orientated on Getz and Page (2016a, p. 340), which this phenomenon can be looked at were presented. The psychological background of experience was discussed, to ensure a deeper knowledge of the topic. In the course of this, the Benckendorff and Pearce (2020, p. 230) model, which guides this project, was presented. It showed what stakeholders might be included inside an event experience and how the topic can be divided into pre-, on-site and post-event experiences.

Chapter 3.3 introduced the category of sports events. These were once again linked to experiences. Sports events appear in different forms and are important for the tourism sector. At the same time, they include highly personal dynamics and present an intertwined network of many actors. Sports events can contribute positively to personal development, create communitas, and fulfill desires. Especially in the youth, those events are important. They

open up the entrance to sports for young people and make it possible for them to find their own way of doing. Physical and mental health improves, particularly in the context of outdoor sports.

Chapter 3.4 delved deeper into the theory by focusing on the topic of dog sled events. Their structure, characteristics and dynamics were all presented. Dog sled races, such as *Finnmarksløpet*, can only take place at certain locations. They involve numerous mushers and their dogs and are organized under challenging conditions. Particularly in Norway, long-distance dog sled races play a pivotal role. They serve as a motivational factor for the dog mushing community, allowing them to pursue their hobby in a competitive format. In particular, *Finnmarksløpet* acts as a goal to strive for. Its unique landscape and conditions make it an attractive event to participate in. Moreover, the race serves as a powerful tool in promoting the region of Finnmark and raising awareness for the sport itself.

4 Methodology and Methods

The fourth chapter of this Master's thesis discusses the methodology and methods used to gather data to answer the formulated research questions. Research can be conducted in different ways. Hence, the purpose is to make the procedure of the project and its grounded research background better understandable. In this chapter, the philosophical position of the study is discussed and followed by an explanation of the research design and methods in use. The chapter is closed with a description of the data-gathering process and the analysis. The limitations of the research are presented as well.

4.1 Research position

First, it is crucial to position the research within the field. This subchapter addresses the different philosophical approaches to research to define the research position and better understand the underlying foundation of this study. The paradigms of ontology and epistemology are in focus and are applied.

The basic assumptions in philosophy are about the nature of the world (Ontology) and the knowledge about it (Epistemology) (Spencer et al., 2020, p. 114). These operate under the term anthropology (Jones & Donmoyer, 2021, p. 890) and can analyze the approaches of positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 108–109). Guba and Lincoln (1994, pp. 107–108) pioneered defining the relevant research paradigms. In this context, a paradigm stands for “a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates or first principles” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 107).

The ontological paradigm deals with a belief system about the natural social reality. More precisely, with the questions of what and how can we learn about this reality. Therefore, the ontological question would be “What can be known?” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 108–109; Leavy, 2020, p. 4). On the other hand, epistemological questions focus on the relation between a knower and a would-be knower (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). This paradigm focuses on who is a researcher and how this person can influence the research. The researchers' personal and influential aspects are being considered when doing research (Leavy, 2020, p. 5). Generally, the researcher is regarded as an research instrument (Saldaña et al., 2011, p. 22). On the contrary, the research participants are known as co-creators of knowledge. They play an active role in the epistemological paradigm and are highly valued.

Hence, both parties are brought on an equal footing (Leavy, 2020, p. 5). Generally, epistemology refers to the documentation and observation of social life. Here, aspects like fieldwork and the final written product are commonly used. The aim is to identify social patterns while understanding and giving them meaning (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108; Leavy, 2020, p. 2; Saldaña et al., 2011, p. 3). Hence, epistemology can be described as the logical groundwork for social science (Grass, 2024, p. 42).

In a broader context, it is essential to understand that the positivist approach assumes an ultimate truth (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 109), whereas constructivism acknowledges the existence of multiple views (Barbour, 2000, p. 156; Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). Hence, constructivists believe that realities include multiple views that are mentally and socially constructed as well as experiential based (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 110–111).

Considering all these grounded principles and research methods, this research can be located inside the epistemological paradigm and constructive approach. Here, the focus is on identifying and understanding social patterns while considering the roles of the interviewer and interviewee. This Master's thesis doesn't aim to find one truth about the event experience of young dog mushers but considers the multiple views as well as the social and mental background of the attendees. Through those paradigms, this thesis aims to bring better understanding and meaning into this context.

4.2 Research design

Besides the philosophical paradigms, the research design is fundamental and usually consists of two types. This subchapter describes the used qualitative research approach. A general description and the characteristics of the research design are presented and applied to the study in focus. An explanation of why this discipline is suitable for this thesis gets provided.

Two typical research designs exist: one is the quantitative approach, and another is the qualitative type. Quantitative research focuses on aspects like statistical testing techniques and measuring phenomena and the results are presented mainly by numbers (Dwyer et al., 2012, pp. 1–2). The qualitative approach concentrates on an in-depth investigation of issues (Naz et al., 2022, p. 43) as well as exploring and analyzing events, conditions and relations (Zainal, 2007, p. 4). This research design is of particular importance in the field of social science. The qualitative matter relates to people's social and individual contexts in

society, cultures, and communities (Bryman, 2016, p. 3). Social scientists aim to explore how people perceive and respond to the complex world around them and how these experiences and interactions are shaped by broader social forces (Jetzkowitz et al., 2018, 45). Hence, social science “enhanced the understanding about ourselves and the society in which we live” (Liamputtong, 2023, p. 1).

Earlier, social science was described as being ‘too soft’ due to a lack of dependability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 105–106). Since the end of the 20th century, this picture has shifted. Social science and thus, the qualitative research approach is now respected and commonly used (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 106; Naz et al., 2022, p. 43; Shipway et al., 2020, p. 314). As Guba and Lincoln (1994, pp. 106–107) argued, qualitative approaches can balance out unequal themes in quantitative research. One example is context stripping, where qualitative methods can broaden the context and include other variables. Furthermore, qualitative data can provide insights about behaviors, meanings and purpose. Overall, this approach underlines the interdependence of facts and values in research, which means that most cases are situated and that this needs to be taken into consideration (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015, p. 1). Such social situations lay the basis for making sense and bringing meaning to the context (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015, p. 2). So, how do people actually understand and see themselves and certain situations (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015, p. 5).

Hence, qualitative research includes a wide range of topics and disciplines. It evolves and expands continuously. Particularly in social science, qualitative research serves the purpose of exploring, explaining, or describing phenomena. This research field can assign meaning to specific situations and build a deeper understanding of social life with its events and happenings (Leavy, 2020, p. 2). Given that tourism spaces are complex and socially constructed, it is crucial to understand those interrelations. Qualitative studies are particularly suitable for the search for experiences. This is because this design captures the multidimensions and multiphases of them (Jennings, 2010, p. 83). In addition, it is substantial to “focus upon the individual’s role in the active construction and reconstruction of reality through interactions with others and the meanings they attach” (Goodson & Phillimore, 2004, p. 40). Especially the role of a researcher and the accompanying awareness of one's influence on the case study are to be considered. The research becomes more reliable by showing understanding and limiting the personal background and values during such a project

(Goodson & Phillimore, 2004, pp. 40–41). To ensure reliability, this thesis tried to limit the researcher's biases, values and former knowledge during the research process while trying to stay on the objective side.

An approach that runs under qualitative research is the phenomenological tradition. Phenomenology refers to the study of lived experience. This Master's thesis aims to explore the unique meanings of human experiences which is a part of phenomenology (Given, 2012, p. 614). Hence, this study is partly situated in this thesis while staying more on the surface. In the context of phenomenology, it is posited that a fundamental structure exists governing our experience of phenomena within the lifeworld. This can include, among others, feelings or development (Brinkmann, 2020, p. 449). Merriam (2016, p. 28) highlighted that a phenomenological approach is particularly suited for studies including emotional and often intense human experiences, which applies to the researched ones in this study. Different approaches to phenomenology exist, to specify the area of study and the relevant one in this thesis is named interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), which can be described as

a blended approach that aims to provide detailed examination of the lived experience of a phenomenon through participant's personal experiences and personal perception of objects and events. In contrast to other approaches, in IPA the researcher performs an active role in the interpretive process (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 91).

This approach underlines the researcher's active role in interpreting the gathered data. Hence, as Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 111) underlined, the researcher's inclusion is indispensable.

Given the aspects above and the aims of qualitative methods, this project can be positioned inside this research discipline. Considering the research questions, the qualitative approach is best suited for this thesis. The research project aims to explore the themes contributing to event experiences regarding a dog sled event while creating a deepened knowledge about it. The thesis tries to bring meaning and understanding into these social phenomena while concentrating on the young generation of mushers. In this regard, qualitative data supports the procedure. The phenomenological approach especially brings deeper meaning into the research of event experience and is helpful within the interpretation process. Furthermore, the qualitative approach leads to the methods used in this thesis, which will be addressed in more detail in the upcoming subchapter.

4.3 Methodology

This subchapter deals with the interview and observation methods. Hence, the methodology used in this thesis to gather data is presented and discussed. This provides insights into the methods of this work and explains why this process was chosen.

Methodology “refers to the way in which we approach problems and seek answers. In the social sciences, the term applies to how research is conducted” (Taylor et al., 2016, p. 14). One of the main tools that social scientists employ to conduct their knowledge is interviews (Karatsareas, 2022, p. 99). They are a common way of gathering data using the qualitative approach (Shipway et al., 2020, p. 314). Interviews are a powerful tool to grab one another’s experiences (Rabionet, 2014, p. 563), opinions or thoughts (Shipway et al., 2020, p. 323). In their most basic form, interviews consist of a one-to-one conversation with interviewees (Karatsareas, 2022, p. 99), which are particularly useful regarding aspects concerning people’s life or sensitive topics. Hereby, the interviewer can create an atmosphere of trust and confidentiality (Brinkmann, 2020, p. 442), influencing the flow and outcomes of the interview. The person in charge leads and provides the subject with relevant questions concerning the area of interest. Before preparing the interview guide, the interviewer must have excellent knowledge about the topic of concern (Kallio et al., 2016, p. 2959). This knowledge creates a basis for the interview. The questions are usually designed beforehand but can come up spontaneously during the conversation (Naz et al., 2022, p. 43). Based on this, interviews are distinguished in structure, as demonstrated in Figure 3.

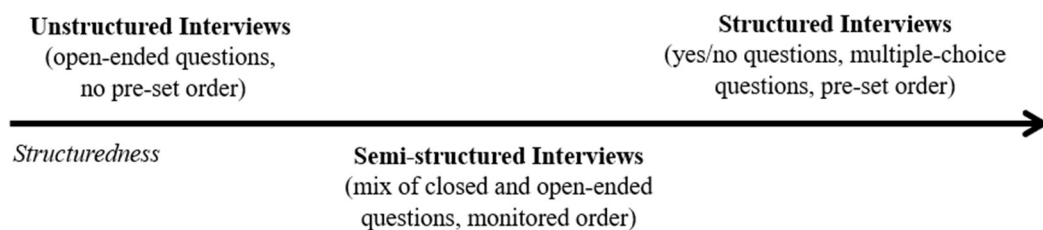


Figure 3: Continuum of Interview structuredness
Source: Own representation based on Karatsareas, 2022, p.100

They are divided into unstructured, semi-structured and structured interviews. While structured interviews usually involve yes or no questions, unstructured interviews include open-ended questions without pre-set order. In this thesis, the relevant form of interview is the semi-structured one. According to Brinkmann (2020, p. 437), this structure is the most used one in terms of social sciences. Semi-structured interviews refer to closed and open-

ended questions (Karatsareas, 2022, p. 100). Most of the questions are pre-formulated and an approximate order established. The actual arrangement of the questions ultimately depends on the conversation's course (Naz et al., 2022, p. 44). The interviewer can steer the conversation toward topics that they consider important (Brinkmann, 2020, p. 437). Hence, the researcher must act flexibly and adapt to the interview flow. In this context, follow-up questions to elaborate on upcoming topics can be helpful. Those can be particularly useful in the context of misunderstanding or misleading the conversation (D. Turner, 2010, p. 758). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews can shift the focus on the topics most relevant to the interviewees. Thereby, one can achieve substance and present important aspects to the participants (Barbour, 2000, pp. 157–158). Considering the amount of information given through conversations, it is wise to use recordings and notes to get a detailed and correct interview account (Naz et al., 2022, p. 51). After the data gathering, the aim is to identify, analyze and address themes that occur as patterns (Karatsareas, 2022, p. 106).

Observations were included as an additional research method, to broaden the horizon of the research. During this procedure, the researcher focuses on a specific setting and people in detail while following a systematic structure to understand and report the happenings (Shipway et al., 2020, p. 314). In accordance with Merriam and Tisdell (2016, pp. 138–139), it is natural for us humans to observe situations. Once a system and a purpose are added, it becomes research-worthy. Research observations have been criticized for being highly subjective since people observe differently and for selective human perception. Hence, it becomes vital to mentally to act confidently and trustworthy during the procedure.

Observations support the understanding of the entirety of the event experience. This method, also called descriptive observation, doesn't only include watching a specific event and focuses on all the different senses, such as listening, feeling, or talking. Researching this way can generate a broader picture (Shipway et al., 2020, pp. 314–316). Additionally, observations carry firsthand encounters instead of secondhand ones like those found in interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 137), which supports the reliability of the research again. Moreover, observers are a kind of outsider who can perceive moments and behaviors during the actual event that might be routine for others (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 139). However, it is essential to note down the observations quickly afterwards. One can capture moments through field notes or other media like photos or videos (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016,

pp. 149–150). So, observations are a great technique to get firsthand information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 139).

