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**Author:** Outi Kulusjärvi

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# **Sustainable Destination Development in Northern Peripheries: A Focus on Alternative Tourism Paths**

**Outi Kulusjärvi**  
University of Oulu  
Oulu, Finland  
[outi.kulusjarvi@oulu.fi](mailto:outi.kulusjarvi@oulu.fi)

## **Abstract**

Research has pointed out how tourism destinations in northern, sparsely populated areas are typically developed in accordance with the ideals of growth. This hinders efforts towards sustainable development in destination communities. The objective of this paper is to look into the large-scale growth-focused path creation process by studying how such tourism path creation appears from the perspective of various tourism actors in a destination community. The research draws on insights from local tourism actors in the case study area of the Ylläs in Finnish Lapland. This paper approaches tourism path creation by combining poststructural political economy thinking with evolutionary economic geography perspectives. The analysis highlights the existence of alternative economic knowledge on tourism development in the Ylläs tourism destination community, which deviates from the strongly growth-focused tourism path. The paper proposes that if regional economies of northern sparsely populated areas are to be developed in line with the goals of sustainability, tourism path creation should appreciate such alternative economic thinking existing in the community. In doing so, the paper suggests there is a possibility for less resource-intensive and more locally-led path creation through tourism in the sparsely populated north.

Keywords: tourism destinations, path creation, co-evolution, economic difference, community economies, networking, sustainability

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## **1.0 Introduction**

Finnish Lapland is a peripheral, sparsely populated region in Finland. In this area, paths to support the regional economic development and local well-being are sought within tourism to counter the declining economies of agriculture, forestry, and reindeer herding. In this process, as stated by Viken and Granås (2014), local destinations are “exposed to the imperatives of growth, i.e., to that of increasing profit through quantitative means in the development of more powerful production units” (p. 7). Carson and Carson (2017) note that this is often not a new development in sparsely populated areas; due to the path dependency of economic development, tourism tends to evolve into an industry focused on bulk resource export and large-scale investments with an aim to attract non-local investors. Saarinen (2004, 2017) notes that neoliberal market-led tourism development tends to result in enclave-like resorts also in northern sparsely populated areas, which differentiate from their surrounding peripheries. This creates challenges for implementing sustainable development through tourism (see e.g., Burns, 2004; Saarinen, 2017).

In the case study site of this paper, the winter tourism-based destination Ylläs, resort growth has come at the expense of local hopes about preserving rural villages and the natural environment (Tuulentie & Mettiäinen, 2007). As research has pointed out, although the state and local municipalities have the role of both a regulator as well as a promotor of the economy, the latter role tends to predominate in destination development (see e.g., Hall, 1999; Dredge et al., 2011; Dredge & Jamal, 2013). Tourism governance via public-private partnerships seems insufficient in its current form to guarantee that non-economic goals are sufficiently taken into account in destination communities.

The objective of this paper is to look into the large-scale growth-focused path creation process by studying how such tourism path creation appears from the perspective of various tourism actors in a destination community. In doing so, the paper observes to what extent the goals of this tourism path are shared by the various tourism entrepreneurs and other tourism actors. To understand the everyday tourism realities present in destination communities in Finnish Lapland, a qualitative case study method is used. I conducted 37 semi-structured and in-depth interviews with local tourism actors in the Ylläs tourism destination in 2015. In order to meet the research objective, three research questions were posed:

1. To what extent is the tourism growth paradigm shared by the various local tourism actors in the Ylläs destination?
2. Are there alternative, co-evolving tourism paths that exist in the destination?
3. Through which means are tourism actors able to create the alternative tourism paths they desire?

The analysis shows that tourism actors have divergent views and desires in the Ylläs destination community concerning local tourism development. There exist alternative tourism pathways which deviate from the dominant paradigm of destination growth. The paper argues that when aiming to meet the sustainability goals of including local voices as well as ecological concerns in development, the alternative, less growth-focused tourism paths that are already present in the Ylläs tourism community need to be recognized and regarded as valuable forms of economic practice also for overall destination development. As a rule, these paths should not be viewed as dependent on large-scale, growth-focused tourism. With these notions, the paper contributes to research on new path creation in the sparsely populated north by highlighting potential alternative tourism development pathways.

