

Olli Rosenqvist (ed.)

## THROUGH JOY

Mapping sporty activities in Norway, Sweden and Finland  
with a view to enhancing regional attractiveness



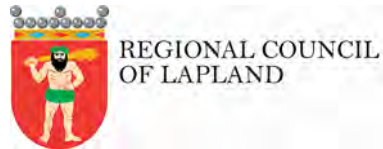


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with a view to enhancing regional attractiveness

University of Jyväskylä  
Kokkola University Consortium Chydenius  
Kokkola 2014



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# PREFACE

This compilation is the final report of the project *THROUGH-JOY 1 – Mapping phase: Enhancement of regional attractiveness of northern localities through development of joyful and distinctive sporty hobbies for inhabitants and visitors*. THROUGH-JOY 1 is the first part of a two-phase project entity the aim of which is, through development of joyful sporty activities, to enhance the regional attractiveness and competitiveness of Central Ostrobothnia in Finland, Västerbotten (Vindel River area to be precise) in Sweden and Nordland (Lofoten area to be precise) in Norway. The mapping was realized during 2013–2014. It lays the basis for the development phase of the project, THROUGH-JOY 2, for which a separate funding will be applied for during the current EU programme period.

THROUGH-JOY 1 project has been a cooperative effort between Kokkola University Consortium Chydenius (as the Lead Partner, project manager Olli Rosenqvist), Department of Geography and Economic History of Umeå University (project manager Håkan Appelblad) and Nordland Research Institute (project manager Brigit Dale). It has been financed through the Interreg IV A North programme, and the financiers consist of the following parties: the European Union, the state of Finland (Regional Council of Lapland), the town of Kokkola, the sub-region of Kaustinen, the town of Kannus, University of Jyväskylä (Kokkola University Consortium Chydenius), the Region

Västerbotten, VIKOM municipalities, Umeå University, VRI Nordland, the state of Norway (IR funds), and Nordland Research Institute.

The following persons have been nominated to the Steering Committee of the project: Tanja Risikko (Kokkola University Consortium Chydenius, Chair of the Steering Committee), Ulf Wiberg (Department of Geography and Economic History, Umeå University), Jarle Løvland (Nordland Research Institute), Marita Mutka (Kokkola University Consortium Chydenius), Olli Rosenqvist (Kokkola University Consortium Chydenius, Secretary of the Steering Committee, project manager), Håkan Appelblad (Department of Geography and Economic History, Umeå University, project manager), Brigit Dale (Nordland Research Institute, project manager), Olli Pohjonen (Regional Council of Lapland), Ilkka Kangas (Town of Kokkola, deputy Seppo Kässi), Petri Jylhä (Sub-region of Kaustinen, deputy Esko Ahonen), Anne Pesola (Town of Kannus, deputy Mari Äijälä), Nils Sandberg (Region Västerbotten), Leopold Sjöström (VIKOM municipalities), Christoffer Björkman (County Administrative Board of Norrbotten), Ian Jawahir (Troms fylkeskommune), Petri Harsunen (Keski-Pohjanmaan Liikunta ry – Kepli), Seija Virkkala (University of Vaasa), Åge Mariussen (Botnia-Atlantica Institute, University of Vaasa), Hannu Itkonen (University of Jyväskylä), and Allan Sande (University of Nordland).

A substantial part of the mapping data has been gathered by thematic interviews of the following persons: Maren Eek Bistrup (Northern Alpine Guides, NAG), Hans Erik Forsell (Västerbottens Turism), Heikki Haapala (work group on Central Ostrobothnian regional relay), Lauri Heikkilä (volleyball club Kokkolan Tiikerit), Steinar Jøraandstad (Jøraandstad Consulting), Per Lund (Lofoten Ski Lodge), Torbjörn Norrman (Vindelälvsloppet IF), Randi Normann (Lofoten Ski Lodge), Olle Rosén (UBHK, Umeå Working Dog Club), Leopold Sjöström (VIKOM municipalities), Janne

Vähäkangas (Kokkola City Run, Keski-Pohjanmaan Liikunta ry – Kepli). The interviews were made in Norway by Brigit Dale, in Sweden by Håkan Appelblad and in Finland by Olli Rosenqvist.

We warmly thank all our financiers, members of the Steering Committee and the interviewees for their contribution to the project. Specific thanks go to Seija Virkkala and Åge Mariussen who helped us to find each other in the first place.

In Kokkola, Umeå and Svolvær, June, 2014,

Olli Rosenqvist, Håkan Appelblad & Brigit Dale

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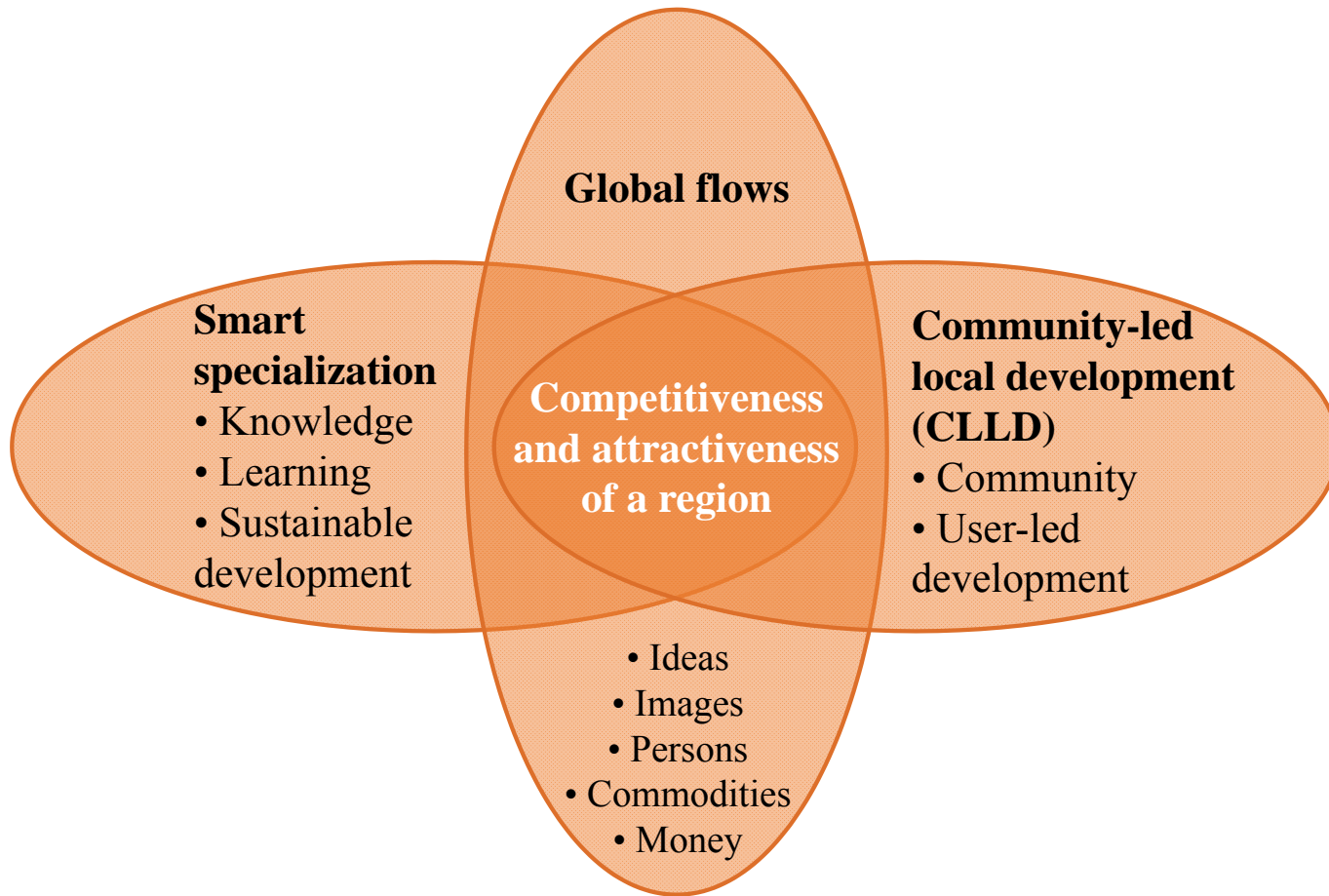


# 1 MAPPING SPORTY ACTIVITIES FOR THE BENEFIT OF REGIONAL ATTRACTIVENESS

*Olli Rosenqvist, Håkan Appelblad & Brigit Dale*

## *Regional competitiveness and attractiveness in the north of Europe*

In *Figure 1*, we visualize the relevant processes that determine the competitiveness and attractiveness of a region in the present-day Europe, namely globalization, specialization and community-led local development. The vitality of the communities of northern Europe depends on their ability to adapt to changing circumstances, on their competitiveness and on their ability to keep up social cohesion. Region's competitiveness is to a large extent dependent on its attractiveness: its capability to attract businesses, inhabitants and visitors. Traditionally, the attractiveness of the North has been based on its rich natural resources and cultural heritage. Thus, a novel and exciting possibility for northern regions in the future would be to broaden their economic base towards knowledge creation and knowledge economy.



*FIGURE 1. Competitiveness and attractiveness of a region.*

In a globalized world, the success of any particular region would depend on its ability to attract desirable and simultaneously repel undesirable effects of global flows. According to Arjun Appadurai (1990), the most important things that flow in the globalized society are ideas, images, persons, commodities and financial capital. Regions and localities can try to utilize these flows in many ways. They can temporarily try to tap into these flows, and they can also contribute to the global circulation with new ideas, images, persons, commodities and capital.

In the future, according to the Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies, economic growth in Europe will largely be based on knowledge creation; and especially knowledge promoting sustainable development, clean environment and social togetherness will be of importance. These objectives are further emphasized in the Europe 2020 strategy which aims at smart, sustainable and inclusive economic growth in Europe (European Commission 2010). This is thought to be achieved through what has been called smart specialization on the one hand and through community-led local development (CLLD) on the other. Smart specialization means identifying and utilizing the unique characteristics, assets and competitive advantages of each region. What sets *smart* apart from *conventional* regional specialization is that in the former knowledge creation (RDI activities and learning) is emphasized to a larger extent than in the latter (cf. Foray et al. 2011: 5; Mariussen & Virkkala 2013). From the point of view of innovation systems, smart specialization focuses on deepening of cooperation and learning both on regional, inter-regional and international level. The aim of community-led local development (CLLD) is to take into consideration local needs and potential in particular, and to strengthen the integrated and multi-sectoral, area-based local development (European Commission 2012). CLLD also focuses on innovative networking and cooperative efforts.

For countries and regions in the North it is reasonable to unite the efforts in enhancing regional attractiveness. Transnational and transregional cooperation makes it possible for actors living in different countries to disseminate ideas and knowhow between each other, and to develop new forms of knowledge and services. In our opinion, interregional networks build social capital and togetherness, and they create a good basis for both social cohesion and regional competitiveness. Cooperation between Nordic universities and practical actors strengthens the whole innovation environment because it supports the development of knowhow, participation of citizens, tolerance, culture exchange, knowledge dissemination and intercultural learning. This process has already been going on in the North for some years, for example, through the efforts of the regions of North Finland, East Finland, North Norway, North Sweden and Mid Sweden to create a 'European macro-region' under the heading Northern Sparsely Populated Areas (NSPA) (see Gløersen 2009).

### *Leisure and work in the current society*

Current society is characterized by hybridized cultural forms; it is, for example, more and more difficult to separate leisure from work. For instance, while there always have been people who make their living of the leisure activities of others – thus blurring the boundary between the realisms of 'work' and 'leisure' – work increasingly has the tendency to penetrate into 'free time' also for the broader population as such. This blurring of categories reflects the complexity of late modern society. On the one hand, we as individuals must be very efficient – we are always in a hurry, and the (imagined) scarcity of time is always with us. On the other hand, individuals have to have means by which they can make sense of their lives, and maintain their wellness and social relations.

Leisure activities can be used as resources, or competitiveness and attractiveness factors, in personal life-management.

Robert Stebbins (2008: 4) defines leisure as an ‘uncoerced activity engaged in during free time, which people want to do and, in either a satisfying or a fulfilling way (or both), use their abilities and resources to succeed at this’. He (2008: 11–13) lists six distinguishing qualities of what he calls *serious leisure*: (1) need to persevere, (2) creation of a moral career in the endeavour, (3) putting effort based on knowledge, training, experience, or skill, into the activity, (4) durable benefits, (5) unique ethos, and (6) strong identification with the activity.

According to Chris Rojek (2010: 189), leisure activities can be regarded as schools for life itself. These activities form multifaceted constellations or actor fields, where both individual and communal actors can learn and develop their emotional intelligence and emotional labour capacities – properties that are extremely important with reference to adaptive capacity and competitiveness in current society (see Rojek 2010: 188). Therefore, leisure activities can be seen as socio-cultural *laboratories*, not only of entrepreneurship, but also of life-management in general.

### *Joyful leisure activities*

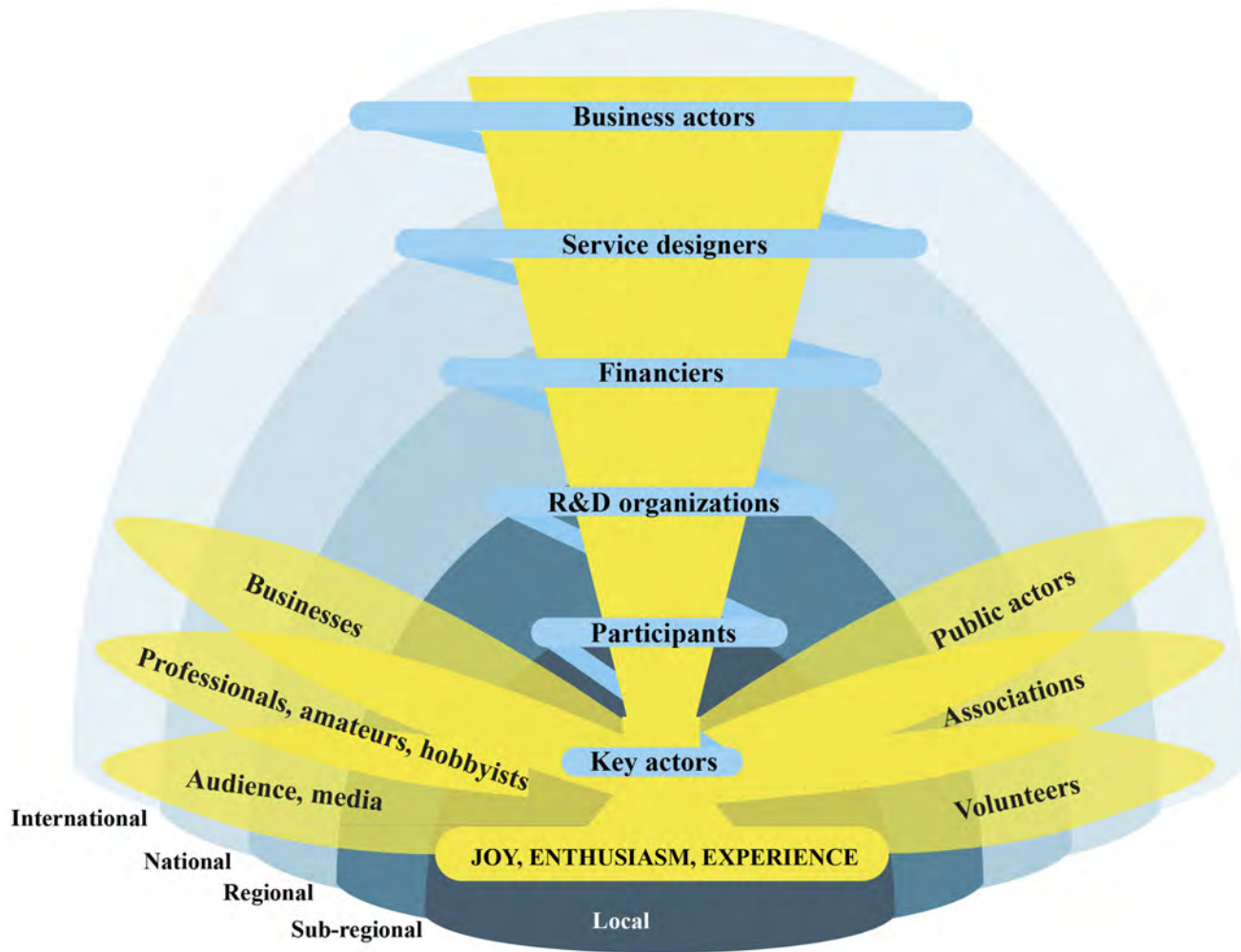
Joy is a concept that cannot be unambiguously defined. The phenomenon of joy is described by Martin Seligman (2002, 2011) with the concepts of ‘happiness’ and ‘flourishing’, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1997, 2005) with the concepts of ‘optimal experience’ and ‘flow’, and by Stebbins (1982, 2008) with the concept of ‘serious leisure’. Connective properties between these concepts are the positive thinking, enthusiasm and success included in them. By applying Stebbins’ (1982, 2007, 2008, 2009) concepts of

leisure and work we can separate joyful activities from obligations (the darkened cells in *Table 1*).

**TABLE 1. Joyful activities as against obligations (cf. Stebbins 1982, 2007, 2008, 2009).**

Use of time	Activity	Actors
Work	Non-devotee work	Professionals
	Devotee work	Professionals
Leisure	Serious leisure	Amateurs
		Hobbyists
		Volunteers
	Casual leisure	Pleasure-seekers
	Non-work obligations	Citizens

Actors in and around joyful leisure activities can be illustrated as being in a spatially multiscalar spiral where the actors have the common aim to broaden the joy, enthusiasm and positive experiences connected to the activity in question (*Figure 2*).