Overall, interviews and observations set a great basis for this research project. In particular, with their flexibility, the individual semi-structured interviews can dig deeper into personal experiences. Here, the researcher adapts to the flow of the conversation and the aspects of interest. Especially in this thesis, where the experience is in focus, this research method is a great tool to gather in-depth information and capture opinions while catching a glimpse of the dog musher's world. The observation method is an additional tool to broaden the picture of the event experience. In particular, a researcher can include firsthand observations and moments that might be invisible to others. On this occasion, it is vital to be aware of one's role as a researcher and its influence on the project.

4.4 Data collection

This subchapter describes the use of the mixed methodology within the project to ensure a clear understanding of the approach. Here, the exact procedure of the data collection is presented. Moreover, detailed aspects of the interviews and their analysis are discussed. Further on, the chapter deals with the observation process.

4.4.1 Interviews

During the data collection phase, thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted. They were divided into pre- and post-event. The total number of informants was seven and one only participated in the first interview. The conversations occurred in Alta and online over Microsoft Teams during February and March 2024. The language in use was English. The first interviews were conducted three to two weeks before the race. The post-event interviews were taken within a maximum of ten days after the race to grab some fresh memories, emotions, and experiences. The general length of the conversations varied between twenty to thirty minutes.

The focus group of this research project included mushers from the younger generation. In detail, the dog mushers, mainly female, belonged to the age group of sixteen up to twenty-eight. It was intentional to select mostly female mushers because women start to dominate the sport more. Hence, having the focal point set on this group seemed reasonable. Regarding the experience, for some interviewees, it was the first time participating *Finnmarksløpet*, whereas

others had some more experiences of the race. The selection of the informants was in close connection with own knowledge through my guide job and the Finnmark race website. All the registered mushers were to be found on the official webpage (portal.finnmarkslopet.no). Here, it was clearly visible who was going to attend as well as what age and rank they were. The process after identifying potential informants was characterized by writing messages, mostly over Facebook to ask for an attendance in my research project. The feedback from the mushers was surprisingly positive, and I've met with good support and enthusiasm. Table 1 shows an overview of the interviewed participants with focus on their age, gender, class and rank.

Table 1: An overview of interview attendees, Source: own representation

Name	Age	Gender	Class	Rank	Nationality
Participant 1	22	Female	600	Rookie	Norwegian
Participant 2	16	Female	Junior	Veteran	Norwegian
Participant 3	20	Female	600	Rookie	Norwegian
Participant 4	23	Female	600	Rookie	Norwegian
Participant 5	19	Female	600	Veteran	Norwegian
Participant 6	28	Male	600	Rookie	Danish
Participant 7	27	Female	600	Veteran	Norwegian

The informants' names were intentionally left out to ensure their anonymity. Except for one, all the interviewees have the Norwegian nationality. Some originate in the Alta region and some are from the southern part of Norway. Here, it must be stressed that the one non-Norwegian national interviewee still lives in Norway.

Next to the participant list, the interview guide is essential in the process (D. Turner, 2010, p. 758). The ones in use, attached in Appendix A, B and C, consisted of preformulated questions to guide the conversations and were adapted to the flow of the talk. The second interview guide was adjusted after the first interviews were taken and after the race was done due to its dependence on the pre-event and on-site events. Furthermore, as D. Turner (2010, p. 757) recommended, a pilot test was done beforehand with a friend.

Additionally, all attendees had to sign a data protection and consent form, attached in Appendix D, before taking the interviews. This served the purpose that all parties included knew about their rights and that it followed the ethical and legal rules defined by Sikt, the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (<https://sikt.no/en/data-protection-services>).

The conversations were recorded with a smartphone and notes were taken throughout the talks. Initially, the interviewees were asked again for permission to record to ensure everyone felt comfortable. The interviews stuck to the pre-formulated questions to follow a red line and the interviewees were asked to elaborate more on specific topics that arose during the talk. This ensured a better understanding of the substance. In addition, the second interviews were conducted with a little more caution and some varying questions, as some participants could not finish the race. Here, to grab the spectrum of the different experiences and outcomes, the interview guide for the mushers that finished the race varied from the ones that had to scratch.

Interview analysis

After the process of taking interviews the analysis part moved into focus. A typical goal of a qualitative analysis is to understand experiences (Brinkmann, 2020, p. 449). The thematic analysis method was used in this Master's thesis. The procedure supports the identification and analysis of patterns within the data and reports them (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). This method was chosen because it "reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). As Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 86) underlined, an analysis is a constant process of going back and forth between the entire data set and the produced analysis of the data. The analysis followed the process of getting familiar with the data, searching for themes, defining and naming them and finally reporting them (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87).

A transcription of the oral discourses laid the basis for the data analysis. A transcript can be described as a translation from one narrative mode to another. More in detail, a transformation from the interview recording to an written discourse (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 106). At the beginning of the transcript creation process, it became clear that this is very time-consuming and tiresome. An AI transcriber was used to optimize the transcription and support the procedure (OpenAI, 2024). Here, the audio recordings were uploaded and the transcriber turned them into written form. The given texts were double-checked with the recordings afterward to eliminate errors and correct a few words which is essential to do (Patten, 2016,

p. 157). In general, interview transcripts serve as a solid foundation for research projects. It must be stressed that aspects like tone of voice, laughter and breaks get lost during a transcription. One can say that the conversation gets decontextualized (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, pp. 106–107). By transcribing the interviews freshly in mind, moments and feelings that weren't on the recording tapes were captured. The same applies to essential aspects after the recorder was turned off. Warren et al. (2003, p. 96) underlined that people talk more openly and deeply about topics, especially in the conversations after an interview, due to the cause of more relaxation. This opened up the research to more and deeper information.

After the transcripts, a systematically work through the data was done and a scheme arranged by highlighting repetitive aspects, summarizing them and taking notes. Braun and Clarke (2006, pp. 88–89) called that system coding. The first part of the transcript analysis process concentrated on grouping given information (Tuckett, 2005, p. 77). It helped to better understand the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88). After identifying certain groups and exciting aspects, the process moved one step further toward searching for themes. Here, the aim was to identify patterns. This laid the foundation for bringing meaning into the data and comparing (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89). A particular color coding inside the transcripts was in use and notes were taken on the sides to create an overview. A focus was set on naming the identified themes. With this, the essence of the topics and what they are about were investigated (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). The systematic analysis supported answering the research questions by examining the most essential aspects of the gathered data and bringing meaning to them. Finally, all the data and created transcripts were stored safely and coded on my computer to secure the confidential data. The interviews' recordings were deleted after the transcripts and analysis were made.

4.4.2 Observations

In addition to the interview method, observations were included in the data-gathering process. Here, this methodology was used as an additional aspect of the interviews to better the chances of capturing the wholeness of the event. Observations play a little role in this research compared to the interviews but are still important.

The observations occurred during the Finnmark race in March 2023 and 2024, including the time before the start and moments at the finish line. Additionally, my volunteer work helped to gain more insights about the general mood, the mushers and the race environment. On the

other hand, my presence in the race environment and the conversations with many different actors during the event were part of the observation process. This included interactions with mushers, handlers, volunteers or simply spectators. Through those observations and field conversations, broader view of the event and its surroundings was ensured. Shipway et al. (2020, pp. 315–316) stressed this as an essential aspect. In addition, observations played a unique role because they enabled capturing moments firsthand. This means they were unfiltered and independent from other people's perspectives. Furthermore, it supported the method of descriptive observations, which does not only include watching but also listening, feeling and talking (Shipway et al., 2020, p. 315) to understand the entirety of the *Finnmarksløpet*.

The observations took place at the registration office before the race, at the waiting areas right before the start, at the start- and finish line. The observations became broader by including the different areas and times of the race. Particularly before the race, capturing the attendees' mood and having conversations was interesting, providing insights into the pre-event experience's affective dimension. The observations at the finish and starting line ensured a broad range of information including the different human senses. Watching and listening to the environment helped grab certain dynamics, especially related to the spectators. At the finish line, not only the interviewed mushers were in focus. Here, the role of observation was fortunate to capture certain moments that the mushers might not even be aware of.

4.5 Limitations of the research

It must be stressed that this research project faces limitations, especially under the influence of situational knowledge and my role as a researcher. In this part, the reliability and validity of the research data are discussed as well as further limitations of the project.

Mainly, qualitative research deals with different limitations because it's based on assumptions about reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 237) and biases of the researcher (Jones & Donmoyer, 2021, p. 890). Qualitative research must present trustworthiness to become relevant and make a difference inside the research spectra (Bochner, 2018, p. 366). The reliability of the research focuses on the methods used and their application while validity refers to the accuracy of the data (Rose & Johnson, 2020, p. 435). Grass (2024, p. 52) recommends overcoming such challenges with a certain degree of flexibility, while Merriam

and Tisdell (2016, p. 237) focus more on using ethical manner. In accordance with Tracy (2013, p. 230), a relevant qualitative study needs to include a worthy topic, transparency, make a significant contribution and stay within ethical correctness. This Master's thesis aims to fulfill those aspects with a clear conscience. By looking at specific research gaps, I tried to end up on a worthy topic that aims to create new knowledge inside those gaps. The interviews and observations stuck to the ethical frame as reasonably as possible. Here, it helped orientate the formulated rules and regulations of the qualitative research procedure. When it comes to the biases of the researcher, who usually is one of the leading research instruments, it gets harder to eliminate the limitations of the project. Jones and Donmoyer (2021, p. 891) underlined that in most cases a researcher goes through the data analysis alone. Hence, no intersubjective agreement can be ensured. Usually, no reliable and validated instrument exists that works against the leverage of personal biases. Thus, including more than one person in the data analysis process can be helpful. In the case of a Master's thesis, this point is hard to implement, but in other research projects, it might be possible.

During the interview process, the data outcome can be influenced by preformulated questions and lead the interviewees in a certain direction, defined by the researcher (Jones & Donmoyer, 2021, p. 897). To limit this impact in the research, questions were included that did not focus on one specific area but gave the interviewee the freedom to indulge in the topic. In addition, the conducted interviews stuck to a certain level of flexibility, which was adjusted to the interviewee's flow. Furthermore, one could suspect that the language influenced the interview outcome. According to Jones and Donmoyer (2021, p. 892), the chosen language of the interview can profoundly impact the research. All the talks were in English, and all interviewees' mother tongues were Norwegian or Danish. Some interviewees had issues with the English language, which might have harmed the conversation. At the same time, most of the attendees interacted confidently during the interviews and we overcame language difficulties. Still, in future research, the Norwegian language could be used to ease the flow of the conversations.

In addition, the interviewees' age, personality and ethnographic background can change the outcome of the data. In particular, the semi-structure of the interviews might lead to uneven data. Some experience descriptions can be more detailed, while others may be sparse (Jones & Donmoyer, 2021, p. 901). In this research, some interviews were more fruitful than others

concerning the detailed and reflected account of the interviewees. It was the most challenging to talk to the youngest participants. As an interviewer, a better preparation and youth-friendly adjustments for the questions should have been done. This means that some questions might have been too complex, or poorly formulated, which can lead to a limitation of the research and should be adjusted in the future. Moreover, the interview timing limitations need to be considered. So, the period during which the interviews were taken. The post-event interviews were conducted shortly after the race. The advantage of this procedure is that the experience with its memories and emotions was still freshly in the participants' minds. On the other hand, some longer reflection time on the event could contribute more positively. Hence, reflections and more time to reflect on the event might result in a clearer picture and different answers. Due to the time limitation of this Master's thesis, this wasn't impossible.

Furthermore, observations are limited by personal aspects, such as one's focus, perception, or biases. Brinkmann (2020, p. 439) highlighted that a researcher must still interpret people's experiences as described in an interview. Hence, it is hard or almost impossible to present or reconstruct the actual experience of the mushers. This should be taken into account. Still, observations can be fruitful for the research, particularly connected to the outsider role of the researcher, as it was the case in this thesis. Moreover, a clear differentiation of firsthand observations and information given by the interviewees is beneficial in that context.

Still, the chosen methods and approaches seem appropriate for this research project. The qualitative approach made it possible to gain fruitful experiences. In particular, the semi-structured interviews and observations helped to get better insights. I, as a researcher, tried to keep the possible limitations small and stuck to the given rules. In future research, the talks should be done in Norwegian and a better timing for the interview included.

4.6 Summary of the methods

The forth chapter of this Master's thesis presented relevant information regarding the methodology and procedure of this research project. Chapter 4.1 positioned this thesis inside the epistemological and constructivism paradigm. Here, the aim is to understand social patterns and bring meaning to them while including the multi-views perspective. In addition, the research design of this project was described in Chapter 4.2. The qualitative approach was the focal point, focusing on in-depth investigations. The core of qualitative research is the

people. Here, the aim is to bring meaning into their behavior and thinking. Therefore, it is a good fit for the research on the event experience of young mushers. A specific term for this type of research was described: phenomenology. Moreover, the data gathering methods were thematized in Chapter 4.3. Here, interviews and observations were in focus. In particular, the semi-structured interviews were highlighted as being the ones in use. Chapter 4.4 described the exact procedure of the data collection and analysis. Among others, the precise methods used to analyze the data were discussed. The last chapter dealt with the limitations of the research process. Here, aspects like validity, the role of the researcher and language were thematized. Despite the limitations, the chosen methods fit this Master' thesis.