The study builds on political economic (e.g., MacKinnon et al., 2009; Pike et al., 2009, 2016) and especially poststructural political economic perspectives (e.g., Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008; Massey, 2008). The proposed theoretical approach is open to multiple understandings of the economy concerning its aims and value basis—it deviates from the capitalist growth-focused view on development. Two feminist political economists and economic geographers under the pen name Gibson-Graham (2006) have challenged the traditional structural logics of the economy, which are normally “elevated as universal principles (sometimes represented as natural ‘laws’) of economic evolution” (p. 166). Their project focuses not on the role of governance in implementing new economies but suggests that change can happen through economic agency itself. One of their intentions is to show that not all capitalist enterprises follow the same principles of

economic agency. In this way, Gibson-Graham are “reading for difference rather than dominance” (p. 54). Similarly, North (2016) states that changes towards more sustainable economies can take place in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) beyond the so-called greenwashing. With this novel theoretical approach to tourism studies (see also Hillmer-Pegram, 2016), the paper advances research on the sustainability perspective on path creation, a line of research that is hoped will gain strength in tourism research within evolutionary economic geography (EEG) (Brouder, 2014, 2017; Brouder & Eriksson, 2013; Brouder & Ioannides, 2014; Essletzbichler, 2009). In addition, the bottom-up, real-time perspective to path creation demonstrated in this paper deepens the EEG accounts of path creation, which, according to Steen (2016), usually “render social agency, motivation, and strategy largely invisible” (p. 1606).

The article proceeds in six sections. The first section presents the theoretical frame of the article in more detail. The second part introduces the case study region of Ylläs. In section three, the research methods are introduced. The article then moves on to the analysis, illustrating the multiple tourism paths that exist in Ylläs as well as their co-evolution. The discussion section considers the ways in which recognition of multiple tourism paths can be used to rethink tourism agency and facilitate sustainability in northern peripheral tourism communities. It also reviews the study implications with respect to theories on path creation. Conclusions end the article.

## **2.0 Economic Agency in Sustainable Destination Evolution**

Theories and concepts of EEG aim to bring into focus the role of economic actors’ (individuals, firms, and organizations) micro-scale agency and their self-transformation in economic development. This line of research is an applicable starting point for economic analysis that highlights the differences within economic agency as well as possible transformations within “the economy” which is often considered unable to escape its internal, predetermined logics. The concept of *path creation* has been used as a way to prioritize the role of intentional human agency in economic change over path-dependent processes (see Martin & Sunley, 2006; Boschma & Martin, 2010). In tourism research, studies on path creation mainly draw on Garud and Karnøe (2001) and Karnøe and Garud (2012) who argue that “entrepreneurs are embedded in structures that they jointly create and from which they mindfully depart” (2001, p. 3) and thus “continuity and change are both preserved in the act of path creation” (2001, p. 25). This view thus offers an agent-focused and real-time approach to economic change.

In an effort to broaden EEG studies on tourism, Brouder (2014) has argued for the incorporation of the sustainability perspective. For him, “developing EEG measures in line with the goals of sustainable development (including sustainable tourism development) will be one of the most important challenges of EEG and tourism research going forward” (p. 544). This is considered a prerequisite for broadening the scope of EEG research beyond tourism entrepreneurship and business development studies. This section of the paper examines theoretical notions from (poststructural) political economy linking them to path creation studies in order to advance sustainability thinking in EEG tourism research.

## **2.1 Uneven Power**

In their study of existing development paths, Garud and Karnøe (2001) found that “mindful deviation” is a mental and social process that is central to the creation of new economic paths. Here, entrepreneurs become conscious of their disadvantageous routines, reframe their thinking, use existing resources meaningfully, and act at the right juncture to create novel paths (Garud & Karnøe, 2001; Gill & Williams, 2014). This viewpoint maintains that self-reflection is needed to escape path-dependent development. Economic actors that are able to reflect on their paths are considered “boundary spanners” (Garud & Karnøe, 2001, p. 14). In path creation literature, this is referred to as innovativeness, in which new knowledge and its accumulation are regarded as central (see Boschma & Franken, 2006; Steen, 2016). This notion of mindful deviation rightly emphasizes the human ability to evaluate and understand the past and current development in multiple ways. Thus, the direction in which actors mindfully deviate also differs. In addition to the need for economic actors to be self-aware of their agency, mindful deviation in path creation involves the ability to mobilize a collective despite any resistance that may arise when the existing order is challenged (Garud & Karnøe, 2001).

Although the agent-focused and real-time approach of path creation in EEG tourism studies accurately emphasizes the human ability of reflective and novel thinking, it seems to pay little attention to the ways in which path creation is influenced by power hierarchies. As MacKinnon et al. (2009) caution, evolutionary theories should be careful not to presume voluntarism at the expense of missing wider structural influences. There has been a recent call in the field of economic geography for EEG to also account for the institutions, social agency, and power relations that impact economic agency on a micro scale (see MacKinnon et al., 2009; Martin & Sunley, 2015; Pike et al., 2009). A similar rethinking is needed in EEG research in the field of tourism studies. Tourism policies concerning destination branding are typically formed according to the desires and values of a limited number of major stakeholders (Messely et al., 2014). Not all tourism actors are able to direct the overall destination development. In such circumstances, the multiplicity of values and expectations behind tourism operations often remains hidden (Mosedale, 2011). As Viken (2014) states, “the democratic idea of participation collides with the democracy of capital” (p. 36). This means that the tourism actors with less capital remain marginal and do not have equal potential for creating new development paths in the destination through collective agency. Thus, the multiple ways in which path creation by dominant tourism actors impact the co-located others needs to be recognized in research.