*FIGURE 2. Actors in and around joyful leisure activities.*

In *Figure 2* we see that leisure is situated in a more multifaceted context than working life. A leisure activity is generally, originally and continually defined and energized by a relatively small-sized group of core devotees or key actors. But, important as they are, core devotees are not enough for a leisure activity to have social meaning. To have broader meaning, leisure activity has to be interesting enough to attract both *regular* and *casual* participants. In addition to participants there are also volunteers who do not actually participate in performing the activity in question. For example, non-participating chairs and secretaries of associations can be key actors, as are also assisting volunteers, like security officers in sporting events.

Leisure activities are also linked in many ways to various kinds of professional groups of people, i.e., people who in one way or another get paid for what they do in supporting the activity. Public professionals are, for example, those public actors which provide leisure activities with spaces and environments (municipalities, the state etc.). Examples of private professionals are entrepreneurs that provide leisure activities with equipment and various kinds of services, like training. Some leisure activities have their professional counterparts, so that the professional hobbyists get paid for what they are doing. In most cases leisure activities are of communal nature, so that the public is always present in one way or another, for example, in the form of audience or that of media.



## *Sporty activities, play, flow, joy, pleasure and regional attractiveness*

Concerning *regional attractiveness*, sporty activities constitute an interesting interface between individual and collective action, between tradition and modernity, between body and mind, between sports and culture, between work and leisure, between competition and cooperation, and between instrumental and value-based rationality. These multifaceted interfaces offer a good basis for various innovations in improving the attractiveness of regions.

According to Theodor Adorno (1991: 89), *sport* is an 'imageless counterpart to practical life' in society – a ritual in which subjects celebrate their subjection determined by the society. According to David Inglis, Adorno does not mean that sport always has been, nor in the future will be, just ritualistic behaviour predicated on dominion – it is only in the current society that sport has a tendency to take this reified form. Inglis writes that in 'actual fact, sport's "essence" – and thus its potential in a possible future characterized by non-dominion – is of "play", that is, free and purposeless bodily activity enjoyed for its own sake'. So, according to Inglis, Adorno can be interpreted as supporting the idea that play can, to a degree, stand beyond the 'realm of instrumental-rational activity'. (Inglis 2004: 91.) This means that sporty activities can be conceptualized as hybrids of instrumental-rational and value-rational principles and practices.

According to Roger Callois (2006: 128), *play* can essentially be characterized as free (i.e., playing is not obligatory in any way), separate (defined space and time), uncertain, unproductive, governed by rules and make-believe (awareness of free unreality, in contrary to real life). But, as we understand them, play and leisure activities in general have also productive and real qualities. When we think of the potentialities of leisure activities, the interface between playfulness and seriousness is interesting (cf. e.g.

Huizinga 1971 vs. Stebbins 2008). To be a successful professional, amateur or hobbyist you have to reach a balance between playfulness and seriousness. This balance is a crucial component of the thing called joy.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has developed these notions and concepts further into a theory of *optimal experience*. Key concept in this theory is *flow*. Flow is a state of mind where a person is concentrated to her/his action so deeply that nothing else matters; the experience by itself produces such joy that she/he is ready to spend a lot of time, energy and money to be able to do what she/he is doing (Csikszentmihalyi 2005: 19). The experience of flow is characterized by a number of essential elements: (1) the activity has a clear and achievable goal, (2) there is a possibility to concentrate on the activity, (3) the actor gets immediate feedback from the action, (4) there is a balance between challenges and skills, (5) the actor has a feeling of control, (6) self-consciousness disappears, and (7) the activity becomes autotelic, i.e., it is experienced as being rewarding by itself, regardless of its instrumental utility (see Csikszentmihalyi 1997: 111–113, 2005: 82).

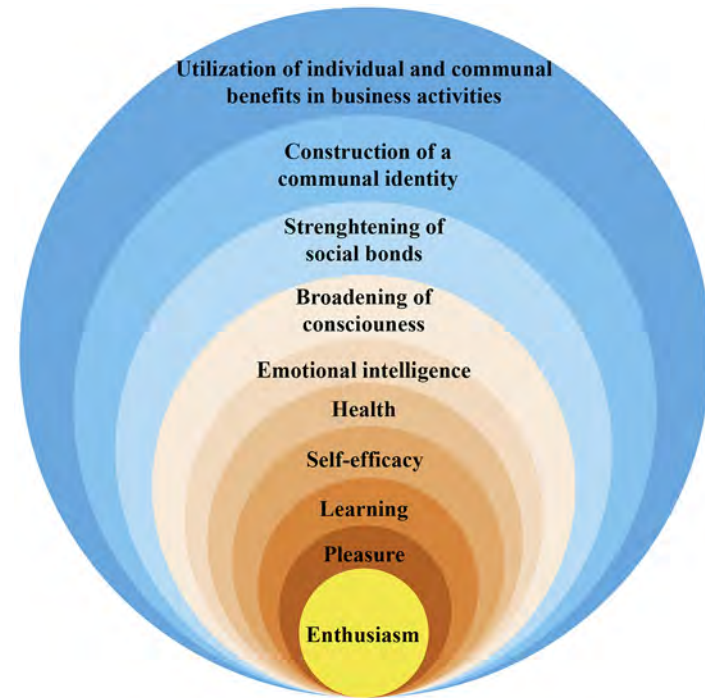
Flow and joy are deeper experiences than *pleasure*. According to Csikszentmihalyi, pleasure is an important factor of quality of life, but it does not bring happiness by itself. Shallow pleasure-seeking, like habitual alcohol drinking or watching soap operas on television, can reconstruct or restore the mind into equilibrium when it is in disorder. But, unlike flow, pleasure does not usually bring about psychological growth. Flow and joy are characterized by movement forward: the skills and challenges develop together so that the person feels that she/he achieves and learns all the time something new. (Csikszentmihalyi 2005: 77–78.) A problem with the flow experience is that from a societal point of view it can be utilized for both good and bad purposes. For social policy and regional development work this means that we have to learn to set apart the

positive and negative effects of flow, and encourage and utilize the former as much as possible and prevent possibilities of the latter.

Plays, games and sporty activities are good laboratories or test fields for investigating flow experiences. Sportiness brings with it the endeavour to do something better than what has been done before (cf. *citius, altius, fortius* = faster, higher, stronger). Playfulness brings with it different kinds of challenges, like uncertainty and the possibility of surprise. Competing, inherent in sporty activities, can be taken, as the etymology of the notion (lat. *competere*) suggests, as 'striving together'. Communality is in many ways an essential characteristic of sporty activities. To be joyful, sporty activities need *constructive actors* that are capable of setting aside their egocentricity. Excessive sportiness, for example, in the form of *overemphasis* on beating the competitors at the expense of respecting other participants leads to negative forms of flow experiences. Dedication and enthusiasm are necessary, but too hard and too tense competitiveness may kill the relaxedness and the joy that are necessary conditions for a successful performance.

In the best case sporting improves the physical and mental health of people, and sporty activities can be used as schools of life, or as tools for proactive prevention of exclusion. According to Csikszentmihalyi (2005: 74), in principle, there are two ways by which we can improve people's quality of life. The first way is that we try to change the external conditions of life to make them favourable to our objectives; the second way is that we try to change our own attitudes towards experiencing those conditions, so that the conditions fit better with our objectives. THROUGH-JOY project seeks to pave the way for a constructive dialogue on these issues in the context of intercultural learning between – and regional development in – northern localities of Europe. In this way the project aims at influencing *both* social environment *and* attitudes.

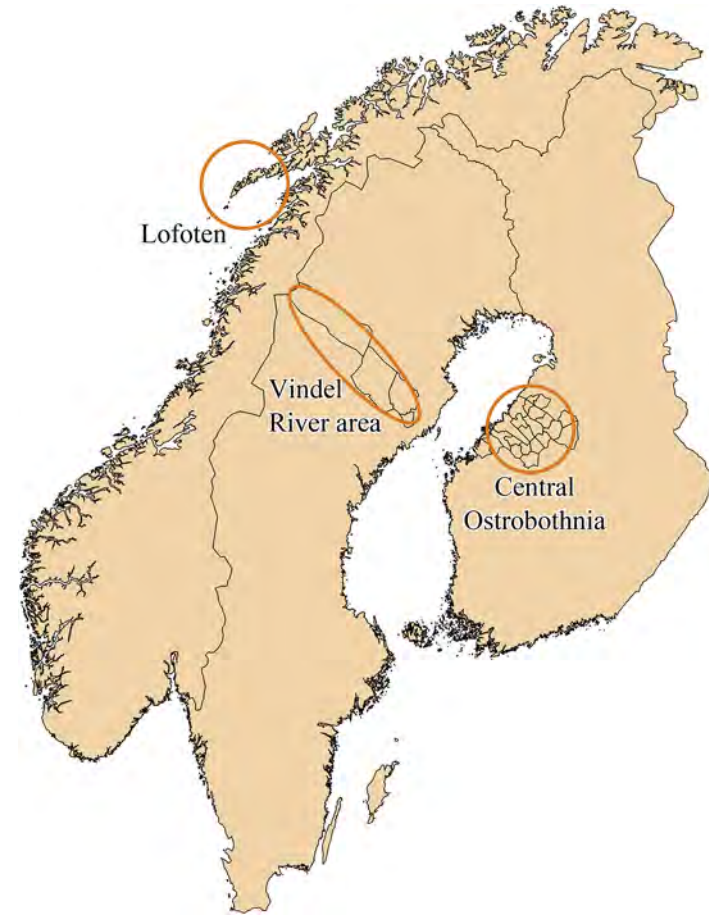
Specialization and distinction are important competitiveness and attractiveness factors for both – the individuals and regions of current society. In sociology the term distinction has been made familiar by Pierre Bourdieu (e.g. 1984; see also Tomlinson 2004). In the THROUGH-JOY project the notion is used in a broad sense, as an attractiveness factor. Distinctive sporty activities are compelling, and they enhance the attractiveness of both individuals and regions. Through collective intercultural learning it is possible to strengthen the togetherness in the North, and, at the same time, to improve the competitiveness of these regions. The individual and communal benefits of sporty activities are captured in *Figure 3*.



*FIGURE 3. Individual and communal benefits of sporty activities.*

## *Realization of the mapping*

In each country, Norway, Sweden, and Finland, the mapping was directed towards regions and sporty activities that were seen as the most potential cases for us to be able to find actors who are willing and able to join in the transnational learning and development process in the second phase of the THROUGH-JOY project. The regions selected were: the Lofoten area in the Nordland County of Norway, the Vindel River area (i.e., the municipalities of Sorsele, Lycksele, Vindeln and Vännäs) in the Västerbotten County of Sweden, and the Region of Central Ostrobothnia in Finland (*Figure 4*).



**FIGURE 4. THROUGH-JOY 1 project regions.**

Among the various sports we searched for such activities that are specific to each region, and such that filled the three selection criteria: (1) emergence of joy in the activity in question; (2) sportiness of the activity, and (3) existence of a community that might have a need for change and new knowledge, and a mental and financial ability and readiness to join in the transnational learning process (absorptive capacity (AC) and development capacity (DC) referred to by Mariussen (2013: 14) and Virkkala (2013: 74–77)). In Lofoten back country skiing (or alpine touring skiing, if you like), and the guiding and lodging services connected to it, were selected as the target of the mapping. In the Vindel River area the mapping was targeted at two sports events: the Vindelälvsdraget, which is a dog sledge relay race, and the Vindelälvsloppet, which is a running relay race. In Central Ostrobothnia the mapping was targeted at the three major sports phenomena or events at the moment: The regional volleyball boom, the Central Ostrobothnian regional ski relay race and the Kokkola City Run running race.

The data of the mapping consisted of (1) research literature, administrative and marketing documents, registers and statistics, (2) interviews of key persons, and (3) intercultural communication between the researcher groups during the project. Especially fruitful in the last-mentioned sense were the Erasmus staff training mobility visits to both Nordland Research Institute (autumn 2013) and Department of Geography and Economic History of Umeå University (spring 2014) made by the project manager of the Lead Partner.

During the mapping, 11 persons – 4 from Norway, 4 from Sweden and 3 from Finland (see the preface of this publication) – were interviewed by means of thematic interview. In the interviews there were 10 broadly defined themes:

- (1) Institutional/organizational and geographical description of the phenomenon/ community, development story
- (2) Forms of action
- (3) Emergence of joy/flow/enthusiasm/movement forwards/positivity
- (4) Key actors, hegemonic visions/shared beliefs
- (5) Other actors
- (6) Need for change
- (7) Need for cooperation with research institutions
- (8) Need for transnational learning
- (9) Community's assets/success factors that have potential to be disseminated transnationally
- (10) Prospects for self-financing and for getting other regional funding for the THROUGH-JOY 2 project.

After this introduction this final report of the THROUGH-JOY 1 mapping continues as follows: *Brigt Dale* reports the case Lofoten in chapter 2, *Håkan Appelblad* the case Vindel River area in chapter 3 and *Olli Rosenqvist* the case Central Ostrobothnia in chapter 4. Chapter 5 crystallizes the main conclusions made by the transnational researcher group.

## 2 CASE LOFOTEN

*Bright Dale*

### *Introduction*

The THROUGH-JOY project focuses on the enhancement of regional attractiveness of northern localities through development of joyful and distinctive sporty hobbies for inhabitants and visitors. The project will compare case studies of distinct activities in the regions of Nordland in Norway, Västerbotten in Sweden and Central Ostrobothnia in Finland, and aims at initiating learning processes in the specific contexts of joyful/distinctive sporty activities and leisure research. The main objectives of the THROUGH-JOY project are to map potential joyful and distinctive sporty activities in the project regions; and to select and describe one or more sporty activities, and the way they are used – and their future potential – for enhanced regional attractiveness.

As part of this work, this chapter presents the case of skiing activities in Lofoten, mainly through a description of a short, ethnography-inspired fieldwork at work with an actor delivering guiding to visitors to the Lofoten region, their cooperation with a small scale business that owns a rebuilt jetty-turned-lodge, and in addition a description of the



extent back country skiing, also called alpine touring skiing, is grassroot-based in the region. Thus, the activity will be described and explored with the aim of revealing both its potential as a basis for tourist activities, and therefore business – and its propagation in and significance for the populace of Lofoten.

### *The Lofoten region*

Lofoten is a region in the Nordland County consisting of a number of islands characterized by a ragged coastline and an alpine mountain range. The climate is rough – with long winters and short summers. In the wintertime, northern lights flair the skies, whilst the midnight sun provides a welcoming extension of sunny periods during the summer season, provided the weather is good enough for the sun to appear at all.

In 2012, the Lofoten region, consisting of the municipalities Vågan, Vestvågøy, Flakstad, Moskenes, Værøy and Røst, had 23,779 registered inhabitants (Statistics Norway 2014). In this region, people have traditionally relied on the sea, both for income and as a travel route. Today, a fairly well developed network of roads with bridges and tunnels ties most of the Lofoten communities together, but just a few decades ago, ferries between the islands were the only option – besides the coastal steamer which for over a century has been considered the lifeline for many coastal communities in Northern Norway. Most settlements, be they large or small, were originally based on fisheries, and many living here still rely on income from the sea – as costal fishers and trawler crew, or as seamen in cargo shipping or the petroleum industry (which in Norway is an offshore activity).

Lofoten has been dominated by what has been called fisher/farmer households – a denomination reflecting the need for families to both fish and farm for subsistence –

and the settlements are typically scattered along the coast. One will find clusters that have developed into fishing villages, but there are also large areas where settlements are dispersed. Shipping, dockyards, mining activities, public administration and small-scale industry have been the main drivers behind the development of small towns and cities in the regions (Eriksen 1996; Jaklin 2006). There are two small towns in the region; Svolvær in the east and Leknes in the west. In Svolvær, public administration, a strong shipyard industry and a booming tourism sector has taken over for the fisheries as its main *raison d'être*, whilst at Leknes, trade and administration are the main sectors, in a municipality where both fisheries and farming still hold strong. In total, though, as earnings have risen per fisher due to technological innovations and managerial and policy reforms within the fisheries, the number of fishers in Lofoten has been steadily decreasing (in short, each fisher catches more fish, therefore there is no need for a large number of them), as shown in the statistics: in 1983, Vågan had 508 registered full-time fishers, Vestvågøy 705. The smaller, more fishery dependent municipalities further west – Flakstad, Moskenes, Værøy and Røst – had 285, 271, 148 and 130 fishers, respectively. In 2010, the number of active fishers was less than half of that of 1983, in all Lofoten municipalities (Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries 2011). Over the same period, centralization trends pulled people out of the region – mostly southwards to the major Norwegian cities – but also towards province centres like Bodø and Tromsø. This meant that the relative importance of the main settlements in Lofoten – Leknes and Svolvær – grew as well, as administration, trade and production of goods was centralized.

As the fisheries over the past 20 years steadily has decreased its capacity to provide people in Lofoten with jobs, the tourist industry has become one of several important industries for the region. Up to the mid-2000s, tourism was almost exclusively a summer activity, but with the increasing interest in skiing and outdoor activities in the winter –

together with an interest and a commitment from several actors to present the winter cod fisheries as an event well worth experiencing (through, for instance, the festival in February called the *Skrei Fishing World Championships*) – travellers started finding their way to the region also during the winter season. Now, as the tourism industry expands and commits itself to providing all-year work places, the professionalism and focus pinned upon Lofoten as a skiing destination has started to attract also new full-time residents.

### *Skiing as a joyful activity in Lofoten*

Skiing in Lofoten has, as in Norway in general, a history which is based on both necessity and recreation. The 2000-year-old ski found at Snauøya close to Henningsvær (these days a 20-minute drive from Kabelvåg) was in all likelihood seen more as a tool for getting around than a toy for leisure activities, and stories children are told about how children ‘in the old days’ had to use skis to get to school – sometimes passing rough mountain passes daily – are reminiscent of days gone by when living in these areas, subjected to nature’s whims, was more of a struggle than it is today, when people longing for that struggle no longer settle for those mountain passes, but go all the way, to the peaks.