5 Results and Findings

This part deals with the project's results and findings based on the data collection and analysis. This chapter is the central part of this Master's thesis, which presents the gathered data. The information is contextualized with the academic literature and research questions. The structure of this chapter is again orientated on the model of Benckendorff and Pearce (2020, p. 230). It is, therefore, divided into the pre-event, on-site event, and post-event experiences. These are marked by the identified main themes and further explored in those main topic subchapters. The results and findings deal with the impact of the race, the personal importance of the event, the motivations, values, impacts, etc. connected to the experiences of the young dog mushers. Some subchapters intentionally start on the next page to bring a clearer separation within the long results and findings part. The direct quotations of the young mushers are in *italic* font, to set them apart from the rest of the text and to make them clearer.

The data analysis identified three main patterns concerning the event experience of young dog mushers attending *Finnmarksløpet*: the care for nature, the dogs, and the people. Those are the three overarching topics that leads this part of this project. In addition, the interviewees described the general event as effective for their experience. This applies particularly to the pre-event and on-site event experience.

5.1 The pre-event experiences

In the pre-event experience part, aspects like motivation, personality, and values are in the focal point, orientated on Benckendorff and Pearce's (2020, p. 230) model, illustrated in Figure 1. These points are accentuated with concrete examples. The pre-event experiences include several essential parts and start with describing the importance of the Finnmark race as an event. Afterward, the main themes of nature, people, and dogs are discussed in more detail and their impact on the pre-event is presented.

5.1.1 The importance of Finnmarksløpet as an event

The interviews with the young dog mushers underpinned the *Finnmarksløpet's* importance as an event. The data clearly emphasized its role and with this, supports the academic literature. The meaning of the Finnmark race was identified through the interviews and connected to being a motivational factor for the young generation to partake in the event. Therefore, it is highly influential for the pre-event experience.

Many of the interviewees described *Finnmarksløpet* as the ambition of the season. As aforementioned, this event is Europe's longest dog mushing race (Finnmarksløpet AS, 2024a). The interviewees underlined how big of an event the Finnmark race is, especially concerning the dog mushing environment. The race brings attention to the dog sport, creates awareness, and functions as a future recruitment tool, said Participant 1. Since dog mushing is not highly respected, many young mushers care about people understanding and respecting the sport more.

In connection with that, the informants accentuated the awareness creation for the destination of Finnmark. The mushers highlighted, that the race and its position bring attention to Northern Norway's region. According to Getz (2012b, p. 50) and Prebensen (2010, p. 38) , this is a natural phenomenon inside the event field. Many informants underlined that creating awareness for the region and its unique environment is important to minimize the existing lack of knowledge about the North. The mushers who originated in the North notably reported the importance of this aspect. Participant 7 accentuated this aspect by saying: *“There are so many people who haven't been more north than Trondheim. But now people in the South know that we have a place and see what we can offer”*.

Secondly, the interviewees emphasized the power of togetherness regarding their experiences and the specific energy generated by the event. In particular, sports events are known for this (Chalip, 2006, p. 110). For example, Participant 4 told about her experiences during the race when she lived in Tana and said: *“It felt like the whole town came together to celebrate. And a lot of people were helping out and coming to see”*. This statement underpinned the togetherness of the event. Participant 6 related to a similar acquaintance in Alta and said:

It's kind of a dead city [Alta] but last year I've never experienced so much energy and vibrations in the air, than it was here at the starting line. That was crazy ... and I also think this is why many people do it.

This special energy is also a phenomenon that Chalip (2006, p. 110) underlined in connection with sports events before. Here, the event catalyzes a so-called multi-sensory activity, including many dynamics and emotions, as earlier emphasized by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982, p. 136). This is an aspect that plays into the event experience for the young mushers and motivates them to participate.

In the further context of the motivational aspects of the pre-event experience, *Finnmarksløpet* was described as “*the ultimate test for long-distance mushers in Norway*” by Participant 1. Here, mushers can test their abilities inside a competitive format. Participant 1 said, “*this is where you’ll go when you really want to prove yourself*”. Kemp (1999, p. 90) described many mushers as very competitive. The gathered data has proven the opposite among the young participants. Many do not compete at this event and competition rarely serves as a motivational factor. The dog mushers said it is all about the trip itself and making it to the finish line. This is the biggest goal. Except for one of the interviewees, it didn’t matter which place they get as long as they finish the race with happy dogs. Hence, none of the mushers went into the race with high expectations regarding this aspect. Usually, the pre-event experience is characterized by certain expectations. Whereby every interviewee set their individual goal before *Finnmarksløpet 2024* and was aware of the events’ unpredictability. Most of the expectations were connected to spending quality time with the dogs in nature, having a great time and fun as well as meeting like-minded people. But most young mushers have not given much thought to certain expectations in advance and just let it happen. Participant 7 underlined this point and said, “*I don't have any expectations. I just want to cross the finish line. That and having a good time with my dogs is most important for me*”. Hence, the motto here was ‘Take it as it comes’. These perspectives and approaches again underscored the young dog mushers' shared values, motivation, and similar personality traits.

In the bigger picture, participation in this sports event is a dream for many inside the dog mushing community. Participant 2 emphasized, “*It’s always been about Finnmarksløpet since I was born*”. The event is something to work towards, said the interviewees. The training for such a race is a long and arduous process. As it turned out, many mushers train over 3000 kilometers with their dogs before the event. Many hours, a lot of money as well as many emotions are put into the preparation for such a race, as Participant 4 emphasized by saying, “*I had to sacrifice my social life during the whole season and this sport is really expensive. I would not be able to have my own dogs while being a student*”. Participant 7 described the sport as “*a very time-consuming hobby*”. This supports Gillespie et al.'s (2002, p. 287) assertion that the sport is time-consuming and costly. Additionally, a lot of physical and mental preparation must be done by the attendees beforehand. Participant 4 accentuated, that the race is a small part of the season. She said, “*the biggest task is all the training I've done*”. Due to its significant meaning, many participants highlighted that this aspect should

be more in focus and appreciated from the outside. The race results are usually commented on but the actual performance, as many mushers described it, fades into the background. The overall topic becomes even more impressive if the excessive time and money-consuming process, as well as the age of the participants, get put into context. Among others, the need for commitment, a deep personal connection to the sport, and motivation are connected to this hard work. This is illustrated once again by Participant 5's statement. She referred to keeping the big goal in mind and emphasized that,

During the season in the autumn, you lose your motivation. You're sitting on the ATV and it's raining, and you have mud in all your face and you're like, oh my God, why am I doing this? But then you're thinking, oh my God, in not such a long time, I'm going to be on Finnmarksvidda [the Finnmark plateau] and it's going to be Northern Lights and so nice.

Here, the critical role of the race as a motivational aspect, as something to work towards, gets stressed. Furthermore, Participant 7 stated the addictive and repetitive factor of the race by saying, “*Crossing the finish line with the music and with the people, that’s it. If you have done that once, that’s motivation*”. Hither, the races’ reputation, as highlighted by Baldwin and Norris (1999, pp. 7–8) before, gets intensified.

Apart from those aspects, some of the young participants still struggle with motivation and the focus on the preparation of the race. Participant 2 told about her strain of combining her teenage life with her passion for dog mushing. According to Roberts (2016b, p. 21), this phenomenon is typical in youth sports. However, looking at the list of participants over the years, it is evident that this event usually is nothing to attend just once. A visible pattern in this young generation of dog mushers is that many first participated in the Junior race and later attended the longer classes. In this context, a particular loyalty towards the race can be identified, which benefits the event and region with a steady number of visitors. Hence, the event serves as a repetition purpose for the mushers while functioning as a motivational factor. This theme was underpinned by Knudsen (2019, p. 36) before. Thus, the race is a long-term motivation that continues for many years. This means that dog sledding is slightly different from typical sports. It counteracts the sports dropouts in a certain way. One can assume that the enormous amount of time, effort, and passion involved plays a part in the continuity of young people's involvement in the sport.

Overall, the data supports much of the knowledge about events from the theoretical framework. The power of the Finnmark race was emphasized and highlighted with concrete examples. Gathering people and a specific energy represents essential aspects of the young musher's experience. On a personal level, the event fulfills a huge motivational purpose for the young dog mushers. For many *Finnmarksløpet* has been a long dream and functions as a goal to work towards to. Care for the sport and degree of involvement were other values and personality traits identified in this section. All those points are intertwined with the pre-event experience of the mushers.

5.1.2 The nature

The race's importance and role can be linked to various patterns. One of the most influential aspects of dog mushers' participation in *Finnmarksløpet* is the nature aspect.

The research revealed that nature is an integral part of many young mushers in their daily lives. Some did an outdoor study, went to an outdoor and mushing folk high school, or grew up surrounded by nature. All the mushers have a deeper connection with nature and value it greatly. Participant 1 said, "*I've always loved the nature. Here, I feel really at home*". According to Bouchet et al. (2004, p. 131), this specific role of nature is a typical inside outdoor sports.

In context of dog mushing, the wilderness character of the Finnmark nature plays a significant role. The young participants highly value its beauty, uniqueness and extreme conditions. The natural environment was described as a comfortable place and a home and as a motivation to return to the destination and the race. The remarkable mountains, changing landscapes and icy weather were mentioned as a challenging but, at the same time overly exciting aspect. Bull and Weed (2012, p. 57) emphasized the environment and landscape as an essential factor for sports events, which is strengthened here.

This year's race, with 168 kilometers in the first lap, presented some mushers with new challenges. They knew beforehand that they wouldn't get the chance to go anywhere inside or receive help from their handler team. This means the rest periods had to be done in the nature in whatever circumstances and on their own. Still, many of the mushers connected those challenges to enjoyment and motivation, which can again be connected to their love for nature.

Participant 6 underpinned his appreciation of nature by saying:

It's nice to be in touch with nature and to follow the flow of nature, because it's always changing and then you need to adapt. I think that is where it gets very difficult, because it's never gonna be as how you trained. It will be different every day. It's good to feel that not all is in my power. The nature, she has the real power. I think that's nice.

Here, Kemp's (1999, p. 87) aspect of appreciating nature is deepened. The unique environment allowed the mushers to be in the moment, leave other thoughts behind and to concentrate 100 percent on what they were doing. Li and Petrick (2005, pp. 242–243) highlighted nature before as a catalyst to escape the daily grind. The young mushers connected the feeling of freedom to nature, which Getz and Page (2016a, p. 244) described as a crucial part for a thriving leisure experience. Escapism served also as a motivation during the pre-event phase.

Moreover, the natural environment supports personal development. All interviewees underlined that dogsledding is connected to an eternal process of learning, which excites them. This process stands among others in context with being in the nature and out on the trail mostly alone. The young participants can unfold and nature gives them room for development. The learning outcome is one of the common motivational aspects of attending such an extreme sport (Farrell et al., 2015, p. 65; Waaler & Thomassen, 2019, p. 57), which was proven again in this context. The younger generation's values, motivational patterns and similar personality traits were underscored here. Furthermore, the mushers showed determination, an enjoyment of challenges, a desire for development and a deep connection to nature.

5.1.3 The people

In addition to the natural environment, the people inside the event are vital and influential for the pre-event experience. As stressed earlier, many people gather during the race in the Finnmark region. These are, among others, spectators and locals or participants and their handler teams. In accordance with Grohs et al. (2020, p. 69) and Woratschek et al. (2014, p. 8), sports events are an intertwined network of several actors who are all influential for the overall event experience. This statement was underlined through the interviews and my

observations. The opportunity to be together motivated the informants and was highly valued, as shown in the following.

As underlined by the interviewees, dog mushing is usually a very lonely sport. *Finnmarksløpet* aims to gather different dog mushers from all over Europe. The event lays the perfect platform to be surrounded by other like-minded people, which Miller (2012, p. 110) emphasized as a crucial aspect. The race was described by Participant 4 as “*the ultimate way to get to know people*”. Many people get to know each other when meeting at a race and stay in contact afterward. This is a perfect opportunity to become part of this close-knit community as accentuated by Participant 1. She said, “*the races make the community*”. Hence, a specific subculture is created through the event, as earlier described by Gillespie et al. (2002, pp. 287–288) concerning sports events. Furthermore, the feeling of *communitas*, as described by Chalip (2006, pp. 110–111) and Miller (2012, p. 110) is strengthened. Many of the attendees talked about how helpful and important it is to be surrounded by people who work towards the same goal, share the same interests and values. This underlines again some of the most important factors inside the pre-event experience as highlighted by Benckendorff and Pearce (2020, p. 230).

Additionally, many attendees highly valued this adventure with their handler team. Some of the teams comprised close friends, family, or partners. Here, it became clear that such a team usually consists of trusted people. Participant 5 emphasized that if it weren't for the support of her handlers, she wouldn't participate in the race. The young mushers accentuated the commitment and enthusiasm of their team as valuable. Torheim (2012, pp. 46–47) has already highlighted the vital role of handlers and is supported in this context. Moreover, the young mushers referred to the spectators as a motivational aspect. Many mentioned the unique energy which gets created by the audience and how they were looking forward to experiencing this again.

Overall, the importance of the different actors inside the Finnmark race was underpinned through the findings. The race's spectators can set the setting and mood for the race. Furthermore, the dog mushers play a crucial role in motivating them to attend such an extreme event. Being surrounded by like-minded people, being part of the community and showing support along the way are valuable aspects for the young attendees. Lastly, the

handlers play an essential role in the musher experience. They function, among others, as an anchor and motivation for the young mushers.

