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TOURISM IMAGINARIES OF LAPLAND

A Content analysis on the views of domestic tourists

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Abstract

Looking at the growth numbers, the tourism industry in Finnish Lapland has been a success story. Until 2020, the annual growth rate of the industry in Finland was approximately 9 percent. Most of the growth has come from inbound tourism. However, the travel account is still negative as many Finns choose to travel abroad on their holidays instead of choosing a domestic holiday. In recent years, there has been a growing number of discussions around domestic tourism in the media. At the latest it was the pandemic which showed the importance of domestic tourism. Since then, there have been more studies on the state of domestic tourism. One key message in the surveys of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment is for instance, that domestic tourism needs to be developed. To know how domestic tourism should best be developed, it is important to know peoples' current views. The object of this thesis is to bring to light the experiences and imaginaries of domestic tourists. In the focus are the tourism imaginaries regarding Lapland.

The main research question of this qualitative study was What kinds of tourism imaginaries the Finns have about Lapland as a tourism destination. The question was divided into three sub-questions, taking a closer look at the imaginaries of place, people, and practices of Lapland. As research data, I have used the comment chains of four different online conversations. The conversations were analysed with content analysis.

The results indicate that above all, Lapland is seen as a nature-based destination. People connect many uniquenesses of nature to Lapland and appreciate the possibilities for doing outdoor activities. The barriers to Lapland tourism discussed in this study include the expensiveness and accessibility, both to and within Lapland. The findings also indicate that there is a demand for new kinds of products and services that better take into consideration the needs and wants of the domestic tourists.

Key words: domestic tourism, tourism imaginaries, Lapland, content analysis

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1. INTRODUCTION

The topic of this thesis is tourism imaginaries. These are images that people, as the potential travellers, have on their minds about a destination (Martins, 2015). In this thesis I am aiming to find out what do Finns as domestic tourists think about Lapland as a tourism destination. The idea to do a thesis on this specific topic arose from the difficult situation that the tourism companies in Lapland were facing at the time that the design of this thesis was made, which was in the fall of 2020. Due to the travel restrictions (pandemic) the number of foreign tourists heavily decreased. Raising the share of domestic tourism was rapidly recognized as a quick solution in the situation.

Although the restrictions caused a lot of damage for tourism industry in Lapland, it also served a purpose. It showed the dependency of Lapland's winter tourism on the foreign tourists. This makes the industry vulnerable. One way to decrease the dependency, is to give more attention and importance to domestic tourism. Honkanen, Sammalkangas and Satokangas (2021, p. 9) state, that the crisis did not only highlight the importance of domestic tourism, but it also showed that the domestic tourists should be served in the best possible way (see also Honkanen et al., 2021, p. 9). I hope that with this study I am able to contribute to improving the state of domestic tourism in Lapland. In order to improve something, it is necessary to know the current state. A good starting point would be to know what the current state of the imagery of Lapland is, as imagery is one of the most important factors that guide our decision making regarding a holiday destination. That is why I decided that I would like to study the imaginaries that the domestic tourists have about Lapland as a tourism destination.

1.1 Background of the study

Tourism in Lapland has been a success story. In a relatively short period of time, it has become a well-known destination attracting more and more visitors each year from all over the world. It has been especially the international visitors who have made the growth (9 percent annually) of the industry in Lapland (Regional Council of Lapland, 2022, p. 9). The

pandemic affected the industry and tourism in Lapland suffered severe losses. In 2020, the registered overnight stays decreased by a third in comparison to the previous year (House of Lapland, n.d.). Domestic tourism recovered relatively quickly, but as inbound tourism basically stopped, the total tourism demand stayed negative (House of Lapland, n.d.). The travel account would be less negative if Finns would more often choose a domestic destination over a foreign destination (Honkanen et al., 2021).

A consequence of the pandemic was that it highlighted one of the weaknesses of tourism in Lapland which is that it has become dependent on inbound tourism. This issue was discussed a lot in the media during the first year of pandemic, and one discussed solution was to raise the share of domestic tourism. In addition to the media, The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment also rose the issue of domestic tourism into discussion as it had surveys done, for example on the current state and potential of domestic tourism. The surveys clearly state that domestic tourism needs to be supported (Honkanen, 2020), and that it needs to be developed further as there is potential for growth (Honkanen et al., 2021). Not only would domestic tourism act as a balance in case there would be a change in the number of inbound tourists coming to Lapland, but it would also support year-round tourism. Namely, one challenge with the industry in Lapland is that it has been mostly based on winter season. This dependence on one season causes all sorts of challenges.

One essential factor which determines the success of a tourism destination is its' image (Hunt, 1975). Image is one of the key factors that play a role as people make decisions about their holiday destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). For a tourism destination to attract tourists, it needs to be positively positioned in the minds of people. Therefore, if Lapland is to lure more domestic tourists, it is vital that the domestic tourists have positive imaginaries about it. The opinions and thoughts of the domestic tourists are also meaningful for other reasons. Namely, Tuohino et al. (2004) have stated that the imaginaries about one's home country are part of that persons' identity structure. This means that the way we think and talk about our home country affects the way others will see it (Tuohino et al., 2004, p. 29). In that sense, our own views about Lapland partly play a role in how the international visitors see it and what they think about it.

1.2 Previous research

There is extensive research on the destination image of Finland (e.g. Ilola & Aho, 2003; Tuohino et al., 2004; Saraniemi, 2009). For example, MEK (Visit Finland) did annual image studies in the years 1998-2013. Some of these studies have concentrated on specific places, for example certain region such as Saimaa Lakeland (e.g., Pasanen & Pesonen, 2016; Tuohino & Pitkänen, 2004) or even more specifically on certain cities or resorts (e.g., ski resorts). These studies have been conducted as assignments of different organizations and institutions, such as Visit Finland, regional tourism organizations and higher education institutions. Some have investigated the image that is being created by the tourism actors, while others have studied the perceived images. Most of the latter studies have been interested in the imaginaries of the foreign tourists (Tuohino et al., 2004).

Although my study is about the imagery of Lapland, it is worthwhile to look at some studies done on the destination image of Finland, alone for the reason that Lapland is part of Finland and therefore there are similarities in the imaginaries. The differences in the image perceptions can also differ depending on whose images we are looking at. As Tuohino et al. (2004) state, the imaginaries of the foreign tourists can differ from the imaginaries of the domestic tourists. As said earlier, the centre of attention in many studies has been in the perceptions of the foreign tourists. The responses that people have given in these studies also depend on the research design of the respective study. If pre-set attributes have been used, they guide the responses. It is interesting to also look at some research (e.g. Arminen, 2021) which have studied the created image of Lapland.

Examining the studies done on the destination image of Finland, it can be said that the imagery has not changed significantly over the years. Nature seems to always have been dominating the tourism imagery of Finland. More specifically, nature attributes that have emerged in studies are forests, lakes, cold weather, silence, and cleanliness (Garam, 2001; Ilola & Aho, 2003). Other attributes related to Finland have been safety (Garam, 2001; Pasanen & Pesonen, 2016; Tuohino et al., 2004), hospitality (Tuohino et al., 2004), and the northern location in general. Especially the British tourists associate Lapland with Santa Claus and Christmas (Saraniemi, 2009). One observation about the previous studies is that

winter have been imagined more than the summer. Typical winter imagery consists of elements such as snow, polar night, and coldness of the weather. There were not many imaginaries about the Finns, other than they were described as friendly, helpful, hospitable, and interesting but having poor language skills (Tuohino et al., 2004, pp. 20-21). The overall destination image of Finland is positive. The two most common negative images about Finland are that it is difficult to get there, and that it is expensive. Finland has also been described as a vague and somewhat boring destination (Garam, 2001; Saraniemi, 2009) that is not especially cultural nor versatile destination (Tuohino et al., 2004).

The image of Lapland has also been in the centre of many studies. For example, Arminen (2021) has recently studied how the imagery of Lapland is represented in classic Finnish posters used in international tourism advertisement. Typical themes in the posters over the years have been for instance Sámi exoticism and nature, such as fells, midnight sun and reindeer. Nowadays, the Northern Lights have become one popular theme. Winter images (e.g. skiing, snow, Northern Lights) seem to be more common than summer images (e.g. midnight sun). Hautajärvi (2014) studied in a doctoral dissertation the architecture in tourism in Lapland. He says that for instance, landscapes, silence and wilderness of nature, the midnight sun, reindeer and the Sami culture, and different nature-based activities are factors that attract tourists to Lapland. They are the more traditional factors that attract tourists. Nowadays tourists are also lured with ski resorts, snowmobile safaris, golf courses, shopping opportunities and restaurants.

Image has also been the theme of many thesis in the institutions of higher education (universities and universities of applied sciences). For instance, Portti (2014) studied the image of Inari by comparing the pre-travel expectations with the post-travel experiences. The pre-travel imaginaries were strongly nature-based, about landscapes, the Northern Lights, reindeer, snow, and wilderness, but also about the Sámi culture and traditions. People also pictured activities such as land cruises, hiking, snowmobile and husky safaris, fishing, and ice fishing as well as horse riding. In addition, people expected to experience silence. Haantie (2013) studied the identity of Inari-Saariselkä region and used visitors as informants. Tolonen (2011) compared the created images of Finnish Lapland with the Swedish Lapland. As a result, it was noticed that in Sweden they use more Sámi culture representations in marketing

materials, and in the marketing materials of Finnish Lapland Santa Claus was a central figure. Otherwise, both represented pictures of landscapes, nature, and activities.

More recently, for example Lepänaho and Pulska (2019) studied the imaginaries of Lapland as a summer holiday destination. What emerged from that study was for example that the domestic visitors highlighted different activities (hiking, fishing, biking). Nature-based attributes that emerged from that study were clean air, berries, reindeer, mosquitoes, and the polar days. Lapland was pictured as beautiful, peaceful, and interesting. Many also imagined the summer to be cold in Lapland. According to this specific study, the recommendations by family and friends have a lot of weight when making decisions about a holiday destination. Another recent thesis (Niemi & Örrri, 2020) explored the domestic tourists' thoughts about the domestic luxury destinations. In conclusion, many luxury services were found to be inadequate and expensive. Generally speaking, it has been argued that the pulling factors for domestic tourism usually have to do with either responsibility, safety, or nature, and that domestic tourists are interested in the same things as the foreign tourists are (snow, nature-based experiences) (Honkanen et al., 2021). However, they (Honkanen et al., 2021) highlight that the services must be designed differently. In addition, they (2021, p.9) argue that the advantages of domestic tourism are the easiness, and the shorter traveling times.

1.3 Research aim, objectives, and questions

In general, most studies on tourism imaginaries in Finland have been concerned in exploring the image of Finland and its' regions among the inbound tourists. Much less is known about the imaginaries that the domestic tourists have. The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the body of knowledge on tourism imaginaries about Lapland. More specifically, the aim is to study the tourism imaginaries that the Finns themselves have about Lapland. The objective of this study is to give voice to the Finns and hear what they think about Lapland as a holiday destination. The main research question of this study is *What kind of tourism imaginaries do Finns have about Lapland?* As the topic is quite broad, I have divided the main research question into three sub-questions which are set as a guideline to fulfil the objectives of this thesis. The three sub-questions are 1) *What kind of tourism imaginaries are there about*

Lapland as a place? 2) What kind of tourism imaginaries are there about the people? and lastly, 3) What kind of tourism imaginaries are there about the practices?

This thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of the opinions that Finns have about holiday in Lapland, as well as offers some important insights into the wishes that people have over holidays. It sheds light into the possible barriers that there might be regarding domestic tourism. Within limits, this study, and its' findings regarding the thoughts of the domestic tourists, could be of use for tourism companies and other operators as they develop products and services and marketing campaigns that are targeted to the domestic tourist.

1.4 Research design

Unlike most image studies in the context of tourism, this thesis is qualitative of nature. I chose a qualitative research methodology because it better suites the research aim, which is to explore the holistic and possibly unique characteristics of Lapland as a tourism destination. It is one of the strengths of qualitative research that it allows to examine research cases in depth (Martins, 2015). Moreover, qualitative approach allows to hear peoples' own views and focus on what they have to say about the issue. I wanted to be able to catch the genuine thoughts of the people, and not to guide them in any way with the prior knowledge of the topic, or questions that are set in advance. Prior knowledge can more easily guide a quantitative image research, as there are pre-set attributes used on a questionnaire. There is not that much space for something new to emerge.

The theoretical framework of this thesis is tourism imaginaries. The paradigm of my thesis is constructionism, as tourism imaginary is a social construction (Chronis, 2012; Cremers, 2020, p. 612; Gravari-Barbas & Graburn, 2012). According to constructionism, there are multiple interpretations of reality (Merriam, 2009, pp. 8-9). This means that there are not right answers, just different opinions. As Derrien and Stokowski (2020, p. 2) state that tourism imaginaries are “socially constructed meanings about reality” which people distribute to with one another.

The research data of this thesis consists of written, online conversations that people had with each other on the topic of domestic tourism, and specifically about Lapland as a tourism destination. All of these four comment chains date back to year 2020, when domestic tourism was discussed a lot in the media. One reason for choosing data that already existed online was the COVID-19 restrictions that were ongoing as this research design was developed. Not only was online data convenient to use at a time when social distancing was preferred, but I also noticed that there is a lot of unused material data available online. The conversations that were selected were comment chains that were attached to four different online articles. These freely flowing online conversations formed my research data. I used the method of content analysis to analyse the written comment chains. Altogether, the data consists of approximately 29 pages of text.

1.5 Structure of the study

This thesis has been divided into five parts, first one being this introduction chapter. Chapter two begins by laying out the theoretical dimensions of the research. I will first shortly introduce the concept of destination image although it is not the key concept of this thesis. However, it is so closely related to the main concept, tourism imaginaries, that I did not want to leave it without mentioning. The third chapter is concerned with the methodology used for this study. I will justify my research methods and explain the data collection and analysis process in detail. Chapter four analyses the findings of the online conversations and focuses on the three main themes that formed my sub-questions. The chapter five is dedicated to discussion and conclusions as I draw together the whole research, and make some suggestions for future research.