However, skiing as a sporty activity in Norway is not a new invention. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century skiing was introduced to the bourgeois in the major cities in the south in need of symbolic activities that could be deemed as ‘typical Norwegian’ for use in their building of an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1991), i.e., a nation on which a new, modern Norwegian state could be built. The skiing adventures in forests and on mountains of the legendary Sondre Nordheim became stories that would to a great extent epitomize what it meant to be Norwegian; to actively engage with the

surrounding nature, to be playful when faced with the miraculous stuff called snow, and to master the environment to the extent needed in order to survive in these harsh surroundings.

Skiing is thus a part of the historical basis for the construct 'Norwegian' (Bomann-Larsen 1993), and a source of pleasure for many. As such – and also of course due to preconditions in nature – utilization of this culturally preferred activity as basis for business models and strategies within the tourism sector is not surprising. But it is also multiple in scope, as it can generate *both* financial income *and* a (renewed) sense of pleasure, of pride, of identity. As such, its value is *beyond* capitalization as it for many residents and visitors represents – both symbolically and in practice – a way of life and an attitude towards nature that is part of their ontological lifeworld.

A relatively new trend in skiing has made the specific natural preconditions more attractive than ever: ski touring, or more specifically 'back country skiing', 'alpine touring' (in North-American terms), or 'ski de randonnée' (more common in southern Europe) (*Figure 5*). Typical for this activity is the desire to reach parts of mountainous areas less frequented by skiers, and where off-piste downhill skiing can be performed (*Figure 6*). Key to this activity are the skins, which are mounted underneath the skis for better grip uphill. These skins are then removed for the ride down. Also snowboards are used, and they can either be carried strapped to a backpack or some buy the split-board version, which is split in two for use as skis with skins back country.



*FIGURE 5. Back country skiing in Lofoten: up to the peak.  
Photograph: © Northern Alpine Guides, Lofoten.*



*FIGURE 6. Back country skiing in Lofoten: down to the valley.  
Photograph: © Northern Alpine Guides, Lofoten.*

For most people, back country skiing is performed during leisure time, but for some, the border between leisure and work is blurred (as for instance for quite a few of those providing guiding services in the Lofoten mountains), and – more importantly – the notion of ‘what it is that defines us, work or play’ – is not always as clear as often described by sociologists prone to linking profession to both social class and identity (see for instance Parekh 2008: 21–26, for a discussion on the plurality of social identities). For many of these actors, their leisure activity is as important as (or often at least complementary to) their professional lives to the construction of identity and sense of self. We could indeed claim that for many, it is serious business.

Sociologist Robert Stebbins, when writing already in the 1980s, indicated with the concept of *serious leisure* a desire to analytically divide serious and unserious leisure activities and likewise between those engaging in them (Stebbins 1982). For Stebbins and others, the idea was that performers of the so-called serious leisure typically showed a high level of *perseverance* in the activity, despite (short-term or immediate) discomfort; they would often have non-professional *careers* connected to the activity, for instance as runners, skiers, or even as volunteers working for children in local sports clubs; the leisure activity would require specific *skills, knowledge and/or training*; it was seen as enriching to the individual *self-image* of the actor; and finally it established for the actor a specific ethos to which she/he and others would ascribe – in other words, *a collective or a community*, based on the activity, was formed and identified with (Stebbins 1982: 256–257). It seems evident that both the clientele of the actors here described as building a business based on ski guiding and a proportion of the general public in Lofoten can be ascribed to this description, i.e., their leisure activity of using skis to access (often remote and alpine) mountain areas is for them, indeed, serious business. They also, curiously enough, fit into the description of Stebbins of what he calls *amateurs*, i.e., performers

who are linked to both *professionals* and *public* (called a P-A-P relationship) in specific manners that makes them particularly suited as a basis group from which recruitment of customers for ski guides can be done. Stebbins (1982: 259) writes that there often exists a monetary and organizational relationship between professionals and amateurs: ‘... such as when professionals train, advise, organize and even perform with amateurs’. They often have intellectual ties with each other; and (at times) they even serve the same public – for instance, when they participate and perform in competitions, or simply when they take on an expert’s role on trips made by their families or friends.

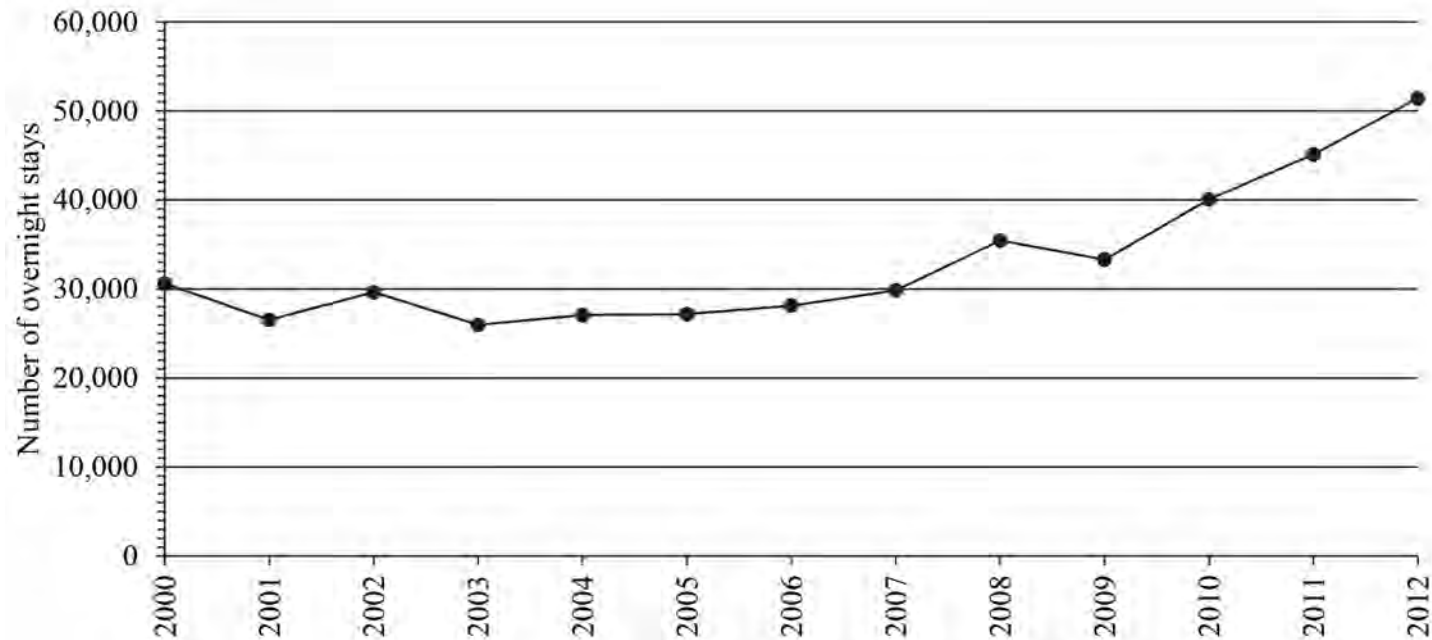
Collectively, then, the role of all these skiers vis-à-vis local communities, be they professionals or dedicated amateurs, is one of constructing, reconstituting and (re)-defining a specific social construct; *a culture of back country skiing* which is based, importantly, on a desire to *play*, to enjoy the landscape surrounding them and a will to facilitate for joyful activities for all who want to participate, including those who, according to Stebbins, belong to a specific category of serious leisure; the *hobbyists* (Stebbins 1982: 259). These are also both potential customers for guides in the Lofoten Mountains and a part of a general trend where the performance of so many of this joyful activity enhances the visibility and thus the attractiveness of Lofoten as a region and of particular communities in it.

### *Overall trends in back country skiing in Lofoten*

In this section, trends in the development of back country skiing, both as a recreational activity for residents and as an activity connected to tourism, is presented. There is unfortunately very little actual data collected that can be directly ascribed to back country skiing, but data on, for instance, the expansion of winter tourism in Lofoten is

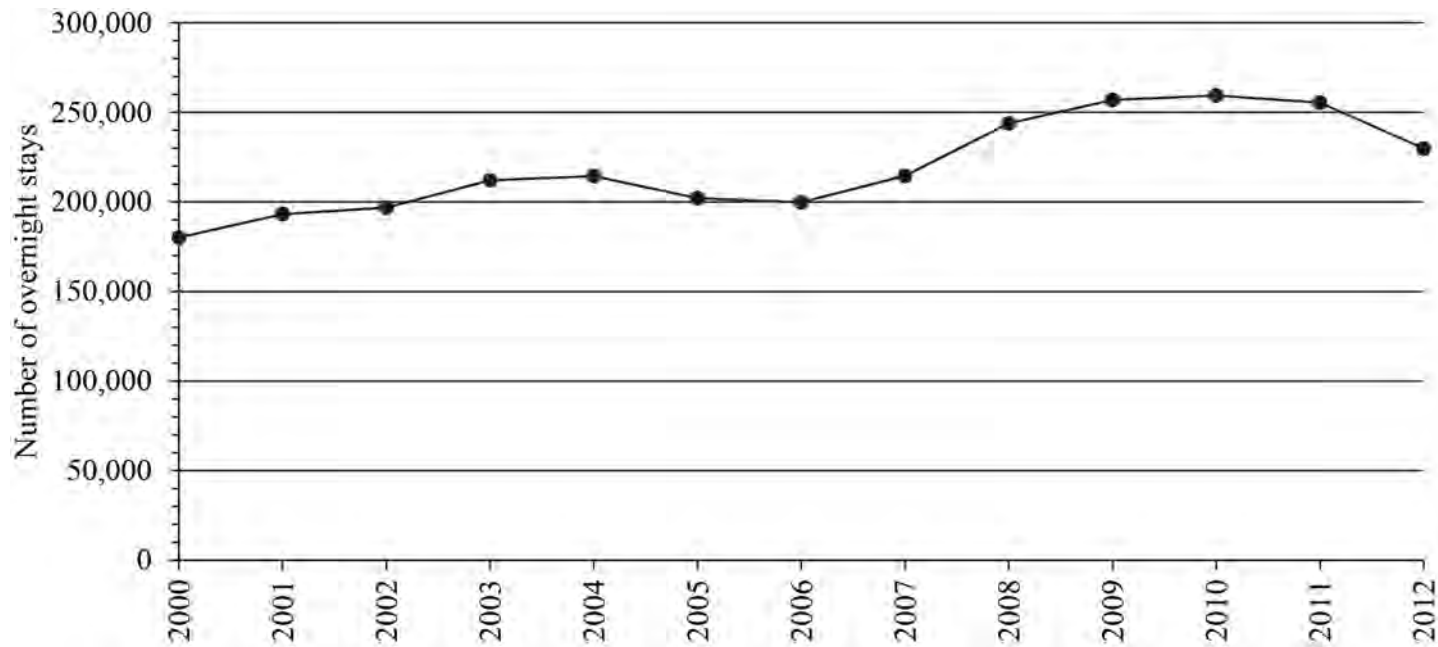


a tendency that coincides with an expressed – and observed – interest in this activity amongst an increasing number of both visitors and residents. Numbers from Statistics Norway for the period 2000–2012 show an encouragingly increasing trend, although with marked variations for individual years which is a concern for businesses (*Figure 7*).



*FIGURE 7. Overnight stays of winter tourists in Lofoten from 2000 to 2012.  
Source: Statistics Norway.*

After a number of years of losing visitors up to 2004, the overall trend has been very positive, with the exception of the winter after the financial crisis hit Europe in 2008. Still, this reduction was not dramatic (in actual number of visitors), and the overall increase from the year 2000 to 2012 has been approximately 68 percent. Overall growth in visitors during winter does not, though, mean that the winter season is even close to filling its potential, as the capacity of the tourist industry in the area is adapted to the summer season, where annually over four times as many use these facilities (*Figure 8*). What is interesting here is also that even the figures still are much higher for summer visits; the trend is that winter is growing, while summer seems to suffer still from the impacts of the financial crisis and from increasing competition brought about by other destinations, both in Norway and abroad. However, these figures are also deceitful in the sense that they do not depict the actual number of visitors to the islands, as many travel with and stay in caravans, motorhomes and tents outside of camping sites, or stay with friends or rent private homes.

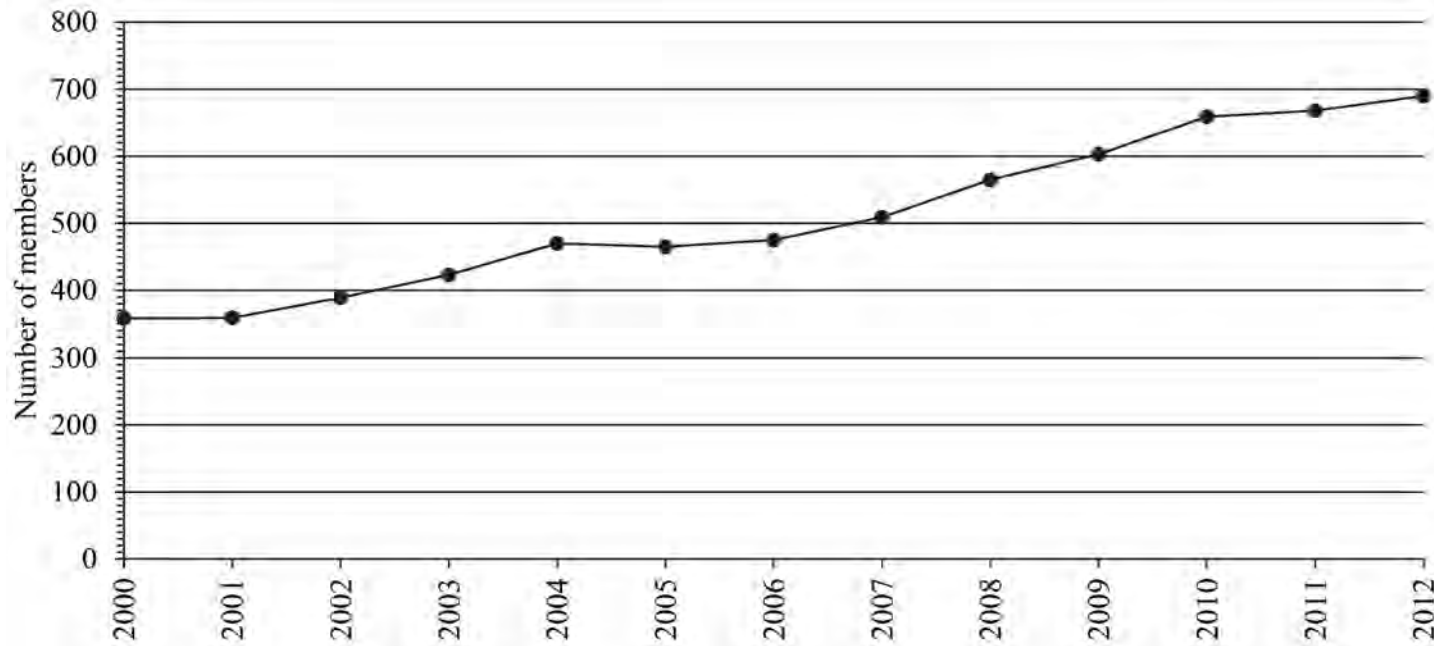


*FIGURE 8. Overnight stays of summer tourists in Lofoten from 2000 to 2012.  
Source: Statistics Norway.*

This surplus capacity during winter is an important basis for the increased commitment by more and more actors to increase occupancy during winter. However, accommodation for visitors is only one of many important infrastructural pieces of the puzzle when it comes to the development and promotion of the joyful activity here described – back country skiing. Another important piece is the growing local enthusiasm for this kind of activity. The growth of the number of local skiing experts adds to the deepening of local knowledge concerned with the terrain and weather conditions, and to the development of high-grade ski shops and ski slopes. These, for their part, contribute to better experiences – and thus also to better, more competitive products – for those visiting for the sake of exploring the mountains. This local group of enthusiasts is even more difficult to quantify, as formal registration of members of sports clubs or tourist associations is low compared to the number of skiers in the mountains during winter. The Norwegian Tourist Association (NTA<sup>1</sup>) membership figures for the period 2000–2012 show a steady rise, from 358 to 690 members, which indicates an increased use of hiking and skiing areas in the region (*Figure 9*). The number has increased further in 2013, and in January 2014 there were 737 members of the NTA in Lofoten.

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1 The NTA is an organization that primarily promotes and organizes outdoor activities such as hiking and skiing.



*FIGURE 9. Members of Norwegian Tourist Association in Lofoten from 2000 to 2012.  
Source: Norwegian Tourist Association.*

These trends briefly described are the foundation for the commitment from an increasing number of actors in Lofoten towards utilizing and promoting the possibility for back country skiing in the region – a focus which clearly heightens the attractiveness of the region for both visitors and inhabitants, including potential future inhabitants. Destination Lofoten, a company jointly owned by municipalities and tourism actors in the region, and designed to promote the region for visitors has in their records 135

membership businesses, of which 18 promote guiding services such as ski trips, hiking, fishing, kayaking and diving. In addition, a number of membership businesses support (or are being supported) by guiding services, as they, for instance, provide lodging and/or food services to visitors who also use guiding services – in fact, we see an increasing trend of cooperation between small-scale businesses, enabling them to provide a more professional, full-fledged experience that includes travel, lodging, food, guiding and other experiences, such as museum trips.<sup>2</sup>

In the following, we will look more closely at one such attempt, by two business actors, to promote a joint product in which food and lodging and the search for joyful experiences – vital amongst them back country skiing during winter – are the main ingredients.<sup>3</sup>

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2 Figures provided by Destination Lofoten via e-mail, November 6th, 2013, supporting information from interview with Steinar Jøraandstad, Jøraandstad Consulting, February 6th, 2014.