## **2.2 Economic Diversity**

Another issue in tourism path creation research in terms of the sustainability perspective concerns the way economic logics are understood. Although the concept of path creation discusses intentional human agency in “the economy” as enabling diverse economic paths it, nevertheless, assumes that the goal of all economic agency is uniform, i.e., economic growth. These viewpoints also dominate the EEG studies on tourism, which tend to take the ideal of destination growth as a given. Yet, it needs to be asked whether all tourism actors in destinations share this goal, and if they do, what are the limits of growth? As noted (Brouder & Ioannides, 2014; Brouder & Fullerton, 2015), EEG is conceptually

broad enough to transcend the prevailing growth-centric and monetary approaches to development. According to Brouder (2014), tourism success should be evaluated in terms of broader socioeconomic, environmental and community goals in addition to more traditional quantitative growth. This is considered particularly essential when studying regions dominated by mass tourism but which aim to create more sustainable paths (Brouder & Eriksson, 2013). Brouder and Fullerton (2015) argue that more attention needs to be paid to the marginal development paths of tourism because “the laggards of today may be the leaders of tomorrow” (p. 153). This argument points out that certain tourism actors may currently possess knowledge that is needed for transformations towards sustainability.

The multiplicity of bases for economic agency has been approached from poststructural political economic perspectives. Gibson-Graham (2006, 2008) aim at demonstrating how the dominance of the growth ideal is not the result of unavoidable mechanistic logics but is ultimately dependent on the decision-making of individuals. Thus, there is space for alternatives. Gibson-Graham (2006) focus on deconstructing the dominant economic discourses and demonstrate how economic agency is diverse and always political. Their thinking connects to Massey’s (2008) poststructural spatial theory. Both direct us to conceive space as consisting of multiple concurrent histories and development paths. In other words, space is always a *meeting place*, not a homogenous community. This perspective resonates with the idea of tourism path *co-evolution*, used to illustrate the co-existence of heterogeneous tourism paths and their mutual influences (Brouder, 2014; Brouder & Ioannides, 2014; Ma & Hassink, 2013). However, Massey (2008) underlines the difference in terms of the contribution of economic paths to positive local development. For her, globalization does not automatically contribute to this. She argues that, currently, the influence of the neoliberal form of economic globalization hinders the co-existing alternative economic paths. Thus, in economics, there is no one globalization to which local agents merely respond, but actors participate in creating the forms globalization takes. Recognition of the economy as being diverse sets the groundwork for imagining novel ways how tourism might be transformed into a just and sustainable economic path.

### ***2.3 Economic Interdependence in Community***

Gibson-Graham’s project (2006) focuses on disclosing the alternative forms of economy (e.g., household production, social entrepreneurs, and voluntary labor) that already exist as constitutive elements of economic exchange in addition to capitalism. Gibson-Graham (2006) explain they are “reading for difference rather than dominance” (p. 54). However, Gibson (personal communication, April 22, 2016) confirms that ‘economic difference’ can also be sought within capitalist enterprises, such as tourism firms. This indicates that the persons who are engaged in tourism business cannot be expected to have a shared basis and logic for their economic agency. The recognition of the economy as being diverse challenges the notion of a homogenous destination with a shared path towards destination growth and competitiveness at the global scale. According to Gibson-Graham (2006, 2008), by drawing attention to existing, unorthodox views that typically remain marginal or unseen, such ideas can be made visible and empowered and can serve as examples of forms of economy that are more socially and ecologically sustainable. Following poststructural thinking, as we construct the world with our research, we also help create new realities or disclose already existing ones. Gibson-Graham (2008) call this an ethical rather than structural perspective of

economy. They (2006) focus not only on criticizing current economic development (e.g., focusing on pointing out structural inequalities) but searching for ways for implementing positive change.

In their local action research projects, Gibson-Graham (2006) are attempting to construct “intentional community economies”. They aim to build communities where economic agency is based on recognizing and fostering economic interdependence (p. 165). This means that the direction of an economic path is collectively negotiated by community members and the social and environmental origins of economic growth are recognized. In this way, economic relations are re-socialized and re-politicized. There is no separate field of “the economy” which would reside outside socially and economically just and sustainable decision-making. To similar end and drawing on Gibson-Graham, Hillmer-Pegram (2016) emphasizes that tourism development should be considered sustainable only if its political economy succeeds in supporting the traditional cultural values of the local community. He further argues that in the context of Indigenous communities, adapting tourism economy to correspond with alternative economic ideas is possible.