2. TOURISM IMAGINARIES

Although the conceptual framework of my thesis is tourism imaginaries, I will first shortly discuss the concept of image, and more specifically destination image, because it has similarities with the concept of tourism imaginaries. For instance, research on destination image and tourism imaginary have the same objectives, which is to find out what the thoughts and ideas a certain destination or place awakens in people. On the other hand, the theory on destination image covers areas that apply with tourism imaginaries, too. For instance, destination image can be referred to all that which is created with marketing, but it can also refer to the mental picture that people form in their minds (Tuohino, 2002). This mental picture of a place is what basically the tourism imaginaries are also about.

2.1 Destination image

Destination image is one of the most studied areas of tourism research. It has been a major area of interest among tourism scholars since the 1970s (Bonn, Joseph, & Dai, 2005; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Gartner, 1994; Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2007; Kanemasu, 2013; Kislali, Kavartzis, & Saren, 2016; Pike, 2002). There are several definitions of destination image. For example, Gartner describes the tourism image “as a function of brand and the tourists’ and sellers’ perceptions of the attributes of activities or attractions available within the destination area” (Andersen, Prentice, & Guerin, 1997, p.454). Thus, for Gartner (1994) destination image is associated with the place itself as well as with the activities that can be found at that specific destination. The article by Matos, Mendes, and Pinto (2015, p. 140) presents examples of definitions broken down by different decades. To point out some definitions from the 2000’s, Echtner and Ritchie (2003, 43) define destination image as consisting of “functional characteristics, concerning the more tangible aspects of the destination, and psychological characteristics, concerning the more intangible aspects”. Another example by Alcañiz, García, and Blas (2009, p. 716) states that destination image “consists of all that the destination evokes in the individual; any idea, belief, feeling or attitude that tourists associate with the place”. (Matos et al., 2015, p. 140).

The role of images is central in the promotion of a tourism destinations (Andersen et al., 1997; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Salazar, 2012). Hunt (1975), who was one of the first scholars studying destination image, argued that the success of a tourism destination is dependent on the image that people have of it (as cited in Tasci & Gartner, 2007, p. 414; see also Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002). That is because image is one of the key factors determining the choices that people make about destinations (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). As potential travellers cannot test destinations in advance, nor try out their service offerings, they base their decisions on the image they have of that particular destination (Baloglu & McClary, 1999; Um & Crompton, 1990). Therefore, the aim of the destination promoters is to project compelling images, so that people would want to visit that specific destination (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Image, which is based on commercial information and messages, is known as induced image, which is a term introduced by Gunn in 1988 (Andersen et al., 1997, p. 454).

However, consumer images (how the consumer perceives a place) are not always the same as the images projected by destination marketing organization (Schmallegger & Carson, 2009; Tasci, & Gartner, 2007). According to Kislali et al., (2016) marketing might have lost its' dominant role as image creator. A possible explanation is that if people of a certain group are not the target group of destination promotion and marketing, they are not exposed to commercial material. On the other hand, people are more probably exposed to non-commercial sources of information, such as newspapers, books, and education, or word-of-mouth which cannot be controlled by the organizations and companies representing a destination. Gunn (1988) defined the image, which is based on non-commercial sources, as organic image (Andersen et al., 1997, p. 454). Word-of-mouth, especially from friends and family, is usually valued. Nowadays, internet provides people opportunities to share information and experiences outside the friends and family circle (e.g. on sites such as TripAdvisor), which might be another factor that explains the decreasing role of commercial information as an image creator. The sharing of experiences online is referred to as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (De Ascaniis, Bischof, & Cantoni, 2013). Even though it is the opinions of anonymous people, it is still considered to be a reliable source of information. This is probably because of two things. It is about peoples' personal experiences (no commercial interest), and there is a good number of opinions that are shared (the more shared experiences, the more realistic).

According to Kislali et al., (2016) more research is needed on the role of social media in creating destination images. From the destination organizations' point of view, it seems that there is a lot of image and narrative flow over which the advertisers have no control over, on social media but on internet in general. Other issue is whether or not the conventional research methods for studying destination image are sufficient for gathering all the possible information.

The vast majority of the research on destination image have used quantitative methodologies (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991, 1993; Lin & Huang, 2009; Kislali et al., 2016; Pike, 2002) because destination image research has its origins on product image research. Traditionally, destination image has been assessed by measuring individual attributes of a destination (MacInnis & Price, 1987) by asking customers to rate those attributes (Dann, 1996). Attributes that have been rated are things that are common to all destinations, for example accommodation, transportation, attractions, prices (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Kislali et al., 2016). These kinds of studies are useful when for instance comparing different destinations.

The limitation with quantitative research methodology is that they do not consider the holistic aspects of destination image nor allow new attributes to emerge during the study (Hosany et al., 2007; see also Echtner & Ritchie, 1991, 1993). Attribute-based research can even give misleading information about the real imaginaries (Tuohino et al., 2004, p. 22), and can overlook the affective aspects of destinations (Hosany et al., 2007). Moreover, drawing a line between attributes and holistic imageries is difficult as holistic impressions are based on attributes, and on the other hand, individual attributes can be affected by holistic, overall impressions. An alternative for studying the imagery of a tourism place is to use qualitative research methodologies, and using the concept of tourism imagery, whose aim is to study perceptions of a place from a more holistic point of view.

2.2 Tourism imaginaries

2.2.1 Roots and definitions

Before looking at the characteristics of tourism imaginaries, it is necessary to first clarify what is meant by the concept “imaginary”. The roots of the study of imagery are in psychology and psychoanalysis (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Leite, 2014), but it has also been conceptualized in other disciplines, such as philosophy and social theory (Salazar, 2012; Salazar & Graburn, 2014). Nowadays, it is very much an anthropological concept (Leite, 2014; Salazar & Graburn, 2014). Imaginaries do not have one specific definition (Andrews, 2017; Arruda, 2015; Leite, 2014) as different disciplines have defined it differently. For example, scholars of psychology have defined imagery as “a distinct way of processing and storing multisensory info in working memory” (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991, p. 39). Arruda (2015, p. 128) describes imaginaries “as a mental activity of producing ...images”. According to her (2015) imaginaries can refer to the process of creating imaginaries as well as to the set of images that people obtain by simply being and living in a society. Salazar (2012, p. 2) conceptualizes imaginaries as “socially transmitted representational assemblages that interact with people’s personal imaginings and are used as meaning-making and world-shaping devices”. According to Castoriadis (1987) imaginary is “a society’s shared, unifying core conceptions” (as cited in Salazar, 2012, p. 2).

As stated earlier, the concept of tourism imagery is closely related to the concept of destination image. Tourism imaginaries view the image of a destination from a holistic perspective, including also abstract components, such as atmosphere of a place (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; MacInnis & Price, 1987). Even though research on the subject has increased during the last three decades, it has not been studied as much as destination image. According to Leite (2014) the first serious discussions and analyses of tourism imagery emerged during the 1990s.

Although the concept is perhaps not as problematic as the concept of destination image, there still is a degree of uncertainty around the terminology. Difference is being made between *tourist* imaginaries and *tourism* imaginaries in the literature (Leite, 2014, p. 264). The former

would refer to imaginaries about the tourists themselves, and the latter one would refer to the imaginaries that people have. However, these terms are often used interchangeably and without precision. Martins (2015, p. 1) describes tourism imaginaries as “a little bit more than the image that they can create in the minds of potential travellers”. For Echtner and Ritchie (1991, p. 40) tourism imaginaries are about total impressions, auras, and feelings. As Echtner and Ritchie (1991, 1993) state tourism imagery is based on image, but offering a more holistic way of viewing a destination.

Table 1. Definitions of tourism imaginary

Scholar	Definition
MacInnis & Price, 1987, p. 473	“a process (not a structure) by which sensory information is represented in working memory”
Govers, 2005, p. 28	“a distinct way of processing and storing multisensory information in working memory”
Lee and Gretzel, 2012, p. 1270	“when travellers engage in mental imagery processing, they experience the destination in their mind’s eye”
Gravari-Barbas & Graburn, 2012	“spatial imaginaries that refer to the potential of a place as a tourist destination”
Kim, Kim, & Bolls, 2014, p. 64	“mental-imagery processing refers to the psychological process engaged in by listeners during exposure to ads”
Matos et al., 2015	“a way of processing information on working memory”
Martins, 2015	“the image in the minds of potential travellers”
Piñeros, 2019	“a personal (subjective) construct shared by individuals”

Source: Matos et al., 2015, modified by author

In this thesis, I use the term tourism imagery or imaginaries (plural). It will be used in its broadest sense to refer to all individual destination attributes as well as the holistic ideas about people, places, and practices including atmosphere.

As a conclusion, tourism imaginaries refer to the imagining of places, people, and the tourism practices at the destination (Gravari-Barbas & Graburn, 2012; Salazar, 2012; Salazar & Graburn, 2014). Tourism places refer to geographical locations outside the place of residency (Gravari-Barbas, & Graburn, 2012). Imaginaries of people can be about the host communities, which is often the case in anthropological approaches to tourism imaginaries, or about the tourists themselves (Salazar, & Graburn, 2014). The imaginaries of tourists are usually stereotypical representations of certain nationalities, such as the Asians etc. Imaginaries of practices are connected to the activities that take place in a certain destination, like practices that are connected to a beach holiday or being at the beach (Gravari-Barbas & Graburn, 2012).

2.2.2 Imaginaries in different phases of travel

The imaginaries influence our decisions in different phases of journey. The journey can be divided into phases: pre-visit, the actual visit, after visit and the journeys to the destination and back home (Matos et al., 2015). According to Matos et al. (2015) consumers are involved with imagery in all of these phases. Imagery is important especially in the pre-visit phase, as a holiday cannot be tested or tried out before actual visitation. Therefore, the decision-making process regarding destination selection is based on the imaginaries. Tourists therefore rely on their imagery which inspires and influences the decision-making process about the selection of the travel destination. The destination selection process consists of cognitive (beliefs) and affective (feelings) aspects (Matos et al., 2015). The affective aspect of tourism imagery is about the personal motives for selecting a certain destination over others (Gartner, 1994). Gartner (1994) explains this further as follows: if our motivation for travel is to learn about new cultures, we select a destination that we consider to be different than our own because it is considered more valuable.

At the destination, consumers continuously build on their imagery. New imaginaries may arise based on new experiences, and these may reshape or even replace the old ones. At this stage, the different tourism intermediaries influence the imagery construction as they create meanings. When the tourist returns home, s/he continues to imagine and re-live that what has been just experienced during the visitation. This further constructs the perceived imaginaries.

One big part of the returning-home process is that the experiences are being shared with friends and family, and thanks to the internet and social media, even more widely.

2.2.3 The sources of information for imaginary formation

According to Hall and O’Sullivan (1996) destinations are constructed with the help of the media, promotion, and word-of-mouth, which was already discussed in the destination image chapter (as cited in Martins, 2015). It could be summarized that tourism imagery is a construction formed by people and the media (Adams, 2004; Kanemasu, 2013; Piñeros, 2019). Tourism imaginaries are based on information (images and discourses) that an individual gathers from various sources on a daily basis (Gravari-Barbas & Graburn, 2012; Piñeros, 2019). One influential source of imaginary is the media (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2002; Gravari-Barbas & Graburn, 2012; Martins, 2015; Matos et al., 2015; Salazar, 2011; Wang & Marafa, 2021). Media sources include for example TV, movies, newspaper articles and blogs, social media, and the internet in general. These are non-commercial sources of information, which means that their purpose is not to “sell” a destination, but by existing they still influence the formation of the imagery. For example, the things that are told or pictures that are shown in the news from different places influence the way we see those places. As a result, people usually have imaginaries of places without having visited them (Salazar, 2011).

Destination marketing organizations send designed marketing messages with the aim of creating compelling images. They use promotional material, such as advertisements, for this purpose (Gutberlet, 2019; Khazami, 2020; Leite, 2014; Martins, 2015; Salazar & Graburn, 2014). Photos and narratives are used in order to make a destination visible and recognizable (Piñeros, 2019). Tourism imaginaries are usually related to mental picturing. However, we should note that it can also include any other sense in addition to the visual one (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; see also Gutberlet, 2019). For example, a certain smell or sound can awake imaginaries in our minds and take us to other places in our imagination. These possibilities (to use pictures, words, sounds etc) to stimulate imagination are applied in tourism branding and marketing (Babin & Burns, 1997; as cited in Kim et al., 2014; and Khazami, 2020). Tourism destination organizations apply tourism imaginaries in order to sell destinations to potential customers (Martins, 2015; Salazar, 2012).

The biggest factor that shapes peoples' tourism imaginaries are their own experiences. For example, Martins (2015), Matos et al. (2015), Piñeros (2019) and Derrien and Stokowski (2020) discuss the meaning of own experiences. By personally visiting a place, we get to see the reality as we see it with our own eyes. Then our thoughts are not based on merely imaginaries anymore. We get to reflect our imaginaries with our experiences. As a result, the imaginary might change from what is used to be, or it can be confirmed. Even though we have ourselves experienced a place, it does not mean that we do not imagine it anymore. In the contrary, our imagination can take us back to places after we have visited them.

Tourism imaginary is a construct that different actors participate in creating. As Salazar (2012, p. 12) states: "tourism imaginaries are always the co-product of local people, mediators and tourists, and these different stakeholder groups are simultaneously intermediaries and consumers". Intermediaries can be for example travel agencies, hotels, tour guides and all other agents that stand between the tourist and the destination (Martins, 2015; Matos et al., 2015; Gravari-Barbas & Graburn, 2012). Tourism imaginaries are not static (Leite, 2014). Moreover, they are constantly (re)shaped, (re)created, (re)produced, and (re)invented by people (Cremers, 2020; Khazami, 2020; Salazar, 2012; Salazar & Graburn, 2014). This means that they can change over time. Nowadays due to the access to information on the internet, and people's constant sharing of experiences and recommendations, the change can happen rapidly.