3 There are of course several events and/or business ventures that could be chosen, and such an event that could potentially broaden our scope, is the event SKI2SEALofoten (<http://www.norwegianadventurecompany.com/opplevelser/nord-norge/ski2sea-events/ski2sea-lofoten/>), which is a back country skiing festival arranged each year for relatively well-off customers, mostly from the southern part of Norway, based in Henningsvær. I have, however, for this preliminary study, chosen to focus on the example to follow, and have not approached the organizers of SKI2SEA.

*An example: Lofoten Ski Lodge  
– a cooperative effort building a multi-sports venue*

In Kabelvåg, a sleepy small town just west of the self-ascribed capital of Lofoten called Svolvær, mountain guides Maren Eek Bistrup and Seth Hobby have put up shop. Their business, Northern Alpine Guides (NAG), is found on a central corner of the town, just off the main square. From here, they run a small-scale but successful business based on accommodating for skiers, hikers and mountain climbers connected through an international network. The young couple has for years been part of an international community of mountain adventure-seekers, and is now facilitating activities in the ragged mountains of Lofoten for a diverse clientele. Customers range from mature couples in their 50s eager to explore more of Lofoten than what can be seen from a car window, to groups of athletes seeking the ultimate challenges these mountains can offer; true alpine experiences, straight from the sea. Most of the NAG's clientele are from Central Europe and Southern Scandinavia, but also North-American skiers have found their way to these relatively accessible alpine areas of the Arctic.

Maren, from the southern part of Norway and Seth, who is from the US, met during a climbing holiday in the early 2000s, maintained a long-distance relationship for some time before getting married. For their honeymoon they decided on Lofoten, '... and since then, we've sort of been here', says Maren. Seth, an internationally certified mountain guide and climbing instructor and Maren, who holds a degree in innovation, creativity and business development, has for the last few years built a business which has left its mark on the local community and also been an important part of the increasingly popular trend of using the mountains of Lofoten for back country skiing, also amongst

residents. Their ‘choice of residence has, of course, much to do with how they want to live, and where they want to play’, says Maren, and continues: ‘Here, we can lead a quiet life, in small-scale surroundings that are both soothing and at the same time provide ample opportunity to go for that adrenalin rush, in the natural surroundings.’<sup>4</sup>

For the season 2013–2014 Maren and Seth engaged in a cooperative effort with Per Lund and Randi Normann, the owners of an old fishing jetty at Kalle, an historic old settlement at the very foot of the iconic Vågakallen mountain. Together they now launch Lofoten Ski Lodge, a full-service lodging for skiers and other adventurers who want to both discover the mountains of Lofoten using professional guides and enjoy the scenic tranquillity of the Kalle Rorbu facility. These two small, family-run businesses have joined forces to create a new, viable and versatile cooperation, within which both hope to expand their reach and assist in building a more professional, better adapted product. Maren says: ‘As we have had a couple of seasons now working out of the town of Kabelvåg, we have gained enough experience of what the town can and cannot offer to know what was missing. First and foremost we needed to ensure ourselves and our customers that we could provide both lodging and food of a quality that would meet the expectations. Remember that going skiing in Lofoten is for most people a fairly expensive holiday, and therefore, everything we provide should be of the highest quality.’<sup>5</sup>

Per and Randi, the owners of Kalle, are of a different generation than Maren and Seth, and they own the place ‘because of a romantic whim’, as Per jokingly puts it.<sup>6</sup> They were leading comfortable lives in the city of Tromsø, with children well situated in

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4 Interview, Maren Eek Bistrup, Per Lund and Randi Normann, February 7th, 2014.

5 See footnote 4.

6 See footnote 4.



school and other activities and with well-paying and interesting jobs. On their way back from a short outing in 1993, they decided to stop by the place to have a look. 'I knew that it was empty, and that the owner had run himself close to bankruptcy trying to fix it up', Per continued, 'and we loved it'. They bought the place soon after, sold their assets in Tromsø and moved to Lofoten. Today they categorize it as a 'bold move', one more guided by the heart than by reason. Over the years they have run the place which holds a large main house, a jetty – rebuilt as a restaurant/lounge, complete with saunas, steam bath tubs, bathroom facilities, and fishermen's cottages (called *rorbus*), feeling that the place held a potential beyond what they were able to fill themselves. The answer came when Maren and Seth came looking for ways to better secure good lodging facilities for their guests.

Quality is important, they all agree. Equally important are the natural scenery and the potential for great outdoor activities that Lofoten delivers all the time, if one is flexible when it comes to the weather. Choosing Lofoten instead of the Alps or the Rocky Mountains for your skiing holiday means that you are aware of the risk of being caught in a storm, or that fog hides the famous scenery from the peak you might be standing on. But then more than ever, quality reigns, and Maren and Seth agree that the ability to provide for good food and lodging is even more important when the weather turns to the worse. It all adds up, weather and all, to the total experience that is Lofoten, they agree, and point to the future potential for additional activities and recreational ('wellness') products they can develop and offer both visitors and local residents out of Kalle.

The Lofoten Ski Lodge project is one of several attempts at providing ski tourists with a broader concept when travelling to Lofoten. Previously – in the early beginning of tourism to the area and up to the mid-1990s – Lofoten has been described as a typical ‘receiving destination’. This means that traditionally, little was done in terms of advertising or streamlining products for a market. People would simply find their way to the islands, and would be provided for on an ad-hoc basis. Small businesses did exist though, but these were merely supplementary to what people were really doing. Many would offer lodgings in traditional rorbu facilities outside of fishing season, and as the need for these facilities for fishers declined – mostly due to better living standards onboard fishing vessels – those that took care of their rorbudid so because of their often small, but lucrative, tourism business.

But this approach to tourism can only take you a short way. As interest in the Lofoten area has grown both nationally and abroad, many actors have realized that their ability to provide visitors with products that meet their expectations is dependent on them being able to cooperate and to enhance and join competences and skills that together raise the overall experience of visiting a region such as Lofoten. For instance, the ability of Seth and Maren to provide first class guiding ensures that their visitors will in all probability be provided with the best trips Lofoten has to offer, weather conditions and seasons considered. To be able to know where to go for the best trip on any given day requires technical skills, local knowledge and continuous monitoring of snow conditions, weather patterns and seasonal changes. Combined with Per and Randi’s lodging facilities and excellent kitchen, the Northern Alpine Guides now hopes to provide an even better, more fulfilling total experience for visitors.

## *Identified needs and wishes from regional partners*

According to our conversations, regional partners Kalle AS and Northern Alpine Guides have focused so far mainly on two issues; the first concerning the attractiveness of the region for skiers, the second on how to develop a full-year business, meaning that the project will have to include other activities beyond skiing for the rest of the year. As for attractiveness for skiers, the main aspect which they believe is of importance is to increase efforts concerning the promotion of the region; in other words, making sure potential customers know about and find it worthwhile to go there. Secondly, the products and packages designed for these visitors should be of a standard and quality that justifies the price level (as Norway is an expensive country) and the extra effort in going 'off the beaten track', so to speak; to a region above the Arctic circle instead of, say, the Alps. 'This place is for enthusiasts mainly', says Maren, 'meaning that it is for those who are ready to go that extra mile, and pay that little extra – but they also want quality in return'. This basis for operations at Kalle, with Northern Alpine Guides as *content producer* for visitors, makes up for a large bulk of the basis they need for funding their project together. However, for it to be profitable, they need more visitors all year, in order to utilize the potential at the facilities – they can provide room and board for 50 people at a time, meaning that what is now considered 'off seasons' (predominantly the autumn months) is an under-utilized potential which they need to explore.

Development of business cooperation between Kalle AS and Northern Alpine Guides thus requires thinking outside the box; in order to ensure a sustainable product over time in which back country skiing is a vital part, other seasons with other activities will have to be explored. NAG already provides tours and services for climbers during the summer season (and for those few who want to climb in ice during winter), but

they need to develop other activities as well. In short, what is needed is a business plan in which seasonal changes are taken into account, and where facilities and expertise is needed for the introduction of new, joyful, sporty activities for visitors in nature.

### *Potential for phase 2 of the THROUGH-JOY project*

During our discussion at Kalle, quite a lot of time was used trying to flesh out what further cooperation under the umbrella of the planned phase 2 of the THROUGH-JOY project should include for it to be of interest for the two companies – Kalle AS and Northern Alpine Guides – and the four individuals involved in them, Maren, Seth, Randi and Per. It is clear that, for these actors, important aspects include: the potential for innovation of products, a stronger emphasis on knowledge of (different) market(s), and the initiation of a process in which governmental and municipal actors participated together with both professional and civil society stakeholders in order to clarify goals and strategies for the (continued) utilization of natural surroundings for joyful activities.

Concerning innovation of products, they all emphasized the need for further development of a diverse set of activities *beyond skiing* to better utilize what is now considered 'off-season periods', first and foremost the three months up to Christmas (and to some extent the month of May, even though some skiers remain – and some summer visitors arrive early). Concerning markets, they consider the potential for more visitors all year to be good, but that they are in need of better marketing possibilities and market analyses. And finally – and maybe most importantly – they point to a lack of clarification concerning managerial and strategic planning of use and protection of nature, cultural heritage sites and buildings and landscapes that could represent both opportunities and restrictions for future investments. Therefore, both NAG and Kalle

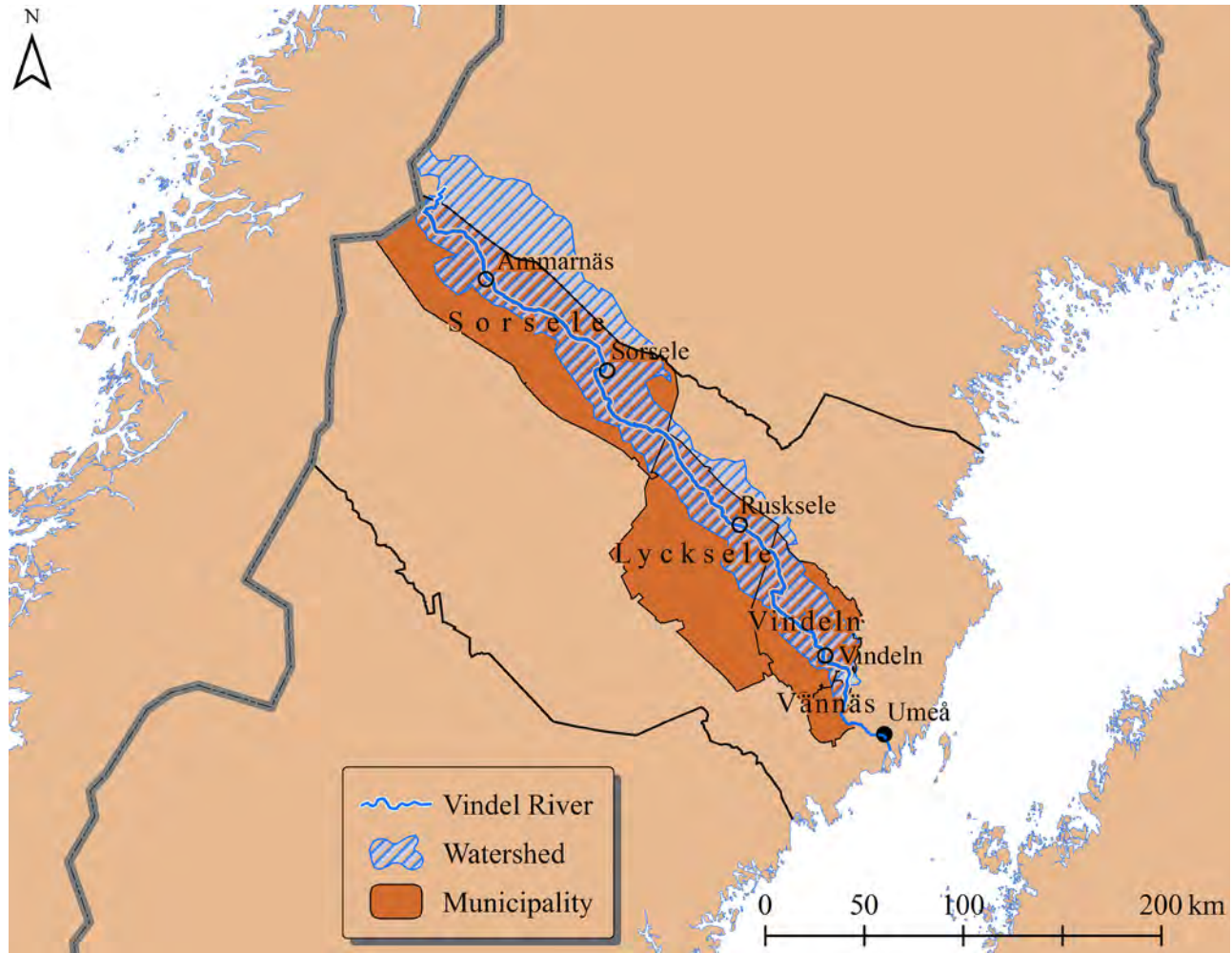
AS ask that the project would open for a broader investigation also into the practical issues needed to be clarified in order to better fulfil the potential for playful activities in nature in Lofoten – both for professionals amateurs, residents and visitors.

### 3 CASE VINDEL RIVER AREA

*Håkan Appelblad*

#### *Introduction*

The project in Sweden deals with activities in the Vindel River (Vindelälven) area in the Västerbotten County and also by the catchment area partly including neighbouring areas in the Norrbotten County (*Figure 10*). The sporty activities chosen as cases are the two arrangements: the *NYA Vindelälvsloppet* and the *Vindelälvsdraget*. The NYA Vindelälvsloppet is a running and biking relay race, and the Vindelälvsdraget is a dog sledge relay race. Both races have a stretch of some 350 kilometres from the start in the village of Ammarnäs in the mountain area to the finish in Vännäsby, where the Vindel River ends at the point where it empties in the Ume River, about 40 kilometres from the coast.



*FIGURE 10. Vindel River area. Map by Magnus Strömgren.*

## *Vindel River area's physical geography*

Vindel River is a mountain river stretching from the mountain and high tundra in the west, through the extensive forests and marshes and finally reaches the coastal zones. The length of the river is 450 kilometres and the total catchment area 12,650 square kilometres. It is a large river in the Swedish context. It belongs to the category of mountain rivers, but yet it belongs to the smaller segment of mountain rivers in the northern Sweden. Vindel River is, together with Pite River, Kalix River and Torne River (all three situated in the Norrbotten County), one of the four remaining mountain rivers that principally are not exploited for hydropower production. These four rivers have a status in the Swedish environmental legislation of being national rivers. It means that they are of national importance and subjects for preservation.

Vindel River is physically characterized by the fact that a relatively small area consists of lakes. The largest lake along the main course is Storvindeln, upstream Sorsele. Storvindeln is a small lake compared with for example Storavan, Uddjaur and Hornavan in the neighbouring mountain river to the north, Skellefte River. On the contrary, Vindel River consists mainly of rapids and between the rapids, long parts with plain and calmly running water (in Swedish known as *sel*). Along Vindel River, it is to be found strikingly many geographical place names, in all about forty, ending with the word *sel*, adjusted grammatically to *-sele* – Sorsele, Kraddsele, Rusksele and Åmsele – to mention a few. The largest rapids along the river are Vindel-Storforsen, Vormforsen and Mårdseleforsen. Further may be noted that Vindel River is a tributary to the hydropower exploited Ume River. The former empties into the latter some 40 kilometres from the coast. Downstream the conjunction of the two rivers we can find the Stornorrforss hydropower plant with its dam construction crossing the river bed.



Apparently locked in, migrating stocks of salmon and sea trout in the Vindel River system, consequently, have to use the constructed fish ladder through the dam in the Ume River, to reach the spawning areas in the Vindel River system.

### *Vindel River area's cultural history*

The river valley has a long cultural history. There are many traces of early Sami sites and settlements. Herding grounds and paths for the migrating reindeers are still in use by the Sami communities along the whole river valley. Agriculture is to be found, not at least on fertile arable lands created by river sediments, especially in the lower reaches of the river. In recent years, efforts have been made to encourage farmers to let their cattle graze outside the farmstead to create natural pastures and meadows. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century forestry and the immense timber logging activities created many historical artefacts in the river, in order to adjust it to a more convenient route for timber.

During the era of large scale hydropower exploitation of Swedish rivers in the 1950s and 1960s, also Vindel River was seen as a potential source for hydropower, even if the physical conditions for hydropower productions were less favourable than in other comparable rivers. After many years of investigations and debates the government finally decided in 1970 that Vindel River should be protected from hydropower exploitation. Vindel River became in this time, from the latter part of the 1960s and the early 1970s, a specific Swedish symbol for environment and nature conservation. For example, the highly recognized Swedish artist, composer and singer, Evert Taube, was directly inspired of the Vindel River issue when he wrote one of his most famous songs, Änglamark (Angelic soil, freely translated), in 1971.

### *The Vindel River area and the VIKOM municipalities*

The Vindel River area is located within the Västerbotten County, but – through the tributary, Laisälven – it also goes up to the neighbouring areas in the municipality of Arjeplog situated in the Norrbotten County. The river is mainly stretching through the municipalities of Sorsele, Lycksele, Vindeln and Vännäs, listed in order of their appearance when coming from the river sources, in the north-west corner of the county, to where the river empties in the Ume River in the south-eastern part. The four municipalities mentioned have created a cross municipal organization, VIKOM, in order to deal with issues in the river valley in which they have common interests. This part of Sweden is very sparsely populated, and has also suffered hard from population loss and an ageing population since the 1960s. *Table 2* shows the population change in the municipalities between 1968 and 2012. In total the decrease has been 19 per cent, or nearly 7,000 persons. The loss of population is mainly a result of the ongoing urbanization process in Sweden. The loss of people is, in relative terms, strongest in the upper parts of the river, i.e., Sorsele. On the other hand, Vännäs, close to the regional centre Umeå, has actually had a population growth during the period.