5.1.4 The dogs

Finally, the topic that has emerged as the most important for the young participants in the pre-event experience of the Finnmark race is presented. The dogs lay the foundation for the whole event and serve as a bonding aspect, as formerly mentioned by Farrell et al. (2015, p. 62) and Kemp (1999, p. 86). The interviewees reported that it is all about the dogs. Many described them as real athletes, and Participant 7 even referred to them as part of her family, which supports Carr (2015, p. 28) and Kuhl (2011, p. 33). Hence, the importance of dogs in the mushers daily lives was emphasized through the interviews. Most young mushers grew up having dogs in their family and some now own huskies themselves. Their way into the dog mushing sport developed naturally for all the young attendees. This is a typical phenomenon in this sport, as per Baldwin and Norris (1999, pp. 7–8). The interviews revealed that in most cases, this entry was linked to working in a dog kennel and to dog mushing enthusiasts from the social environment, like family, neighbors, or friends. According to Roberts (2016b, p. 19), this is a widespread pattern for the start of young people attending sports.

Furthermore, the new generation's genuine interest in dogs and their potential was identified. Participant 1 stressed the importance of the development process for her and the dogs. She said: *“I’m excited to test myself and the dogs. I’m looking forward to see everything that we’ve worked on”*. In addition, the interviewees emphasized that it is about teamwork between them and the dogs. It is an interplay, where both parties are dependent on each other. The dogs become cooperating partners, as underscored by Participant 7 and Løken and Lyngstad (2019, p. 113). The teams work steadily together for many months. During this time, the musher gets to know the dogs better, which Kuhl (2011, p. 26) highlighted as essential for a working interrelation. A better knowledge of the dogs is accompanied by a safer feeling for the mushers, as accentuated by Participant 2. The trust in the dogs (Kuhl, 2011, p. 30), knowing them and what they’re capable of, took away some of the insecurities of the mushers during the pre-event phase. Participant 6 emphasized that he knows the dogs want and will give their best for him.

In addition, Participant 1 reported the capability of her dogs and how this influenced her by saying:

I am excited for the weather and a bit nervous. I am not too nervous about wind because I have a couple of dogs that are really good at finding the trail and walking in the wind. So, I think it's really fun to go mushing in that.

All those aspects influenced the preparation for the race, the motivation and the pre-event experience.

Concerning the team's development, Participants 4 and 6 emphasized that dogs are individuals who need to be treated as that. Kuhl (2011, p. 26) underpinned this aspect as well. Hence, it is an exceedingly long process to get good enough to take part in a race and to be able to take good care of the dogs. Many mushers conveyed this point. This again confirms Hultman's (2015, p. 54) statement that dog mushers are essential as leaders and trainers. Many of the interviewees emphasized this aspect and described it as a motivation. The musher is the one to decide when to take breaks, feed the dogs, take care of them, and train them while keeping them motivated. They set the mood and energy level of the team and told the interviewees. The dogs will quickly realize this and adapt if a musher gets tired or demotivated. This can become a big challenge, especially during preparation or after some time out on the track. Participant 6, particularly, realized this during the race. Moreover, there is no general right way of doing dog mushing, said Participants 4 and 7. Many of the young attendees described finding their way of doing things as a pleasure and motivation to attend. This phenomenon was described by Green et al. (2015, p. 541) in connection with youth sports before. Once again, the dogs play an important part in this. They can catalyze energy and motivation, especially in the pre-event experience, as Baldwin and Norris (1999, p. 10) mentioned. Here, one can see the mutual influence of the two. Participant 1 underlined this point by saying, *“Every time that I feel sad or depressed and I go out with the dogs, I become just happy”*. Furthermore, many mushers accentuated that being alone with the dogs motivates them to partake in the Finnmark race. An evident passion and love for the dogs are seen here and they also function as motivation. The shared values about their relationship with the dogs were illustrated here.

Moreover, the young generation underlined the health and well-being of the dogs as priority number one and a factor they put high value on. This aspect runs through the entire

experience. The young mushers give their all to ensure the dogs are having an enjoyable time and to bring the best out of them. All interviewees highlighted that the race was good if they finished with happy and healthy dogs. This aspect drives their motivation before the event immensely. Additionally, the dogs serve as a learning development tool. Three of the mushers emphasized how much there is to learn from the dogs, which Kuhl (2011, pp. 32–33) also accentuated. Firstly, they presented that dogs are unfiltered and will always show their feelings. Secondly, they stay in the moment, focus on one thing and give their best. Especially Participants 4 and 6 looked at this behavior in the dogs and integrated it during the race and their daily life. The continuous development process is an additional motivational aspect during the pre-event experience.

All those aspects and the role that the dogs play underpin again the importance of their health. An apparent influence of dogs on young people's personalities and values can be identified in this chapter. The mushers care so much for them, share a passion, and give their all to the dogs that it becomes natural to care for their well-being. Many described the dogs as part of their family, someone they need to care for and have a lot of love for. It became clear that the event experience strongly depends on the dogs and their well-being. The young mushers can intensify their trip and develop their self-worth through the dogs. Those non-humans are a source of energy, safety and development, pushing motivation.

5.1.5 Pre-event experience summary

Considering everything, it becomes clear that many of the described situations deepen the information given in the theoretical framework regarding the event experience. Specific patterns and aspects were presented with examples and expanded regarding their meaning. The first part of the research made it clear that, in particular, the event itself and themes of nature, people, and dogs are essential for the pre-event experience of the young dog musher generation. In Chapter 5.1.1, the interviews showed clearly what dynamics the leisure event *Finnmarksløpet* carries and the importance of the destination. But primarily, the races' meaning for the dog mushing community was put into focus. Aspects that drive the young generation to be part of this community and extreme events were presented. Furthermore, it became clear that the Finnmark race can be described as a social event. It brings people together and creates excitement for people outside the mushing society. *Finnmarksløpet* lays the foundation to enter the dog sled community, develop knowledge, and strengthen the

relation with other like-minded people while being an arena for self-development and support. With all its characteristics, the event represents a huge motivational factor for the dog mushing community; more precisely, the event is a goal to work towards. The young people appreciate that they can learn new skills during such a competition, to be active and social with people with the same interests and values. Those aspects explain why young people attend such an extreme sport and partly define their personality and values. Another aspect that defined the pre-event experience is the connection with dogs. Building a relationship with them, developing and enjoying the time together, and taking care of them, as well as the dog's influence on the mushers, clearly dominate the experience. I believe the focus on the dog's health and the proper treatment aspects stand out in this project and have not been emphasized in previous studies. For the young generation, this is crucial to a great and memorable event experience in long-distance mushing. The upcoming chapter underlines once more how this aspect can influence the overall experience.

5.2 The on-site experiences

The second part of the results and findings focuses on the on-site experience of the young dog mushers. Here, aspects like emotions, relationships, activities and involvement orientated again on Benckendorff and Pearce's (2020, p. 230) model about the event experience are underpinned. The on-site experience is looked at from the conative (activities), cognitive (memory, awareness, understanding etc.) and affective (emotions and feelings) dimensions referring to the conceptualization of Getz and Page (2016a, p. 340). Many aspects and expectations from the pre-event experience are addressed again and further looked at in this part. This subchapter's arrangement is based on the previous one to maintain structure. Hence, the influence of the event itself and its organization on the experience is presented first. This is followed by the themes of nature, people, and dogs.

First, it must be mentioned that *Finnmarksløpet* 2024 took place under challenging weather conditions. As mentioned earlier, coldness is one of the most common challenges for dog mushers in this sport (Calogiuri & Weydahl, 2017, p. 1), but the opposite was the case this year. The warm weather with plus degrees was a major challenge, which every interviewee emphasized. Instead of dealing with minus thirty degrees Celsius, this year, the plus five degrees put every attendee and their team to the test. So, not all of the interviewed mushers finished the race. Therefore, the interviewees' experiences varied and were highly influenced by the completion status of the race.

5.2.1 The importance of the Finnmark race as an event

Observations posed *Finnmarksløpet* as a well-organized event that focuses on the security of the attendees and a smooth process. During this year's competition, this feature became even more important due to the challenging temperatures. The track had to be adjusted and the care taking of the trail was put into focus. Many young mushers reported their amazement for the organization and how it influenced their experience.

Every interviewee talked about how safe they felt during the race. The event management with its security measures made it possible that the mushers didn't have to worry about their safety. This impacted the experience positively. The attendees reported that being out and training alone is much more dangerous than being at the race. Participants 2 and 4 emphasized that it was always someone within reach to help if anything went wrong and the GPS tracker attached to the sled served as an additional safety aspect. The same applied to the road

crossings along the trail. Participant 6 highlighted how fascinated he was and said, “*When I came in towards the finish line, there was a road crossing. I thought maybe I just stop and take a look. But there were people early in the morning. Wow! They were always here*”.

Next to the trail organization, the veterinarians who supported the mushers with help and advice were safety anchors. This aspect was beneficial and essential, especially for the rookies and the ones with little experience. All this assured a greater focus for the mushers on the dogsledding itself. In addition, the role of the commentators at the finish line and the run-in music were emphasized by the mushers who finished the race. Getting this support from outside and being praised like that rounded up their on-site event experience. Participant 4 has particularly emphasized how emotional she gets when she hears the song accompanying them during their last meters toward the finish line. This example reveals the event experience's affective dimension (Getz & Page, 2016a, p. 340). Moreover, equality of gender and age has been mentioned in the academic literature before (Kemp, 1999, p. 88). Observations and talks showed that the race organization ensured this aspect, which made the on-site experience for the young generation fairer and more enjoyable. The gender gap wasn't visible during the event and all ages had equal chances to finish the race. This is an aspect that Turner (1974, pp. 233–234) described as a typical one for sports events.

When looking at the affective dimensions (Getz & Page, 2016a, p. 340) of the on-site experience, it becomes clear that the event was an emotional rollercoaster. The young mushers reported how deeply connected their emotions and feelings were to the race. This applied to both positive and negative ones. In the context of her disappointment at not completing the race, Participant 7 said, “*I think when you have finished it once, then you know how nice it feels. It's the best feeling in the world*”. Here, the affective power of *Finnmarksløpet* is highlighted. However, even the attendees who finished the race had to deal with negative feelings and emotions during the race. Doubts, disappointments and excessive demands have put the mushers to test. In particular, the participants who could not finish the race had to battle self-doubts and blamed themselves. On the other hand, small achievements, external impacts and the activities influenced the affective dimension for the young attendees positively.

Furthermore, the circumstances of race and mental state affected the motivation during the event. Some of the participants struggled more and some less with their motivation. Several mushers highlighted that keeping their big goal of the race in mind kept them going. Participant 7 said, *“All the motivation has been to cross the finish line. And I was like, that's my goal. We're doing this”*. Additionally, all the effort and training in advance of the race motivated the attendees to continue. One of the points that stood out the most during the interviews, for me as a interviewer, was the young attendee's mental attitude. Staying positive and hopeful and not getting pulled down by the circumstances of the race seemed crucial to maintaining the motivation to continue and finish the race.

The physical challenges for the attendees during the race were presented before by Calogiuri and Weydahl (2017) and Calogiuri et al. (2011). Among the young dog mushers in focus, their physical challenge was not extremely present during this year's race. Many reported that they weren't highly physically exhausted and could deal quite well with the loss of sleep. Only one of the mushers talked about his health issues concerning his back and some sickness. Still, all attendees emphasized that the race was exhausting but not as bad as they had assumed beforehand.

Overall, the Finnmark race as an event impacts the on-site experience. Remarkably, the organization ensures safety and allows the mushers to focus on their primary job. Also, the little details, such as the commentator and the music, influence the on-site event experience of the young participants. Notably, the emotions and feelings of the mushers were deeply connected to the event, which turned the race into an emotional rollercoaster. This year's rough conditions influenced the mushers' emotional and physical conditions and their motivation to continue the race. Here, to stay positive, keep your own goal in mind, and the consideration of all the former work were the key elements to that challenge.

5.2.2 The nature

As aforementioned, nature was the most challenging aspect for all the attendees this year. The adverse trail conditions and the warmth put the mushers and their dogs to the test. Many mushers had to deal with injuries, overheating and in general, health issues among the non-humans. The trails were full of water and the snow was slushy. This challenged not only the dogs but the mushers. Additionally, the dogs could not work properly due to the warmth. As Participant 5 emphasized, the natural environment influenced the dogs' physical and mental

capacities. This naturally curbed the experience in nature and even led many to stop the race. Due to the warm weather, many more breaks had to be included to ensure good hydration for the dogs and prevent overheating. Many mushers accentuated that it was a lot more challenging to keep the good health of the dogs and to adjust the speed to the conditions. Participants 4 and 6 described the stopping and handing out water as decisive factors in completing the race. Some more experienced mushers even described this year's race as the most challenging and hardest ever.

Still, many interviewees highlighted nature as an enjoyment factor. Firstly, the natural challenges were also exciting for many mushers, as accentuated in the first part of the findings. Secondly, the race was still about being outdoors with the dogs even when the weather conditions weren't in the musher's favor. Participant 4 said, *"I felt more relaxed when I was alone on the track with the dogs than at checkpoints. I actually enjoyed the rest on the trail more"*. At the checkpoints, there were so many people and influential aspects around. In nature, the focus was just on the dogs and oneself reported Participant 4. The informants described it as a much more intimate experience for the musher and the dogs. This represents the point of escapism from the daily grind, which is known to be a common one related to outdoor sports (Cohen, 2010, p. 27; Kemp, 1999, p. 87). For Participant 7, it was the first time to rest alone out in the wilderness with her dogs. She said, *"I think it was very fun to rest with the dogs because I have never done that before"*. Hence, the excitement about new tasks is shown here.