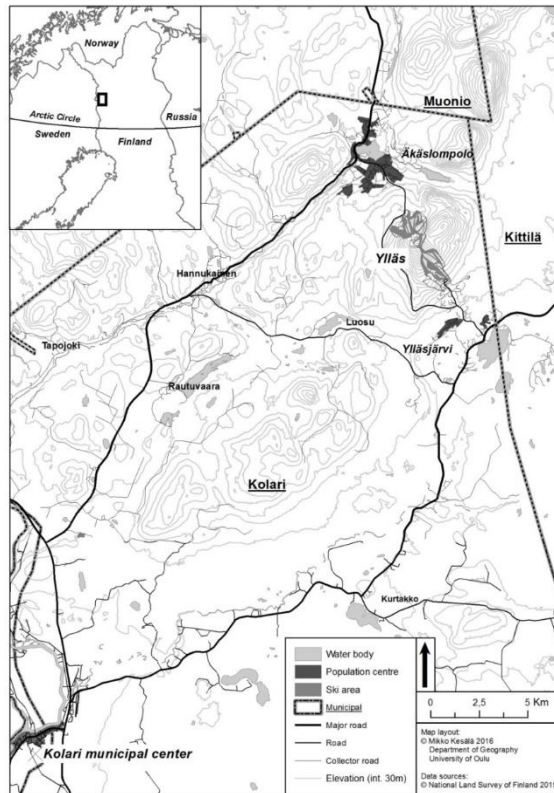
### **3.0 Study Region: The Ylläs Destination**

Tourism path creation and co-evolution are discussed by drawing on empirical case study research conducted in the Ylläs tourism destination in Finnish Lapland. The Ylläs destination is located at the foot of a chain of mountains in the municipality of Kolari (see Figure 1), which is a peripheral region at the national scale. It is a municipality of 3,885 residents, with an additional 2,292 second-homes in 2013 (Statistics Finland, 2017). Kolari is dependent on tourism as a formal livelihood. In 2011, direct tourism income represented 48% of total turnover of all local livelihoods (Satokangas, 2013). Yet, tourism development is clearly spatially concentrated: most tourism jobs are located in Ylläs, mainly in its two local villages, Äkäslompolo and Ylläsjärvi, which together have 900 residents. In 2009, there were 126 enterprises in Ylläs (Kauppila, 2011), the majority of them were small enterprises. In the villages of Ylläsjärvi and Äkäslompolo, the population is growing, unlike elsewhere in the municipality. The unemployment rate in Kolari was 14.9% in 2013, which is above the national average (Statistics Finland, 2017). Villages in the southern parts of Kolari derive their livelihood primarily from agriculture, forestry, and reindeer herding.

The development path of tourism in Kolari started in the 1930s when local villagers were the main actors in small-scale tourism. Downhill skiing, in contemporary form of that time, was the main tourism attraction. Along with the growth in visitor numbers, ski lifts were built on the Äkäslompolo side of the mountain in the 1950s and in Ylläsjärvi in the 1980s. At both locations, lift operations were first run by local villagers, but later on, as tourism grew, they were bought out by non-local actors. Besides the growing tourism sector in Ylläs, people in the other parts of the municipality were often employed in the mining industry. In the late 1980s, the mining industry closed down, causing unemployment. In consequence, tourism was selected as a source of revenue to be developed further. The 1980s were a phase of strong development in Ylläs. Tourism investments in Kolari received 50% subsidization from the state (Director of Economic Development, personal communication, February 2, 2015; Pöyry Finland, 2006). However, the risks of fast development were considered at that

time, and the large resort of Saariselkä in Lapland was treated as a ‘cautionary tale’ (Lapin seutukaavaliitto, 1987): “Although it is estimated that downhill skiing will grow by 20% yearly, Ylläs will not be turned into another Saariselkä resort. When developing the Ylläs tourism region, the aim is to avoid “urban-like” development” (p. 112).

Figure 1. The Ylläs Tourism Destination in the Kolari Municipality, Finland.



Source: Mikko Kesälä.