**TABLE 2. Population in the VIKOM municipalities in 1968 and 2012.**  
*Source: Statistics Sweden.*

Municipality	1968	2012	Difference	Relative difference
Sorsele	4,581	2,673	-1,908	-42 %
Lycksele	15,084	12,351	-2,733	-18 %
Vindeln	7,998	5,359	-2,639	-33 %
Vännäs	8,228	8,522	+ 294	+ 4 %
<b>VIKOM total</b>	<b>35,891</b>	<b>28,905</b>	<b>-6,986</b>	<b>-19 %</b>

Two other features of the Vindel River area may be noted. As indicated in *Table 2* there is a weak urban structure along the river. Only the small municipal centres of Sorsele, Vindeln and Vännäs are located in close proximity to the river and the rest of the river valley is characterized by settlements in small villages and single houses. Another condition is that the highway 363 stretching along the river has a dead end in Ammarnäs, in the uppermost part, with no further connection to Norway. At the moment, on both sides of highway 363, there are two parallel road connections from Sweden to Norway: to the south, highway E12, connecting Umeå and Mo i Rana along the Ume River, and to the north, highway 95, connecting Skellefteå with Bodø along the Skellefte River.

## *Earlier legislation measures and projects*

Since the governmental decision in 1970 to preserve the Vindel River, many land use planning issues and development projects have been conducted in the Vindel River area, focusing mainly on environmental preservation issues and promotion of outdoor and recreational land use activities.

Among the most important planning landmarks can be mentioned:

- 1974: The establishment of the extensive nature reserve in the mountain area, Vindelfjällens naturreservat
- 1975: The Vindel River area was pointed out as being one of Sweden's 25 primary recreational areas (primärt rekreationsområde)
- 1981–1992: Recreational fishing project 'Fiskeprojekt Vindelälven–Laisälven'
- 1992: Establishment of the municipal organization ViEF, later on named as VIKOM, with the main objective to promote tourism and recreational use of the river
- 1993: Vindel River received status as a National river
- Included as an area in the European network Natura 2000
- 1996–2000: Project 'Framtid Vindelälven' (Future Vindel River), development of tourism, cultural activities and sports events. The project was funded by the EU Structural Funds, Objectives 6 and 5b.

- 2001–2006: EU and WWF funded an agricultural project concerned with natural pastures along Vindel River (Landskapsvård och köttproduktion i Vindelälvens närområde)
- 2010–2015: Vindelälven LIFE – Restoration of tributaries of the Vindel River. The project aims to improve the physical qualities of the Vindel River's tributaries through the restoration of the timber floating adjusted riverbeds.

Maybe a bit discouraging in this respect, is the tendency that the touristic and environmental path that was devised for the Vindel River area, does not seem to have increased the numbers of visitors and inhabitants. The presumed positive correlation between visiting tourists and a preserved and 'wild' river has been challenged by Bodén (2000) in a study comparing the twin rivers, the Ume River and the Vindel River. The former river is along most of its course, heavily exploited for hydropower purposes and the latter one, as we have described, unexploited and subject for nature conservation measures. Bodén simply claimed that there were no indications that Vindel River gained some increasing shares of visiting tourists since the time when it was decided to be preserved up to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On the contrary, it was rather assumed that the larger investment in infrastructure induced by the hydropower exploitation in the Ume River, also supported the development of tourism in that area (Bodén 2000).

## *Sports and outdoor recreation projects*

As Vindel River was not to be exploited for hydropower purposes, it has been proposed for other purposes. The answer so far from the authorities has been *tourism* and *recreation*. Through the years, efforts have been made to create touristic facilities along the river for anglers and outdoor recreationists; hiking and biking trails, trails for snowmobiles in wintertime, windshields, etc. However, the most pronounced efforts have been the establishment of the two sport events stretching along the major part of the river, the Vindelälvsloppet and the Vindelälvsdraget. Both of them have been the largest of their kinds in the whole world. Besides these two events also other arrangements can be found, like the Hjuldagen (biking, Ammarnäs–Sorsele), the Kungsledenrännnet (xc skiing, Hemavan–Ammarnäs), the Sjumila (xc skiing, Vindel–Robertsfors) and eventually, the alpine skiing competitions in Nalovardo (outside Sorsele). Contrary to the former two events, the latter events are only partly or to a smaller extent related to the Vindel River area.

### *Vindelälvsloppet*

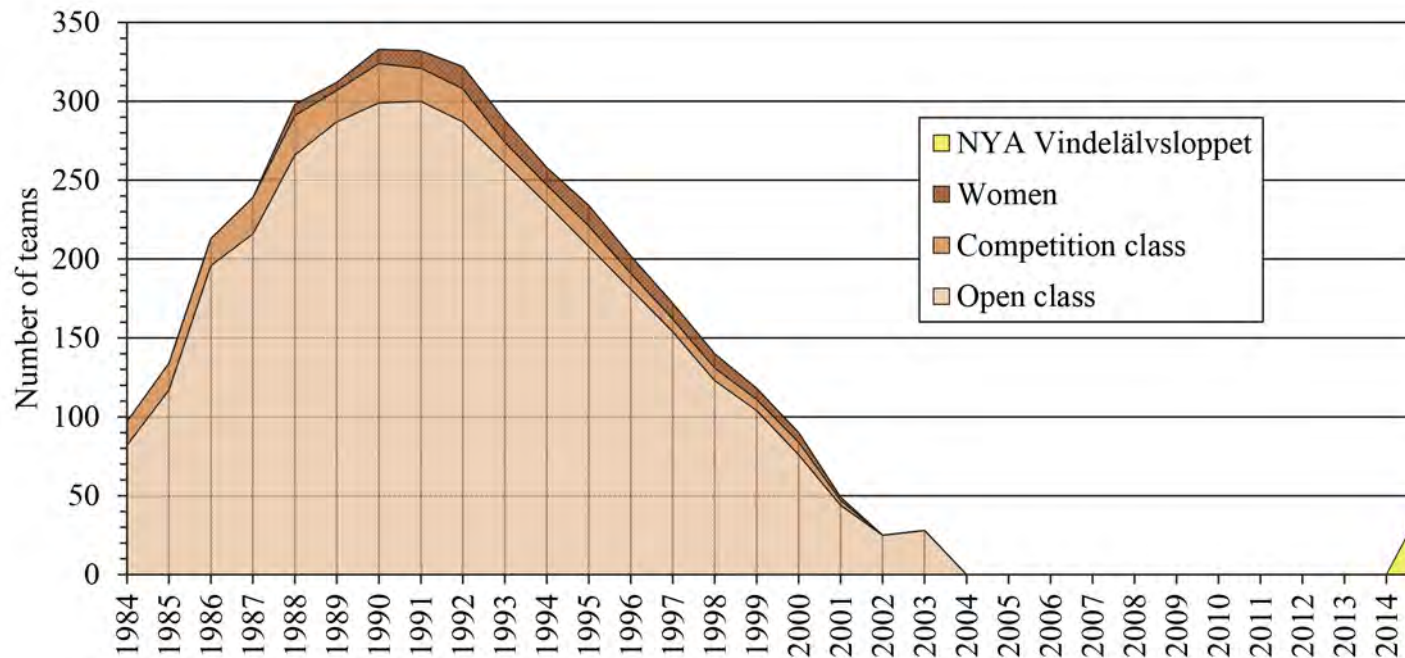
The Vindelälvsloppet was arranged for the first time in 1984, and in its first form it lasted until 2003 (*Figure 11*). The NYA (new) Vindelälvsloppet is a slightly modified relaunch, which is planned to be arranged for the first time in 2015. The review made below refers mainly to the former Vindelälvsloppet.

Originally, Vindelälvsloppet was a four-day arrangement, and from the beginning it included 22 individual distances, from 5 kilometres up to a full marathon, 42 kilometres. Later on the race was divided into 27/30 individual distances. In the first

years, the organizer of the race was the club Öråns SK from Lycksele. Later on the organizers formed a specific club for the race: Vindelälvsloppet IF. The first year 100 teams participated. Later on the number increased rapidly to 330 teams in the beginning of the 1990s. From the early 1990s began the steady decrease of participating teams, until the race was cancelled in 2004 (*Figure 12*).



**FIGURE 11.** *Vindelälvsloppet, 2001. Photograph by Lars Fällman.*



**FIGURE 12.** *The life cycle of the Vindelälvsloppet: the rise, fall and return.*  
 Source: Appellblad 2010 (years 1984–2003).

From the start, Vindelälvsloppet included a competition class, which attracted some athletic and running clubs, mainly from the Västerbotten County, but also some established clubs including Swedish elite runners, from southern parts of Sweden. Despite the competition class, Vindelälvsloppet was always mainly a race for joyful amateurs, teams including working mates, village members, various NGOs, etc. From 1988 there



was also a single class for women only, which gathered about 10 teams throughout the years. However, women to a large extent also participated in teams in the open class which was mixed in terms of gender.

A large share of the local inhabitants, second home owners and locals in 'exile'; were serving as functionaries in this race. Assuming that each team involved on average 20 runners, the whole race attracted no less than 6,000 runners, during the years when the race was on top. To these figures may be added companions, spectators, functionaries, and other people who contributed different kinds of services to all visitors. Everybody seemed to gather on those few summer days along the otherwise sparsely populated river valley. As it was often claimed, Vindelälvsloppet changed the time perspective in the Vindel River area. In places in northern rural areas, the traditional way of referring to the time as being before or after the elk hunting season, the yearly time ordering principle changed to be a question about before or after the Vindelälvsloppet (Appelblad 2010). The magnitude of Vindelälvsloppet was certainly impressive on those who could watch it on site. The former mayor of Sorsele municipality, Rune Tovetjärn, characterized Vindelälvsloppet as the single initiative that contributed most to the development of the whole river valley (Abrahamsson 1992).

The establishment of Vindelälvsloppet can be seen as a response to two important factors. *Firstly*, it was a response to the rising running movement in the early 1980s. Running had become a widespread and popular sport among many different segments of the population. The running movement received a massive breakthrough in North America in the 1970s, manifested by the appearing and fast growing city marathon races throughout the continent. A few years later, this running revolution hit also the Swedish ground and one of the flag ships in Swedish running, Stockholm Marathon, was established in 1979. *Secondly*, the Vindelälvsloppet was also a response to engagement

for the Vindel River valley and its local development and environmental awareness, which might have been stronger in the early 1980s, than what has been the case later on.

The decline of Vindelälvsloppet might be regarded as a counter reaction to the initial era and consequently the backward development that can be explained by the logics of the typical life cycle development, and also the related issue of the declining interest for running that hit also many other amateur running races in the 1990s. The renewed interest for running that appeared around the millennium shift, came too late to rescue the declining race (Appelblad 2010).

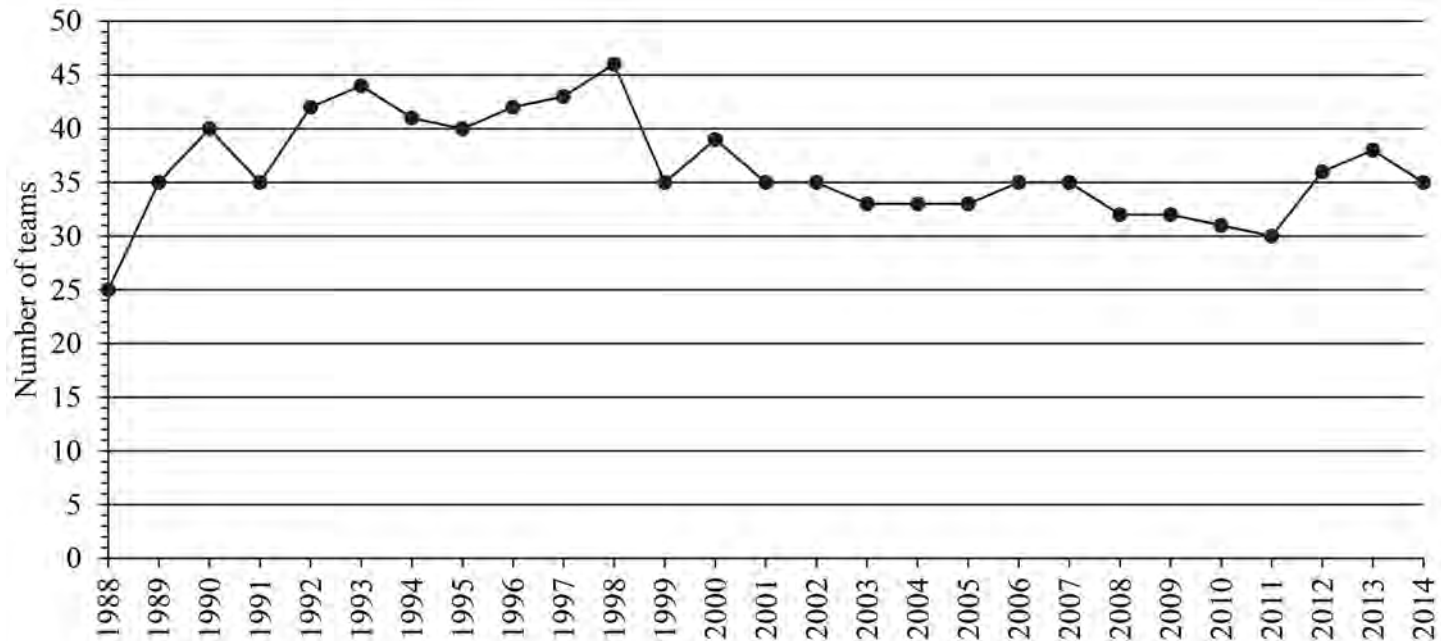
### *Vindelälvsdraget*

The dog sledge race Vindelälvsdraget was arranged for the first time in 1988, and since then it has been arranged every year in the middle of March. About half of the distance is on the Vindel River's unregulated ice cover, and the rest on paths and unploughed forest roads in close proximity to the river (*Figure 13*). As the case with the running race Vindelälvsloppet, this race also stretches from Ammarnäs to Vännäsby, divided in four days and 30 individual distances, from 6 to 22 kilometres, in all covering 400 kilometres. The organizer of the race is the UBHK, Umeå Working Dog Club – Umeå Brukshundklubb ([ubhk.se](http://ubhk.se)). Hence, the main organizers of the Vindelälvsdraget, the club and many of the leading functionaries, are actually localized outside the immediate proximity of the Vindel River.



*FIGURE 13. Vindelälvsdraget, 2014. Photograph by Olli Rosenqvist.*

In the first year 25 teams participated, since then not more than 46 teams and not less than 30 teams have participated each year (*Figure 14*). Compared with Vindelälvsloppet, Vindelälvsdraget expresses a much more stable development. The manager of the Vindelälvsdraget, Olle Rosén from the UBHK, claims that, 'Vindelälvsdraget addresses a rather narrow group of people, with such a specific interest that they have invested a lot of resources in the hobby'. Educating and training a dog demands an immense effort. Hence, these people interested in dog sledge racing are not sensitive in the same way to shifting trends as the average person that participates in a running event. It can be assumed that the participants due to their strong commitment in their hobby, generally are also more deeply engaged in the arrangement than what was the case for the average participant in the Vindelälvsloppet. In addition, as the competition is carried out with dogs, participation in the Vindelälvsdraget is clearly regulated. For instance, dogs must wear identification markings, be vaccinated and all dogs are inspected during the course of the competition. Strong commitment is also something that is found among the leading functionaries, which consist of a small close-knit group of people who usually have held tight to their commitments for many years. Recruiting new members to this inner group of organizers can thus be complicated.



**FIGURE 14.** Number of participant teams in the Vindelälvsdraget from 1988 to 2014.  
 Source: vindelalven.se.

Despite the fact that the race in practice attracts a rather narrow group of participants as well as organizers, Vindelälvsdraget has an inclusive approach to participants. There is only one open class in the race for all. In dog sledging, there are basically two major forms; *skijoring* and *sledding*. Skijoring is performed by a single skier and one dog. Sledding is formed by an equipage, which consists of a sledge and a team of dogs and the driver. Both these two forms are welcomed in the Vindelälvsdraget. The welcoming nature of

Vindelälvsdraget is also expressed in the prize ceremonies which mainly consist of raffle prizes to all participating teams.

Another vital aspect for the Vindelälvsdraget are the *relations* to the local communities along the river. As the arrangement involves a large number of dogs and is carried out in reindeer herding areas, it is essential to get approval from the reindeer herding Sami community along the river. Sami reindeer herders may have reindeers gathered on the river or in close proximity to the race track. Olle Rosén stresses the importance to inform and discuss in advance with reindeer herders and others that might be affected by the arrangement. It is essential to maintain such contacts throughout the year, not only during the time for the competition.

### *Current projects in the Vindel River area and the relaunched NYA Vindelälvsloppet*

The municipalities along the river cooperate through the association VIKOM, which coordinates and promotes recreational and touristic activities along the river valley. Referring to the highly valued natural and cultural assets in the Vindel River area, VIKOM has initiated a proposal for making this area one of the objects on the UNESCO's world heritage list (see ViEF 2008). In August 2013, a feasibility study started of the Vindel River area as a UNESCO Man and Biosphere area, headed by the WWF, the Västerbotten County and the VIKOM.

Since 2012 an informal group connected to VIKOM has worked with a layout for a relaunched version of the Vindelälvsloppet. The new concept has been presented for village representatives and associations along the river valley under the new label, NYA Vindelälvsloppet, with a planned comeback in 2015. The new concept builds on the

previous race, but in addition proposing; a shorter time span to three days, which will be possible by also making use of one night in between. Seasonally the race has been moved closer to the midsummer (from the previous week 30 to 27) in order to better make use of the bright summer nights. Two classes will be offered, the RUN and the COMBO (running and biking).

