Winter holidaymaking in Arctic Norway: how is the North Norwegian landscape represented to the German and French market and are there gender differences in landscape perceptions between individuals in German and French mixed-gender travel parties?

1. Main objective and summary of the project

This research proposal outlines the candidate’s research intentions within the project WINTER: New turns in Arctic winter tourism: Adventuring, romanticising and exoticising, and demasculinising nature? at UiT - the Arctic University of Norway, Faculty of Finnmark.

The primary objective of this research is to contribute to social science by understanding landscape perceptions among German and French winter season tourists in Northern Norway, focusing on individuals in mixed-gender travel parties. Furthermore, the author seeks to research how Arctic Norwegian landscapes are portrayed and represented to potential German and French visitors. Finally, landscape perceptions and representations in relation to the French and German market are looked at from a gendered perspective.

This proposal firstly gives an insight to the background of the research by showing up how it is of personal interest to me, interesting for society and of value for the tourism winter developments in Northern Norway. The research is then put into context by introducing a theoretical framework. I will further show up suggested methods, possible methodologies and the proposed research questions.

This research proposal aims at giving the expert committee insight into the suggested topics and methods of the PhD dissertation. It is pointed out that modifications might be necessary, in order to better complement related research carried out within the research group. The suggested progress plan is to be adapted in accordance with the candidate’s obligations as a member of the research team, obligatory course participation and feasibility of the empirical part of the study.

2. Project background

The proposed research is connected to the Tromsø University project “Winter: New Turns in Arctic Winter Tourism”. In this project, winter tourism developments in the Arctic are examined from multiple thematic angles and through the introduction of four work packages:

2. Finnmarkslopet and the Iditarod of Alaska: Event Tourism
4. Aurora Borealis: Tourism Performances and Symbolic Meanings

(Heimtun, Viken & Granås, 2013).

My research is related to “Work Package 1” and possibly also to “Work Package 4”. Empirical results can contribute to science by showing up trends in exoticising, adventuring, romanticising and above all demasculinising Arctic Norway’s winter nature.

It should be rewarding to conduct the proposed research, as Arctic Norway can show up important winter product developments and a significant increase in
winter tourist numbers in the recent years\textsuperscript{1}. From 2002/2003 to 2009/2010, Finnmark county has had a 103% increase in winter overnight stays (Finnmark Reiseliv, 2010). According to Øverås (2014), overnight stays in Tromsø, Troms county, have augmented to 580 000 per year. The most important markets are Germany, Sweden, the UK, Asia and the US. When it comes to the German market, numbers of overnight stays are fair at this point but there is potential for more. The German market is a very precise market, as Germans value a reliable product in the sense that phenomena like the northern lights cannot be the sole reason for holidaymaking in the north due to their unpredictable nature and the fact that they cannot be seen every day or night\textsuperscript{2}. It would therefore be interesting to look at landscapes from a German visitor’s point of view. A focus on the French market allows for possible comparison of these two segments, interesting in itself since the French are less present in Winter Arctic Norway at current stage. The focus on German and French visitors is also of personal interest as I have lived in both countries and worked with tourists of both nationalities. I am familiar with cultural attributes and peculiarities regarding these nationalities. What is more, I speak both languages at a level that makes in-depth interviews possible.

Finally, I have strong ties to Northern Norway and am very eager to find out more about how our arctic landscapes are represented by scholars and industries and how they are perceived by actual visitors. I believe that the topic will contribute to the “Winter” project and to the tourism research community at large while also providing first-hand data useful for the tourism sector.

“The word ‘landscape’ embraces not merely the notion of a physical space, but also both its pictorial representation and that which the eye can comprehend in a single gaze” (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000a, p. 118). In other words, tourist landscapes are not only about the places themselves but also about how they are represented and what is attributed to them. Tourism influences and changes landscapes (Terkenli, 2002) and I cannot see that previous research has dealt with landscape perceptions of German and French visitors in Norway’s Arctic in a winter setting. Furthermore there is also a dearth of studies focusing on how the arctic winter landscape in Norway is represented to the French and German market. There have been studies focusing on representations of Northern Norway to German tourists (Heimtun & Jacobsen, 2012), however these studies do not concentrate on the winter season. Heimtun and Jacobsen’s study (2012) is more about guidebook image mediation, excluding other possible channels that can influence landscape perceptions. Furthermore, I cannot see that Norwegian Arctic winter landscapes have been researched from a gendered perspective.