In addition, the unique moments of co-working with the dogs without any judgments from the outside were underlined. Being alone in nature with their furry friends made the young mushers feel like a team. Here, the influence of nature and its power of connection is visible. Lastly, the natural environment was emphasized as an exciting part of the event experience. Even some of the race's favorite moments connected with the landscape. Participant 1 reported her fascination for her stay on the mountains and how stunned she was by nature and said, *"When we came up on the mountain plateau, it was really, really gorgeous and then we rested for four hours, just on the trail"*. Participant 4 even described it as a weird feeling to return to civilization after being outdoors for so long. So, despite the poor weather conditions, the mushers' love and fascination with nature could not be removed.

It still represented a highly influential part of the on-site experience, as Bouchet et al. (2004, p. 131) and Perić et al. (2018, p. 759) outlined before.

Overall, the importance of nature for the on-site race experience was emphasized. Its strong influence on the outcome of the race was especially shown. The warm conditions profoundly impacted many aspects, especially the trail and the dogs. This, in return, affected the broad experience. On the other hand, being in nature with the dogs and the closeness to each other that it brings with it, was one of the most positive influential points for the on-site experience. Nevertheless, the young mushers are outdoor people. Being out in nature is vital to them and they take a lot from it. Despite the difficult weather conditions, their fascination with nature could not be lost.

5.2.3 The people

The aspect of people turned out to be highly influential to the on-site event experience of the young dog mushers. The gathering of people and the support of all parties were essential, especially this year. Many mushers have once again confirmed that cohesion and support are a big part of the race. Also, the data emphasized Matheson's (2005, p. 159) statement about the fruitful impact on the experience of being social.

All interviewees talked about the togetherness inside the community during the event. The encounters with other like-minded people, old and new friends and other persons included inside the event environment played an essential role in the on-site experience. Participants 1 and 4 said that many mushers are easily recognizable around the city as soon as the Finnmark race is around the corner. Similar equipment and clothing inside the community were emphasized. Observations confirmed this aspect. Hence, a sense of identity got created. This is a typical pattern for a sports event, as McCarville (2007, p. 168) stressed before and influences the feeling of belonging.

Several parties of the race can impact the on-site experience. Firstly, the importance of the spectators is highlighted. The cheering people standing along the start or finish line, the trail and at the checkpoints played a vital role. Seeing and feeling their support and excitement pushed the young attendees. Two mushers shared their experiences with the spectators and how much it meant to them. The first one referred to the start of *Finnmarksløpet* 2023. Participant 7 said, "*That was special for me. My kindergarten was there. So, everyone was*

standing along the start and I was like, oh my God, my kids. It was my 18 kids from work and that was really fun". Here, the mental engagement of the event experience is clearly shown. Participant 5's second experience related to an encounter in the finish area.

There was this American lady coming up to me and congratulated me. I was like wow; this is so cool. They just had a vacation and were going to Alta and then Finnmarksløpet happened. They were so amazed by everything going on.

Here, the sympathy of the spectators is visible. Through those two stories, the importance of the spectators gets clearer. My observations showed that even people that usually aren't interested in dog mushing gathered during the event and shared their excitement with the world and the mushers. This resulted in an incredibly positive feeling and memory for the participants. Here, the valuable outcomes of the interaction between the different actors became clear, as Vargo and Lusch (2004, p. 12) underlined before.

Secondly, the teams around play an essential role. They include, among others, the handler and people in trust. As aforementioned the mushers bear a great responsibility for themselves and the dogs. This can be very demanding occasionally. Those around come into play here. In particular regarding advice, many interviewees reached out to their handler team or other trusted people. For example, Participant 6 said, "*When I got insecure, I called Erik [dad of his boss], mostly when it was about dogs and injuries and where the limit is because he's very good at that*". Other mushers stayed in close contact with their handlers to ask for advice during the more challenging parts of the race. Participant 4 reported a moment where she talked to a person working at a checkpoint, a former, well-experienced dog musher who supported her in her doing and advised her with the dogs. She told how this talk changed flow of the race further. Moreover, the backup and mental support of the handler team was thematized. Participant 6 said, "*They [his handlers] didn't know much about running the dogs. So, they were just backing me up in my thoughts. And this was very good and helpful*". Hence, the critical role of the handler team, as outlined by Torheim (2012, pp. 46–47), gets supported. Through another case, it became clear that the people around don't need to relate to oneself to help or to have an impact. Informant 1 talked about an encounter with another handler: "*He was an Estonian handler for another person. And he gave me apple cider whiskey and he was just really nice and comforting and said all the right things*". Here, the power of mental support from others gets highlighted again.

The mushers were occupied with the race; they were exhausted, influencing their thinking capacity. Sharing knowledge and experiences is a crucial element to better the on-site event experience and the race's outcome, told Participant 7. This was highlighted by Kemp (1999, p. 90) before. In particular, the good feeling of affirmation was emphasized. Participants 2 and 7 told how good it felt to hear that they did a respectable job or gave their best.

In addition, the support among the mushers was mentioned. Many of the young participants put high value on the togetherness inside the community. They either talked along the trail, at the checkpoints, or even called each other to ask for advice. A continuous exchange and support on the trail from all participants existed. People stopped to ask if everything was okay and offered their help. Some even risked their flow of the race to assist as reported by Participant 5. Here, a pattern of unconditional support is recognizable where the competition is set aside and humanity is brought into focus. Many of the young mushers described it as an unwritten rule to support each other along the trail, as mentioned by McCarville (2007, p. 168) and Wallace et al. (Wallace et al., 2000, p. 503). However, the cohesion in this community is powerful and many participants wouldn't have made it to the finish line without this support, as stressed by the interviewees. They accentuated that 'we are all in this together'. This picture of a strong community and support was also strengthened through my observation. Additionally, Participant 7 underlined that *"it's important to show up on the revelation, prize ceremony. We have to be happy for each other"*. Furthermore, each other's motivation was a highly appreciated and highlighted aspect of the community. All those cases again accentuated the *communitas*' feelings, as Chalip (2006, p. 110) outlined.

Overall, every interviewee emphasized that it gave them a better feeling to know everyone was in the same boat. Especially after scratching the race, it helped to share experiences, hear others' perspectives and be there for each other. It turned out that the people around were the safety anchors during the challenging moments. Without the support and advice from outside it wouldn't have been the same experience. The small tips, the understanding and backing up made a big part of the race experience for the young musher. It helped them to keep going and to stay motivated. So, the people theme is unique in the on-site event experience. The mushers put high value on the togetherness and all the support made it easier to overcome the challenges that arose. At the core, the people around are essential to finish the race. Here, Bouchet et al.'s (2004, p. 131) point about the indispensable role of sports support was again

accentuated as well as the meaning of Chalip's (2006, pp. 110–111) *communitas* feeling. All those aspects contributed to the event experience through their memory and understanding.

5.2.4 The dogs

As it turned out, the dogs were the most critical aspect of the on-site experience. Their impact on the event was immense. Some evident aspects are the connection to the dogs, their health, and their role connected to the race's outcome. The close relationship between the mushers and their dogs stood out for me as an interviewer during the talks. Many referred to 'we' when they told about their experience. It wasn't just the musher and the dogs but them together as a team. Moreover, the interviewees made their dogs the focal point of their experience. They continuously talked about their amazement, pride and respect for the dogs. The informants underpinned more the respect and achievements of the dogs than of themselves. In addition, the observations showed a remarkable moment. When the mushers reached the finish line, the first thing they did was go to their dogs. They gave them snacks and showed their appreciation with cuddles. Only afterward were the people around greeted.

Considering the on-site event, the young mushers reported their unique outdoor experience with the dogs. The activity of spending a lot of time together was the most enjoyable. This event period brought them a lot closer, as accentuated by the interviewees. The dogs were the co-creators for the on-site experience as Participant 7 described it. Participant 6 referred to a quote that caught me. He said,

During my first year in the study somebody said that you only know a person after you've been on a trip with them. And that is so true. It makes a huge difference after you've done this [race]. I've been on many trips with my dogs, but this one has been where we all have pushed the limits the most. This brought us together.

This statement highlights the impact of time and circumstances on the relationship with the dogs. Many of the mushers said that they got to know their dogs better and in different ways during this year's race. For some, pushing the dogs to points where they would not go during a training session was strange. In this context, Participant 4 talked about the vets who made sure to stay on the ethically correct side and have kept a close eye on each dog.

During this provoking time, the mushers were surprised by how well the dogs handled the challenging conditions. They were amazed by the excitement and commitment shown by the dogs. This behavior influenced the attendees own one and their motivation. Here, the cycle of

emotions and feelings is shown. As underlined by Løken and Lyngstad (2019, p. 108), dogs can impact the musher. The interviewees outlined that their moods depended on the dogs one and the other way around. Hence, the mushers focused even more on staying positive and in a good mood. Being emotionally reliant on each other connected the whole team even more. In addition, Participants 5 and 7 highlighted that not only an improvement of their relationship with the dogs was recognizable but among the non-humans. They emphasized, that the dogs got better along with each other and learned to show consideration. Hence, development is seen not only on the human side but also on the non-human one.

Furthermore, trust was in focus and influenced the on-site experience immensely. Overcoming the challenges and the constant good work of the dogs strengthened the basis of trust even more. The young participants knew that the dogs are dependable and give their best. Trust is a foundation inside this sport, as underlined by Participant 5's situation. Her challenge was not the physical health of the dogs, but the mental state. She realized that the dogs weren't themselves anymore. She tried, but they did not want to continue the race. Talking to the dogs and reading them was essential to figuring this out. The young musher mentioned,

There were other mushers around my handlers saying that you just have to be a little bit harsh and you just have to push them further. But I'm really happy that I stopped when I did because I think that the trust between me and the dogs would be completely broken if I had pushed them even further.

This statement again emphasizes the high value of the trust relation between them and the dogs. The interviewee highlighted that respecting the limits of the dogs, especially concerning their health, is crucial. Another fundamental point was emphasized in that case as well. Participant 6 said, *“One needs to be a dog person to be good in this sport”*. By that the interviewee meant that one needs to know how to treat and manage the dogs to become successful. It is all about reading and understanding them as individuals. This is also why strengthening the team relationship is so fruitful for the on-site event experience.

One of the biggest tasks of the mushers is to be independent while being responsible for them and their furry companions. Many of the mushers talked about what a strong feeling it is to need to take care of oneself and the dogs. Participant 1 underpinned this aspect by saying, *“What I really love about mushing is ... being able to have full responsibility for yourself and*

your dogs. And just needing to be able to figure things out by yourself, like being independent". In this context, Participant 6 explained the other side of the Medaille where everyone gets an unfiltered confrontation with their own mistakes during a race. This can be rough but also a chance for development. The mushers can also find their way of doing things during the on-site event, which Participants 4 and 7 as well as Green et al. (2015, p. 541) stressed as an essential part of dog mushing. The pattern of feeling independent in connection with outdoor sports by Liebermann et al. (2023, p. 1) was also supported in the dog sled context.

The health factor was one of the most common reasons for not finishing the race. Many dogs had to fight with injuries or other health issues. This impacted the course of the race and the caretaking. The breaks had to be done individually, the tempo was slowed down and the mushers had to take more care of their furry companions. This included aspects like massages, talking sweetly to them as well as giving them enough water and food. Hence, the young mushers put the caretaking and well-being of the dogs as priority number one. Those challenges were emotionally draining, reported the mushers. It greatly impacted the affective dimension when a dog had to be taken out of the race. Here, Participant 1 even referred to the feeling of betrayal, that she felt towards the dogs. Many thought they let the dogs down when they had to be taken out of the race. The mushers cared a lot about offering the whole team a good race experience. Not only for themselves but mainly for the dogs. The health aspect influenced this point.

As mentioned earlier, some people are critical of the sport, especially in connection with the treatment and health conditions of the dogs (St. Ours, 2020, p. 27). The set focus of the young generation of the dogs' well-being and how they care for them can act against this factor. Considering that the health factor wasn't focused on in earlier generations and research, a shift in the young generation of dog mushers can be assumed. They create their own and new preferences in the dog sport as Green (2015, p. 541) accentuated before in context of the youth in outdoor sports. So, the caretaking towards the health and wellbeing of the dogs determines the way how dog mushing is done for the young generation.

In summary, the dogs influence the overall on-site event experience extremely. The dogs' abilities, the teamwork, seeing them doing what they're good at and just spending a lot of

time with them intensify the experience and make it memorable. Above all, the experience stands and falls with the dogs' health. Both physically and mentally. Due to the race conditions, this factor was challenged. Here, the young mushers took extra care of their companions and gave their everything to ensure the dogs' well-being. However, the furry friends serve as a source of positive energy. Being with the dogs, connecting with them and seeing them do what they like to do were the most exciting and valuable moments for the mushers during the race. Specifically, the relationship between the mushers and the dogs was strengthened. The event brings the whole team closer together.

5.2.5 Summary of the on-site event experience

The second part of the findings chapter delved into the unique on-site event experiences of the attendees at *Finnmarksløpet* 2024. These experiences were filled with various activities, emotions and relationships. The attendees shared special moments, faced challenges and experienced a range of emotional states. Chapter 5.2.1 aimed to highlight the influential aspects of the race itself on the on-site event experience. These aspects included the general organization of the race, safety measures and the role of motivation and emotions. Many of the mushers were amazed by the control of the race organization and how the smallest event details influenced their experience. The preparation for *Finnmarksløpet* served as a constant motivation for them to continue.