### *Major assets and developmental needs*

The assets related to Vindelälvsloppet and Vindelälvsdraget are manifold – the geographical settings with its natural and cultural attributes, the specific and unique forms of arrangement, the local engagement and popular support for the whole arrangement. Both arrangements have today a strong '*brand*'. Torbjörn Norrman, the manager of the former Vindelälvsloppet, emphasizes the engagement along the river valley and among the participants, as one of the arrangement's main characteristics and consequently main assets. Vindelälvsloppet was heavily dependent on the efforts made by many functionaries and volunteers. They mostly participated with great engagement, enthusiasm and joyfulness. The same can be said for the Vindelälvsdraget, and here the engagement is even more deeply connected to this specific sport, due to the *heavy personal investment* it takes to participate in dog sledging. In a survey targeted at the team leaders in the former Vindelälvsloppet, it was found that the positive attitude towards possibilities to relaunch the race, correlated positively with whether the respondents thought that the connection to the Vindel River was important for the race (Appelblad 2012).

The Vindelälvsdraget is a unique and over time sustainable event. The major concept is appreciated among the participants. The relaunch of NYA Vindelälvsloppet seems to be well timed with the currently positive trend for running and running races in general.

Running seems to be as popular as ever before, and according to the organizers of the new race, many runners around the country await this relaunch. A practical bottleneck for both arrangements is the shortage of people. Declining number of inhabitants, more pronounced in the upper parts of the river valley, is a critical issue for further development of both races. A related issue is the shortage of accommodation opportunities for those people who participate or visit these events.

### *Concluding remarks – readiness for the project's development phase*

In the era when most of the larger rivers in Sweden were projected for hydropower exploitation, Vindel River faced an alternative destiny. The Vindel River area is therefore an interesting example when it comes to development issues with the focus on recreation, tourism, sports, etc. Development of joyful sporty activities that make use of the landscape along the whole river can presumably also be an approach that responds well to the concept of *smart specialization* as it is defined in the EU Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies, in short, concentrating efforts on unique and available resources within the region in question.

Through the years, many initiatives and planning measures have been done in the Vindel River area. However, they have not so far, on a substantial way, helped to reduce or stop the general population decline along major parts of the river valley. Still, there is a strong engagement for the NYA Vindelälvsloppet and the Vindelälvsdraget. Both arrangements are open to initiatives that can contribute to *user-led development*.



## 4 CASE CENTRAL OSTROBOTHNIA

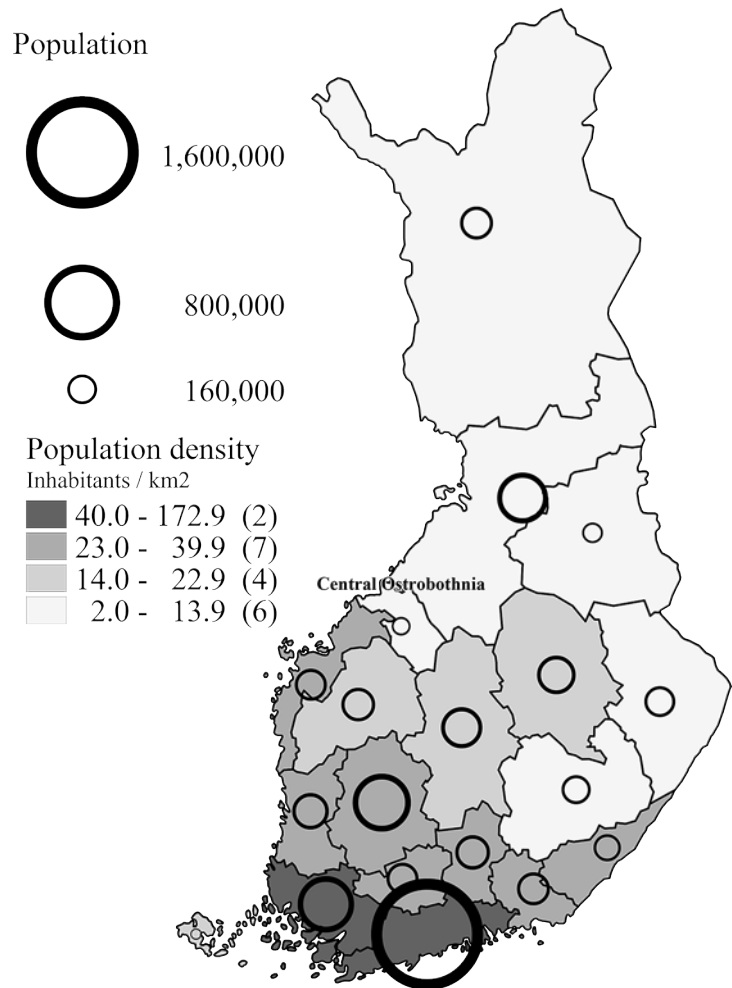
*Olli Rosenqvist*

### ***Introduction***

In the framework of the Interreg IV A North programme Central Ostrobothnia is the southernmost of the three Finnish programme regions. To the north of Central Ostrobothnia locate themselves North Ostrobothnia – also called Oulu region – and Lapland. These three regions belong to the nineteen regions in Finland in all of which there is a statutory Regional Council which is responsible of the regional development in its area. Administratively these Councils are federations of municipalities. The population of the Finnish regions is described in *Figure 15* in twofold manner. On the choropleth map level<sup>7</sup> you can see the population density and on the graduated symbols map level the amount of population by region. From the figure it can be seen that Central Ostrobothnia is a small region in the Finnish circumstances – only 69,000 inhabitants in the beginning of 2013.

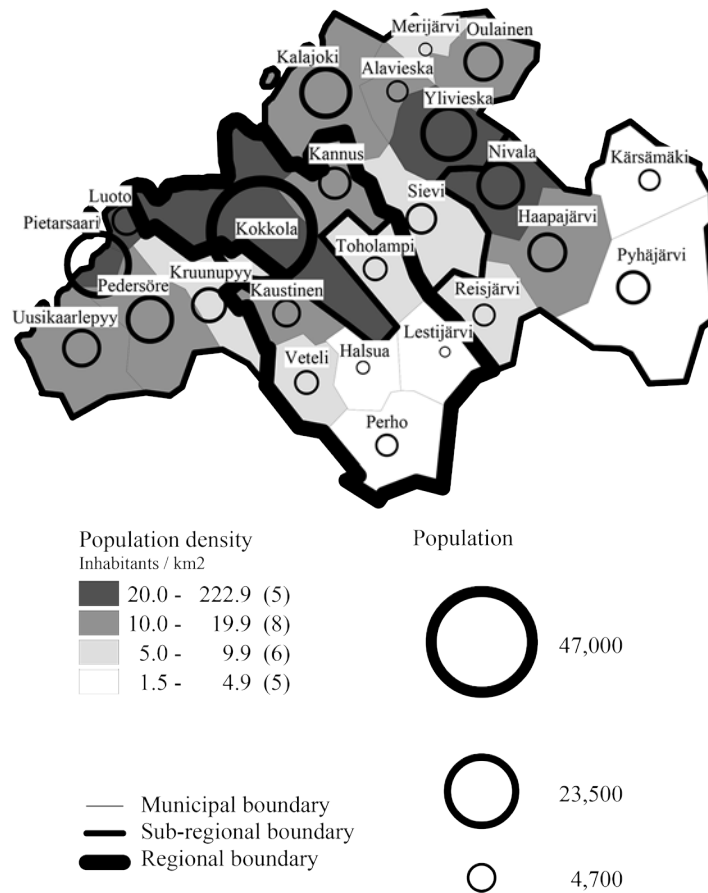
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<sup>7</sup> The shaded pattern on the base map.



In regional development work the above mentioned official Central Ostrobothnia can be divided into three sub-areas: Kokkola and Kannus, which are towns/municipalities, and the sub-region of Kaustinen, which consists of 6 municipalities. Central Ostrobothnia cannot be said to be an isolated area, since its actors have a lot of functional day-to-day connections to the neighbouring regions, especially to the sub-region of Pietarsaari in the south-west and to the sub-regions of Ylivieska and Nivala-Haapajärvi in the north-east. The population of the regions mentioned above amounts in all to 192,000. This larger area can be called historical Central Ostrobothnia (see *Figure 16*).

**FIGURE 15.** Population by region in Finland, 1.1.2013. Source: StatFin/Statistics Finland.



**FIGURE 16.** *Population by municipality in the historical Central Ostrobothnia, 1.1.2013.*  
 Source: StatFin/Statistics Finland.

Despite the facts that 61 percent of the value added and 64 percent of the employment in Central Ostrobothnia came in 2011 from the service sectors (Statistics Finland), the *smart specialization* strategy of Central Ostrobothnia – which can be read from the Regional Development Plan and the Regional Strategic Programme – emphasizes the development of technology and natural resource based industries. Culture, creative industries and sports are held in the programme-based development work as attractiveness and competitiveness factors rather than sources of livelihood. In the Central Ostrobothnian circumstances it is important to examine carefully all kinds of leisure activities to figure out justifications for their development also as sources of livelihood.

With regard to national and international mobility of people, Central Ostrobothnia can be characterized as a rather remote area. Figure 17 describes the total number of overnight stays in hotels with at least 20 beds by region in Finland,

and *Figure 18* describes the same information in respect of foreign visitors. The choropleth map levels in *Figures 17* and *18* illustrate the relative meaning of the phenomenon in question. The relative meaning is measured by location quotient (LQ)<sup>8</sup>

The graduated symbols map levels in *Figures 17* and *18* indicate that the absolute number of overnight stays in hotels in Central Ostrobothnia is remarkably lower than the absolute number of population might imply (cf. *Figure 15* above). So, there is still a lot of work to be done to develop Central Ostrobothnia into an attractive national and international destination.

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8 LQ is calculated for each region *i* according to the formula

$$LQ_i = \frac{X_i/X}{Y_i/Y}$$

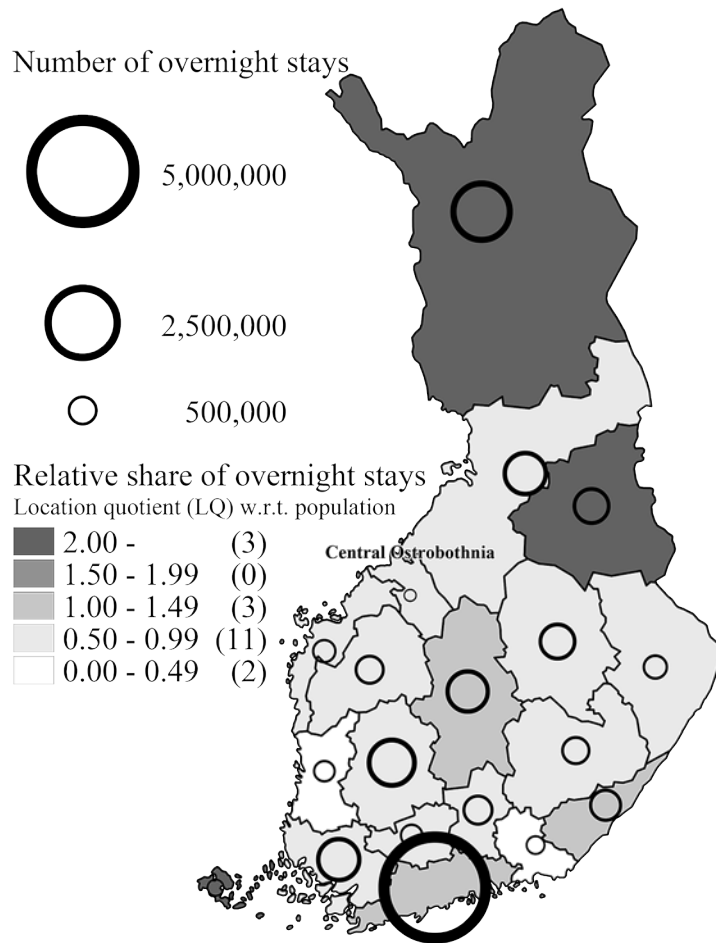
where  $X_i$  = Number of overnight stays in region *i*

$X$  = Number of overnight stays in the whole Finland

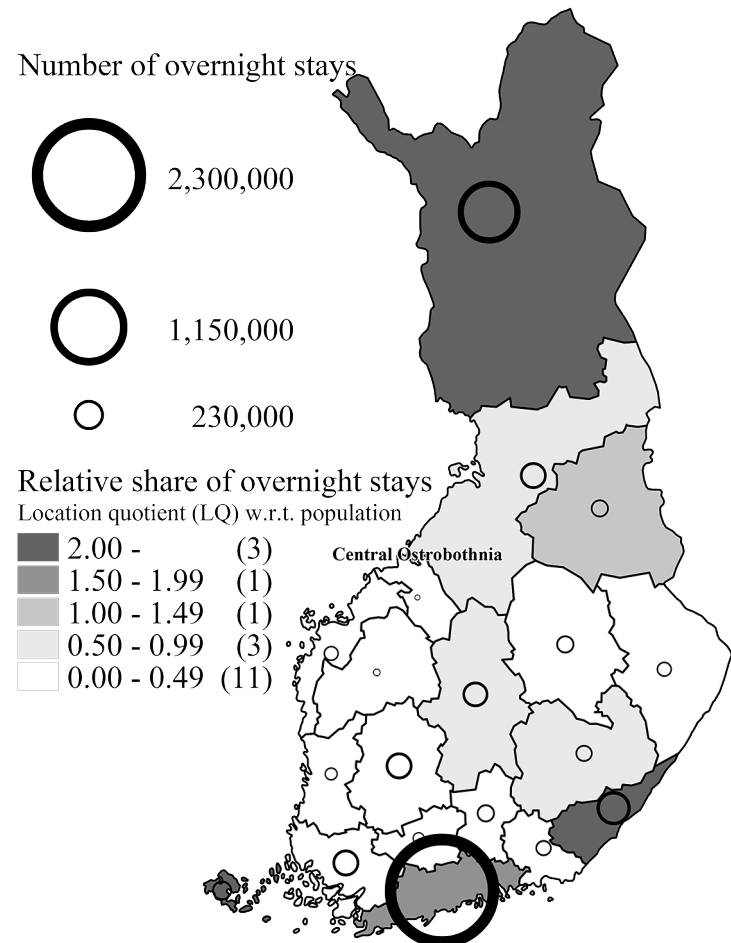
$Y_i$  = Population in region *i*

$Y$  = Population in the whole Finland.

Value 1 of the LQ means that the region's share of overnight stays equals its share of population in Finland. The value 0.5 means that the region's share of overnight stays is a half lower than its share of population, and accordingly, value 1.5 means that the region's share of overnight stays is a half higher than its share of population. The minimum of LQ is zero and the theoretical maximum is infinity. A region can be said to be specialized in the phenomenon in question, if its LQ is greater than 1, and the greater the LQ is, the more the region is specialized.



**FIGURE 17.** Number of all overnight stays in hotels by region in Finland in 2012. Source: StatFin/Statistics Finland.



**FIGURE 18.** Number of overnight stays by foreigners in hotels by region in Finland in 2012. Source: StatFin/Statistics Finland.

Figure 19 depicts sports businesses by region in Finland.<sup>9</sup> The choropleth map level in the figure (location quotients, LQs, by region) indicates that sports firms are quite evenly distributed among regions in Finland. In all regions the LQ, i.e., the share of sports industries of all industries in the region divided by the same share in the national level, is between 0.50 and

9 The map is based on the business register data compiled annually by the Statistics Finland. From the register a collection of industries has been chosen to represent sports businesses. Industries in Finland are defined according to the Standard Industrial Classification (TOL 2008), and the TOL codes 323 (manufacture of sports goods), 46493 (wholesale of sports goods), 47641 (retail sale of sports equipment and bicycles), 77210 (renting and leasing of recreational and sports goods), 85510 (sports and recreation education), 86909 (other health care services), 92 (gambling and betting activities), 93 (sports activities and amusement and recreation activities), and 96040 (physical well-being activities) were chosen to represent sports businesses.

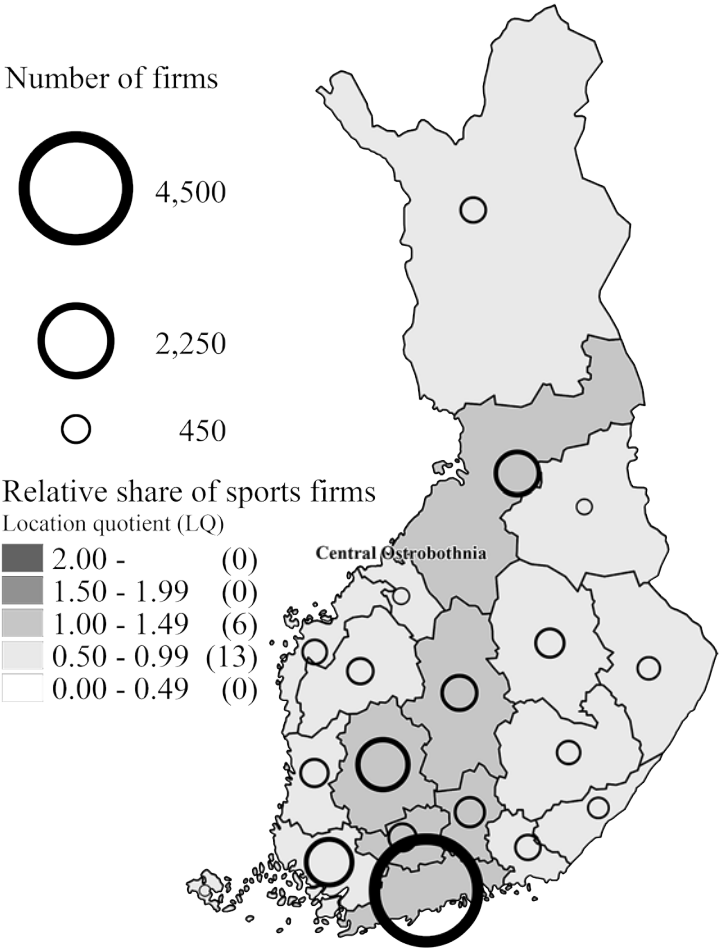


FIGURE 19. Sports firms by region in Finland in 2012. Source: KunTo/Statistics Finland.