Several authors have studied gender in relation to tourism (Chhabra, Andereck, Yamanoi & Plunkett, 2011; Kinnaird & Hall, 1996; Swain, 1995). However, most of the existing literature analyses gender from a host perspective, in contexts such as employment, development and poverty, often in developing countries (Feng, 2013; Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012; Wilkinson & Prativi, 1995). Pritchard and Morgan (2000a) conclude that tourism studies that addressed gender

\textsuperscript{1} Heimtun, B. (23.04.2014). Nordlysturismen med ferskt forskerblikk (A novel scientific gaze on northern lights tourism). \textit{A chair in arctic tourism research, seminar 3}. Conducted at Tromsø University, Alta Campus, Alta, Norway.

\textsuperscript{2} Øverås, T. (23.04.2014). Hvordan har Tromsø lykkes med sin satsing på nordlysturisme? (How has Tromsø succeeded with its commitment to northern lights tourism?). \textit{A chair in arctic tourism research, seminar 3}. Conducted at Tromsø University, Alta Campus, Alta, Norway.
either commonly focus on economic relationships and female employment in the industry or on destinations and host-guest relationships (p.116-117). What is more, many scholars dealing with gender and tourism from a visitor perspective take a theoretical approach to the topic (Kinnaird & Hall, 1996; Swain, 1995) and while setting gendered tourism in a theoretical framework is useful, there is little research creating empirical data on gendered landscape perceptions.

There have been several studies of female travel experiences (e.g. Heimtun, 2007), mostly unrelated, however, to specific destination areas and commercial products. Furthermore, previous studies have shown the need for scholars taking on a less stereotypical and less gender-blind approach to destination and landscape representations, as this gendered shaping of places implies a certain type of tourist gaze, also referred to the “white, male, heterosexual gaze”. (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000a, p. 117). This means that places are shaped to appeal to a specific type of men. Even though the male gaze is overrepresented in destination promotions, Pritchard and Morgan (2000b) suggest that female and male experiences and perceptions of travel surroundings often differ greatly. Tourism research should therefore not only focus on traditional demographics, but target gendered perceptions as well. There is also a dearth of research on such themes in relation to Winter Northern Norway.

3. Theoretical framework

The concept of landscapes in a tourism context has received attention by multiple scholars (Benediktsson & Lund, 2010; Friedman, 2010; Fyhri, Jacobsen & Tommervik, 2009). Bærenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen & Urry (2004) argue that “Landscape emphasises leisure, relaxation and the visual consumption of place especially by those who are ‘touring’ “(p. 140). This can relate to Urry’s tourist gaze, where sightseeing is an important element (Urry, 1990). Places are visually consumed and signs are collected and interpreted to give meaning to the surroundings (Urry, 1990). Bærenholdt et al. (2004) point to the significance of the visual compound, which transforms land into landscape and therefore into something that can be enjoyed and visually consumed by people. These scholars emphasise that place and people (or tourists and destinations) cannot be seen as separated or clearly distinguished elements but are linked through “performances” (p. 150).

Jóhannesdóttir (2010) emphasises the role aesthetics and atmosphere have on landscape. Frequently debated upon, landscape is analysed as either a subjective or an objective concept (Jóhannesdóttir, 2010), meaning that landscape characteristics either are universally accepted or individually recognised. If landscape can be seen as having objective aesthetic physical features, then personal opinions would not count in the evaluation of such places (Jóhannesdóttir, 2010). This would then contradict Bærenholdt et al. (2004) who discuss the effect human behaviour has on places.

Bender and Winer (2001) deal with the question of how people create meaning of place and how landscape understanding varies according to the experiences individuals have gained over time, making it a subjective question. “…the study of landscape is much more than an academic exercise – it is about the complexity of people’s lives, historical contingency, contestation, motion and change” (Bender & Winer, 2001, p.2). Landscape is the way in which people perceive and interact with the physical world around them (Bender & Winer, 2001). Always in process, landscapes are often conflicted, complicated and always under creation (Bender & Winer, 2001). What is more, landscapes involve the telling of stories related to historical pasts and social connections between its people, and people create...
a sense of self and belonging by moving through landscape and interpreting it (Bender & Winer, 2001).

Opposing, landscape assessment deriving from an objective definition would mean a projection and classification by experts (Jóhannesdóttir, 2010). This however, could not involve the relationship humans have to the land (Jóhannesdóttir, 2010). When it comes to subjective interpretation of landscape, assessment is usually carried out through qualitative or quantitative research in order to map preferences and experiences people have when it comes to the studied landscape (Jóhannesdóttir, 2010). As a solution, Jóhannesdóttir (2010) proposes to combine the two approaches by introducing the term “atmosphere” (p.118), suggesting “…certain physical qualities can create atmospheres that have ‘a tendency or urge toward a particular mood’ “(p. 120). In other words, certain landscape features are easily universally agreed upon and could be seen in an objective light while other landscape aspects are subject to individual experience and interpretation.