Since the time of these conclusions, the local tourism economy has faced economic booms and busts. According to the numeric data on tourism development in Ylläs, the peak year was 2008, with approximately 350,000 overnights. In 2016, Ylläs saw the first signs of a new boom in tourism, as registered overnights by international tourists increased 32.1% from the previous year (Statistics Service Rudolf, 2017). Today, the Ylläs tourism destination is one of the leading winter destinations in Finland. Yet, it has not grown as intensively as some other resorts in Lapland, e.g. Levi. As Tuulentie and Mettiäinen (2007) describe, Ylläs has a reputation of a quieter and less “urban-like” destination. The main tourism activities are downhill as well as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and husky and reindeer programs. Outside the winter season, the Pallas-Yllästunturi National Park, located adjacent to Ylläs, is a major attraction. The destination management organization is the main body in tourism management. It aims to coordinate between the various cooperative groups, two lift companies and the villages of Ylläsjärvi and Äkäslompolo with an aim to unite the approximately 170 member companies.



## **4.0 Research Methods**

To gain access to the views and practices concerning tourism path creation, I conducted in-depth and semi-structured interviews with 37 tourism actors in Ylläs in 2015. The intention was to meet those locals whose work in tourism and whose practices are related to destination development and planning. The term “local” refers to tourism actors who operated and primarily also lived in the municipality at the time of the fieldwork (that is, the group also included in-migrants). The interviewees were tourism entrepreneurs and representatives from third sector organizations as well as representatives from the local municipality. The interviewees were selected based on purposeful sampling in order to reach tourism actors from enterprises of different sizes, different fields of business and different parts of the destination. The interviewed actors were located not only in the core resort area of Ylläsjärvi and Äkäslompolo but also in the nearby smaller villages, which form a part of the Ylläs destination. Also, variety in terms of gender, age, and place of birth of the informants was considered. Through this sample, I was able to understand both more and less growth-focused perspectives on local development. All interviews were conducted in the participants’ and researcher’s native language Finnish.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the data collection method since the aim was to gain a thorough understanding of local views on the research topics. The interview topics included collective agency in tourism, influence opportunities, participation in decision-making, and desired destination development. My interest was to hear about the views the interviewees had and about their actual tourism practices, both individual as well as collective. I attempted to keep the interviews as informal as possible and let the interviewee guide the conversation. I focused on covering set themes, only directing the conversation when needed. This open method resulted in fruitful coincidences during the interviews: some points that were ultimately central to the research and analysis emerged when the discussion turned to unexpected topics. During my five-week stay in Ylläs, I began to understand the multiple subjective viewpoints on the everyday tourism politics. As an individual, I was able to sympathize with the multiple motivations and aims of the interviewees and noted the strong professional expertise that each tourism actor held in their own field of tourism. After the fieldwork, the recorded data were transcribed and manually coded into preliminary themes drawn both from literature and the interviewees’ insights. The analysis continued following poststructuralist thinking, searching for differences within the tourism actors’ views and practices (see Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 54), paying special attention to deviant economic views. Through the research lens of critical geography, I positioned the subject viewpoints within the structural power hierarchies embedded in the destination. In this way, I was able to gain insight into the perspectives of sustainability transition in the analysis.

## **5.0 Creation of Multiple Tourism Paths in the Ylläs Tourism Destination**

In the political debates in the Kolari municipality, the tourism economy is often presented as a coherent economic path for regional development. Such discourse emerges, for instance, when tourism livelihoods are defended against dismissive attitudes critical of tourism entrepreneurship in favor of more traditional and industrial economies such as mining. A common view voiced was that the local

municipality council favors the wishes of the villages elsewhere in the municipality and ignores the everyday realities of the tourism villages of Äkäslompolo and Ylläsjärvi. In this context, tourism actors are perceived to have similar needs of local governance. Yet, in the interviews, the divergent views and desires that tourism actors have in the Ylläs destination community concerning local tourism development became clearly visible. Often, the differing ideas on economic agency were regarded solely as results of differences between the tourism products offered and arising due to tourism actors' consequent competitive rather than complementary relations. Yet, the present analysis will argue that some of the contradictions that take place with respect to destination development in Ylläs are examples of "economic difference", following the conceptualizations of Gibson-Graham (2006).

### ***5.1 Multiple Tourism Paths***

The most dominant pathway in Ylläs is resort-oriented destination development focused on downhill skiing and related activities. There are both in-migrant and native-born tourism actors as well as small and large enterprises that support this path. They aim at intensive destination growth and view new tourism construction, i.e., new skiing slopes and accommodation, as the best way to achieve this. The aims of the dominant tourism path are present in the future masterplans of the resort. The two lift operators have a plan to build 19,000 new bed-places close to the mountain area, along with additional building plans. The success of this path of "intense growth by new tourism construction" is perceived to be dependent on an increase in international tourism. These growth aims are strongly supported by the local municipality as well as local destination management and marketing organizations.

The collective destination marketing actions aim to strongly increase the number of international overnights. Joint marketing in Ylläs was initially conducted by the destination management organization but was outsourced to a separate marketing company in 2016, in which approximately 20 of the local enterprises are stakeholders. The arrangement of outsourcing joint marketing to a separate marketing company was described as having increased the marketing resources, as the largest stakeholders were willing to invest more in return for having more say about the use of funds. Due to this change, the power to influence the destination development path via marketing operations is currently concentrated in a small number of enterprises.