1.49. So, in regional level, sports business can be consider a ubiquitous rather than a regionally concentrated industry. The graduated symbols level of the map shows that in Central Ostrobothnia the amount of sports firms is well comparable to the amount of population (cf. *Figure 15* above).

The regional economic meaning of sports in Central Ostrobothnia originates from and develops through the interplay between different kinds of actors: hobbyists, amateurs, professionals, volunteers, associations, public sector actors, businesses, audiences and media. Sports events bring together all the essential actor groups. They can be seen as good laboratories for examining the regional meaning of sports. This is why sports events and phenomena around them have been selected as the target of the Finnish part of the THROUGH-JOY project.

The regional support and development of sports activities have been organized in Finland since the 1990s through 15 regional associations (Haukilahti 2013). In Central Ostrobothnia the regional sports association is *Keski-Pohjanmaan Liikunta ry – Kepli* (2014). The most important task of Kepli is to support and develop diverse and pluralistic sports culture in Central Ostrobothnia. Kepli's area of operation consists of the official region of Central Ostrobothnia plus the sub-region of Pietarsaari to the south-west and the municipalities/towns of Alavieska, Haapajärvi, Kalajoki, Nivala, Pyhäjärvi, Reisjärvi, Sievi and Ylivieska to the north-east of the official region (see *Figure 16* above). The regional sports association operates under the management by results of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The management by results is manifested in the performance agreement made between the regional association and the Ministry. The key result areas of Kepli are club activities, sports for children and the youth, and fitness training and health exercise for adults. In addition to these Kepli also focuses on competitive sports, communications and sports policy. According to Petri Harsunen (2014), organization of

sports events is one of Kepli's core expertise areas. Kepli has a good grandstand view of the needs of the different actor groups around sports, and by means of its employed staff of about 7 persons it also has enough human resources to run development projects.

### *Sports events and phenomena in Central Ostrobothnia*

In regard to development of *experience economy* Central Ostrobothnia possesses some promising starting points. The top attractions of tourism in the region are the *Hiekkasärkät* tourism area in Kalajoki (just north of the official region); the historical wooden house area *Neristan* in Kokkola; the lighthouse island *Tankar* situated about 15 kilometres to the north-west of the harbour of Kokkola; *Metsäpeuranmaa* nature tourism area in the eastern part of the region; and the *Kemora* motorsport park in Veteli.

The most noticeable cultural event in Central Ostrobothnia is the *Kaustinen Folk Music Festival* which is one of the largest and oldest folk music festivals in Nordic countries. To the most important attractiveness factors in Central Ostrobothnia in the field of sports at the moment belong the regional sports boom developed around *volleyball*, the traditional cross country ski relay race, *Central Ostrobothnian regional relay*, and the *Kokkola City Run* running race.

### *Volleyball boom in Central Ostrobothnia*

According to the Finnish Volleyball Association, founded in 1959, volleyball arrived in Finland in the 1920s. The highest level of professional volleyball in Finland, the national championship series (nowadays called the LML league (Lentopallon Mestaruusliiga)), has been played since 1957. Beach volley came into picture in Finland in 1989 when



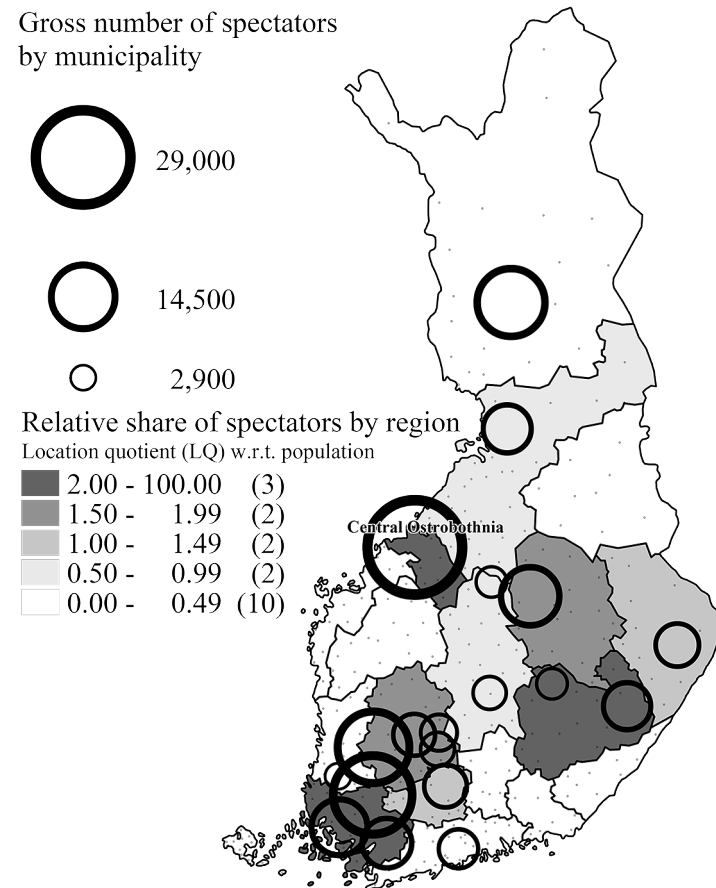
the first national championships were played. (Finnish Volleyball Association 2014.) According to the national sports studies (organized in 1995, 1997–1998, 2001–2002, 2005–2006 and 2009–2010), the number of all volleyball and beach volley hobbyists in Finland decreased from 132,000 in 2001–2002 to 110,000 in 2009–2010, whereas the number of club volleyball and beach volley players increased from 41,000 in 2001–2002 to 47,000 in 2009–2010 (Kihu – Research Institute for Olympic Sports 2014). The challenge for volleyball is to maintain its attractiveness in the eyes of potential hobbyists and other actors around the sport in a situation where new team sports and also new types of individual sports are gaining ground.

In Central Ostrobothnia volleyball has been played since the early days, but a real boom arose in the season 2012–2013 when the club *Kokkolan Tiikerit* (Kokkola Tigers, freely translated) won the championship of the LML league (*Figure 20*). Kokkolan Tiikerit was founded in 1974. It played in the national championship series in the end of the 1970s and in the beginning of the 1980s. But only after the rather tame seasons from the 1980s to the 2000s, Tiikerit managed to climb to the LML league, and to finally crown its success by winning suddenly the championship in the spring of 2013.



*FIGURE 20. Volleyball boom in Central Ostrobothnia. Photograph by Olli Rosenqvist.*

The success of Kokkolan Tiikerit can be observed from *Figure 21* where the circle symbols, drawn by municipality, mark the gross number of spectators in home matches of the LML league (both women's and men's series taken into account). The choropleth map level in *Figure 21* illustrates – by region – the relative meaning of the number of spectators compared to the number of inhabitants. The relative meaning is measured by location quotient (LQ) (see the formula above). In addition to Central Ostrobothnia, the relative meaning of volleyball events in the season 2012–2013 was substantial also for the regions of Southwest Finland (in the south-west corner of Finland) and South Savo (in the south-east part of Finland).



**FIGURE 21.** *The gross number of spectators in the Finnish LML volleyball league (both women's and men's series) by municipality and the relative share of spectators by region in the season 2012–2013. Sources: LML league (Lentopallon Mestaruusliiga) & Statistics Finland.*

In Central Ostrobothnia volleyball activities are not limited to the LML league and the men's team of Kokkolan Tiikerit. In the leagues sanctioned by the Finnish Volleyball Association played in the season 2013–2014 also *Särkät Volley* from Kalajoki in the men's 1<sup>st</sup> division (the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest level in Finnish volleyball), *Vieska Wolley* from Ylivieska in the men's 2<sup>nd</sup> division, and *Kokkolan Tiikerit* from Kokkola and *Ylivieskan Kuula* from Ylivieska in the women's 2<sup>nd</sup> division. Särkät Volley won the men's 1<sup>st</sup> division, and it will be seen in the LML league in the season 2014–2015. Volleyball enthusiasts in Central Ostrobothnia also play in the *KokkoVolley* (2014), which is a 'wild' hobbyist volleyball league. In the season 2013–2014 the number of teams in this league was 17. Seven of these were from the town of Kokkola, five from the sub-region of Kaustinen, three from the sub-region of Ylivieska, one from the town of Kannus and one from the town of Pietarsaari.

The conditions for success in volleyball were favourable in Central Ostrobothnia in the beginning of the 2010s. A *social demand* for a national championship title in team sports had grown little by little in the minds of local sports enthusiasts. The most recent year a Central Ostrobothnian club had won the national title was 1969 – over 40 years ago – when the club Kokkolan Pallo-Veikot (KPV) gained the championship in football. In the beginning of the 2010s an appropriate combination of key volleyball actors in and around Central Ostrobothnia found each other, and they started to develop a top volleyball team in Kokkola. Very important in these early stages was the cooperation of the key actors of Kokkolan Tiikerit with *Kuortane Sports Institute* and its *High Performance Training Centre*. Kuortane is a municipality located in South Ostrobothnia, some 140 kilometres to the south of Kokkola. The Kuortane High Performance Training Centre acts on a contractual basis as the official national training centre of the Finnish Volleyball Association. From Kuortane Kokkolan Tiikerit found a 25-year-old, winning volleyball coach, a former national youth team player who was forced to give up playing because

of an injury, and who, additionally, had an ability to motivate some of his peers, similar rising stars in the Finnish volleyball, to join in Kokkolan Tiikerit as players.

In the season 2012–2013 the successful encounters led to the birth of *an interesting sports product*. The team consisted of some players who could be considered local, several national stars and three foreign professionals. The team including the training staff and the members of the club's board was full of more or less colourful personalities with interesting life stories. The organization of the club succeeded to create in and around the team an atmosphere based on positive thinking, relaxedness, easiness and joy. As the head coach of the team put it: 'Occasionally coaching of the team is rather like circus ... all kinds of dudes on the move, and the ringmaster's role is mine to take' (Yle 2013, freely translated). Fans and also more casual audience from all parts of Central Ostrobothnia were enthused by the success of the team, and also this for its part pushed the players to even better performances. The success also fostered the enthusiasm of other actor groups on the background of the team: volunteers, sponsors and media.

The sudden success also created challenges for the development of the club's activities in all directions, towards players, training staff, sponsors, media, audience and junior activities to name just a few. As for the atmosphere around sports in a small region like Central Ostrobothnia, it is important to succeed in channelling the natural *jealousy between sports* in a positive way: the success of one sport or club can be seen as a victory for the whole region, and other sports and clubs have the possibility to learn from the winners and get new energy to become better in a constructive, sportsmanlike manner.

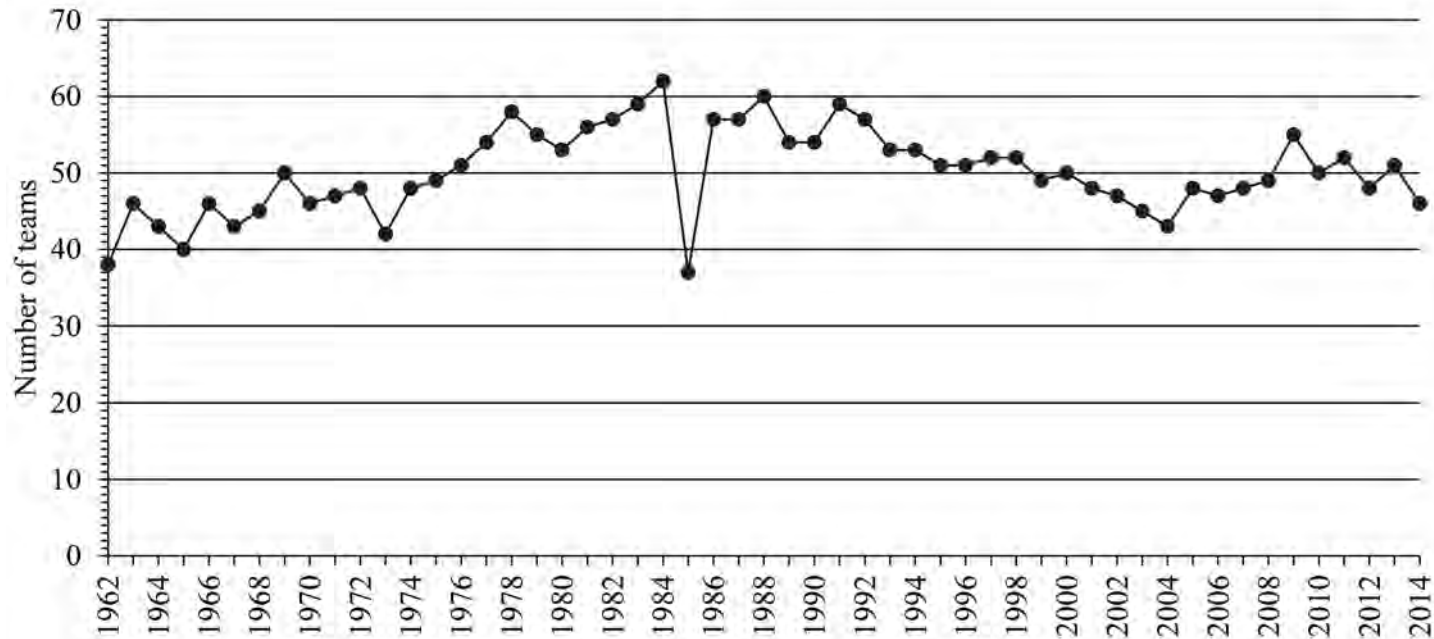
## *Central Ostrobothnian regional relay*

Central Ostrobothnian regional relay is a cross country ski relay race that has been organized in the current form from the year 1952. According to the current rules, the maximum length of the race is 62 kilometres. The teams consist of 8 skiers, both females and males with different ages. The teams are municipal, so that the team members must be inhabitants of the municipality in question. The race is organized annually in different municipalities of the historical Central Ostrobothnia. The organization of the race is a cooperation of the responsible club(s), municipality, sponsors and volunteers (*Figure 22*).



*FIGURE 22. Central Ostrobothnian regional ski relay race, 2014. Photograph by Olli Rosenqvist.*

Regional cross country ski relays are a *national tradition* in Finland. They are organized every year in every region on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January. Especially in Central Ostrobothnia regional relay is popular among skiers including the top skiers. The Central Ostrobothnian regional relay is commonly said to be the largest and the most beautiful regional relay in Finland (see e.g. Heikkilä 2008: 8). It has kept its popularity during the years: the number of teams has fluctuated around 50 teams (*Figure 23*). The greatest anomaly in the time series is the year 1985 when the temperature in Kälviä was -27 degrees centigrade, and 22 of the registered 59 teams refused to start the race.



**FIGURE 23.** *Number of teams in the Central Ostrobothnian regional relay from 1962 to 2014.*  
*Source: Regional Council of Central Ostrobothnia.*

According to the national sports studies the number of people having skiing as their hobby has decreased by 117,000, from 927,000 in 2001–2002 to 810,000 in 2009–2010 (Kihu – Research Institute for Olympic Sports 2014). Reflected to this development Central Ostrobothnian regional relay has succeeded very well. This is based on the fact that in almost every municipality there are enough enthusiastic cross country ski people, experienced ski race organizers, and experts like Technical Delegates (TDs).

Central Ostrobothnian regional relay is an event which is organized very *efficiently*. Everybody seems to know where to go and what to do at the race venue. The spectators are enchanted by the excitement of the race, so that they hardly have enough time to enjoy the soup, grilled sausage, waffle and coffee which are for sale in the stalls organized by ski clubs and sponsors. The driving force behind the continuing popularity of the Central Ostrobothnian regional relay is the *positive jealousy* between organizers of the race. Every year the organizers want to deliver the best race ever.

The challenges of the Central Ostrobothnian regional relay have to do with the decline in the number of people skiing (especially among the youth). In some municipalities it has been difficult to find skiers for example to the legs intended to boys and girls. Another challenge for the event is to provide experiences also to the general public – regionally, nationally and internationally. Currently the spectators consist largely of regional cross country ski people.

### *Kokkola City Run*

Promoting fitness training and health exercise is one of the key result areas of the regional sports association Keski-Pohjanmaan Liikunta ry – Kepli. In the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century among the people in Kepli arose the idea of starting

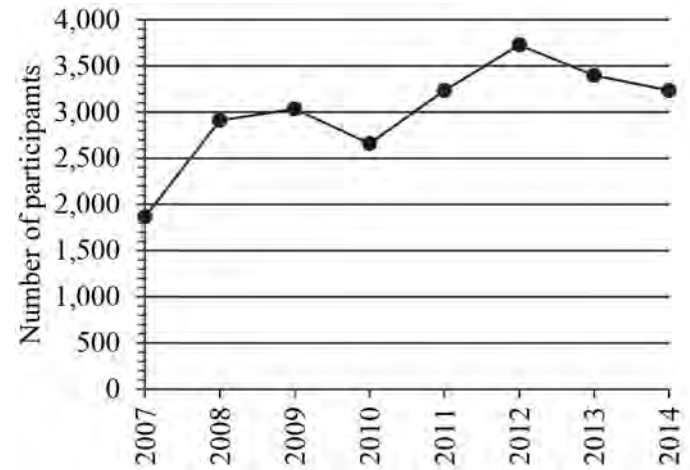


to develop a running event for the inhabitants of Kokkola and Central Ostrobothnia (Figure 24).