The debate of whether landscapes are of subjective or objective nature is also interesting for my research, as I seek to analyse people’s perceptions of arctic landscapes. Possibly, some perceptions will appear repeatedly among holidaymakers while others differ from visitor to visitor depending on personal experience and traits. Just like Terkenli (2002), Bender and Winer (2001) state that visitors are not only affected by the landscapes they visit; they also affect the landscapes they visit in return. This means that as landscapes are continuously in the making, visitors do unconsciously influence and shape them through their behaviour and interpretation.

Førde (2014) states that even though tourism involves the stereotyping of places, tourism landscapes and community landscapes cannot be seen as separate identities. Places have always had identities, even before they were affected by tourism. It is important that representations of places actually match the places’ initial identities, as locals will always be affected by these touristic representations of places and a mismatch could make locals’ identification with the representations impossible3. Bringslid (2012) illustrates how local communities and landscapes are staged in order to communicate certain images to outsiders. As visitors demand to experience what they believe to be authentic, landscapes are frequently portrayed to meet these stereotyped expectations. Heimtun and Jacobsen (2012) analyse mediation through German guidebooks and point out that stereotypes are being presented in several cases. Photographs of the Sámi for example, are presented homogenously and enclose traditional markers (p.283). Cultural landscapes are often portrayed in the light of the past and by relating to how things used to be in an area in earlier times (Bringslid, 2012). “A little distance in time makes it beautiful” (p.20), introducing a romantic interpretation of place and memories of history and the past.

The degree to which products and landscapes are staged and experienced as staged (e.g. Cohen, 1988; MacCannell, 1973) is likely to influence landscape perceptions visitors have. Stereotypes are of importance here and depending on previous information search, visitors might have different expectations of what will meet them upon arrival. Visitors might attribute Arctic Norway with low temperatures that do never rise above zero degrees Celsius in winter, ever-white surroundings, Sámi people running errands in traditional clothing on a daily basis and a continuous

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show of colourful northern lights whenever looking up in the sky. These holidaymakers might readjust their perception of the Arctic Norwegian winter landscape throughout their stay.

Tourists are said to form expectations about destinations and holidays by using information from “internal sources” such as their own past experiences and from “external sources” such as word-of-mouth, brochures and advertisements (Del Bosque, San Martin, Collado & Del Mar García de los Salmones, 2009, p. 145). Expectations are of a highly subjective nature and differ from tourist to tourist even though individuals’ expectations about places can show up similar trends. The branding of destinations can lead to certain trends among visitor expectations and also lead to the creation of collective opinions. Branding and marketing can lead to the creation of various images. Destination areas and landscapes are often linked to either masculinity or femininity (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000b). Even though partly of subjective nature, demographics such as nationality, age and gender shape conceptions of destinations (Oliveira & Pereira, 2008), meaning that certain personal traits and characteristics influence our perceptions.

Destination images are affected by information sources such as guidebooks and social media. Traditional guidebooks select, frame and name destinations (Zillinger, 2006, p.244), meaning that they put places and attractions “on the map” and give them names. With focus on German travellers to Sweden, Zillinger (2006) found that regions that were more extensively described in guidebooks showed more overnight stays than regions that were not, indicating the books’ importance for holidaymakers’ choices. This shows that guidebooks have an influence on the perception of place and therefore also on the popularity of place. This is also a reason why guidebooks are chosen for the secondary data analysis. In the case of Northern Norway, research on guidebooks has previously been conducted (e.g. Heimtun & Jacobsen, 2012; Jacobsen 1999; Jacobsen & Dann, 2003; Jacobsen, Heimtun & Nordbakke, 1998), however these studies have not aimed at analysing the winter season. Jacobsen and Dann (2003) found that holidaymakers are influenced before their travel by “verbal” and “pictorial stimuli” (p. 43). With the latter, meaning stimulation through photography or illustration, being an especially strong force directing tourists’ perceptions of destinations. Jacobsen and Dann (2003) also found that this was especially true for nature-based tourists. It seems therefore likely that holidaymakers in Arctic Norway will have been influenced by written information and photography before arrival.

Furthermore, destination images are influenced by the tourism sector, which portrays landscapes in particular ways through targeted marketing approaches. Such images are created to generate profit and revenue for the industry, and a general assumption is that tourism promotion in many cases seems to be unconsciously focusing on male consumers (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000b). There is thus often a lack of gender differentiation in tourism product development and promotion, and one can easily assume that marketers in many cases may not see the importance of gender-differentiated campaign targeting.