In contrast to the strongly growth-focused path, many interviewees deviated from the dominant path of destination development. These actors did not have a desire to be involved in growth plans which require new, large-scale tourism construction in the resort area. They justified their alternative views by the need for natural conservation and by the perceived intrinsic value of the natural environment. In addition, these interviewees considered preventing new tourism construction as central also to advance their alternative tourism operations in the destination. The actors with alternative economic views on destination development included native-born tourism actors but also in-migrants. Their tourism work is informed by their close relations with the local natural environment. As the following quote from a native-born entrepreneur from one of the larger businesses shows, many of the actors with less growth-focused views are also against the current plans to open an iron-ore mine 10 kilometers away from Ylläs:

The environment is being destroyed around the world, and there are only few places left where there are no mines or polluted areas or waters or bad air. Such places will be in great demand. And tourism should not destroy these either; a cap should be put here too, not to construct over a certain limit. In Canada, there is a place called Whistler, and they have put a limit on the number of bed-places. ... It would keep it in check ... the building plans should be rethought.

This quote is representative of an idea that many interviewees shared: the requirements of conservation should limit economic agency in the destination more than it currently does. This shows how values strongly guided the economic agency and tourism path creation of many tourism actors. That is, economic benefits were not considered as justifying all economic decision-making.

Noteworthy is that these alternative practices do not constitute a uniform tourism path but take place across differing tourism products, scales of operations, market segments and peer groups. Actors with less growth-focused views might target for example international visitors such as independent budget travelers, central European eco-tourists, cross-country skiers, nature photography enthusiasts or exchange students. Currently, there is no strong destination-scale collaborative agency within the alternative, less growth-focused tourism paths. Tourism actors create the alternative paths mainly through their own tourism operations for instance by offering products that are dependent on the unbuilt natural environment.

## ***5.2 Challenges in Tourism Path Co-Evolution***

The alternative ideas on what the tourism path should look like in the Ylläs tourism community are currently not implemented through destination-scale decision-making. Some of the actors with alternative views related that they are not interested in “political development talk” and are not involved for this reason. Yet, many of the tourism actors with alternative views are willing to participate in destination development but felt they had no power to influence the decision-making processes. They felt that their tourism knowledge is not equally valued by the more powerful tourism actors or the local municipality. Furthermore, the municipality’s decision to open a mine in Kolari was often pointed out as an example of how alternative tourism paths dependent on nature conservation are not acknowledged or appreciated in local governance. The Ylläs destination is governed more as a business environment where the largest stakeholders are allowed to have the most influence. Some who had previously taken part in destination development felt that they had no influence and thus had stepped back from active participation since it was experienced as futile. For instance, some had resigned from the local tourism organization, and a few interviewed current members were planning to do so. By many others, this practice of resigning was considered inappropriate.

It seems that, for the alternative actors, the potential economic benefits gained from co-location with the growing ski resort were outweighed by the perceived negative effects of destination growth. As the dominant tourism path—materially

as well as discursively—focuses on transforming the destination in a direction that is not in line with their values or with the desired environment for their tourism operations, many tourism actors felt frustration and social dissatisfaction with the mainstream economic decision-making. One actor advocating for an alternative tourism path experienced: “I don’t need special acknowledgement of my work. I only wish that decision-makers would understand the operational environment of tourism, that the natural environment is significant.” Another interviewee expressed that it is difficult to get her concerns heard. She explained: “Our resistance has only ever been considered as opposition on principle; it has never been recognized that ... that these are our concerns ... that we are interested. And that we want to speak up and share our thoughts.” This is an example of a situation where the political and social dimensions of economic actions are disregarded. Yet, based on the interviews, it appears that it can be difficult for the actors themselves to raise the topic of the negative impacts of tourism since they at the same time have benefited from past destination growth.

### ***5.3 Creation of Alternative Tourism Paths in Ylläs***

Although the alternative views on tourism development are not implemented at the destination scale, tourism actors have ways to utilize tourism for their purposes on a smaller scale. Many tourism actors have mindsets and practices that help them implement the alternative paths through their own entrepreneurial activities, even if these would not become a more prominent path in the near-term. For instance, one native-born entrepreneur explained that her way of coping with the ecologically unsustainable path of local development is to focus on her own way of life only and, through her own actions, create the kind of world she hopes for. Another local actor had similar experiences:

For instance, in the Ylläs development meetings, I have always been an underdog there. I have realized that my energies go to waste there ... trying to bring out my own ideas ... because they are so different. All the effort goes to convincing and negotiating. It is much easier to act on my own straight away if I get an idea.