*FIGURE 24. Kokkola City Run, 2014. Photograph by Roosa Rosenqvist.*

The running boom of the 1980s was long gone, and in the beginning the expectations were moderate: it was anticipated that some 800–1,000 participants would take part in the first run, organized in 2007. Surprisingly, the number of participants grew to above 1,800 (Figure 25). A social demand for the event had emerged without a lot of publicity. The event was sensitive to the spirit of the time which called for new forms of sports activities and new ways of doing traditional sports. After the start the popularity of Kokkola City Run even grew: the record year so far is 2012 when over 3,700 runners took part in the event. At the moment the number of runners seems to be stabilizing to above 3,000 persons.



**FIGURE 25.** *Number of participants in the Kokkola City Run from 2007 to 2014. Source: Keski-Pohjanmaan Liikunta ry – Kepli.*

Behind the success of Kokkola City Run lies partly the general running boom in Finland. According to the national sports studies, the number of 19–65-year-old people having jogging as their hobby has grown no less than by 283,000 persons, from 356,000 in 2001–2002 to 639,000 in 2009–2010 (Sport.fi 2014).

Kokkola City Run is worthwhile in a number of ways. In the organization of the event services offered by sports clubs are utilized, and the clubs get paid for their services. Sponsors get the visibility and attention that they are expecting. In exchange for their registration fees the participant runners get a rousing and joyful experience. Kokkola City Run is open for all groups of people, including special groups like wheelchair users and people who in general are reluctant to exercise. The region and its inhabitants can enjoy a carnival-like atmosphere, and the event also enhances the general attractiveness of the region.

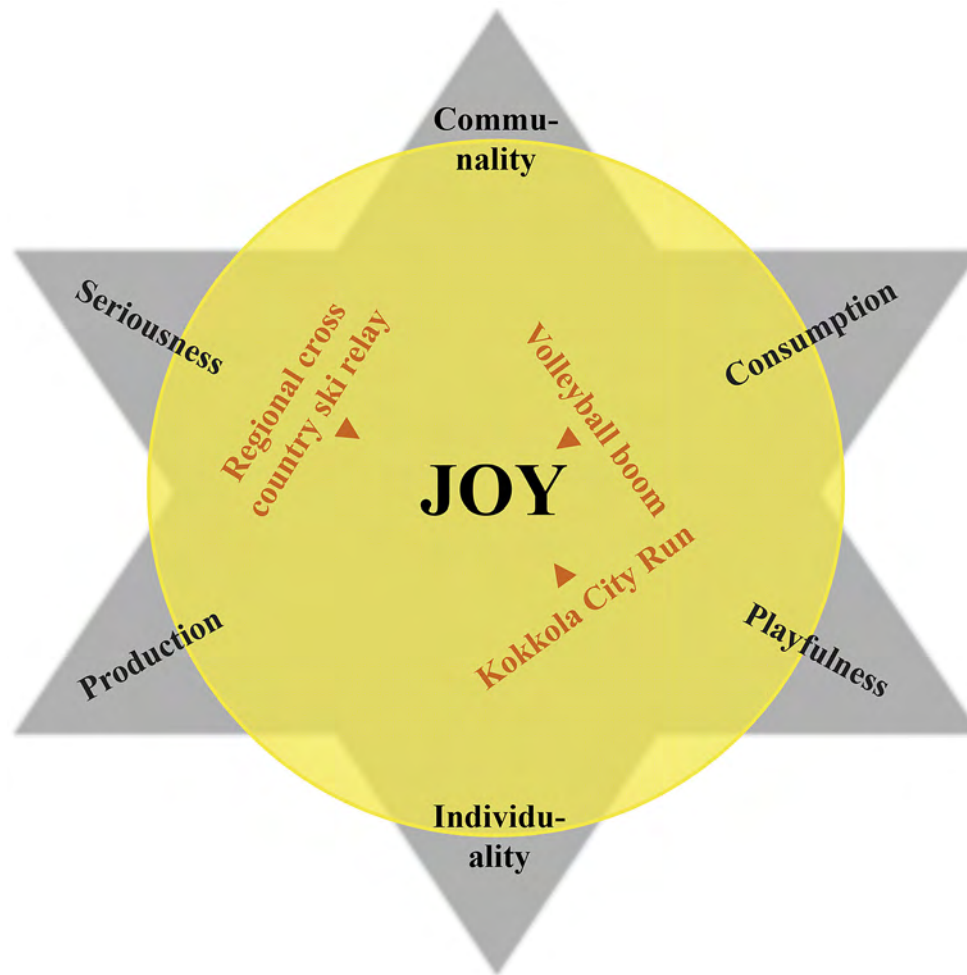
The main challenge in the development of the Kokkola City Run is the maintenance of enthusiasm in a situation where the range of different kinds of sporty activities and sports events is widening. In general, the run in itself is well rewarding for the runners, but it would be desirable to invent something new to happen in the opening and closing phases of the event. As things currently stand, the event starts with a warm-up on the market square of the town. Runners with smiling faces, many of them peculiarly or funnily dressed, get ready for the run by stretching their muscles under guidance. Improvements to the event have been made little by little, and with regard to this work there is a lot to learn from other regions and also from other countries.

## *Emergence of joy*

With regard to the Central Ostrobothnian cases, joy and enthusiasm can be approached by way of *three dichotomies* (Figure 26). Joy in sporty activities springs up largely from the simultaneity of *production* and *consumption* of the activity. This simultaneity brings with it a possibility for surprises. Uncertainty, for its part, adds to the attractiveness of sports. The competitors and players often ponder how they fare in the race or match. The audience has its own diverse expectations.

At its best sports can be characterized by an interplay between *seriousness* and *playfulness*. Seriousness reflects engagement and mastery, whereas playfulness is related to a relaxed and carnivalistic spirit of the actors in question. You cannot win if you do not take your doing seriously, but, on the other hand, top performance necessitates also relaxation to a certain degree.

The third duality characteristic to the emergence of joy in sports is that between *individuality* and *communality*. A sporty activity is important to an individual but it achieves broader meanings when it is understood in its communal relations.



*FIGURE 26. Dimensions of joy and the positioning of the three Central Ostrobothnian sports events/phenomena on them.*

The Central Ostrobothnian sports events and phenomena examined in the THROUGH-JOY 1 project approach joy from different angles. The volleyball boom is nearest to a balance or stability with regard to the three dichotomies characteristic to joy. However, it can be said that without spectators and fans (consumption) there would not be a boom, but only ordinary serious competitive sports. In Kokkola City Run especially the carnivalistic spirit becomes emphasized. Central Ostrobothnian regional relay is based on tradition which underlines such things as communality and professional organization of the race. Common challenges for each event or phenomenon include the maintenance of attractiveness, integration of seriousness and playfulness, and overall management of the event or phenomenon.

### *Readiness for the project's development phase*

Readiness to listen to new ideas and perspectives, and to search for fresh solutions varies among sporty activities examined in the Central Ostrobothnian case. Top-level volleyball is geographically multiscalar in character. The players and training staff of the team come from different regions and even from different countries. The best national teams participate in intercontinental tournaments, such as the CEV<sup>10</sup> Champions League and CEV Cup in Europe. Clubs organize fan trips to their supporters. In most cases, for mobile people the presence of multiple perspectives is natural, and in their doings they have learnt to take advantage of what they have experienced and discovered. The Central Ostrobothnian top team, Kokkolan Tiikerit, is ready to adopt new perspectives to develop its activities.

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10 Confédération Européenne de Volleyball.

Running and jogging are worldwide sporty hobbies, and events like Kokkola City Run are organized all around the world. City Run started as a local experiment, and its organizers think that they still have a lot to learn from other corresponding events organized in other regions and countries.

Compared to the volleyball phenomenon and the Kokkola City Run, the Central Ostrobothnian regional relay can be characterized as an original event. Originality combined with a long tradition carries with it a certain amount of conservative attitudes towards potential changes in the organization of the event. In any case, also the organizers of the relay are ready to find out how they could benefit from and contribute to the THROUGH-JOY project's development phase.

Common challenges for the three Central Ostrobothnian activities are the *maintenance of attractiveness* and the *overall management of the event or phenomenon*. Facing these challenges calls for an actor-based, user-based and customer-based approach. For different actor groups joy and enthusiasm arise from different sources, and it is important to take these various viewpoints into account.

For an individual sports club it is difficult to become a project partner in a programme like Interreg, because it seldom has employed staff at its disposal. In Central Ostrobothnia the regional sports association Kepli is a natural candidate for partnership, because the overall development of sports in Central Ostrobothnia belongs to its businesses and it has employed staff to do this. In Central Ostrobothnia the starting-point in planning the development phase of the THROUGH-JOY project is that Kepli joins in the project as a partner. For each activity – volleyball, regional relay and running event – a special subproject will be planned and implemented. The main challenges in the planning of the subprojects are their specification and the commitment of the regional financiers to the project.

# 5 GETTING READY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT PHASE OF THE THROUGH-JOY PROJECT

*Olli Rosenqvist, Håkan Appelblad & Brigit Dale*

## *Quality, user-led development and management of an event or phenomenon*

The sporty activities chosen in Norway, Sweden and Finland as targets of mapping differ from each other. Because the phenomena and events cannot be compared and benchmarked directly, we have to move on to a more abstract level to find *common denominators*, and ideas for the coming development phase of the project, THROUGH-JOY 2.

Although the phenomena/events that we want to develop are not of the same kind in Norway, Sweden and Finland respectively, we have agreed that the main common denominators in them – the importance of *quality* and the need for *user-led development* – are comparable. The foreign back country skiers want to get services of high quality if they pay a considerable amount of money for the trip to Lofoten. The dog sledge and running racers in the Vindel River area and the ski relay and running racers in Central Ostrobothnia can also be said to be demanding customers, and they should have quality services and circumstances at their disposal. With regard to Central Ostrobothnian volleyball boom, the needs of different actor groups are even more complex and diverse, if we think about, for example, the needs of professional players, training staff, sponsors,



media, audience, volunteers, junior players and hobbyist players. From the viewpoint of regional attractiveness and development, all actor groups (key actors, customers, participants, volunteers, audience, media, professionals, amateurs, hobbyists, businesses, associations, public actors, r&d actors, financiers, local inhabitants etc.) around sporty activities in question should be satisfied, or – at the minimum – not dissatisfied.

In addition to quality and user-led development, the third common denominator in the cases chosen is the need for better knowhow on how to comprehensively *manage* the development of the event or phenomenon in question. We illustrate this learning challenge by adding to our spiral diagram of leisure actors (*Figure 2* above) a new spiral, namely the spiral of learning (see *Figure 27* below) – inspired by the SECI model of organizational knowledge creation, developed originally in the field of organizational management by Ikujiro Nonaka & Hirotaka Takeuchi (see e.g. 1995: 56–73) and further elaborated, e.g., by Mariussen (2013: 38–39) and Virkkala (2013: 88–96). The combination of letters SECI come from the words ‘socialization’, ‘externalization’, ‘combination’ and ‘internalization’. According to the SECI model, in the first phase of learning we have to get acquainted with our partners and share knowledge with them (socialization). After that we must conceptualize the shared knowledge in some new way (externalization). In the third phase we combine the new ideas to the old ones (combination), and in the last phase we apply the new knowledge in practice (internalization). The learning process, however, does not end here: when the circumstances change, it starts again from the first phase.

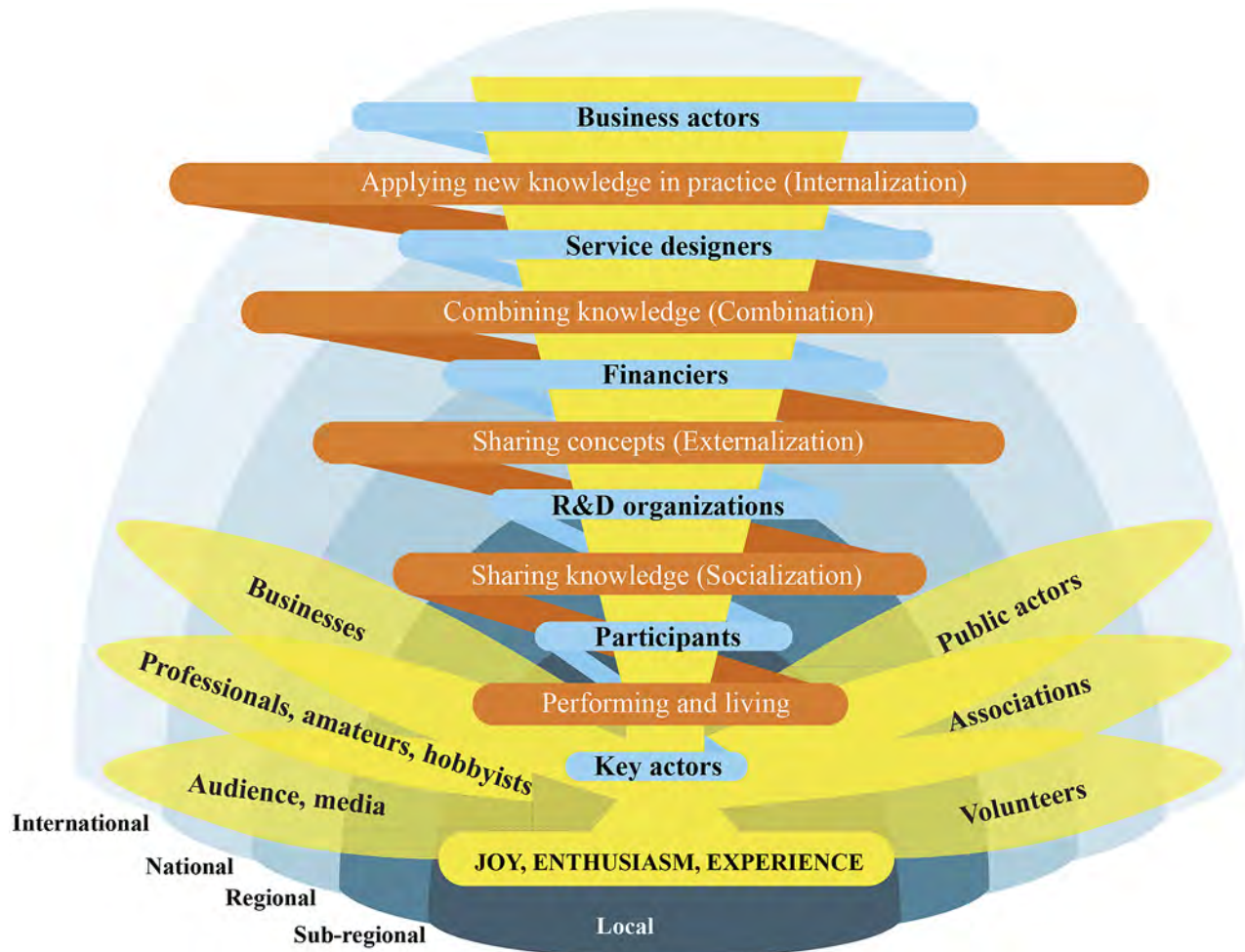


FIGURE 27. Actors and learning spiral of joyful leisure activities.

## *Guidelines for the planning of the development phase of the project – THROUGH-JOY 2*

The actions needed in the development phase of the project can be divided broadly into three categories: (1) practical development measures in each project region, (2) regional and local learning measures, and (3) transnational learning measures. It is recommendable that the development measures will be gathered into separate work packages, in order to specify clearly the objectives and responsibilities of each partner.

*The practical development measures* are defined by the local actors according to the principles of community-led local development (CLLD). The measures will be implemented by following the action research approach where the practical actors and researcher developers work together towards the desired goal.

*Regional and local learning* is a challenge for all of our project regions. An ideal worth seeking would be such that the relevant local and regional actor groups in and around the activity in question would learn to row in the same direction. This will not develop by itself. A lot of discussions, meetings and seminars are needed for this purpose. Both researcher developers and practical actors are responsible for the progress of regional and local learning processes.

*Transnational learning measures* can be implemented, for example, by making benchmarking trips and by organizing focus group meetings, seminars and conferences. It is extremely important that during the learning process every project partner tries to carry its absorptive and development capacities further, so that it is able to utilize the process in full. Giving birth to transnational learning is, however, mainly the responsibility of the project's research partners.

When planning the development phase of the project – THROUGH-JOY 2 – it is worthwhile to keep in mind the general purposes and objectives of the overall project.

The project has five main purposes:

- (1) To enhance the regional attractiveness of northern localities of Finland, Norway and Sweden through development of joyful and distinctive sporty activities for inhabitants and visitors
- (2) To improve the regional competitiveness of the North
- (3) To encourage intercultural learning
- (4) To bring together actors and researchers of the field
- (5) To strengthen the regional and interregional togetherness in the North.

The long-term objectives of the overall project (THROUGH-JOY 1 & 2) have been defined as follows:

- (1) Enhancement of regional attractiveness and competitiveness of northern localities
  - Empowerment of inhabitants, entrepreneurs, and public and associational actors to active participation
  - Finding new possibilities for commercial activities
  - Diversification of possibilities for leisure activities (making possibilities visible)
  - Improvement of the welfare of people through joyful and distinctive sporty activities
  - Advancement of tolerance for different articulations of culture, even taking pleasure in diversity
  - Creation of new knowledge and new practices:
    - Long-term research cooperation on leisure studies to strengthen regional innovation environments in the North

- Search for a northern identity through intercultural learning, emotional togetherness and pride of togetherness.

(2) Development of joyful and distinctive sporty activities

- Understanding of the institutional structures (voluntary, public and private partners involved) and financing of the activities
- Making the diversity of possibilities visible
- Encouragement to ways of life that make for a healthier life
- Understanding of the motivations, rewards and costs of various joyful and distinctive sporty activities
- Understanding of the processes of different lifestyles and identities
- Enhancement of justice and equality in sporty activities and among citizens.

The THROUGH-JOY project is needed because it helps northern regions to keep pace with the change in society. Northern regions cannot be successful in the future just by leaning on their rich natural resources or cultural history. Mixture of traditional, modern and postmodern cultural articulations together with intercultural learning enables regions to regenerate and keep in pace.

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