“Currently, the language and imagery of tourism promotion privileges the male, heterosexual gaze above all others, and landscapes are gendered to appeal to this gaze” (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000b, p.899). Tourism promotion aimed at potential guests is frequently designed to appeal to men. This leads therefore to the trend of feminising many landscapes and portraying them as innocent and exotic. Depiction of landscapes as feminised invites seduction and possession by male visitors (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000b). On the other hand, northern environments are commonly
accorded masculine characteristics, thus being described and promoted as harsh, wild and untamed. These northern destinations are also regularly marketed as masculine playgrounds that need to be conquered, appealing especially to men (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000b). Tourism promotion may still show potential tourists gendered destinations that appeal to men rather than to women. Relatively few tourism promoters have dealt with how female tourists react to these “undifferentiated” but still masculine product offerings, and whether profit is lost by certain tourism companies due to female customers’ possible preference of more feminine aspects and products. This study can help give North Norwegian tourism promoters a more gender-aware picture of the landscape they market and the products they offer.

Pearce (1989) has claimed that women dominate holiday choices for family vacations. Also Barlés-Arizón, Fraj-Andrés and Matute-Vallejo (2010) maintain that there is an increasing female influence in holiday-decision making processes and they have explored the profiles of women that make tourism decisions. These authors stress that women have various influences on decisions both before and during holidays, and that the tourism industry has to become aware of the role women play in various stages of holiday decision processes. With women being important when it comes to decision-making and holiday choices, one might very well see the need to study the perceptions women have of landscapes, as these perceptions naturally would have an influence on travel choices.

A look at promotional material shows that Norway is often marketed in the light of adventure (e.g. NordNorsk Reiseliv, 2014a). Gyimóthy and Mykletun (2004) argue “The construction of polar adventure tourism as being risky and dangerous may be a particular masculine interpretation” (p.875), thus suggesting the absence of female components. Gyimóthy and Mykletun also discuss play in adventure tourism. They debate the trend of seeing Arctic destinations as playgrounds, connected to challenges, risks and immersion of the individual. Gyimóthy and Mykletun (2004) suggest further research on gendered perspectives in adventure tourism.

Little and Wilson (2005) have conducted a study on female adventure tourists’ experiences. Their findings suggest that adventure products also are often marketed towards male travellers in a way that makes female identification with the products difficult or impossible. These authors point out that female adventure experiences need neither remoteness nor extreme physical challenges but are categorised by a presence of novelty and challenges for the individual. Little and Wilson (2005) consequently suggest that researchers might want to move away from a narrow male-dominated definition when it comes to the term adventure tourism as well. Moreover, Gyimóthy and Mykletun (2004) argue that the notion of adventure tourism is still debated among researchers and that definitions are not yet universally agreed upon.

Elsrud (2005) analyses adventure tourism from a feminist’s point of view. According to her, it is essential to integrate women into adventure tourism research and product offerings. Researching female adventure tourists’ travel stories, Elsrud (2005) found different facets of travel experiences and a high degree of individuality between the different female respondents. Just like men, females are individuals and have varying product preferences and therefore possibly also varying perceptions of landscapes.

This dissertation will contribute to social science by researching landscape representations of Winter Arctic Norway as a holiday destination. Furthermore, winter holidaymakers’ landscape perceptions are addressed and possible gender differences concerning these perceptions are analysed. The focus is placed on
individuals of mixed-gender travel parties in Arctic Norway in winter. Information on landscape representations of Norway’s Arctic is to be gathered from guidebooks, travel websites and different social media channels. What is more, information from social media sites can also complement information gathered during the interviews and facilitate a useful interpretation of landscape perceptions.

4. Materials and methods

It seems appropriate to organise the empirical work of this dissertation into two studies:

- **Study 1** gives insight into the field of landscape representations and perceptions by analysing secondary data. Sources for this data will be German and French guidebooks, North Norwegian destination websites targeting the German and French market and social media sites such as TripAdvisor, Instagram and Facebook
- **Study 2** has a qualitative approach: in-depth, semi-structured interviews with French and German winter-tourists in Arctic Norway

The suggested sample for **Study 2** is a selection of mixed-gender travel parties vacationing in Arctic Norway in winter. A possible solution is to conduct individual interviews with women and men of the chosen mixed-gender travel parties in order to avoid confusion that could occur when interviewing several individuals simultaneously. The sample should only include individuals of mixed-gender travel parties travelling without underage children, in order to be able to focus on the gender variable rather than the adult-child relationship within the travel party. Furthermore, it is assumed that Winter Arctic Norway is less of a family vacation destination; a look at Northern Norway’s destination promotion website supports this assumption, as hardly any winter activities for children or families with children are marketed (NordNorsk Reiseliv, 2014b). An analysis of guidebooks, other websites and social media sites will most likely support this belief.