Chapter 5.2.2 analyzed the natural influences of the on-site experience. The weather conditions and accompanying challenges were troublesome aspects of this year's race. However, the mushers' resilience and love for the sport shone through. Several aspects such as the trail conditions, the health of the dogs and the whole course of the race were dependent on those circumstances. Despite the warm temperatures, the mushers didn't lose their amazement and love for nature. They talked about the natural spectaculars they witnessed and about the relaxation they felt in the nature.

The theme of people was discussed in Chapter 5.2.3. All parties inside the event environment impacted the musher's on-site experience. Everyone talked about their encounters with the spectators, the handler, veterinarians and other mushers. The people were a decisive aspect of completing the race. The social environment served as a motivational aspect but also as a safety anchor. Especially the support made the difference. Not only did the mushers help, advise and motivate each other, but persons who did not even have a relation to the mushers

gave their best to lend a helping hand. Typical phenomena for dog sled events from the theoretical part were presented.

Lastly, the theme of dogs was the focal point in Chapter 5.2.4. As in the pre-event experience, the dogs proved to be the most decisive aspect during the race. In particular, the dog's health is vital. This is the aspect which the mushers care the most for. The dogs and the participants are one team and bond during the race. All attendees shared a fascination, appreciation and respect for their furry friends. Dogs are a source of energy, motivation, development and feelings of happiness. All these points lay the foundation for the post-event experience.

5.3 The post-event experiences

This subchapter focuses on the post-event experience orientated on Benckendorff and Pearce (2020, p. 230) illustrated in Figure 1, to round up the event experience. Here, the outcome of the race is thematized. In particular, satisfaction stands as the focal point. This aspect is, among other things, connected to the development process and involvement of the young mushers. Even though not every of the interviewees finished the race, it became clear that the overall post-event experience was positive and similar to each other.

This chapter differs from the previous ones in its structure and doesn't stick to the main identified themes. It focuses on the days after the race and the development process. Both the affective and cognitive dimensions are examined again.

5.3.1 The days after the race

At first, some outstanding aspects from the days after the race that the mushers highlighted are presented. The interviewees told, that it was strange to know that the dogsledding season ended. Every musher had worked hard since August and then it was suddenly over. They described an empty feeling during the days after. Some were already looking for a new goal, while others were trying to realize what happened in the last few days. Many sad feelings still accompanied two mushers who could not complete the race. They tried to overcome their disappointment and gather some new energy.

Generally speaking, all the stress and tension from the former weeks fell off the musher's shoulders. A feeling of relief accompanied this aspect. All the pressure was suddenly gone. The preparation and the hard work around were done. Participant 6 said the days after the race have been the most relaxing for him for many months. Participant 2 highlighted, *"It's also nice when the race is over and you know everything went well and you couldn't have done anything differently"*. All the mushers were looking forward to spending time with their dogs aside from the race season. The dogs were on holiday right after and it was just about enjoying the time together. Many attendees were excited to go on trips with their furry friends without the training pressure. After the event, it was just about being outdoors with the dogs and enjoying their newfound connection with each other.

One aspect that stood out was the derived motivation to attend another race in the future. Every single musher was motivated to take part in another Finnmark race. Nevertheless, those

who did not finish showed a high degree of motivation for *Finnmarksløpet* 2025. Before the event, Participant 1 talked about how this year's race will be the final one in her dog mushing career. After the race, she clarified that she will attend next year's event. In addition, Informant 5 said, *"The only thing I was thinking was that I'm going to be back next year and it's not going to be the end of the world if I don't finish this year"*. So, all the young mushers who did not complete the race gained much motivation to fulfill it the following year. They highlighted wanting to give their dogs a great experience regarding *Finnmarksløpet*. Here, Participant 7 highlighted that she wants the dogs to feel the satisfaction and excitement of finishing the race. Participant 1 even got motivated to get some own huskies and attend with them next year.

The motivation to attend another race among the mushers who finished the race was more humbled. They could imagine partaking in another Finnmark race but were still determining when or if it would happen. Participant 6 highlighted, *"I can imagine [participating again], but then it's going to be with my own dogs. That would be amazing, but it's going to take a long time to build up a team like this. So, we'll see"*. Here, the difference between the ones who finished and the ones who did not, was outlined. The dissatisfaction with the aspired goal of the season can serve as a highly motivational factor for the future. The young dog mushers got driven to fulfill their set goal. Hence, even though the most significant goal was not achieved, the post-event experience can still be positive, as the interviewees accentuated.

5.3.2 The development processes

The fact that the outcome of the event was still positive despite the negative influences may have something to do with the development process. The academic literature emphasized that the development during a sports event highly influences the post-event experience (Chen, 2006, p. 10). This can apply to both mental and physical development. Here, the most common aspect is the learning outcome.

During the event, many learned that their mental preparation is vital. Here, the attendees underlined their development through experience. Participant 5 talked about her improvement from last year's race. She pointed out that her former experience positively influenced her mental preparation and state. Here, the concept of 'practice makes perfect' gets underlined (Waalder & Thomassen, 2019, p. 55). Moreover, the same aspect was applied to the dogs as

well. Participant 5 emphasized how the mental state of the dogs stood in her way to finish the race instead of the physical one. She said,

Maybe I need to use a little bit more time on the mental part of the dogs, not just the physical part. Because you can be sure that your dog team can physically do a 600-kilometer run, but the mental part is just as important.

In connection with the mental and physical preparation, the understanding of the importance of training stood out. Participant 1 said she should have focused more on the training and believed that this was highly influential on her race outcome.

Regarding the race and dog mushing, the development of the mushers was good. First, many young attendees realized that even though the race did not go as planned or was not completed, the outcome and post-event experience could still be positive. All the interviewees described this year's event as a great and memorable experience. This was connected among other to the dogs, the achieved new skills and the creation of new memories. The young mushers learned a lot more about how to do the race. This was connected, among others, to the dogs, achieving new skills and creating new memories. Some said that they would handle the food preparation differently, some referred to adjusting their race plan and some others learned that they should listen more carefully to their dogs. Informant 6 said, "*I think I understood just a bit more of what it's about to be able to finish these races*". Participant 4 said that she has been in the dog mushing community since sixteen years, but she was still able to learn a lot from this race. Here, the aspect of the continuous learning process inside this sport (Baldwin & Norris, 1999, pp. 7–8) was underpinned. In addition, the skill development was associated with overcoming several challenges. Every participant learned that the weather could influence the overall event and how one needs to adapt to the given conditions. Now, all the young attendees have experience with warm and cold weather conditions. Taking long breaks in the wilderness was an additional aspect that pushed the development process of the young mushers. The attendees learned more about caring for oneself and the dogs in the natural environment.

Moreover, all interviewees highlighted that they gained much knowledge about their dogs and how to treat them. Some figured out new skills related to the equipment. Here, the mushers emphasized aspects like adjusting the harness or putting on the boots. In addition, many participants learned how the relationship between oneself and the dogs can influence the

course of the race. Participants 4 and 5 reported the power of talking to the dogs. Taking the time to comfort them, talking sweetly and showing their appreciation made a big difference regarding the dog's mental state. After applying this method, both young attendees realized a significant change in the dog's behavior. Furthermore, many interviewees learned that even though the trust and knowledge about the dogs is given, they are still individuals and can cause problems. This issue was primarily related to some of the lead dogs. Here, Participants 2 and 5 discovered that flexibility and adjustment are essential inside the team.

Participant 7 reported that she understood that scratching a race is a lot harder than one would expect. In this case, the mental part was the biggest issue. Dealing with self-doubts, blame and disappointment was the biggest challenge here. However, the dogs have been the most comforting factor. Participant 5 said that right after she decided to stop the race, she laid down with all her dogs, cuddled them and cried. She felt that the dogs gave her a feeling of ease. Informant 1 reported that she took one of her dogs into her bed when she was back home. This situation helped her to feel better after not reaching her goal. In contrast, those mushers who completed the race learned that it's possible to finish it. Participant 6 reported, *"I realized it was more a mission possible instead of impossible"*. Many underlined the feeling of mastery, achievement and pride in connection with completing the race.

Overall, it became clear that the outcomes of the on-site event marked the post-event experience. The attendees who completed the race were primarily filled with happiness and pride. Despite everything, all participants were able to express a general satisfaction. At this point, the pre-event experience gets put into context again. Here, it was made clear that only one of the participants had high expectations of the race. The mushers gave little thought to the course of the event in advance and got involved from the outset. Of course, everyone had their goal and generally wanted to finish the race with happy dogs. So, not completing the race affected the overall experience. However, the focus was on spending time with the dogs outdoors, meeting people as well as learning and experiencing something new. Those desires were fulfilled. The generally low expectations of the race and the set focus positively influenced the satisfaction of the event. Here, it is particularly advantageous that many did not compete. Despite the circumstances, many of the expectations were met and this supported the satisfaction. In general, the young dog mushers' personal traits and values lowered the race's dissatisfaction and impacted the event experience positively.

This case again underlined that the cognitive dimension influences the post-event experience significantly more than the affective dimension, as already mentioned by Buttle (1996, pp. 24–25). The memories, the understanding and the learning outcomes had a much more significant long-term impact than the feelings and emotions that were felt during and after the race. Hence, the knowledge gained about race and dogs, the encounters with all the different parties, the time spent outdoors with the dogs and much more had a much greater impact on the event experience than the feelings included. This is particularly advantageous for the unpredictability of the race and the associated potential abandonment.

5.3.3 Summary of the post-event experience

The post-event experience is the part that rounds up the general event experience. The learning outcome and memories of *Finnmarksløpet* 2024 marked this part. Generally speaking, the days after the race were challenging for all the attendees. The fact that the season was suddenly over and that the race everyone had worked hard for was done, put the participants in a situation where they felt lost. Many of the mushers tried to grab what happened in the last weeks while others were already on the search for a new goal again. The time after the race was equally rough for all mushers, independently from the completeness status of the competition. These feelings and moments provided immense motivation to participate in the next event, especially for those who did not finish the race. This was connected to the urge to provide the whole team with a great experience and gain the feeling of achievement.

In general, the development of the young mushers stood out, as outlined in Chapter 5.3.2. All of them learned a lot about the preparation and realization of the race. Regarding preparation, the mushers mentioned equipment, food as well as mental and physical training. Not only are the physical conditions of the dogs and the musher important, but their mental state also. Moreover, the young interviewees got a better overview of dog mushing and what it's about. The knowledge about the dogs, their treatment and their influence on the race increased enormously. Many understood how meaningful the personal relationship between them and their furry friends is and how this can change the course of the event. Furthermore, all the interviewees earned many skills when it comes to handling natural circumstances, mainly when it's warm. Also, the awareness of the role of the included people was intensified.

Even though not all of the expectations were met or exceeded, the satisfaction of the mushers didn't get lost. Everyone described this year's race as a great and memorable experience. This might be related to the low expectations before the race and the mushers' general personality traits and values. On the other hand, the cognitive dimension influenced the experience a lot more than the affective one. Hence, the created memories, the learning outcomes and the understanding mean long term a lot more for the young mushers than the emotions and feeling they felt during the race.

6 Discussion

The sixth chapter of this Master's thesis aims to explain and interpret the results and findings in more detail. It serves as an additional part of the results and findings, where many aspects of the research questions are thematized. Hence, this chapter summarizes the most important information and clearly connects it with the research questions. Closing the discussion, the research is critically evaluated and scrutinized.

The results and findings made it clear that many aspects play into the event experience for the young generation of dog mushers. In this thesis, the event experience was divided into three parts based on the theory of Benckendorff and Pearce (2020, p. 230), which applied aspects of psychology to the event experience. The first part is the pre-event experience, where motivation, values, and personality are in interplay. The second phase refers to the on-site event experience, which focuses on the event's happenings. Some facets are relationships, activities and emotions, which can result in involvement, flow and mindfulness. Lastly, the post-event experience plays an essential role inside the overall experience. This part stands for the outcome of the on-site experience and is also dependent on the facets of the pre-event experience. Therefore, points like satisfaction and happiness are relevant here. Especially satisfaction is connected to certain expectations and if they're met (Buttle, 1996, p. 11). The former chapter related all those different states of the event experience and put the topic in relation to it.

As well known, this Master's thesis focuses on the long-distance dog mushing event *Finnmarksløpet*. The focal group consists of young dog mushers under the age of twenty-eight, who were either rookies or had little experience concerning the Finnmark race.

The main research question of this project is:

'What are the main themes contributing to great and memorable event experiences for young dog mushers in a dog sledding race?'

Under this focal question run two sub-questions which are as followed:

'What motivates young dog mushers to participate in Finnmarksløpet?'

'What meaning does Finnmarksløpet have for the young dog mushers?'

The following part answers those questions directly by applying the gathered data and research outcome. The sub-questions are answered in the same course as the main question, as these are points that contribute to it.

The results and findings indicated that especially the themes of nature, people and dogs contribute to a great and memorable event experience for young dog mushers. Those three aspects significantly impact the motivation, the on-site event and the outcome of a long-distance dog sled race. Hence, these themes are presented and highlighted in the upcoming section to answer the research questions more clearly.

At first, the memorable aspect of the event experience is emphasized. During the interviews, the detailed talks of the young mushers about their race experiences were impressive. Not only were the memories from this year's race described in every detail, but also the former ones. The interviewees remembered even minor aspects related to, e.g. certain moments or encounters. The fact that they could talk so clearly about their race experiences shows the great memory effect of those events. As Pine and Gilmore (1998, p. 99) accentuated before, mental engagement contributes to a memorable connection with an event. Ryan (2020, p. 369) added that the degree of involvement and the derived values are also essential for an experience to become memorable. The findings demonstrated a correlation between mental and physical engagement and the memorable effect. In particular, the mental engagement was encouraged. As a result, points like motivation, a high degree of involvement and values came into play. These three aspects can again be connected to the three main themes of the thesis.