2.2.4 The circulation of tourism imaginaries

The movement and development of tourism imaginaries in societies is described as circulation (Piñeros, 2019; Salazar, 2012; Salazar & Graburn, 2014; Wang & Marafa, 2021). One example of the circular movement is when imaginaries are sent to movement for example by the destination promoters as they market a destination. Then people are able to catch their messages, from where they (imaginaries) return to circulation as such or as changed versions. For Salazar and Graburn, (2014) the circular movement occurs as tourists move between places. According to them, tourists take their imaginaries with them as they travel to tourism destinations, and as they return home, they take them back with them. Once an imaginary is in the circulation, people or potential customers can catch them and process them in their

working memory. As a result, the original imaginary, the one that the customer previously had, can be (re)created, or (re)defined. (Salazar, 2011, 2012; Salazar & Graburn, 2014). The returning-back of the imaginaries into the circulation happens for instance as the tourists share their experiences after their holiday on internet websites where other customers or potential customers can be reached. As Leite (2014) states, tourism imaginaries are the sum of all the images that can be caught from the circulation. The circulation of imaginaries is essential for the creation as well as development of tourism imaginaries of people and places (Salazar, 2012).

Imaginaries develop in the circulation of shared images (Salazar & Graburn, 2014). Shared, also called collective imaginaries, mean that they are shared by large populations (Leite, 2014). As an example, the same culture or cultural context can form these kinds of large populations (Gravari-Barbas & Graburn, 2012). Tourism imaginaries can circulate on different levels. They can circulate on a geographically small scale, for instance regionally and nationally, or globally which is the case with well-known tourism destinations (Gravari-Barbas & Graburn, 2012; Piñeros, 2019; Salazar, 2011, 2012; Salazar & Graburn, 2014, see also Derrien & Stokowski, 2020). People from different cultural backgrounds can have different imaginaries about the same places. For example, Asians might have different tourism imaginaries about Lapland than the Germans have, not to mention the local people whose imaginaries might differ even more of those of the visitors. As the tourism imaginaries can differ between people of different nationalities, they can also differ among the people of the same nationality. For instance, people living in the northern parts of a country can have different imaginaries about the southern parts than the people who actually live in the southern parts and vice versa. If we want to learn more about the tourism imaginaries that a certain group of people hold, it is necessary to study that specific group.

The circulation requires some form of material, institutional infrastructure (Salazar & Graburn, 2014) or other people (Wang & Marafa, 2021). According to Salazar and Graburn (2014) examples of material carriers of imaginaries are souvenirs, guidebooks, photographs, and cuisine. Art, for instance movies, is also a powerful carrier of tourism imaginaries (Salazar, 2012). Salazar (2010) names museums and theme parks as examples of institutional

infrastructure (as cited in Salazar & Graburn, 2014). When referring to people that carry tourism imaginaries, it can be for example the locals or the intermediaries working in tourism.

Due to the circular movement of the imaginaries in societies, it is very difficult, even impossible to determine where some specific tourism imaginary originates (Salazar & Graburn, 2014). Selwyn (1996) states that the longer the imaginary has been circulating, the harder it is to find the origins (as cited in Salazar & Graburn, 2014). Some of our imaginaries might stem from our childhood (school, family context), and become a part of our unconscious attitudes (Gravari-Barbas & Graburn, 2012; Salazar & Graburn, 2014; Piñeros, 2019). Those imaginaries that we have carried with us the longest are the most difficult ones to change.

2.2.5 Research on tourism imaginaries

Research on tourism imaginaries can have two possible approaches: we can study either the projected imaginary, or the perceived imaginary, or a comparison of these two. Projected imaginary refers to the imagery that is being created or the message that is being sent concerning a place (Andersen et al., 1997). Respectively, perceived imagery refers to the imagery that people, the potential travellers, have in their minds concerning a specific place. In other words, it is about how images are being perceived, and how the imaginaries are being formed in the minds of individuals. Tourism imaginaries are studied by using qualitative research methods. Based on the literature review, the most popular methods that are being used are participant observation (e.g. Cremers, 2020; Gutberlet, 2019; Leite, 2014; Lin & Huang, 2009; Wang & Marafa, 2021), interviews (e.g. Andersen et al., 1997; Martins, 2015; Salazar, 2011; Wang & Marafa, 2021) and studying of readily available material, such as texts of various kinds as well as photographs (Ateljevic, & Doorne, 2002; Cremers, 2020; Khazami, 2020; Piñeros, 2019).

Many of the existing studies on tourism imaginaries use a mixture of qualitative methods. The use of ethnographic studies in the form of participant observation is a well-established approach. In these studies (examples named in the previous chapter) the researcher studies a

specific location and observe the tourists' behaviour at site. According to Leite (2014) participant observation can give insights into how tourists engage with their surroundings, e.g. buildings, landscapes and other people. Interviewing people is another of the most common procedures of data gathering (see previous chapter). The research approach determines who is the object of the interviews. Depending on that, it can be the tourism experts (representing the projected imagery) or the tourists and potential tourists (representing the perceived imagery). Interview as a research method gives the researcher more flexibility, as it is not site specific, meaning that the researcher can address also questions concerning other destinations. The third of the most common methods to study tourism imaginaries is to use material that is already available. Scholars studying the projected tourism imaginaries have traditionally studied the marketing materials, such as brochures and narratives, of promotional organizations (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2002; Gutberlet, 2019; Piñeros, 2019). As these are tangible, they might be easier to study than the perceived imagery, which only exists in the minds of the people. In order to study perceived imaginaries, we can either study people's behaviour (by observing), interview them, look at what kind of photographs they take, or see what they write. For example, in a recent study, Wang and Marafa (2021) studied tourism imaginaries by analysing the content that tourists posted on social media.

This section has attempted to provide a brief summary of the literature relating to destination image and tourism imaginaries. There is a consensus among the scholars working on tourism research, that the role of image and imagery is vital for the success of any tourism destination. As Salazar (2012, p 3) writes: "it is hard to think of tourism without imaginaries or fantasies". Marketing organizations and promoters actively work on creating them. However, ultimately it is not in the hands of the promoters whether or not the tourists actually regard some place as worth visiting. There are many other factors that influence our opinions and perceptions of a place. This mental picture that is formed in the minds of people is in the centre of this thesis. If we want to promote domestic tourism, it is necessary that we study the tourism imaginaries of the Finns.

3. CONTENT ANALYSIS ON ONLINE COMMENT CHAINS

3.1 Research methodology

The image of a destination, or place can be studied using quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, or a combination of them, which would provide even a broader variety of image elements (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991). One basic difference between quantitative and qualitative methodologies in image studies is that in the quantitative image studies the researcher always defines the attributes that will be used. Hence, the study is always guided by the attributes that the researcher has decided to consider. The attributes in a qualitative research, on the other hand, always emerge from the data.

In order to capture the holistic, and unique characteristics of Lapland as a destination, I use tourism imaginaries as my conceptual framework, which calls for qualitative methodologies. By so doing, I am better able to capture the perceptions of the people, as they can freely express their thoughts without any expectations. To further differ from the majority of the previous studies, this study is investigating the thoughts and perceptions of the local people and not of the foreign tourists. In this chapter I will introduce my research design in more detail. I will also address issues concerning data collection, data analysis as well as research ethics.

3.2 Research method

If we look at previous qualitative research on destination image and imagery, a variety of research methods have been utilized. Research data on tourism imaginaries have been obtained from participant observation (Cremers, 2020; Gutberlet, 2019; Wang & Marafa, 2021), interviews (Adams, 2004; Khazami, 2020; Martins, 2015), and documents or images (Piñeros, 2019; Wang & Marafa, 2021). In some studies (for example Cremers, 2020; Wang & Marafa, 2021) the researchers have used a combination of data sources. All of these data collecting methods have their own strengths and weaknesses, and it depends on the given research which is the most suitable one.

My research data consisted of online documents. To be more specific, I analysed four different comment chains that were each attached to an online article discussing domestic tourism in general or specifically tourism in Lapland. The role of internet is becoming more and more important in imagery formation, as people share their experiences online. I found it also very inspiring that that I could reach many peoples' thoughts and experiences through these comments. I became interested in reading what the people wrote about and what their images about Lapland as a holiday destination were. I rapidly realized that these naturally occurring online interactions where peoples' thoughts emerge freely, could provide a fruitful data for my research, and thereby give an idea about what the holistic tourism imagery of Lapland is in the eyes of the domestic tourist.

Three of these four comment chains were attached to an online media article, one of *YLE*, one of *Ilta-Sanomat*, one of *Taloussanomat*, and the fourth comment chain was attached to an online post on the web page *Kohteena maailma*. Domestic tourism, and the situation in Lapland especially, were discussed a lot in the media in 2020-2021. Mainly it was for two reasons. One was that there was a boom in domestic tourism at that time. The second reason was that on the other hand, there was a heavy decrease in the number of incoming tourists to Lapland due to the pandemic. The growth of Lapland tourism has mostly come from international tourism (Tarssanen, n.d.; Regional Council of Lapland, 2022). This sudden drop in customer numbers caused challenges in the tourism businesses in Lapland. Increasing domestic tourism was seen as a help in that difficult situation. On the other hand, domestic tourism was seen as a solution also for the Finns who were not able to travel abroad.

I chose online data because of its' strengths as a research method, and the inappropriateness of the other methods in this given research. What comes to the inappropriateness of the other methods, for instance participant observation did not come into question as I was not studying a specific location, for instance a resort. The object of my research was to examine tourism imaginaries of Lapland, which cannot be studied by observation. I did not want to either collect narratives from any specific customer group, such as people with cottages in Lapland, because they are already doing domestic tourism, and I was more interested in finding the weaknesses of domestic tourism, so that it can be developed. On the other hand, narratives would have provided me access to fewer imaginaries. I also felt that due to the situation with

the pandemic, people could have been more hesitant to be in personal contact (for example through interviews). At the time when the research design was made, there were recommendations for social distancing and avoiding unnecessary contacts between people. It seemed difficult in that situation to do face-to-face interviews. I also, as a researcher, wanted to remain distant so that people can more freely express their honest opinions.

All in all, I felt that online data was the best suited for my study in that given time. It is also considered as valid and reliable as any other data (Hewson & Laurent, 2012). All in all, Merriam (2009) states that documents are under-used in a qualitative study. One main reason for choosing online data was that there was plenty of data available. According to Hewson and Laurent (2012, p. 3) the researcher is able to access vast, but topic specific data when using data from online. Online environment also guarantees certain anonymity for the informants, as one can interact under a pseudonym. Although my research does not involve sensitive issues, I think that it can benefit from the anonymity of the internet, as people freely expressed their thoughts. Online data is also cost- and time-efficient (Merriam, 2009). I also like the idea which Merriam (2009) points at, which is that documents do not depend on the co-operation of others, nor can the research influence what people write.

However, no data collecting method is perfect. Therefore, it is to recognize that the using of already existing documents have its' weaknesses too. One weakness is that the researcher cannot influence the data in any way. If the researcher sees that a discussion is heading toward false directions (from the point of view of the researcher), or if the researcher would like to have more information on some specific issue, it is not possible to address these issues. As this kind of data is not specifically created for the purpose of a research, it can be that the data does not provide the information necessary for the study (Merriam, 2009, p. 153). Another concern that is pointed out by McDougall and Fry (1974) is that the research findings are dependent on the writing skills of the participants (as cited in Echtner & Ritchie, 1991, p. 44). If the participants have not provided thick descriptions of their thoughts, there is not much that the researcher can do to compensate that. Despite the weaknesses, I considered online data to be the most appropriate for this specific research.

3.3 Research data

There were many online comments chains in 2020-2021 available to be used in this research. I tried to find and use those that were discussing the topic and were long enough to provide sufficient data for the study. The discussions needed to be about topics that would provide answers to my research questions. I also paid attention to the quality of the conversations, meaning I wanted to find comment chains that were long to have as much data as possible. Many of the comment chains were long, consisting of dozens, even hundreds of comments. In these comment chains people usually commented on the article itself that the chain was attached to, but people were also sharing their own experiences of domestic tourism. In addition to paying attention to the length of the comment chains, the single comments needed to be rich enough so that they would entail thick descriptions of the topic. Many of these articles were published during the first year of the pandemic. The four comment chains, or the articles to which they were attached to, were all published in 2020. However, it is a coincidence that they were published in the same year. The most important criteria for me to choose a specific conversation was the richness of the data.

Of my data's four comment chains, the first to be published was on the website *Kohteena maailma* on the 26th of June 2020. The title of the article, translated into English was "*Finns do domestic tourism incorrectly*". Based on the title, it already seemed that it could possibly provide some critical views on the issue, and therefore give some clues on the issues that should be addressed. The article itself was a bit provocative, and it offered tips on how to get more out of a domestic holiday. The comment chain that was attached to this specific article was the shortest of all four. It had 32 comments written under 16 different pseudonyms. Transferred into a Word document, the comments made seven pages of text (single-spaced Times New Roman, 12 points).

The second comment chain was on *Ilta-Sanomat* websites (under *Taloussanomat*) attached to an article which was published on the 23rd of September 2020. The article was about the package holidays that the tour operator *Aurinkomatkat* was going to be launching to Lapland and Kainuu region (Ruka) that same fall. The title of the article, translated into English, was "*The tour operator Aurinkomatkat begins to offer domestic package holidays*". There were

199 comments left on this article and they were written under 174 different pseudonyms. Transferred into Word document it came to 20 pages of text (single-spaced Times New Roman, 12 points).

The third of the comment chains was attached to an article published on the 12th of October 2020 on *Yle* websites. It was a column by Rajkumar Sabanadesan and the title was (translated into English) "*Lapland is full of incredible experiences, but the Finns rather travel to Phuket than to Pallas*". The column's main point was that domestic tourism is made difficult and it's due to high prices and poor public transport connections. Altogether 146 comments were left on that article. It was also the comment chain which had the most amount of data, approximately 40 pages (single-spaced Times New Roman, 12 points), to be analysed. These 146 comments were written under 105 different pseudonyms.

The fourth comment chain that I analysed was attached to an *Ilta-Sanomat* article which was published on their websites on the 7th of December 2020. The title of the article, translated into English was "*The pictures reveal it: traces of the covid-19 pandemic can be seen in a harsh way at the arctic circle*". Altogether 204 comments were left under this particular article. Put into a word document there was 32 pages of text (single-spaced Times New Roman, 12 points). The comments were written under 173 different pseudonyms. The article itself was quite short, and it consisted mostly of photos from the Arctic Circle as well as the city centre (Rovaniemi) showing how empty the places were in comparison to how it usually is around this time of the year.