The agency of this individual is characterized by enthusiasm and faith in one’s own views. In a similar vein, some other interviewees felt that the decision to abandon the mainstream collective actions had increased their well-being, as they could then more forcefully actualize their own paths.

Many of the local tourism actors have ways to bypass the destination-scale joint efforts and to connect to “the international scale” through alternative means. These minor-scale strategies include, for instance, contacts with international bloggers and creating personalized Facebook pages to build the firm’s reputation nationally. For similar purposes, transnational eco-tourism networks were also considered important. Such ways of marketing were perceived as meaningful; the interviewees seemed to feel they were in control of their own initiatives and did not focus on how much they benefitted from them financially. Furthermore, some of the less growth-focused tourism actors who are not directly dependent on international tourist flows often did marketing mainly in the destination area through press media or relied on word-of-mouth. In addition to marketing purposes, the multiple

connections to like-minded tourism actors operating outside the destination were important also as they provide support for maintaining and fostering one's own agency for path creation. In addition, for a few tourism actors, one way to gain agency through their tourism work was to contact politicians or newspaper journalists to advance their interests. This shows how tourism actors can be political agents in their everyday tourism practices.

## **6.0 Discussion**

The purpose of this paper was to study how large-scale growth-focused tourism path creation appears from the perspective of various tourism actors involved in tourism development in a destination community. In this way, it was possible to observe to what extent the goals of the growth-focused tourism path are shared locally. Everyday tourism realities were examined in the Ylläs destination community in Finnish Lapland. Drawing on poststructural perspectives on economic development, the paper has illustrated how multiple tourism pathways exist in Ylläs. Not all tourism actors support the strongly growth-focused path and stand for alternative tourism paths that do not view new tourism construction and unconditional economic growth as a means to destination success. These tourism paths differ not only in terms of the tourism products offered but also in terms of their value basis. Some tourism actors' business practices are built upon a close connection with the natural environment and a willingness to protect it from further construction. Additionally, the analysis shows how the co-evolution of these alternative paths alongside the mainstream tourism path is challenging. The actors with less growth-focused views related experiences of their voices not being heard and their work not being appreciated in tourism governance. Many had withdrawn from the collective destination development practices. The findings illustrate how economic practices that are strongly guided by broader values (i.e., the need for nature conservation) remain marginal in tourism communities where tourism growth is encouraged and prioritized. As also noted elsewhere, networked governance may not lead to enhanced democracy but may feed exclusionary tourism policies (see Dredge et al., 2011; Dredge & Jamal, 2013). However, the findings also show how the alternative actors can still gain agency through alternative means which do not require collective actions.

### ***6.1 Tourism, Alternative Economic Thinking, and Sustainability***

The present study has shown how alternative forms of capitalist tourism enterprises exist in the Ylläs tourism community and suggested that these can be conceptualized as examples of economic difference (Gibson-Graham, 2006). I argue that if regional economies of northern sparsely populated areas are to be developed in line with sustainability goals, tourism path creation should better appreciate the alternative economic thinking that exists in the community as well as its potential value for overall destination development. Next, I will open up this argument in more detail how this might be brought about.

First, the recognition of economic difference (Gibson-Graham, 2006) is necessary for social sustainability; alternative tourism actors should also be able to influence the direction of tourism development in their community. This is challenging when tourism is locally perceived as a large-scale resource export industry similar to other livelihoods in peripheral areas (see Carson & Carson, 2017). This notion implies that the social sustainability of tourism development cannot be achieved

solely by deploying local cultural characteristics (e.g., reindeer programs or fishing services). It is insufficient that the less growth-focused tourism operations that exist in a destination are regarded as a means of improving competitiveness, i.e., by diversifying the supply of services in a destination (see Gardiner & Scott, 2014; Komppula, 2014). Instead, I argue that social sustainability requires appreciating local traditional ideas on the economy and its aims. Here I concur with Hillmer-Pegram (2016), who states that tourism development should be considered sustainable only if its political economy supports the traditional cultural values of the local community. He writes that “when capitalistic tourism is thoroughly enmeshed in community-oriented values, its exploitative nature is reduced, social–ecological alienation is minimized, and positive change (i.e., sustainable development) can occur” (p. 1206).

This argument is also supported by the recognition that alternative, less growth-focused tourism, can foster ecological sustainability. If the tourism paths which do not wish to compromise their broader values in economic agency gained power, nature conservation aims would get a more prominent position in destination community development. Furthermore, as alternative tourism paths do not, as a rule, depend on large-scale new tourism construction, they would likewise not foster growth in international tourist numbers. In this way, they would support more ecologically sustainable tourism also at the scale of the global tourism system while at the same time being less dependent on increased CO<sup>2</sup> emissions. As argued in research on climate change mitigation, local tourism economies should alter their operations in order to stay within a climatically safe operating space (see Eijgelaar et al., 2015; Gren & Huijbens, 2015). In doing so, tourism community development would be more in line with the requirements of critical sustainability (see Saarinen, 2014).