6.1 The theme of nature

As mentioned, the nature theme contributes to young mushers' dog sled event experience. Remarkably, this aspect impacts the motivation and activities of the race. The landscape of Finnmark and spending time outdoors were some of the driving aspects of participating in this year's race. The young generation sees the event as a chance to escape their daily grind and most importantly to spend some quality time outdoors with their dogs. Additionally, nature serves as a playground to develop the musher's skills and knowledge, their relationships and their mental state. In particular, the challenges and extraordinary situations in connection with Arctic nature make this development possible. Many of the mushers reported a great improvement in their mental state by being outdoors and how nature strengthened their

relationship with the dogs and themselves. This phenomenon was emphasized before by Liebermann et al. (2023, p. 1). Nature is the place where the young mushers can relax and calm down. Many described being in nature as the most intimate moments. Those aspects also represent what motivates many of the mushers in the first place to partake in *Finnmarksløpet*.

The circumstances of the natural environment impaired this year's race. The warm weather greatly impacted the course of the race and led many attendees to scratch. Half of the interviewees could complete the race. In particular, the trail and dogs' health were under the warmth's impact. Here, health applies to both physical and mental health. Many of the mushers could not follow their original race plan and had to take many more breaks to feed the dogs and give them water. Particularly under those conditions, the care for the dogs moved into focus. The trail was marked by a lot of water and slushy snow, which tested the whole team. Furthermore, the race's first lap was extended, forcing the attendees to take a long rest in nature. Hence, nature presented the young mushers with a lot of new challenges. Many participants managed to overcome the challenges that arose, which resulted in strengthening their relationship with the dogs and improving their self-esteem. Here, the aspect of Chen (2006, p. 10) that sports event can result into an increased self-esteem got supported. In general, many of the mushers described the challenges as exciting and motivational and they were satisfied throughout the race. Even though some confrontations led the mushers to scratch, every single one got an improvement and new experiences.

On the other hand, the Finnmark nature lays the foundation for great activities and supports the memory creation. Every interviewee enjoyed their time in nature. Many of the core memories of *Finnmarksløpet 2024* are connected to the environment. The young mushers could not be removed from their amazement and excitement for nature. Encounters with remarkable landscapes or natural phenomena like the Northern Lights made the event experiences whole for the young generation.

So, the nature theme fulfilled many of the expectations related to being active outdoors, spending time with the dogs and improving their knowledge and skills. The natural environment lays the basis for the young mushers' motivation and significant development. Overall, the time spent outdoors presented the interviewees with happiness, well-being and satisfaction. Here, being physically active contributes to the experience to become

memorable. As Getz (2012a, p. 192) outlined before, mental engagement is important for an experience to become memorable. The young participants already proved this point. Nevertheless, the physical engagement supported this outcome also.

The passion for nature presented one of the personality traits of young mushers. This similarity bonds the attendees and provides a basis for a great community. Furthermore, the nature part by O'Sullivan and Spangler (1999, p. 3) is supported and also the theory of Kerr and Houge Meckenzie (2012, p. 656) about outdoor sports including young people. In addition, the young dog mushers demonstrated general motivational patterns in dog mushing concerning nature. The aforementioned importance of nature was outlined by Farrell et al. (2015, p. 65) and Waaler and Thomassen (2019, p. 57) before and deepened through this research project.

This subchapter discussed the role of the nature theme related to the event experience. The thesis demonstrated a correlation between the Arctic environment and the motivation for the young mushers to partake in such an extreme event, while its impact on the on-site event was also shown. In addition, the foundation that the outdoor experience lays for the development process was outlined. All the aforementioned aspects reinforce the theme of nature as one of the main ones decisive for the dog sled event experience for young dog mushers.

6.2 The theme of people

The theme of people was the second one identified as contributing to a great and memorable event experience. This chapter includes aspects of the three parts of the event experience defined by Benckendorff and Pearce (2020, p. 230).

The people theme is as a driving feature for the motivation of young musher's participation at *Finnmarksløpet*. Socialization was marked as a crucial aspect for the youth inside sports events (Farrell et al., 2015, p. 65; Li & Petrick, 2005, pp. 242–243; Waaler & Thomassen, 2019, p. 57) and for the event experience to become fruitful (Matheson, 2005, p. 159). Many of the interviewees described dog mushing as a lonely sport. However, the attendees can be social during the races and broaden their networks. Some even reported *Finnmarksløpet* as the ultimate way to enter the dog mushing community. The race allows the mushers to share their experiences, struggles and knowledge. The event's meaning is connected to socialization and

communitas, as Chalip (2006, p. 110) stressed before. Also the mental engagement of the mushers contributed to the community feeling, as highlighted by Miller (2012, p. 83).

Furthermore, the young mushers put high value on the support of all parties, including those in the race environment. This applied to other participants, handler teams, veterinarians and the spectators. In particular, during this year's event, the help and advice were indispensable and essential to finish the race. Many interviewees underlined how the support improved the course of the event. McCarville (2007, p. 168) and Wallace et al. (2000, p. 503) also emphasized this aspect concerning sports events as well. Significantly, the less experienced mushers and those who had many struggles during the race were greatly impacted by the people around them.

Many of the on-site event activities and emotions were connected to other people. For example, the interactions at the checkpoints or along the trail were part of it. Other persons highly impacted the motivation to keep going during the race. Mushers motivated each other, received encouraging words from their handler team, or were energized by the spectators. As part of this, the young participants strengthened their relationships. The mushers got to know new people and could improve their network inside the dog mushing community. Hence, the meaning of *Finnmarkslopet* for the young mushers as a social event and platform for socializing was emphasized. Moreover, the equality of all attendees ensured a greater experience during the race. The participants had equal chances and any indifferences between gender or age were almost invisible. This supported again the statement of Baldwin and Norris (1999, p. 10) and Kemp (1999, p. 89) about equality inside the sports events sphere.

The affirmation and comforting words from any social parties were constructive for the young mushers during the race termination and post-event experience. Being surrounded by other like-minded people after the race and sharing their experiences and worries was incredibly important to the young mushers. The people around improved the happiness and well-being of the dog mushers, by showing support and understanding. In addition, advices supported the development process of the mushers and resulted in significant knowledge and understanding of the race. Also, satisfaction was achieved through expectations being met and exceeded. For example, the young mushers expected to spend significant time socializing with others, which was fulfilled during the race.

Overall, this chapter highlighted the importance of the people theme inside the event experience of young dog mushers. This analysis supports the theory of Vargo and Lusch (2004, p. 12) about social interactions being crucial for an event to become successful and fruitful. The people inside the event environment serve as a motivational factor to partake in *Finnmarksløpet*. The meaning of the race for the young generation is connected to it as a social event where the participants can become part of the dog mushing community. Moreover, the support of people represents one of the most crucial parts of the event experience. In particular, during challenging moments are the people around the safety anchor and advisor for the young mushers. This aspect is even more relevant for the young generation because more experience is usually accompanied by more security. Lastly, the theme of people impacts the post-event experience. The affirmation, support and presence of others contribute to the happiness and well-being of the young attendees. Moreover, the young generation underwent a significant development due to the surrounding people. All these aspects play a part in the positive experience.

6.3 The theme of dogs

The last of the main themes identified in this thesis is related to dogs. As outlined earlier, the furry companions are the focal point during the event, which was further accentuated by the academic literature (Farrell et al., 2015, p. 62; Non-Stop dogwear, 2018). The interviews and the observations supported this statement. Hence, the theme of dogs contributes immensely to the event experiences of young dog mushers attending *Finnmarksløpet*.

The dogs represent a great part of the motivation and values in the pre-event experience. Spending quality time with their furry companions was one of the driving aspects for the young mushers to participate in *Finnmarksløpet* 2024. Many of the attendees put high value on the fact that they can see the dogs doing what they enjoy and what they're best at. Some others outlined that the event means developing and strengthening their relationship with the dogs. The young mushers got motivated to be part of the race by the potential improvement of teamwork between them and their furry friends. What pushed the motivation to partake in the event additionally was to come to the finish line with happy and healthy dogs. The attendees adjusted their training, the race plan, behavior and set goals based on the dogs' health and well-being. Hence, the conative dimension of experience (Getz & Page, 2016a, p. 340) is influenced.

During the race, the dogs, with their energy and behavior, have a significant impact on the experience for the mushers. Many reported how the excitement of those non-humans affected themselves. They described them as a source of energy and, as underpinned by Baldwin and Norris (1999, p. 10). Dogs are the main reason the young generation keeps going. This fact is also based on the great teamwork and trust towards the dogs. The mushers knew that the dogs would always give their best, which gave them a feeling of security and strengthened their relationship. At the same time, the furry friends are also the reason for challenges. Injuries and health issues were common topics during *Finnmarksløpet* 2024. The emotions and feelings of the mushers depended on this. Many mushers dealt with self-doubts, blames and insecurities concerning the dog's health. The mental capacity of the young attendees was always occupied with the well-being of the dogs. Any incisive event in connection with it was mentally drowning. At the same time, every little success connected with the dogs gave the mushers a big boost and contributed positively to the on-site experience.

In addition, the theme of dogs was intricately connected to the process of development and satisfaction. All the mushers reported how they got to know their dogs better through this year's race. Not only did the relationship between the mushers and their furry companions intensify but also among the non-humans. Moreover, all interviewees emphasized their enhanced knowledge about the dogs and their capabilities. Everyone was amazed by that. An increased understanding of the handling and treatment of the dogs was also reported. Many young mushers learned how to listen and talk to the dogs. The last aspect, in particular, was crucial for the experience. They realized how individual each one of their companions is. Furthermore, the dogs brought happiness to the mushers and ensured satisfaction. One of the young generation's main expectations regarding the race was to spend quality time with their dogs and see the teams' development. This expectation was met, which led to satisfaction. Generally, the mushers improved their self- and dog-related knowledge, which can again be connected to physical and mental involvement (Morgan, 2008, p. 83).

However, one of the aspects that stood out and which hasn't been a focal point in any of the former research is the care for the dogs' health. This aspect, including the caretaking of the dogs, is the one the young generation cares for most. The mushers gave their everything to ensure the dogs' well-being. Getting to the finish line with healthy dogs was their main goal in this event. When the young attendees reached that aim or did the race with healthy dogs,

they felt enormously proud and fulfilled. The fact that the younger generation cares so much about dogs and adapts its entire approach to them leads to a lasting change in dog sport. If more attention is paid to this, criticism of the sport and the dogs' treatment can be minimized and the social image can be improved.

Overall, this subchapter presented the importance and relevance of the dog theme inside the event experience of young mushers. The furry friends serve as a motivational factor and amaze their musher immensely. Dogs carry a unique energy inside them, which affects the overall event. They are the source for excitement and motivation. Their performance during the race strengthened the teamwork and the relationship between them and the mushers. The degree of involvement from the mushers was intensified through the dogs. They gave their everything to ensure the well-being and health of those non-humans. Moreover, the dogs pushed the development process of the young generation and ensured a great understanding of the event itself, the dogs and the mushers themselves. This again influenced the experiences positively.

6.4 Finnmarksløpet as an event

In addition to the three main themes of nature, people and dogs, the event itself and its role contribute to the event experience of the young dog mushers. Especially in the pre-event experience, the event with its statues serves as a motivation. Many mushers described the Finnmark race as the big ambition of the season and as a dream to work towards to.

Many interviewees accentuated how essential the race is in bringing attention to the sport and the destination. Getz (2012b, p. 50) and Prebensen (2010, p. 38) highlighted the power of awareness creation for destinations. Many mushers care about improving the image of the dog mushing sport and community. Hence, the event carries the meaning of being a place to create awareness and additionally as a recruitment tool for future attendees.

Moreover, the young mushers accentuated the impact of the event organization. Many enjoy that they do not need to be in control of everything. The organization ensures their safety. In addition, details like commentators and music affect the experience for the young participants. Many showed appreciation for that and described those aspects as a roundup of their experience.

Furthermore, the dynamics of the race contribute to the event experience. Firstly, the event can be described as a social event that the young participants value. It gives them the possibility to enter the community and broaden their network. Secondly, the race relieves an energy that is hard to describe. Many say that this energy makes one addicted to the race, as aforementioned by Baldwin and Norris (1999, p. 7). Thirdly, the event allows the young mushers to live out and improve their hobby. They can see the results of the season as well as their abilities through the competition format and the extreme conditions of the race. Finally, the young people can find their way of doing things during the event, which is highly important in this sport and particularly for the youth (Green et al., 2015, p. 541). The deeply rooted meaning of the event for the young mushers, intensifies the memory effect of the experiences (Dashper & Buchmann, 2020, p. 305).

Overall, the event itself carries a deeper meaning for the young attendees. *Finnmarksløpet* serves as a motivational aspect by being a big ambition. The event sets the circumstances for social interaction and contacting other like-minded people. In addition, the event functions as a safety aspect and allows the young generation to live out their hobby. In general, the set-up of the event can push their personal development.

6.5 Reflections on the research

This part aims to critically reflect on the research, scrutinizing the work and how it was done. It also thematizes the relevance of my research project inside the field.