Having put these four comment chains together, there were approximately 99 single-spaced Word pages data, with text size of 12 points written in Times New Roman font. However, not all of the comments were specifically about Lapland. Therefore, I picked up those that were about Lapland on a separate Word document. It ended up being 29 pages (single-spaced) of data. There were between four and nine comments on each Word page, which gives an idea about the length of each statement. I considered this to be sufficient data for an analysis, without it being overwhelming.

Next, I will point out some general observations about the discussions. There is a difference between the number of comments and pseudonyms in each conversation chain and it is because some participated in the discussion more than once. Because there are some uncertainties with the use of pseudonyms, I decided to not include them in the excerpts in chapter 4. For it can be that one person has used more than one pseudonym. Based on the pseudonyms alone it cannot be known for sure who is behind each comment. I also considered that it is not a relevant issue in this research, as I was only interested in the imaginaries, not in whose imaginaries they are. Secondly, as the articles themselves, as well as the discussions that followed, were written in Finnish, I assume that these comments are written by Finns. Thirdly, it is not relevant whether or not the commenting person has personally been to Lapland. After all, this research is about the imaginaries. It might be even a positive thing that not all people that participated in the conversations are practicing domestic tourism. In this way I am better able to get to the thoughts and ideas of the possible barriers.

3.4 Data collection process

The data search was done in Fall and Winter 2020-2021. As I came across potential material, I saved in on my computer to be evaluated later. In addition to that, I also did a Google search on three separate occasions in order to find more data. I used key words such as *domestic tourism*, *Lapland tourism* (in Finnish). Altogether, I came across eight articles that had a comment chain attached to them. The articles themselves were discussing domestic tourism from different points of view, for example representing new product ideas, recommendations for domestic destinations, and in general the difficult situation with the pandemic. The articles were published by different online mainstream media sites such as *Yle*, *Ilta-Lehti*, *Ilta-Sanomat* and *Kauppalehti*. It is to be noted, that although I talk about articles, they were of my interest only because with them I found the comment chains and discussions where people shared their imaginaries.

As stated earlier, I chose four out of these eight potential comment chains. It seemed that it would be enough, but still manageable amount of data. The first thing that I did was to read all the articles and scan the comment chains through and choose the one to be used. After having chosen the relevant comment chains, I printed them out on a paper. I read them

through several times in order to get a good feeling about the major themes that emerged. As I was reading the data, I was simultaneously making comments of my thoughts in the margins of the paper. It is advised that one keeps track of thoughts because it serves as a preparation for the analysis (Merriam, 2009, pp. 170, 174). My initial idea was to study the tourism imaginaries of Finland, but as I had at this point familiarized myself with the data, I realized that it would be a too vast topic. As there were quite many comments about Lapland, I decided to limit my study to the tourism imaginaries of Lapland. That way the data would be much easier to handle.

The next step was to copy and paste the comments concerning Lapland on a separate Word document. At this point I had 29 single-spaced pages of data (Times New Roman, 12 points). I then began to work with the data in Word. I made a Word document that was divided into columns. I put the excerpts on the left-hand side column of the table and on its' right, I had some empty columns for my own remarks. The first one, next to the excerpts was reserved for codes, the next one for categories, and the third one for themes. I also added line / segment numbers to the excerpts so that I was able to return to the original data in case I would like to review the content of a data segment later.

3.5 Data analysis

After these preparations, I began to code the data. There were over 200 codes in the initial phase because I coded every small detail that seemed important with regard to my research question. I also did not want to lose any nuances that I found in the data. The dominant themes became quite obvious from the beginning. The actual analysis of the data was made with content analysis. It has been widely used by scholars studying destination image (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991, p. 44; Tuohino et al., 2004) as well as by scholars of tourism imagery, for example Wang and Marafa's (2021) study on tourists' posts on social media. Content analysis basically helps to summarize the content of large amounts of texts and thus, facilitates the sense making of the data, which means, removing the unessential parts and interpreting that what is left (Merriam, 2009, pp. 175-176).

There are different ways of approaching the content analysis process. In the inductive approach, the data itself guides the analysis, whereas in the deductive approach, the analysis is guided by theory (Kananen, 2017, pp. 141-142; Merriam, 2004). I used a third approach, which can be called theory-led analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 121). Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018, pp. 114, 117, 122) state that in theory-led analysis both, data, and theory, guide the analysis as it proceeds in the same order and manner as the inductive approach, but in the last stage theory guides for instance categorization. Independent of the chosen analysis approach, there are some basic ideas that are common to all content analysis. The aim is always to remove the unessential bits and summarize the remaining important parts of the text (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). This makes the data more manageable. The summarizing happens by coding which is identifying the segments in the data that are going to answer the research questions, and then naming these segments. The codes can be single words or even sentences that describe the original text as accurately as possible (Merriam, 2009, p. 173). Then the codes are being assigned to categories so that similar codes are put under the same category. Then the categories are grouped into themes (Merriam, 2009, pp. 176-177; Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 114).

As I had three sub-questions under my main research question, I coded the data three times. In that way it was easier to concentrate on coding data that was relevant for each sub-question. With every research question the procedure was the following: I marked the initial comments for the parts that were relevant for the research question, as Kananen (2017, p. 132) suggests. I used different colours for each research question. Then I coded the segments of the text that I saw as responsive to my research question. Mainly it was single words in the text that were coded. I also highlighted the bits of data that I thought were interesting. In this phase the inductive approach came along, as it lets the data “speak” and codes are formed on the basis of what comes up.

After I completed the coding process, I transferred the codes into a separate table where I could see them listed as a whole. Then it was easier to see which codes belong together and could therefore be reduced into the same category, and what kind of differences and similarities there are. The next phase was to name the categories that emerged from the listing of codes. At this point it became obvious that some categories were stronger than others. For

instance, in the codes about place, nature had much more codes than the other two categories. It was a challenge to figure out which would be the best way to categorize codes related to nature. The problem was to find a balance between each category, so that no category would stand out. I tried a few alternatives, before I found a way that I was satisfied with. This meant that I had to exclude some categories, but if I felt that they were still important to be told about, I managed to include them in some other category. At the final point, the categories were further reduced into themes. Now that I had themes for each research question, I could analyse the findings. As the original excerpts were in Finnish, they still needed to be translated into English, but this was done in the final phase of the analysis, as all excerpts that were to be used, were chosen. I found it easier to work with the data in Finnish, and only at the last stage to translate the most important comments that I would use as excerpt.

3.6 Research ethics

Ethics is an essential part of conducting research. There are guidelines available for the researcher that inform about research ethics and integrity. I followed the guidelines provided by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (TENK, 2019). In addition, there is the aspect of so-called personal ethics of the researcher, that have impact on the research. According to Merriam (2009, pp. 228, 230) considerations of validity and reliability of a research are to some extent dependent on the personal ethics. Therefore, although there are guidelines, for example those of TENK, on how to conduct a research in an ethical manner, ultimately it is the individual researcher whose values and own ethical consideration come into play (Merriam, 2009, pp. 228, 230).

Many of the ethical considerations of a qualitative research have to do with data collection and the publishing of findings (Merriam, 2009, p. 230). The number of ethical considerations that a researcher needs to address varies according to the chosen research method. In this thesis, which uses data from already existing, public online source, there were some particular ethical considerations. One of them is the question of what can be considered “public” or “private” in an online environment (Hewson & Laurent, 2012). I consider my data to be public because it is from an internet site (a newspaper), which is searchable and freely accessible to everybody. People that commented the news article themselves made the

decision to write a public comment that everybody who finds the article can read. Moreover, the discussions are anonymous, because people wrote under pseudonyms, so their identities are unknown. Even if somebody had written under their own name, it does not matter as I do not mention any names nor pseudonyms in this thesis. The anonymity is also a protecting measure as they (the people who commented) cannot be identified. This as a side note, although I do not consider my topic to be harmful, socially nor financially, to anybody: the topic is neither sensitive nor concerned with the imaginaries of any specific person.

The ethical considerations in my study deal with issues such as plagiarism, fraud, and misrepresentation of the results (Polonsky, 2004, p. 64; TENK, 2019). Therefore, I have cited my sources systematically and in accordance with the guidelines provided by the university. I have not “made up” any data, and the findings are based on the comments I have analysed. The third issue raised by Polonsky (2004) is the problem of misrepresenting the data. As for my thesis, there is no need to misrepresent the data, as the research idea is my own, and nobody is funding it. That being the case, there is no enticement to fix the results to please someone’s expectations. I have aimed at looking at the data as objectively as possible, even though I have my own thoughts about the topic. It is however to be acknowledged that the themes that are picked up from the data are always dependent on the researcher’s own interests and perspectives (Merriam, 2009, p. 233). It is also to be mentioned that the excerpts in the next chapter (chapter 4) are in English because I have translated them from the original Finnish ones. I have translated the excerpts as accurately as possible so that the possible nuances of the original comment do not get lost.

4. TOURISM IMAGERY OF LAPLAND

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will present the key findings of my study. The aim of this thesis was to find out what the domestic tourists think about Lapland as a tourism destination. The main research question in my study was *What kind of tourism imaginaries do Finns have about Lapland*. I have approached the topic by dividing tourism imaginaries into imaginaries of place, people, and practices, as suggested by Gravari-Barbas and Graburn (2012). In order to find answers to the main research question, I have developed three sub-questions, which take this division into consideration. The three sub-questions in my thesis are: 1) *What kind of tourism imaginaries are there about Lapland as a place*, 2) *what kind of tourism imaginaries are there about the people*, and lastly, 3) *what kind of tourism imaginaries are there about the practices*? I will discuss each sub-question in a separate sub-chapter (4.2, 4.3 and 4.4).

4.2 Imaginaries of place

The first sub-question in my thesis looks into imaginaries that are specifically related to place. Tourism imaginaries have a significant role in the construction of a place, as they affect how places are seen (Chronis, 2012). Often the decision to travel to a certain destination is based purely on the imagery that people have of it. In this study, the aim in defining the tourism imaginary of Lapland was to find out what attributes people associate with Lapland. As I started to code the data, I paid attention to the nouns, that is the attributes, and the adjectives that people used to describe Lapland as a place. As a result of the coding process, I was able to recognize three bigger themes, that described Lapland as a place and destination. Following the idea of Chronis (2012), most of all Lapland is seen as a nature-based destination. Nature and nature-related themes and attributes were one of the most, if not the most discussed or referenced theme in the data. This is not surprising as for instance The Regional Council of Lapland (2021) has also stated that nature is one of the strengths of tourism in Lapland. The other two main themes that people regard as the imagery of Lapland is that Lapland is considered an expensive destination, and it is difficult to access. Accessibility has also been recognized by the Regional Council of Lapland (2021) as one of the weaknesses of tourism in Lapland. This finding is contrary to the study by Honkanen et al. (2021), but their study was

about Finland in general. It seems that accessibility to Lapland is considered more difficult than to other regions in Finland.

4.2.1 Nature

Places are regarded as the objects of tourism imaginaries (Salazar, 2012). In my study, Lapland was mostly imagined as a place and destination with plenty of nature and special landscapes. Landscapes have emerged also in previous research that have looked into the image of Lapland. According to Hautajärvi (2014) ever since the beginning of tourism in Lapland it has been the unique landscapes that have attracted tourists to Lapland. Lapland has also always been marketed as a nature-based destination (Arminen, 2021). Foreign tourists that have visited Finland, have also named nature as one of the things that have stayed in their minds after the visit (Ilola & Aho, 2003; Tuohino et al., 2004). In the data of this study, Lapland and its nature was described with adjectives, such as unique. The uniqueness has probably to do with the idea according to which Lapland is the last remaining wilderness in Europe (Häyrynen, 2000). The uniqueness can also refer to the purity of the nature, and the silence, as one person stated: "Lapland, a unique place in Europe...It is time to invest in unique nature, cleanliness, and silence without mass tourism and quest for profits". Especially the northernmost parts of Lapland were imagined wonderful: "The Finnish Lapland is a stunning place, especially those northernmost parts above the tree line", as somebody commented.

In the data, there were quite many attributes that were related to nature. I decided to discuss them by dividing them into seasons of the year, as there was something said about each season, and therefore the analysis was in some sort of a balance regarding the quantity of text under each theme. Some attributes could have been organized under two different seasons. This may have resulted in repetitiveness in some parts of the analysis. For instance, the Northern Lights were imagined in association with fall and winter. Another example is snow which was a big part of the imagery of both winter and spring. Naturally, the number of attributes for each season also varied, as some seasons conjured up more imaginaries than others. Therefore, some chapters are shorter than others.

According to (Salazar, 2011) people have different motivations to travel. For instance, in the case of my data, the most common motivator was to do outdoor activities. Some travel to Lapland because they have family members living there. The motivation is one of the key factors which explains why a destination is chosen. Regardless of the travel motivation, people always travel with imaginaries (Salazar, 2011; Skinner & Theodossopoulos 2011, as cited in Salazar 2009), which are pre-assumptions about a destination. These imaginaries circulate among people, as people share their travel experiences with others. According to Salazar (2009) the circulation can be studied with for instance actor-network theory. In my study, the comment chains that were online, can be regarded as “meeting points” (Valaskivi & Sumiala, 2014) where people come together and share their imaginaries. These kinds of meeting points in the circulation, offer an opportunity where signification is given to a place in interaction with others (Derrien & Stokowski, 2020). This could be clearly seen in the discussion chain: as one person shares an idea and imagery about something, others picked these imaginaries up. For instance, statements like:” I recommend visiting the North in midsummer because the midnight sun is genuinely wonderful” were written because the writer wants to share a positive experience and wants to recommend it to others as well.

When someone leaves an imaginary in the circulation for others to pick up, in this case the discussion chain, it gives other people, who come in contact with the imaginary, a chance to modify it perhaps with different views, or agree with it, which makes the strengthens the imaginary. For example, one person wrote a recommendation for others: “Go and visit Lapland in the summer. There is a whole different magic in the summer”. People who participated in the same discussion chain could also take new thoughts from others and put them in the circulation in other spaces, or they can be taken along when perhaps travelling to the destination. Even persuasive language (Derrien & Stokowski, 2020) can be used in order to convince others about the imaginary. In the comment above the writer is recommending others to visit Lapland in the **summer**. Indeed, summer is one of the peak seasons of domestic tourism in Lapland (WSP Finland Oy, 2019, p. 26; see also Visit Lapland, 2019, p. 9). What people mostly associated with summer in Lapland, was the midnight sun. The imagery about the midnight sun was without exception positive. Mostly the comments were about the brightness of the night. People commented for instance, that the midnight sun is wonderful and that there is something magical about the brightness.