The presented notion might be a way to bring tourism destinations closer towards “intentional community economies” as envisioned by Gibson-Graham (2006). This process requires a repositioning of the ideals of destination growth in tourism development discourses. It is insufficient to regard the income and employment benefits of tourism as a sole justification in economic decision-making. Instead, tourism practices for economic path creation in community development need to be collectively negotiated in such a way that the social and environmental origins of profit are acknowledged. In this process, tourism destinations need to deviate from the current strongly growth-focused large-scale and enclave-like development path.

## **6.2 Rethinking Path Creation**

On the theoretical side, the above mentioned notions on alternative tourism economies lead to a rethinking of some conceptualizations on tourism path creation. First, it should be recognized that creating sustainable economic paths in peripheral communities may not require attaining “new knowledge” *per se* but rather incorporating existing local knowledge shared by many of the community members on how to live in the northern peripheral environment. Here, less growth-focused SME entrepreneurs should not be regarded as inherently lacking the knowledge needed to innovate (e.g., Martínez-Román et al., 2015), or as a barrier to destination development (Keller, 2006). Instead, their knowledge could be brought to light as examples to learn from in developing sustainable economies. From this perspective, the novelty that is today needed for achieving ecologically

sustainable tourism path creation may require “negative inertia,” even “backwardness,” meaning an opposition to change (i.e., destination growth).

In addition, the notion of economic difference forces a reconsideration of the role of collective agency (i.e., cooperation, networking, participation) in sustainable tourism path creation in the sparsely populated north. In tourism studies, local cooperation and participation have been commonly considered vital in order to make local voices heard and to engender sustainable destination development (e.g., Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Burns, 2004; Müller, 2011). Similarly, path creation studies (e.g., Brouder & Fullerton, 2015; Gill & Williams, 2014) have emphasized the role of collective agency in tourism evolution towards sustainability. However, this paper has shown how tourism actors can also have valid reasons for *not* participating in destination decision-making and engaging in collective actions. Thus, I suggest that when viewed from the perspective of diverse tourism economies, cooperation is not always needed for implementing sustainability. If economic difference (Gibson-Graham, 2006) in tourism were truly recognized, it would be unnecessary to force tourism actors to search for one homogenous tourism path towards destination growth. Accordingly, I argue that collective agency in tourism within and outside the destination should be more value-driven. Such self-determined networking in destination communities might be the best way to facilitate what Brouder (2012) calls “the positive spiral of creativity” and rural innovation (p. 394). The idea of empowered and bottom-up path creation for sustainability also echoes Pavlovich’s (2014) argument which describes destination change as “anti-hierarchical” and endogenous, being able to “emerge from anywhere within the system—without formal planning, without pre-determinism and without order”, a process in which “multi-dimensional knowledge-based capabilities are central” (pp. 2, 7–8).

The idea of value-driven tourism networking also implies that the path dependence of growth-focused development in peripheral communities can be altered not only through collective agency and policy intervention (see Brouder & Eriksson, 2013; Gill & Williams, 2014) but also through individual decisions to refuse to accept the mainstream views and practices. The viewpoint adopted in this paper differs from Garud and Karnøe’s (2001) notion of agency as relational. If approached from an ethical rather than a structural perspective on the economy (see Gibson-Graham, 2006), structures and path-dependent processes can be weakened simply by not participating. The change towards sustainability can already be effected at the micro-scale through individuals’ practices.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

The current study has drawn on poststructural economic thinking in order to examine path creation through tourism development from a critical sustainability perspective. The study has highlighted the alternative tourism knowledge that exists in the Ylläs tourism destination community in Finnish Lapland which is not compatible with large-scale growth-focused tourism path creation. This paper has proposed that in order to take sustainability concerns truly into account in community development and tourism governance in sparsely populated areas, it is necessary to refashion tourism into an economic path in such a manner that it respects the multitude of voices in the destination community, in this way better recognizing ecological concerns in economic decision-making, and accepting that growth aims cannot be the priority in development. Hence, the paper has

demonstrated the possibility of a less resource-intensive and more locally-led path creation through tourism. In doing so, the study contributes to research on new economic path creation in the sparsely populated north. To advance such alternative development, it seems necessary to start constructing a new tourism development language and practice which would treat alternative tourism thinking as offering valid perspectives for economic path creation. Here, research could have an active role in advancing this understanding on economic difference in tourism destination communities in the sparsely populated north.

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