The research focused on seven young dog mushers up to the age of twenty-eight. Hence, the research was relatively limited, connected to a small sample. I am aware that the topic is overly complex. Hence, a procedure that includes a broader range of young participants could support the validity of the data. Moreover, the Master's thesis set focus on only one specific dog sled event. Even though the work could present concrete examples about *Finnmarksløpet*, including more races to grab a broader range of experiences could be more fruitful. In addition, the data collection process can still be improved. Regarding the language of the interviews, some adjustments should be done in the future. As a final point, the development process of the young mushers within the post-event experience was presented in a limited way. Some crucial aspects that contributed to the general understanding were presented.

However, future research should conduct another interview later to include more reflections and insights about the race.

Nevertheless, the interviews revealed that the general event experience is very much shaped by the pre-event. As some mushers emphasized, the preparation and training are the actual work. Many would like more attention paid to the preparations during the season. The focus is mainly on the races and their results. So, more attention should be paid to this aspect and more closely investigated in future research. This leads to a better understanding of the sport, especially among non-dog sled enthusiasts, and, above all, underlines the impressive things that the mushers achieve, particularly at their young age.

The relevance of this thesis was emphasized by the detailed and real-life examples, which brought the experiences of the mushers closer to the reader. It couldn't completely close a research gap but contributed to a better understanding of the dynamics and meanings of the Finnmark race and the dog mushing sport. Especially concerning the young generation, many essential aspects and patterns were found. Considering that this generation is the event's future (Skirstad et al., 2017, p. 1), those understandings can lead to a more sustainable race. Most importantly, the aspect of the dogs' health and well-being was underpinned, which supports a shift inside the sport and sheds a more positive light on it. Hence, this research is relevant to the dog sled community and the *Finnmarksløpet* organization. As part of this, the empirical data can support tourism in Finnmark. The outlined knowledge can also contribute to other dog sled events and serve as an orientation tool.

7 Conclusion

The last chapter of this Master's thesis concludes with investigations into young mushers' dog sled race experiences. The conclusion aims to state the answers to the research questions clearly, reflect on the research and recommend ideas for future work.

This Master's thesis has aimed to underscore the profound significance of the experiences within the dog sledding context for young mushers. In conclusion, this unique event experience is replete with dynamics, emotions and meanings that are pivotal to the attendee's development. Specific themes that significantly influence the event experience for young mushers were outlined. In particular, the topics of nature, people, and dogs stood out. However, the event and its organization were identified as aspects contributing to the young musher's experiences. Every musher described *Finnmarksløpet 2024* as a transformative and unforgettable experience, which can be connected to their high degree of engagement and values.

Nature is highly motivational but became the most significant challenge during this year's race. Still, many enjoyed the tasks and learned a lot from it. Despite the bad weather conditions, which characterized the entire race course, the young participants' love for nature could not be taken away. Furthermore, the people contribute immensely to the experiences. All parties, like the spectators, veterinarians, handlers, or other mushers, interacted with each other and influenced the race's outcome extremely. In particular, the support stood out in this context. Without the advice and help from outside, many would not even start the race. Hence, the people have a great impact on the course of the event as well as the emotional and mental state of the mushers. Lastly, the theme of dogs contributes to the event experiences of the young participants and is the most decisive one. The furry companions are the focal point throughout the whole experience. They do not only motivate the mushers but influence the progress of the race, the mental state, and the satisfaction of the event. Notably, the whole process depends on the dogs and their well-being, which sheds new light on the event.

The preparation phase and the event time primarily drive the motivation of young mushers to attend the race. The vital role of the whole season was emphasized. But concerning the Finnmark race, the time spent together with the dogs inside nature stands in the foreground. All the young mushers were looking forward to getting out of their daily lives and digging

into the sphere where it was just them and the dogs. The potential development through participation in the race is also a motivational and essential aspect for the young generation. During the race, the people and the dogs are a remarkable source of motivation. The excitement of the non-humans and the support and help from the surrounding people keep the young attendees going. A more unexpected result relates to the high motivation driven by the involuntary abandonment of the race. All the mushers who could not complete the race showed a high degree of motivation to partake in next year's race, whereas the ones that finished proven a minor motivation.

Moreover, the meaning of the event for the young attendees was clarified in the course of this Master's thesis. More precisely, the importance of the race for the young generation and what it stands for. Firstly, the meaning of being a social event was presented. The young mushers care about who they do their activities with and inside the race environment, they can meet many like-minded people. This ensures a feeling of community and increases their development process by exchanging experiences and knowledge. Secondly, the meaning of the event relates to being a great ambition and a long-term dream. The event is something that the young generation of dog mushers work towards. The young mushers also care for the awareness creating for the sport and the destination, which the race ensures. Moreover, the race carries the meaning of the improvement concerning the relationship with their dogs. Through the extraordinary circumstances, the mushers can build up their teamwork, knowledge about their dogs and the connection with them. As part of the event, the young generation gets to live out their passion and share it with others. Many also describe the race as an addiction that mushers have to experience themselves. Hence, the overall meaning of *Finnmarksløpet* is much deeper than just being an event or a race. It stands among others for community, enjoyment, development and most importantly, spending time with the dogs.

With regard to this Master's thesis and the knowledge gained, a future research recommendation relates to an enhanced knowledge creation about the seasonal preparation of dog mushers. The groundwork is a long process that influences the event experience exceptionally. The young generation emphasized this aspect. A set focus here might bring more attention to the sport and the actual work the participants carry out. Additionally, this focus might broaden the overall understanding of the event experience. Another recommendation is to keep an eye on the issue of motivation and how involuntary termination

of the race affects it. The race is unpredictable and a scratch from the event must be considered. Therefore, it can be remarkably interesting to focus on the effects and impact of this and to conduct further research. As a last aspect, future research should have a closer look at the dogs' health and the mushers' caretaking. All the effort and procedures might lead to a better understanding of how the focus is set inside the sport and create awareness of how caring the dog mushing community.

Altogether, this Master's thesis underscores the different dynamics and highly personal aspects of *Finnmarksløpet*. This event is not just a race for the young participants but stands for a lot more. The event experience is extremely dependent on many different aspects and affects the course of the race. The focus on the dogs' health is especially new knowledge that has contributed to former research. In general, my work has aimed to give deeper insights into the event experiences of young dog mushers attending the longest dog sled race in Europe. By underpinning the theory with real-life examples, the project aspired to become more fruitful. In particular, the focus on the young generation might lead the event development in a more sustainable direction. All the gathered knowledge and insights can contribute to further great and memorable experiences for all dog mushers and the ones to come. This research has the potential to inspire and guide future studies in the field, fostering a deeper understanding of the dog sled race experiences of young mushers.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

The interview guide is divided into two parts. The first one focuses on the first interview being taken before the Finnmark-Race and the second part focuses on the interview after the event. It follows the structure of a semi-structured interview and hence, pre-formulated and open-ended questions are included which serve the purpose to lead the interview. Changes in wording and structure of the questions are not excluded. In addition, this guide includes key points (*marked in cursive*) regarding the questions, so that the interviewer can keep track of the most important aspects.

Part 1

Main topic: Pre-event experience

1. Please tell me a bit about yourself, especially related to you as a dog musher.

Subquestion: How did you get into dog sledding in the first place? (Family etc.)

2. How did it come that you started dog sledding as an active sport?

3. Why did you decide to participate in this years Finnmarksløpet?

- *New skills - Social aspect - Search of Challenge - Landscape*

4. What do you think are the most exciting aspects about the race? Why?

- *Fun - Nature - Challenge -Dog-human relation (connection) -Escapism
- Meet other people - physical activity*

5. What aspects do you think might be the most challenging in Finnmarksløpet?

- *Weather - Dogs*

6. To whom and in what ways do you think the Finnmark Race might be important?

- *The region - the locals -mushers -whole team*

Subquestion: Would you say Finnmarksløpet can be seen as a 'social event'?

- *Meet many different people - lots of people from races before → community*

7. In what ways is Finnmarksløpet important for you, and what are your expectations and feelings ahead of the race?

8. Is there something that you think is important related to the race, that I have not asked you about?

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Part 2 (completed race) Main topic: On-site and post-event experience

1. Please tell me a bit about the race and how it went for you.
2. How and what were your feelings when you finished the race?
3. What was a special moment or good experience(s) during the race? Was it something special that stuck in particular with you?
4. What were the most challenging aspects for you during the race and did you overcome them? If yes, how?
- Nature/Track? - own motivation - the dogs – lack of sleep
5. How did you manage to stay motivated during the trip?
-Dogs – handlers -nature

Challenging Track and Conditions, also quite dangerous

6. What or who helped you to feel more better and safe on the track and in what ways?
-Sense of support - Communitas - Like-minded people
7. What kind of feeling did it give you to know you were surrounded by many people who care about the same/ work towards the same/ share values?
8. How have the days after the race been for you?
-Back to reality – after lack of sleep
9. What are your feelings and thoughts now when you think back to the race?
-Motivation - Fulfillment - Well being - Achievement - Satisfaction
Subquestion: Did you feel an development / learned something new?
Would you describe this years race as a great experience?
Are you planning on participating in more races in the future? (Maybe 600 or 1200)
10. If you were to participate in another race, would you do some things differently and if yes, what and how?
11. Is there something that you think is important related to the race and experience, that I have not asked you about?

Appendix C

Interview Guide

Part 2 (scratched race)

Main topic: On-site and post-event experience

1. Please tell me a bit about the race and why you had to scratch?
- *Most challenging aspects*
2. How and what were your feelings right after you had to scratch the race?
3. What helped you to feel better after you knew you wouldn't finish the race?

Challenging Track and Conditions, also quite dangerous

4. How did you manage to stay motivated during the trip?
-*Dogs – handlers -nature*
5. What or who helped you to feel more secure and better on the track and in what ways?
-*Sense of support - Communitas - Safe feeling*
6. What was a specific moment or good experience(s) during the race? Was it something special that stuck in particular with you?
7. How have the days after the race been for you?
-*Back to reality – after lack of sleep*
8. What are your feelings and thoughts now when you think back to the race?
Regarding expectations / Development (skills, personal,...)
-*Motivation - Fulfillment - Well being - Achievement*
Subquestion: Did you feel you developed / learned something new?
Would you still describe this years race as a great experience?
Are you planning on participating in more races in the future?
9. If you were to participate in another race, would you do some things differently and if yes, what and how?
10. Is there something that you think is important related to the race and experience, that I have not asked you about?

Appendix D

Information letter for participants about the Master's thesis project

'The Young Eyes on Dog Sledging Events'.

Purpose of the project

You are invited to participate in a master thesis project where the main purpose is to get deeper insights on the event experience of the dog sled race in Finnmark. The focus is on the 'new generation' (age group between 14 and 30) attending in this kind of event. This focal point is laid due to the reason that most research is done on the dominant age group in this sport. The overall aim of the project is to identify motivational patterns about the event participation and how the event experience gets influenced.

Which institution is responsible for the research project?

UiT Norges Arktiske Universitet – Fakultet for humaniora, samfunnsvitenskap og lærerutdanning / Institutt for reiseliv og nordlige studier is responsible for the project (data controller).

Kari Jæger - Institutt for reiseliv og nordlige studier, takes the position of my supervisor and is hence included in this project as well.

Why are you being asked to participate?

The sample for this project has been selected based on the participation list of the Finnmarksløpet 2024 and after identifying a group of young people up to the age of 30. The total number of the sample includes under 10 participants.

You are being asked to participate, because you fit in the focus group of the project which lays an eye on mushers being kind of new in the sport or presenting the new generation of the sport.

What does participation involve for you?

By participating in my master thesis project, you will be part of two interviews. One being taken before the Finnmarksløpet and one after. Each of the interviews will take approx. 30-60 minutes. The interviews include questions about personal information, own opinions and experiences regarding the dog sled sport. Your answers will be recorded electronically and I am going to take notes.

In addition, I will take some personal information about you from the Finnmarksløpet webpage.

For under 18 years old: If your parents want to see the interview guide in advance, I will provide you with the necessary information.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw the consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you do not choose to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how I will store and use your personal data

I will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified here and we will process your personal data in accordance with data protection legislation (the GDPR).

- I am going to transcript the recording and notes taken during the interview digitally.
- I will present the gathered information in my master thesis paper.
- I will be the person who has the main access to the gathered data. My supervisor will only have limited access to it which refers to the transcription of the interviews.
- I will replace your name and contact details with a code for the storage. The list of names, contact details and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data, I will store the data securely on a digital device.

I am planning to use your name in my master thesis paper which will be published on the UiT master thesis website munin (<https://munin.uit.no/>). If you don't want your name to be included in the paper or in a limited form (just your first name), please let me know. Then you and your data will be fully anonymized.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The planned end date of the project is the **15.06.2024**. At the end of the project, I am going to delete all the personal data, including the recordings, notes and transcriptions.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent. Based on an agreement with Institutt for reiseliv og nordlige studier, The Data Protection Services of Sikt – Norwegian

Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project meets requirements in data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- Me, the researcher via Lucie Engmann, email: lucie.engmann@online.de or by telephone: +47 947 23 258
- Or via Kari Jæger (supervisor), email: kari.jager@uit.no or by telephone: +47 78 45 04 24
- Our Data Protection Officer: Annikken Steinbakk, email: personvernombud@uit.no

If you have questions about how data protection has been assessed in this project by Sikt, contact:

- email: (personverntjenester@sikt.no) or by telephone: +47 73 98 40 40.

Yours sincerely,

Lucie Engmann - Project Leader (Researcher)

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project ‘The Young Eyes on Dog Sledging Events’ and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

- to participate in two interview
- that I can give information about myself to this project
- for information about me to be published in a way that I can be recognized (full name)
- for information about me to be published in a way that I can be recognized (only first name)

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end of the project.

(Signed by Name, date)