Sometimes imaginaries associated with a destination can also be negative (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). Although experiencing the midnight sun makes some people to visit Lapland in the summer, summer was also seen as a “risky” time to travel to Lapland. It was considered “risky” because, although summer, the weather is not necessarily sunny and warm. People commented that they rather travel to Southern Europe which is imagined to be sunny and hot. The weather seems to be a problem because most practices (more about the practices in sub-chapter 4.4) done in Lapland are nature-based activities, which means that people spend a lot of time outside. Another issue with bad weather is that the beautiful landscapes cannot be observed either:

Somehow it seems like a big risk for me to travel to places like Kuusamo, Koli or Ylläs with the kids in summertime, and then realize that one spends time in lousy weather without really seeing the landscapes.

However, the unpredictable summer weather is an issue that concerns the whole country, not only Lapland. Others associated the rainy weather with **fall**, as one person commented: “The colours of fall are great, also summer and winter are fantastic. It’s just that it rains too much, and many Finns are tired of it”. The rainy weather was the only negative imagery about the fall that emerged from the data. *Ruska* (colours of the fall) and the Northern Lights, on the other hand, conjured up positive imaginaries in people’s minds when they imagined fall. One person commented *ruska* as follows: “There are things in Lapland that needs to be seen at least once, like for instance the colours of the fall. Cost what it may”. The Northern Lights, like the midnight sun, have attracted people since the early days of tourism in Lapland (Hautajärvi, 2014). They are still seen as something wonderful and unique in Lapland, and worth experiencing. Landscape has different functions when it comes to tourism imaginaries. It can, for example, create an environment for authentic experiences to take place (Cremers, 2020). In the excerpt above, the colours of the fall with the landscapes, offer a unique stage for nature-based experiences to take place. Many places are staged for the tourists to consume and observe (Urry 1995, as cited in Wang & Marafa, 2021), but in Lapland, the stages are mostly provided by the nature itself.

Although *ruska* and the Northern Lights had a positive imagery, people only mentioned them a couple of times. This was an interesting remark as fall is generally imagined as unique in Lapland. Looking at the data on domestic tourism (WSP Finland Oy, 2019, p. 26; Honkanen et al., 2021, p. 12) it shows that spring and summer are busier seasons in Lapland than fall,

and this comes out also in my data, as spring was imagined a lot more than fall. However, most of the imaginaries of spring rather fell under the theme of practices than under the theme of place.

As people then actually travel, their imaginaries, the pre-assumptions of the destination, are finally faced with the reality of the place (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). This can result in either contentment or disappointment. A person who is content with the destination and the travel experience in general, might return to the destination or even recommend it to others. Experiencing the Northern lights, for instance, was one of the things that people were most touched by, and they wrote about them in a positive way. One person commented: "...and the Northern Lights created magic above the village", and another one wrote: "I have many times thought to myself that the Northern Lights are the best thing on a cold fall or winter night". Both of these comments transfer a positive imagery about Lapland.

Moving on to the **winter** imaginaries, the Northern Lights were the only positively evaluated place-based imagery of the winter. It seems that the Northern Lights do fascinate people (see the comments above), yet there were not that many people that mentioned them in the data. I see two reasons that possibly can explain this. On one hand, it could be that the programme services that are available, for instance the Northern Light tours, are designed for the foreign tourists. On the other hand, a couple of the articles that my data were attached to, were perhaps more concerned with the problems of domestic tourism. It partly guided people to comment more on the negative aspects of tourism in Lapland rather than the positive. This is to be taken as a general observation regarding the whole data, and not just the winter-based attributes.

As said, people associated winter with attributes that they mainly evaluated as negative. Most negative imaginaries about winter concerned the weather and climatic conditions, just like with the summer imaginaries. Almost all imaginaries were about the coldness and darkness, also referred to as the polar night. The majority of the people were tired of the cold and the polar night. Only the people who practice winter sports, were not bothered by these climatic conditions. Although these attributes apply to the whole country, there is less day light in

Lapland and the temperatures are usually colder than in the southern parts of Finland. People seem to have less motivation to come to Lapland in the winter, except for the ones who like to practice winter sports or have a special reason to visit, such as own cabin and relatives. Other are more motivated to travel abroad in winter, where it is sunnier and warmer. The comment below illustrates this lack of motivation to visit Lapland in the winter:

Finns want something out of their holidays, which the home country cannot offer them at this time of the year. That is warmth and sunshine...in the whole country it is cold and dark in the winter. Why should anybody want to go to Lapland to see something that is at one's doorstep at home?

In this excerpt we can see the influence of travel motivation to destination choice (Salazar, 2011, see also Gartner, 1994). If the desire is to travel to a destination which is warm and where there is sunshine, Lapland in the wintertime is not an option. Comments such as the above were not rare. There were quite a few comments where people expressed their tiredness with the winter. Likewise, snow was something that the majority was tired of, and it did not awake positive imaginaries, unless they were tourists that like to do winter sports, such as skiing and downhill skiing. For these people, snow represents cross-country tracks and skiing slopes, and was therefore positively viewed. This theme will be discussed in sub-chapter 4.3 which deals with the practices related to Lapland.

In the data, **spring** was imagined mostly through the activities that can be practiced (skiing, downhill skiing etc.). Springtime, although the conditions are still wintry, had more positive imaginaries than the winter itself. People felt that because the temperatures are more pleasant, and there is much more sunlight, it is nicer to be outside. Lapland was imagined as a place where there is snow to ski. The main motivations to visit Lapland in spring are the possibilities to ski and downhill ski. The imagery of spring was partly the opposite of the imagery of winter. Spring was seen as a warmer and sunnier season, whereas winter was seen as cold and dark. Spring was seen as sort of a more pleasant version of winter. For example, one person wrote: "In spring, the sun warms so much that in the daytime it does not get much colder than -10 degrees Celsius". According to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (WSP Finland Oy, 2019, p. 26) spring is another season when domestic tourists travel the most to Lapland. It is in spring when it is especially nice to practice different outdoor activities, as the weather is warmer, and the days are brighter than in the winter. Spring is something that many look forward to in winter.

4.2.2 Price-level

One strong theme, about which people had imaginaries in my data, was the price-level of Lapland. All in all, it can be said that Lapland is seen as an expensive destination. In fact, the price-level of Lapland was one of the most discussed topics in the whole data, which was rather surprising. I did not expect that it would as a theme dominate (partly) the discussions, or that people would have strong feelings about it. There were namely quite a few comments where people used strong adjectives, such as absurd, unreasonable, or astronomical, to describe the prices of tourism in Lapland. What was also remarkable was that people did not criticize just some aspects of tourism, but rather all aspects, beginning with the transportation to services and till accommodation, everything in Lapland was imagined to be expensive.

Many shared the same imagery that Lapland has become unaffordable as a tourism destination. Several persons emphasized, that above all, Lapland has become unaffordable for the domestic tourists. This dualism, domestic – foreign tourists, is a discussion of its own and will be touched on in chapter 4.3 in more detail. As already stated, it was all the aspects of tourism that were imagined to be expensive. One issue that people discussed was eating out in restaurants. This was for some enough of a reason to choose to stay in a cabin. In that way, they are not forced to dine out and can save money as they can prepare their own food in the kitchen of the cabin. This finding was also reported by Honkanen et al. (2021, pp. 22-23). Cabins were also imagined as a more economical option in comparison to hotels, especially for people travelling in groups, such as families:

One can rent a cabin for a weekend in Ylläs for 200-500 euros...I have paid 500-700 euros for a week in a bigger ski resort during winter holiday, which for me is a decent price for a family of six.

It was interesting to notice, how many of the comments concerning accommodation, included exact prices of cabins. This shows that people are price conscious. Similarly, some people can come to Lapland with their own caravans / campervans because the price of the vacation is then more economical, as illustrated by the comment below:

The hotels and restaurants are of course expensive there. That is why we travelled with a caravan and cooked our own foods. Otherwise, we would not have been able to afford it.

Hotels were in general seen as an expensive accommodation option. It was not only the price of hotel rooms as such that people complained about, but it was more about the price-quality relationship. In one case, somebody wrote: “No way I’m going to go to Lapland and pay hundreds for accommodation that is of lower quality than a pension”. What was also surprising for me is that domestic tourists are also interested in staying overnight in an iglu. My prior imaginary was that it was a product that would mostly interest the foreign tourists. However, the conversation around the iglus was also dominated by the prices. People in general have the imagery that they are still rather expensive, as stated by one person: “As soon as one night in an iglu costs less than thousand euros for a family, I’ll come to Lapland”. Also, the imagery of the guided tours (for example animal safaris), which are program services typically offered to the foreign tourists, was that they are rather expensive. Here, the notion that they are expensive for the domestic tourists, was emphasized. This issue will be discussed more in detail in sub-chapter 4.3.2.

This notion that Lapland is expensive might have severe consequences from the economic point of view. Namely, tourism imaginaries affect people’s behaviour and choices prior, during and after the visitation (Cen and Hsu, 2000, as cited in Tasci & Gartner, 2007). This can be seen clearly in the comment of a person, who stated: “Prices should be lowered significantly, there is a general feeling, and it actually is a fact that one cannot afford a vacation in Lapland. This should be changed”. If people have an imagery of Lapland being an expensive destination, they might not even consider it as a possible destination, and the price becomes a barrier. As a consequence, people choose other destinations, as have been the case by some people. One person wrote: “For many years I have compared the prices of Lapland with the Canary Islands. The Canary Islands have always ended up being cheaper”. In another comment somebody else wrote similarly saying that: “...the price level is also unreasonable, with the same amount of money one can go to Central Europe and there is much more to see and to experience”. There were plenty of similar comments. In some cases, people could even name exact prices of services that they compared with each other. One such case was a person who compared two ski resorts with each other:

I agree with you that the prices of ski lifts are extremely expensive in Finland. For example, a 5-day ticket in Ylläs costs 160 euros for an adult and 100 euros for a child. Not even at Åre are the ski lifts that expensive.

The Regional Council of Lapland (2019, p. 16) also recognizes this challenge of Lapland, which is that it is being compared to other destinations. When people compare different destinations with each other, it comes down to the affective aspect of tourism imagery, meaning people choose the destination based on their personal motives (Gartner, 1994). Someone's motive to travel is to enjoy cultural offer, while another one is interested in the possibilities for practising winter sports. For the latter ones, Lapland might be a potential destination. However, also in these cases, the destination needs to be able to differentiate itself from other similar destinations. Mayo and Jarvis (1981) state that if a destination cannot easily be distinguished from other destinations alike, then its' possibility to be chosen decreases (as cited in Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). Or, if it distinguishes in a negative way (for instance expensiveness), some other destination gets chosen.

4.2.3 Accessibility

Along with the expensiveness, accessibility was another clearly negative imagery that many people had of Lapland. Indeed, the Regional Council of Lapland (2019) has also stated that accessibility is one of the main challenges that tourism in Lapland is facing. In general, it can be said that the people in my data feel that it is quite difficult to get to Lapland. According to Visit Finland (2021, p. 7) Lapland's location in the periphery is one of the main challenges of its' tourism. Also, the long distances within the whole country are also challenges (Visit Finland, 2021, p. 7). Accessibility has always played a role in tourism in Lapland (Hautajärvi, 2014), and it is an issue that has emerged in previous image studies (for instance Tuohino et al., 2004) as well. In this study, the biggest problems were related to the trains. People mostly complained about the timetables, and the costs of travelling in train. One person stated: "Accessing Lapland from Southern Finland without own car is very difficult, like the columnist states. The costs of a train and the timetables – phew"! Another person had similar experiences, and wished for changes and that someone reacts to this problem:

Train would also be an ecological option. That's why I prefer the train. But if you want to reserve a sleeping berth with a child in a night train in late winter it costs approximately 200 euros. VR, there needs to be more sleeping berths available, and the prices should be more affordable. At when returning, the trains need not to arrive at Tampere at six a.m., thank you, because now you spend the night watching the clock...Do VR, the tourism companies in Lapland and Visit Finland hear?

Another issue with the trains that people complained about was the travelling time:

VR has set the prices so high that families with children cannot afford train journeys. For example, if you would like to go from Joensuu to Kemi by train, you have to first travel four hours in the wrong direction to Riihimäki, where you change the train and travel another 12 hours till Kemi. One way ticket costs 200 euros. In addition, the train connections in Eastern Finland are so bad that it is impossible to travel by train, no matter how much you plan and try to make it work. Travelling by train would be ecological, but the VR isn't helping at all with the matter.

In quite a few comments people wished that there would be better connections and lower prices in the future, and they were hoping that some initiatives will be taken to support the development of domestic tourism, for example a person wrote:

Business Finland could more actively support domestic tourism. Both train and flight connections to Lapland could be increased. In addition, we need faster trains. Now it takes 14 hours to Kolari! In China, the same distance can be done in three hours.

People often commented, that due to these challenges that exist with train travel, it is often more convenient to travel to Lapland with own car. This is in line with statistics, as 80 per cent of the incoming tourists come to Lapland by car, which is the most common mode of transport among the domestic tourists (Regional Council of Lapland, 2021). Having one's own car, which facilitates the moving around in Lapland, was another reason why some people decide to travel to Lapland with own car. Discussing about modes of transportation, one person stated: "You just have to go to Lapland by own car so that you can move around and see places". Another person commented similarly:

It's not enough that a train brings you to some station in Lapland, you also need affordable public transport to accommodation places, ski trails and nature attractions...I have for a long time dreamed of a vacation in the North, but the journey seems so difficult and expensive.

However, not everybody owns a car nor wants to come by car. For example, some people prefer to travel by train because of environmental reasons (Regional Council of Lapland, 2021). These kinds of opinions also emerged in my study, although seldomly:

Last year we were in Lapland, and it was much cheaper to fly than to go by train. It's a pity because I would have liked to choose an environmentally friendly option but could not afford it.

Therefore, it is crucial that there is also well functioning public transportation available, so that people themselves can choose what is the best option for them. It is nice to know that these problems have been acknowledged (Regional Council of Lapland, 2021), and hopefully,

we can see some development regarding the train connections. For instance, just by improving the main railway connection (Helsinki-Rovaniemi) the accessibility of Lapland would improve a lot as travel times would shorten. Such advantages could be achieved for instance with the electrification of the railway lines (Regional Council of Lapland, 2021).