The choice of secondary data sources for the first study will not only concentrate on traditional information sources such as guidebooks, but also on social media sources such as review sites, social networks and possibly blogs that develop in the surroundings of the advanced Web2.0. Even though guidebooks are important information sources, editors will have made changes to them in the past decade, especially when considering recent arctic winter tourism developments, implying that studies on guidebooks conducted several years ago are not entirely up-to-date at this stage. Additionally, years have passed and information available on the Internet has gained in importance. Therefore, online information sources have to be included in the secondary source sample for **study 1**. Furthermore, there is a research gap on Web2.0 practices in relation to the holiday offerings in northern Norway, especially in winter.

Test interviews for **study 2** will have to be conducted. It is proposed to have interviews with German and French nationals in order to communicate with respondents in their mother tongue and to use information from French and German guidebooks and French, German and English online sources. It is suggested to use “Hurtigruten” the coastal steamer and hotels in several North Norwegian destinations as interview locations. This allows for longer, in-depth interviews.

The PhD candidate proposes the use of grounded theory to analyse the collected data gained from **Study 2**. “Grounded theory is an analytical method for constructing theories from inductive qualitative data. Data collection and analysis
inform each other in an iterative process as researchers successively make the emerging ideas more abstract” (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012, p. 108). The interactive process can help develop theory over time by combining information from both data collection and data analyses, meaning that theoretical direction is to be seen as a dynamic suggestion at this point. Charmaz (2006) emphasises that people construct data while striving to realise certain research objectives. Research objectives are constructed in various environments depending on social, historical and situation-specific factors. The combination of certain “empirical interests” and “general concepts that give a loose frame to these interests” are the point of origin for grounded theorists (Charmaz, 2006, p. 16). At this stage, the theoretical framework of my project is merely a proposed direction, as data collection and analysis are to help construct a meaningful theoretical basis that cannot be identified at the present stage of the study.

5. Publication strategy

In order to secure progress within the scholarship time frame and to contribute to the academic community at large, it is suggested to choose a paper option thesis, that is, three longer manuscripts of publishable quality tied together with a common theme.

It is suggested to compose two empirical papers and one theoretical paper also referring to methodological approaches. The first paper could concentrate on the study of social media, destination websites and guidebooks with relevance to the French/German market and a focus on Arctic Norwegian winter landscapes. Data would be gained from the previously listed secondary sources. At this point it is difficult to define the exact topics of the articles, as relevant theme formation has to happen over time. The first article (related to the qualitative study based on secondary source data) would also help outline the second study (of qualitative nature with primary sources) and find possible directions for the other articles. It could be of use for the “Winter” project and to social science in general to focus one paper on the romantisation of arctic winter landscapes in Norway and one paper on gender differences in landscape perceptions.

A possible outline for the academic articles:

• Article 1.) A paper focusing on the analysis of secondary data on Arctic Norwegian winter landscapes, gained from social media platforms, destination promotion websites and guidebooks

• Article 2.) A paper focusing on the data gained in Study 2: conducting in-depth interviews with French and German winter tourists in Northern Norway (about landscape perceptions of individuals in mixed-gender travel parties)

• Article 3.) Romanticising Arctic Norwegian winter landscapes and gender differences in landscape perceptions

The three articles will be submitted for publishing to academic journals in accordance with the PhD advisors’ and research team’s recommendations and the research team’s preferences. Additionally, publication of the main results to the tourism sector and the general Norwegian population is intended, for instance through websites. For dissemination to a general audience, it might also be interesting to publish main results in 'Ottar’, the popular science journal of the University Museum in Tromsø.
6. Issues/research questions

The author proposes the following research questions:
1. How are Arctic Norwegian winter landscapes represented in French and German guidebooks and on social media platforms/destination websites?
2. How are these representations gendered?
3. How do individuals of mixed-gender travel parties perceive Arctic Norwegian winter landscapes?
4. Are there gender differences in these perceptions?
5. How have social media/guidebooks/destination websites influenced individuals of mixed-gender travel parties before arrival in Arctic Norway?
6. What are the differences, if any, according to gender, in how individuals of mixed-gender travel parties have been influenced by social media/guidebooks/destination websites before arrival in Arctic Norway?
8. References