4.3 Imaginaries of people

The second sub-question of my research was *What kind of imaginaries are there about the people in Lapland?* According to Gravari-Barbas and Graburn (2012) the tourism imaginaries are mostly about the place itself. However, the people of the destination still influence the holistic imagery of the destination, and therefore are considered as an important aspect of the imaginary. Imaginaries of people are imaginaries about the tourists, the locals and the intermediaries that act between the tourist and the host community (Gravari-Barbas & Graburn, 2012). In this study, I have two categories under the theme people: one category was named the host community, and the other one was named the tourists which are terms that have been used in the literature (Gravari-Barbas & Graburn, 2012). In the category of host community I have gathered the imaginaries of the residents, the entrepreneurs as well as the tourism workers. These belong to the same category, host community, as they are people who represent the destination. This way of categorizing functioned also because sometimes in the data there was a reference to locals without specification whether it meant the tourism workers or just the residents. The category of tourists entails imaginaries of domestic as well as foreign tourists. I will begin by analysing the emerged imageries of the host community.

4.3.1 Host community

According to Gravari-Barbas and Graburn (2012) tourists can have a stereotypical imagery of the **host community**. In my study, there were not that many imaginaries of the host community to begin with, and none that were stereotyped imaginaries. This can be explained with Pool's (1965) notion according to which 1st hand information lessens stereotypes and stereotyping (as cited in Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). Also, Walmsley and Young (1998) have stated that local images are much more influenced by personal experience than for instance marketing material

(as cited in Tasci & Gartner, 2007). People normally have more knowledge about the local environment and their home country than they have about foreign countries.

As tourism imaginary is a social construct (Chronis, 2012), the stakeholders are important actors in the creation and circulation of imaginaries (Wang & Marafa, 2021). Salazar (2009) argues that tourism imaginaries are co-created between the local people, the tourists, and the intermediaries, who are the stakeholders. As the tourism imaginaries are co-productions, it means that different people (the stakeholders) affect an individuals' imaginary for instance by influencing the knowledge about a destination and how s/he feels about a place. For example, if someone shares his / her experiences of a wonderful holiday destination, that particular destination will probably awake interest in others too. Likewise, when someone shares bad experiences regarding a destination, it possibly lessens others' interest in that particular destination.

As said earlier, there were no stereotyped imaginaries about the host community. Neither were there any imaginaries about the Sámi people. The imaginaries of the host community in my study were not about the physical appearance of the local people, but more about the behaviour and personality traits. People had quite opposite imaginaries about the local people. This is not surprising as there is no one imaginary that is exactly the same for everyone, but rather every person can have a different imaginary depending on for instance their personal experiences (Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Salazar, 2012). Some imagined the locals in a positive light: "Most of the people in Lapland are talkative, polite and thoughtful!" but, on the other hand, there were a couple of comments which communicated an opposite imaginary: "No way would I travel to Lapland...and what is there to be seen anyway, small hills, unpolite and greedy people". The imagery is always individual. All in all, there were not that many imaginaries of the local people.

The second category of the host community was named the **employees**, that is the tourism workers. The imaginaries of the employees were also more about the attitudes and behaviour than about physical aspects. Some people had experienced poor customer service in tourism

companies and wanted to share their experiences with others. There were complaints about bad customer service or unfriendliness of the employees:

The price of three nights in a hotel room (140 euros / day) equals a monthly rent for a studio apartment. What do you get with the money: a boring basic breakfast, poor reception service, a 20-inch tv with basic channels.

What is perhaps remarkable, is that the complains about unfriendliness, or bad service were always made with reference to the prices of the services. People thought that the price of a service is not always in line with the quality of the service. Or as comes forth in the comment above, some feel that they do not necessarily get value for their money. According to Gravari-Barbas and Graburn (2012) the employees of tourism industry are in a position where they can powerfully influence the tourism imaginaries, as they get close to the tourists. For instance, Chronis (2012) has written about tour guide's important role in creating the imagery. A customer's bad experience might become expensive for the company in the long run, as the unsatisfied customers might not return. In the case of a destination, it might be that the bad customer experience negatively influences the imagery of the destination. In the comment chains, there were people who shared their bad experiences with others:

I have been in Lapland once with the family. I am not going there anymore. Even if corona would prohibit me from going anywhere else. I've had enough of bad and overpriced services.

This comment shows regret after visitation, which according to Khazami (2020) is one phase of imaginary creation. This kind of negative imagery might have powerful consequences as put in the circulation: as other people get to read the comment, it might influence their idea about Lapland as a holiday destination. Another comment, where bad experience was shared with others, even implied that the tourism companies might offer less quality for the domestic tourist:

It's worth it to invest in positive marketing and try to also offer the domestic tourists something better. Travelling around the world has gotten us used to the quality that is here being offered to foreign tourists. We probably won't demand better service, or better rooms, but we won't return if we are not satisfied. We go there where quality is offered without requirement.

All the imaginaries about the employees were not only about the service performance. Some comments were made about the mobility of the employees (Salazar, 2009). According to Salazar (2009) tourists have the habit of looking at the local employees of tourism as immobile. According to this idea, the more immobile the locals are, the more authentic they are. Often tourists expect that the tourism workers are local experts (Salazar, 2009). This idea

might be bounced at the destination when a tourist is faced with a non-Finnish employee. Some destinations were identified as having more non-Finnish employees than others. One person commented: “I would add to the previous comment, that especially in Levi and Pyhä, it is difficult to find Finnish employees”.

Another reason for why this aspect (the nationality of the employees) can be important for someone is that there might have been a language barrier between the customer and the employee. From the comment alone it cannot be said who wrote it, but for example the majority of the senior citizens lack language skills. The comment just states that Finnish employees were difficult to find. It does not evaluate the situation as such. Perhaps it is just something that came to this person’s mind as someone else had already mentioned the same issue and wanted to mention it too. This issue did not emerge from the data as a theme, so it was not a strong imagery. There were only a few individual comments regarding it.

Next, I will discuss the imaginaries concerning **the entrepreneurs**. If we look at the stakeholder groups that are involved in the circulation of tourism imaginaries, the entrepreneurs belong to the group of intermediaries. The most imaginaries, concerning the theme people, were about the entrepreneurs. The high number of comments concerning the tourism entrepreneurs in Lapland was one of the most surprising observations about the data. It was also surprising, that pretty much all of the comments revealed a negative attitude towards the entrepreneurs. The message in all of them was more or less the same. Namely, it’s the entrepreneurs’ fault that tourism in Lapland is so expensive, as stated in chapter 4.2.2. Some people directly stated so, but it is also the imagery that was transmitted by the way that people expressed themselves and the words that they used. For instance, they used strong words, such as exaggerated and absurd, to describe the prices of tourism in Lapland. For example, one person stated: “I will not go to Lapland, there has been decades of exaggerated pricing. The Swedish Lapland is okay...Here we see once again that greed gets you nowhere”. Another person wrote: “If someone in Finland is good in overpricing their products, it is the tourism entrepreneur in Lapland”.

There were several similar statements in the data, according to which Lapland is expensive because of the actions of the entrepreneurs, who are the ones that set the prices. On the other

hand, there were also statements according to which the entrepreneurs design their tourism products and services more for the foreign tourists than for the domestic ones. This imaginary emerges for example from the following excerpt:

The thing is that tourism in Lapland is designed for the foreign tourists. For them, a vacation in Lapland is equivalent to our fancy vacation in the South. I bet the Spaniards are not willing to pay the prices at their local tourist destinations either.

This is something that has also emerged from previous research. Namely, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment's report has also stated that many of the tourism products in Lapland are in fact designed and prices set with the foreign tourist in mind (Honkanen et al., 2021). As these few excerpts have demonstrated, the entrepreneurs are not the imagined objects (Salazar, 2012) of tourism imaginaries as such, but they are regarded as the ones being responsible for the high price-level of tourism in Lapland. Chen and Hsu (2000) talk about the imaginaries affecting our behaviour also prior to a possible visit (as cited in Tasci & Gartner, 2007). If there is an imaginary, that a vacation in Lapland is expensive, then it can affect our behaviour in the way that a visit possibly never takes even place. Or we begin to compare Lapland with other similar destinations in order to have more options. This is clearly shown in the following comment, where a person directly states that the imaginary about the prices keeps s/he from visiting Lapland:

I would go to Lapland if the prices were not that absurd. The Lappish tourism entrepreneur should forget about the idea that s/he can spend a half a year's holiday with the income from the winter.

To conclude the discussion on entrepreneurs, I want to emphasize that not all the people agreed on these ideas presented previously although it was the imagery of most of the people. There were a few comments where the situation of the entrepreneurs was even sympathized:

Nice to read the thought of someone who thinks positively. At least you are not jealous of the entrepreneurs earning something, I wish you all the best and I believe that the entrepreneurs are thanking you for the sympathy.

Whereas these people did not necessarily disagree about the expensiveness of Lapland, they sympathized with the entrepreneurs. They understand the seasonal nature of tourism in Lapland, which means that many entrepreneurs earn their yearly income mostly during the winter months.

4.3.2 Tourists

Next, I will discuss the imaginaries of **the tourists**. Tourists have two roles when it comes to the imaginaries (Gravari-Barbas & Graburn, 2012). On one hand, tourists are the ones that create imaginaries. Salazar (2012) refers to this as the tourists being the subject of imaginaries. On the other hand, they can also be the ones that are being imagined, which means that they can be the objects as well (Salazar, 2012). In this study, I divided this category of tourists in two: into domestic, and foreign tourists. In the data, people simply used the word tourist as they were referring to foreign tourists. The domestic tourists were referred to as Finns. In the data, there were more imaginaries about the foreign tourists as there were about the domestic tourists.

According to Gravari-Barbas and Graburn, (2012) the imaginaries of tourists, as objects, are often stereotyped ideas, for example about the way tourists behave or dress. In my data, the stereotyped idea of the **foreign tourist** is that it is most likely an Asian, a Brit, or a Russian. Another stereotypical idea about the foreign tourists is that they are rich. One general discussion that people were commenting on was the tourism development in Lapland. People agreed that there has been an increase in tourism in the winter season, especially in inbound tourism in Lapland. According to the Regional Council of Lapland (2022, p. 9) inbound tourism has increased by approximately 9 per cent annually. However, there were differences of opinion whether this is a good thing. Those who were in favour of the tourism development, commented that the increment of tourism is good for the economy of Lapland, as stated in the comment below:

Hopefully the situation normalizes next year, especially the Chinese tourists bring a lot of money to that place too. Of course, there are those who feel that this situation is an ideal.

The situation, of which the person writes about, refers to the pandemic, as a result of which the inbound tourists disappeared in 2020. The positive attitude towards inbound tourism was particularly due to the economic aspect. Still, not everybody was satisfied with the development so far. These people worry that the impacts of overtourism will begin to show in Lapland, and for some that is already reality. They hoped that the COVID-19 crisis would lead to a change of pace in the development. The people who were of the opinion that there already is overtourism, talked about two different issues. On one hand, they feel that Lapland has become too crowded.

Crowdedness had been, according to the comments, experienced in tourist attractions, such as the Santa Claus Village, but surprisingly even in nature, as one informant wrote: “A couple of summers ago I experienced how it is to hike on nature trail at same time with a couple hundreds of Chinese tourists. It was simply horrible”. The other issue that was being discussed regarding the problems with overtourism, was that people felt that the northern feeling gets lost: “So, the Chinese are missing. That Santa Claus Village used to be full of Chinese tourists, you would feel like you were in China, the place had lost its’ Northern feeling”. This specific comment was made about a photograph showing the Santa Claus Village in the middle of the high season in winter 2020. The photograph was in one of the articles, to which the comment chains were attached to. There were no tourists to be seen in the photograph, as it concretely illustrated the consequences of the covid-19 pandemic. The thing that is bothering the person in question, as also stated in the comment, is that the northern feeling gets lost. This is an example of what happens when the prior visit imaginaries confront with the reality at the destination (Chon 1990, as cited in Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). One might, as a result, feel satisfaction or disappointment. If expectations are met, one is satisfied (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). If not, one ends up being disappointed with the destination.

In the case of Lapland, many of the previous research has indicated that Lapland is imagined as a nature-based destination, where there is plenty of room and space for everybody. If people have these kinds of imaginaries when they come to Lapland, and they are looking forward to having some quiet time in nature, and then confront too many people in nature, it does not correspond the imaginary that they had in their minds. This usually leads to feeling of unsatisfaction or even disappointment. This unbalance between the imaginary and reality can result in negative expressions, as is the case in this excerpt: “Hopefully, Lapland learns from this year: No single Asian tourists to Lapland ever again”! Behind such statements, there is a worry that Lapland will suffer from overtourism and loses the imagery which forms the core of its tourism: the silence and space. This concern was directly stated by various people: “As someone living in Rovaniemi, I think that Finland needs a strategy concerning mass tourism – if nothing is done, we lose our competitive advantages: silence and nature”.

The other stereotyped imagery often associated with the foreign tourists was that they are imagined to be rich. This notion of rich foreign tourists is connected to the imagery of

Lapland as an expensive destination. People seem to think that as the foreign tourists are able to afford a vacation in Lapland, they must be rich, as one person wrote: “We’ll certainly visit if the prices are lowered to a Finnish level and won’t stay at the Chinese and Russian millionaire level”. Others understood that these are the prices of luxury services: “Of course, the price is the same for everyone, but it’s high because it’s designed to be ‘luxus’ for the British and the Chinese etc, which it might well be”.

There was almost a dichotomy that could be seen between the foreign and domestic tourists, meaning the foreign tourists were seen as the ones that participate in the programme services whereas the domestic tourists were imagined doing outdoor activities, for instance skiing and hiking. In both of these comments (above) there is an idea that the foreign tourists are better able to afford the tourism services in Lapland, or that the product is more designed for the foreign tourist. The products as such are too expensive for the domestic tourists, as stated by one person: “Not many Finns are willing to pay several tens of euros for a reindeer safari”. Looking at this comment, the person is writing about willingness. The willingness aspect indicates that the problem is not necessarily the price as such, but perhaps more the product and its content. MacCannell (2013) states that tourists seek authentic experiences on holidays (as cited in Wang & Marafa, 2021). According to this idea, the reason why domestic customers are not interested in the products can be that they are not authentic enough and are perhaps therefore not interesting for the domestic tourists. Previous research, for example the survey done by Lapland hotels in 2020 (Honkanen et al., 2021) has come to similar conclusions, namely that the services need to be modified for the domestic customers.

Moving on to the **domestic tourists**, there were fewer imaginaries about them as there were about the foreign tourists. One thing that emerged from the data is that Lapland holiday is imagined too expensive for domestic tourists. Secondly, the domestic tourists were pictured through the activities that they do while in Lapland (discussed in next sub-chapter). Thirdly, many domestic tourists visiting Lapland are families that visit Lapland during school holidays. Then there were some ideas expressed according to which the domestic tourist is not necessarily regarded as important as the foreign tourist. People feel that the domestic customers are not the main customer group in Lapland tourism. Some said that they did not feel valued as a customer.

The discussions about the tourists included some dichotomies. According to Salazar (2012) dichotomies are common with imaginaries. In the case of the tourists, the dichotomy was how domestic tourists were seen in comparison to the foreign tourists. I already mentioned this in the previous sub-chapter. For instance, the domestic tourist was seen as not being able to afford a vacation in Lapland: “It’s unfortunate, that Finland is expensive, and Lapland has set the prices so high that the Finns cannot afford it anymore”. That Finns regard Lapland as an expensive destination, can be also seen in the way how accommodation was discussed. As discussed in chapter 4.2.2, many who travel to Lapland in a group, such as the family, prefer to accommodate in a cabin, as it is regarded as more economical option in comparison to a hotel. Of course, there are a variety of reasons why people choose their accommodation, but the costs certainly are one aspect of it.

We prepare all the foods at home before the vacation. Only the necessities are picked up from the local supermarket. A vacation in a cabin is good because you have a kitchen available. It’s won’t become so expensive....I stay away from hotels.

There were a couple of comments, where people shared that they had gotten the feeling that they were perhaps not especially valued as customers. Talking about this issue, a person wrote: “I’ve just been to Lapland for a short vacation. I got the feeling, from talking to some entrepreneurs, that the Finnish tourist is not as wanted as the Chinese tourist”. Based on such experiences, it is no wonder some feel that they are a marginal group:

The prices are set according to what people are prepared to pay and suddenly we find ourselves in a situation where those foreign tourists, who have been willing to pay higher prices, are not coming, and then one blames the entrepreneurs that the prices are too high for the Finns, who form a marginal group in a normal situation.

The comment above also reveals the attitude that many people have towards the entrepreneurs (discussed in chapter 4.3.1). This aspect has already been mentioned earlier, but it is difficult to discuss a topic strictly under one theme, because a lot of times an imagery has to do with many aspects. Like here, the fact that many people think that Lapland is an expensive destination, tells something about the imagery of the destination, but also about the domestic tourists who feel that the destination is not designed for them. The imagery of a domestic tourist in Lapland is that it is someone who do physical activities, such as skiing and hiking, in Lapland. The practices are the last aspect of the tourism imaginaries and will be discussed next.

4.4 Imaginaries of practices

The imaginaries of practices are about the activities that people in their minds connect to a certain place (Gravari-Barbas & Graburn, 2012; Salazar, 2012; Salazar & Graburn, 2014). Looking at the previous research (for example Tuohino et al., 2004) and what kind of practices people have connected to Lapland, it has mostly been so-called traditional outdoor activities, such as hiking, skiing, downhill skiing and berry picking. With regards to this study, it was mostly those same traditional practices that emerged. Some new references were made to biking, and ice fishing, but they were not dominating imaginaries. That the imaginaries about the practices are all outdoor activities, reinforces the imagery of Lapland as a nature-based destination. These traditional nature-based activities are especially being imagined as activities that domestic tourists do. Foreign tourists are more likely imagined participating in the program services, such as safaris.

As I was scanning the data in order to code the imaginaries of practices, I paid attention to the verbs and nouns that describe an activity. My initial idea was to divide the practices according to the season of year, as was done with the place-based imaginaries, but that kind of division did not function well with the practices, as some activities (for example hiking) can be practiced throughout the year. People who commented on practices did not always connect the practice to a specific time of the year either. For instance, sometimes people wrote clearly about hiking in the summer, but other times they would just talk about hiking. Therefore, I realized that the categorization needs to be done differently. I ended up dividing the activities into organized and unorganized ones. By organized practices I refer to activities that normally require the service of a guide, and unorganized practices (for instance skiing) are those that can be done independently, without a guide and organization. Both words, practices, and activities, are used interchangeably in the literature (Gravari-Barbas & Graburn, 2012). For me, they refer to the same thing, so I also use them interchangeably just to avoid repetitiveness.

4.4.1 Unorganized practices

In the early days of tourism, the midnight sun was an imaginary that tourists connected to Lapland (Hautajärvi, 2014). People who wanted to experience it and had the opportunity, most likely came to Lapland. It can be said that gazing the midnight sun was among the first touristic practices in Lapland. If we look at the data of this study, we can see that people still connect the midnight sun with Lapland (see chapter 4.2.1). However, other activities have become more dominant. Merely the admiration of landscapes seems not to be enough to attract tourists these days, whereas before it was enough of a reason to travel to Lapland (see Hautajärvi, 2014). Perhaps this has to do with the fact that people are travelling more nowadays. How many times can a landscape alone be exiting enough to be a motivation for travel, as discussed in the following comments:

How many times a year should you climb to the top of Ylläs? And once you have admired the wilderness of Lapland from the top of one fell, it looks exactly the same when viewed from any other fell top.

Once you've been to Lapland, you've seen it. I don't understand people who want to travel there because of the fall colours or hiking, you can find similar brushes all over Finland, and you don't need to sit in the car for a day to get there.

Both of these comments imply that Lapland is a place that can be visited once. The latter excerpt mentions hiking. The first national parks were established in Lapland in 1938 (Häyrynen, 2000). The long traditions of hiking in Lapland could be seen in the data also, as it was one of the most referenced practices, although the writer of the comment above would not come all the way to Lapland to practice it. Many of the outdoor activities were also seen as a practices that as such does not cost anything in otherwise expensive imagined Lapland:

Not everything is expensive in Lapland, for example hiking, for which there are different kinds of routes available, also shorter ones for families with children, and what could be more exiting for a child than to spend a night in a tent.

Lapland is imagined as a suitable destination for hiking, as there are different types of hiking trails to choose from. One can choose from shorter, one day trips to several days' excursions and everything in between. In the comment above, there is also a reference to camping, which is seen as an exciting experience for children. It is one of the more traditional practices of Lapland. Camping is also one of those practices that does not cost anything as such. In its simplest form hiking can just refer to walking on duckboards on public nature trails. Usually, the fireplaces are part of the imagery of spending time in nature, may it be on foot, or on skis as referred by one: "I remember several campfires on the ski trails in Ylläs, some hot sausages

and a hot coffee or cocoa in a thermos mug and life smiles again...”. The fireplaces can offer a simple but enjoyable nature experiences all year long.

In addition to hiking, there were many references to skiing and downhill skiing in the data. These are also activities that have attracted tourists to Lapland for decades, as the first ski resorts were built in the 1960s and 1970s (Hautajärvi, 2014). Nowadays, there is a variety of ski resorts, of which Levi, Ylläs, Pyhä and Saariselkä were mentioned in the data. Quite many people commented about coming to Lapland during the school holidays either during Christmas or winter holidays in the spring: “Traveling domestically has been criminally rare, except for a winter holidays in Lapland”. The skiers and downhill skiers seemed to especially enjoy the springtime as the weather is warmer and there is sun light: “In late winter and spring, it is the sunshine and snow blankets in Lapland and Kainuu that give light to life”. Looking at the data, there are many people who come to Lapland every year to practice skiing and downhill skiing. Nature-based activities were basically the only practices imagined in connection with Lapland. Moreover, there was a clear difference in the imaginary that were linked to each practice: the domestic tourists doing the traditional outdoor activities and the foreign tourists occupied with the program services.

The Santa Claus Village was the only tourist attraction that was mentioned in the data. Nonetheless, it seems that a visit to the Village is not necessarily a main goal of the trip. Usually, it was connected with a visit to Rovaniemi. The imagery of the Village varied a lot. Some felt that the Santa Claus Village is unauthentic, like somebody wrote: “I stayed in Santa’s Village in June. A horrible place. In the winter the darkness and snow cover the plasticity of the place, but it’s surprising that such a thing attracts tourists”! But then there were those who enjoyed the atmosphere. According to Hautajärvi (2014), Christmas and the Lappish culture are partly stereotyped at the Santa Claus Village. According to MacCannell (2013) tourists normally want to experience something authentic on a holiday (as cited in Wang & Marafa, 2021). It is good to note, however, that the experience is very much dependent on the time of the year. As can be seen in one of the previous comments, the person had visited the Village in June. The settings affect how the imaginaries correspond to the reality. A summertime setting is very different from the setting that would be encountered in winter, which would be also more in line with the imagery that advertisements are

spreading. Once we travel to the destination our imaginaries are faced with the reality of the place (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). This encounter with the reality might cause feelings of disappointment, as in the excerpt above. More so if we have really anticipated a vacation. As a result, we might never re-visit, or perhaps even worse, we might advise others not to go either. We might speak badly about the destination, just like was done in the online conversation where this comment was originally left, and so our negative imaginaries begin to circulate.

There were also people who had liked the Santa Claus Village and saw it in a totally different light in comparison to those who saw it perhaps as unauthentic. They liked the atmosphere of the place, as one person commented: “I went on a business trip in October for the first time in Rovaniemi and spent the night in Santa’s village. There is no place in Finland as wonderful as that place”. Correspondingly, another person wrote: “Everyone who is even a bit childlike should visit the Santa Claus Village. Next time I’ll bring my grandfather along, he really loves Christmas”. In this comment, there is a sense of childhood nostalgia which is one form of imagination, according to Khazami (2020). The setting is able to bring back childhood memories that are connected to Christmas. Other than these here mentioned imaginaries, the Santa Claus Village was mostly imagined as an attraction which is mostly visited by the foreign tourists. This is supported by previous research, for instance Hautajärvi (2014) has stated that foreign tourists come to Lapland predominantly during the Christmas time. Christmas and Santa Claus are especially popular among the British visitors (Saraniemi, 2009).

4.4.2 Organized practices

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the organized practices here mean practices that require the service of a guide. In Lapland, for example different safaris would be considered as such practices. Guided tours that emerged from my data were reindeer and sled dog safaris as well as snowmobile safaris. In Lapland, the first animal safaris were established as a program for tourists in the 1980s (Hautajärvi, 2014). Therefore, these are not considered as traditional activities. Perhaps that is why the imagery of the animal safaris were not very strong, meaning they were referred to only in a couple of comments. The imagery that came

strongly across from the data was that the safaris are activities that are designed for the foreign tourists. This comes forth also in previous research (for example Hautajärvi, 2014). Falk and Vieru (2019) also argue that the foreign tourists are interested in animal safaris. Based on the data, the reason why Finns do not participate, generally speaking, in animal safaris is because for them they are too expensive, as one person commented: “If a two-hour ride with a dog sled to eat sausages at a lean-on costs 70 euros, I won’t pay”.

However, it does not necessarily mean that the domestic tourists would not be interested in animal safaris. It can be that at the moment, how the product is offered, and with the price that they are being offered, there is no interest. That is, many of the tourism products in Lapland are at the moment designed as well as priced for the foreign tourists (Honkanen et al., 2021). Although the domestic tourists do not necessarily conjure up images of animal safaris, they do have imaginaries of reindeer and sled dogs, which are animals that belong to Lapland. For instance, reindeer were pictured in their natural environments, either on the fells or standing by the side of a road as one passes them by car, as one person described: “Seeing reindeer on the side of a road is already an experience for children. It’s incomprehensible that many people underestimate Lapland”. Those kinds of sudden encounters can be an experience in itself. The animals are very much part of the imagery of Lapland as a nature-based place. As Arminen (2021) states, they strengthen the nature-based imagery of Lapland.

In addition to the animal safaris, people also mentioned snowmobile safaris. Just like the animal safaris, they are mostly offered to foreign tourists (Falk & Vieru, 2019; Hautajärvi, 2014). In my data, the imagery about the snowmobiles was that there are already too many of them circulating in Lapland. It seemed that people did not like the noise that they cause. Snowmobiles were perceived as a loud activity, which disturbs the silence that many come to enjoy, as somebody sarcastically commented: “Nice winding ATV routes, along which it’s nice to enjoy the silence”. The snowmobile safaris in Lapland were also imagined as something expensive, just like the animal safaris, as can be seen in this statement: “Eastern Finland succeeds in terms of price, while snowmobiling and accommodation are half the level of Lapland”. This person writes that snowmobiling is less expensive in eastern Finland, which highlights the imagery of Lapland as an expensive destination. Although it is not clear whether or not the person is talking about the prices of snowmobile safaris, or perhaps the

renting costs of a snowmobile, it highlights the previously stated imagery that Lapland is an expensive destination. Also, snowmobiling is not seen as a unique practice done only in Lapland, as it can be practiced in other parts of Finland as well. That means, that snowmobiling is rather seen as an activity that is done while here, and not as an activity for which it is worthwhile to come and visit.

Nowadays there are also other guided tours offered to the tourists, for example Northern Lights tours, or snowshoe safaris, but these did not emerge from the data as an activity or guided tour that would be taken part in (the Northern Lights emerged as an attribute). It is important to note that there were also imaginaries of the product offering in Lapland being too narrow: “The problem is also that they have sort of put all their eggs in one basket and haven’t developed activities beyond ski slopes, safaris, etc”. Some were of the opinion that there are not so many things that one can do in Lapland. People even had suggestions of new programs that could be packaged and offered to tourists. For instance, one person thought that people could be interested in products that combine the outdoors with cooking food from local ingredients: “Lapland has a good setting to combine outdoor activities and cooking”. Somebody thought that these kinds of traditional activities, such as ice fishing, would have demand:

For many young Finnish adults, going ice fishing and preparing food from fish from start to finish are already experiences. Likewise, cooking courses on other Lapland delicacies such as berries and mushrooms.

There were a few comments that indicated something along these lines, that it could be nice if there were more products offered that combine local food and tourism (ice fishing, berry /mushroom picking etc). According to Visit Finland (2021) nature and outdoor activities are megatrends of tourism in the future too. In this regard, Lapland has a lot of potential to develop its tourism in the future. After all, it seems that the people that already come to Lapland, come here because they know that they will find nature and opportunities for spending time with loved ones: For instance, somebody wrote: “Those who go to Lapland, like the author of the story, value more sightseeing, outdoor activities, and activities with the family”.

Chen and Hsu (2000) state that tourism imaginaries influence our behaviour before, during and after the actual visit (as cited in Tasci & Gartner, 2007). It could be seen from the content of the comments, that most were written by people who had visited Lapland. Now, in the comment chains they shared their opinions and experiences online for others to build on. Perhaps someone's imaginary was (re)shape (Salazar, 2009) by these comments. The data showed that there are many imaginaries about Lapland circulating around. Each individual has his / her own experiences and knowledge (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991) that influence their personal imagery. However, one theme that was present throughout the comments was nature. Therefore, it can be said that the general imagery that Finns have of Lapland is strongly based on nature attributes.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this thesis was to examine what kind of tourism imaginaries do Finns have about Lapland. This is an important question as the image greatly determines the success of a tourism destination. There is not a lot of research done on the imagery of Lapland, and even less studies where Finns would be the informants of the study. This chapter summarises the main findings of the study, evaluates the research settings and makes recommendations for future research.

5.1 Summary of the research findings

The first research question in this study sought to determine the imaginary of Lapland as a place. Based on the findings, Lapland is imagined as nature-based destination. Many of the attributes that arose in this study, such as snow, coldness, Northern Lights, and the midnight sun, are the same images known from previous research. In this regard, the findings are mostly in line with previous research. This study highlights that Lapland is known for its nature's uniquenesses. Every season of the year can have something special that attract people. For instance, in the fall, it is the colours of nature (*ruska*), and the hiking possibilities. On the other hand, each season of the year, can have its negative aspects that keep people away. For example, many described the winter as too cold and dark. Spring was in this study the only season which conjured up only positive imaginaries. People saw themselves skiing and practicing other popular winter outdoor activities in the sunshine and bearable temperatures. The summer imaginaries were dominated by the magical midnight sun, although there were also imaginaries of rainy and cold weather.

Electronic word-of-mouth can be a powerful tool in spreading imaginaries. In the case of this data, people used the opportunity to even make recommendations to others. Of all the aspects of Lapland, the colours of the fall and the midnight sun in the summer were evaluated so high, that they were recommended to others too. Of all the seasons of the year, winter conjured up the most imaginaries, which is in line with previous research. Looking at the previous research, the reason for why there are more winter imaginaries than there are of summer imaginaries, might be that the informants (foreign tourists) of those studies mostly visit

Lapland during the winter months. So, they have better knowledge about the winter. The reason for why there were more winter imaginaries that emerged in this study might be because the majority of the comments were written in winter and fall. Also, some of the articles that the comment chains were attached to, were specifically discussing winter tourism, so it is only natural that they have guided the discussions to some degree. The northern most parts of Lapland (above the tree line) were also imagined as unique in Lapland. It is probably related to the idea of this geographical place being the last wilderness that is left in Europe. Perhaps this notion of a uniqueness is why some people were concerned about the consequences that the growth of tourism industry might bring along. They fear that the nature could be spoiled with too many tourists. The unpredictable weather (cold and rainy) emerged as an issue that can form a barrier to some, especially in the summer and fall.

One of the most unexpected things about the data was the number of persons who commented that Lapland has become too expensive as a tourism destination. What was curious about this result is that people were quite frustrated with the current price-level. The expensiveness of a Lapland vacation has even formed a barrier for some people. Lapland was also often being compared to other destinations, and it seems that often Lapland loses in the comparison for a variety of reasons, such as the weather, the price-level, limited range of services and accessibility, which was already known to be a challenge. The price-level was also known to be a challenge for tourism in Lapland, and this study confirms that notion. Honkanen et al. (2021) have for instance suggested that the imagery of expensiveness could perhaps be changed by offering added value. The imagery could also change if the expectations of the domestic customers could be exceeded. In that way, the reality would be more positive than the imagery.

The second research question in this research was about the imaginaries regarding the people as the subjects as well as the objects of the imagery (Salazar, 2012). The imaginaries of the people were divided into imaginaries about the host community and imaginaries about the tourists. The imaginaries about the host community included some imaginaries about the local people and the tourism workers, but mostly they were imaginaries about the tourism entrepreneurs. If we look at the categories of local people and tourism workers, there were not many imaginaries shared about them. Mainly, the imaginaries about them were about the

friendliness of the people and the quality of customer service. It was namely a theme that emerged occasionally, but still throughout the data, that some people feel that the quality of customer service could be better. This was in connection to the discussion about the price-quality relationship. The domestic tourists are quite price-conscious and require good-quality products and services. Yet understandably, the quality of a service depends on the situation. If, for example in a busy ski resort, the workers are in rush while serving the customers, it has an influence on the quality of the service that they are providing. Therefore, for example service experience from a ski resort during the high season differs from another person's experience from a quieter place during low season. This can explain why some perhaps had have some negative experiences, and why the imagery can differ among the people as everyone has unique experiences. Another thing that could explain why some felt disappointment with their visit to Lapland, is that the price-quality relationship was not in balance. There were namely some comments where the poor customer service was connected to expensive products. This would mean, that not necessarily the service as such is bad, but it is not in relation with the price of the service. In all cases, customer service has great influence on the overall experience of a customer and therefore it needs to be paid attention to.

In connection to the discussion about the customer service is also the imagery of the domestic tourists not feeling as valued as the foreign tourist. This emerged from the experiences that people had had with the service or the products that are being offered. It was a quite common imagery that tourism in Lapland is designed for the foreign customers (stereotyped mostly as Britt, Asian or Russian). Indeed, the tourism sector in Lapland has risen for the past decade and it has become a popular destination for many foreign tourists. Whereas some saw it as a good thing that the economy in Lapland is growing, others were more sceptical. They fear that if the number of tourists continue to rise at this pace, the uniqueness of Lapland (silence, sense of space) are lost as a result.

Considering all the imaginaries about the people, the most imaginaries were about the entrepreneurs. Surprisingly many had a somewhat negative attitude towards them. Many blame the entrepreneurs for the high prices. Domestic tourists feel that the entrepreneurs, sometimes out of greediness, have set the prices as high as possible. This discussion about the

high prices is connected to the more general discussion about Lapland being an expensive destination, as well as it is connected also to the discussion of some seeing Lapland as a destination that is constructed for the foreign tourists. The domestic tourists might think, that as the foreign tourists are more willing to pay higher prices, the entrepreneurs rather design products for them in order to gain more profits. This all gives some domestic tourists an impression that they are in the margin, meaning that they do not feel as valued as a customer.

The third research question looked into the imaginaries about the tourism practices in Lapland. In the past, one of the things that motivated people to come to Lapland was the midnight sun and the landscapes in general. Nowadays, those are still things that people enjoy, but it seems that the biggest motivations are offered by different kinds of nature-based outdoor activities. Mostly, it was traditional activities, such as skiing, downhill skiing, and hiking, that people in their minds mostly connected with Lapland. These have for long been the activities in Lapland which people like to spend their leisure time with. People were also discussing these activities from the point of view that they do not cost anything as such. This further highlights that what is already known, which is that Lapland is imagined to be an expensive destination. Although there is also an ever-growing offering of tourism products available, it seems that the majority of the domestic tourists have not yet found them. Moreover, in the data these activities that I am referring to, for example animal safaris, are perceived as tourism activities of the foreign tourists. Previous research (Honkanen et al., 2021, p.9) confirms this finding by stating that tourism in Lapland is designed (and priced) for the foreign tourists.

One thing that emerges from this study is that the tourism products and services should be designed differently if they are to be offered to domestic tourists. There were two bigger themes that emerged from the data as a barrier when it comes to consuming tourism products. Firstly, the tourism product in Lapland have become too expensive. This was a theme that came up throughout the data. Secondly, the offering of tourism products and services were found to be too narrow. For example, the findings showed that domestic tourists could also be interested in experiencing same things that foreign tourists are interested in, for instance Northern Lights and reindeer, or how it is to overnight in an iglu. At the moment however, the product design or the price is not appealing to them. It is important to consider how the

services could be modified so that they would become more accessible for the domestic customers. People are becoming more and more interested in authentic experiences, and those who know how to provide them, succeed in the keen competition because satisfied customers recommend the service to others, and possibly make a re-visit in the future.

The aim of this research was to find out what imaginaries Finns have about Lapland as a tourism destination. This study has found that the domestic tourists also regard Lapland strongly as a nature-based destination. Based on the data of this study, the most domestic tourists come to Lapland in the spring to enjoy outdoor activities and snow. In addition to the more traditional activities, it seems that the domestic tourists would also be interested in new tourism products and services. At the moment, though, there is a lack of such, as the existing services are imagined to having been designed for the foreign tourists. This has also emerged in previous research (for instance Honkanen et al., 2021, p. 9). The other barrier is that other kinds of tourism products (for instance animal safaris) are often found to be too expensive. If I were to pick up perhaps some wishes of the domestic tourists for the future that emerged from the data, it would be, on one hand, that the costs of a vacation in Lapland would not be so expensive, and that something could be done to make it more accessible from Southern Finland. Looking at the data of this study, it is clear that tourism imagery is a social construct, and that there is not just one imagery of Lapland that is common to everyone. There can be as many imaginaries circulating as there are people, as each and every one has their own unique thoughts, which are shaped by the personal experiences (Tasci & Gartner, 2007).

5.2 Methodological considerations

Traditionally, destination image has been studied using quantitative research methodologies. However, there is a growing number of qualitative studies that analyse the imagery of a destination. The current study used qualitative analysis in order to gain insights into the imaginaries that domestic tourists have about the Finnish Lapland as a holiday destination. I decided to use qualitative research methodologies because I wanted that the informants freely speak about their thoughts on the issue. I wanted to give the word to the people themselves and guide them as little as possible with pre-set attributes of imaginaries. The data of this study consists of conversations that were found online. More specifically, I used the data of

four different comment chains that were attached to four different online article, each of which dealt with domestic tourism. The decision to use already existing data was based on, at that time relevant recommendations for social distancing (COVID-19) but perhaps mostly because of my own will to take advantage of the plethora of information that is freely and easily available on the internet.

Also, my initial thought was that as I am using data that already existed before this research was conducted, I would have no influence on what the people say about the issue. I thought that in this way I would get to know their true thoughts, which was my aim. What I did not realize is that instead of me, the people were partly influenced by the article on which they were initially commenting on. They were “speaking” with the article in a sense, as the articles partly guided the conversations by focusing on certain themes. For instance, if an article talked about the problems of tourism in Lapland, then the people mostly commented about these problems that were highlighted by the article. This can partly explain why so many comments were negative. I believe also that the COVID-19 pandemic at that time (2020) influenced peoples’ attitudes. If we look at the conversation that revolved around the foreign tourists, some people had negative attitudes towards them. I believe that these negative attitudes arose from fear for the spreading of the COVID-19 virus. I think that it is possible that had I collected the data during different periods of time, there might had been fewer negative comments. Yet, I think that the timing was not a big issue as the findings are well in line with the findings of previous research.

One issue that I sometimes wondered about was that I was not sure if my data was becoming irrelevant and old, as it is data from year 2020. The reason why I decided to use data from that particular year was simply based on the fact that there were a lot of conversations going on in the media and online at that time. Considering the remark that Tuohino et al. (2004) made in their research, which was that the tourism image of Finland had not changed much in over a decade, I felt confident that my data is relevant and in comparison, not that old even. My findings are also topical, because the findings that emerged in this research have emerged in previous research or have been discussed otherwise, for instance the problems with the accessibility.

One challenge, however a minor one, that I had with the data was to evaluate whether or not a comment was written sarcastically or not. There were some situations where I had to think about what the writer of a specific comment really wants to say. But, as said this was not a big issue, but something that can happen as the researcher is not involved in the situation and cannot ask further questions. In these couple uncertain situation, I decided to leave the comments out of the analysis. Another challenge, which occurred as I was writing the chapter 'findings' was that it was sometimes difficult to decide which excerpt should be put under which research question and theme, place, people, or practices, as one excerpt could include elements from two or three different themes. This challenge had to do with my research questions, but I am not sure if I would have avoided this problem if I had used other research questions.

Usually, the results of a qualitative research study cannot be generalized beyond the sample group of a specific study. The data of this study consists of a relatively small number of comments, by people who happened to participate in a specific discussion at a specific time. However, I hope that these findings offer some insight into the imaginaries of the domestic tourists and possible obstacles that they are facing. The study certainly adds to our understanding of domestic tourism in Lapland and the nature of domestic tourism in general.

5.3 Recommendations for future research

In the future, tourism imaginaries could be studied further. There is plenty of research that can be conducted on the image of Finland, especially from the point of view of domestic tourism. Considering alone the different tourism regions in Finland, research could be done on the imagery of each region, not to mention the possibilities that there are to study the image / imagery from the point of view of different tourist groups. As stated in this thesis, image in the context of tourism has usually been studied using quantitative research methodologies, so it would be nice to see more qualitative research in the future around this topic.

One thing that kept emerging time and time again throughout the conversations that I analysed, was that some domestic tourists feel that the foreign tourists are more valued as

customers. They feel that tourism in Lapland is more constructed for the foreign tourists. It would be interesting to study this further in the future. What makes the domestic tourists feel this way, and how could this imagery be changed. It would be important to find out what kinds of products and services the domestic tourists would be interested in, in the case that the current services are not interesting for them. Another fruitful area for future work would be to study what domestic tourists consider to be luxury in the context of tourism in Lapland. What do the domestic tourists think about silence, which is a theme that emerged a couple of times as something that people looked forward to in Lapland? Could some services be specifically designed for them around the theme of silence? Future research might further explore the imagery of the price-level in Lapland. How could the image of Lapland as an expensive destination be changed? Would adding value to the products and services be a solution, as suggested by Honkanen et al. (2021). What would it look like concretely?

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