

Tourists' Affective Perceptions of a Cold Destination: Feelings Toward Northern Norway in the Winter

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Abstract: This article examines potential tourists' interest in Northern Norway as a Subarctic winter destination. Specifically, it explores seasonal destination image constraints and drivers among national and international tourists visiting Norway in the summer. The aim was to qualitatively explore these tourists' feelings towards the winter climate, winter landscapes, winter activities, and winter attractions. The study identified three affective images. First, among the "winter people," the climatic conditions and opportunities evoked positive feelings towards the northern lights, coldness, darkness, snow, and remoteness. Second, the "summer people" reacted negatively towards Subarctic winter landscapes, which they found too cold, too dark, and too dangerous for travel. Third, the "ambivalent people" were both pleased and aroused by winter; at the same time, cold and darkness were not as exciting. These findings revealed that seasonality shapes affective destination images and that several perceptions of a tourist destination co-exist.

Introduction

The Arctic and the North have been enveloped in legend since ancient times, and to many civilizations they were terra incognita, wrapped in myth and mystery (Simpson-Housley, 1996). Moreover, narratives of the winter in the North have been divided between constructions of an icy landscape of harshness, fear, and death, and constructions of a landscape of beauty, purity, and exoticism (Hansson and Norberg, 2009). The notion of winter as beautiful and as something romantic is, according to Gopnik (2011), only possible in modern times with indoor heating. Winter in the Arctic has also

been historically linked to polar expeditions and solstice celebrations and, more recently, to leisure/tourism winter activities and a sense of loss due to global warming—these are labelled by Gopnik (2011) as, respectively, radical winter, recuperative winter, recreational winter, and remembering winter. Such descriptions constitute a set of Arctic discourses that shape contemporary tourists' expectations and within which they rehearse their seasonal perceptions of this region.

The aim of this qualitative research is to understand the perceptions of Northern Norway as a Subarctic winter destination by asking tourists visiting Norway in the summer about their images of this area and season, thereby adding to the growing literature on polar tourism. According to Hall and Saarinen (2010: 454), "Polar tourism refers to the shared environmental, developmental, and policy characteristics of the Arctic and Antarctic regions in tourism, including relatively high seasonality of activities and tourism flows." Research on polar tourism has often explored environmental issues such as climate change, alternative livelihoods, and wildlife protection (for an overview see Müller et al., 2013), as well as cruise tourism, which is one important form of tourism in the Arctic (Lück et al., 2010). More specifically, this article adds to the destination image research on northern peripheral regions in Norway (see Dann, 2004 for a comprehensive list; Fischer, 2007; Prebensen, 2007; Denstadli et al., 2011). Contrary to previous research, which has mainly studied general perceptions of specific destinations or specific aspects of Northern Norway, I focus on feelings towards one season. I argue that Subarctic winter climatic conditions and opportunities form tourists' affective destination images and their awareness of this region as a potential winter destination.

To date, research exploring the effects of seasonality upon image has not received much attention (Gartner, 1986; Ryan and Aicken, 2010). According to Hinch and Jackson (2000), there is also a general lack of theoretical knowledge on seasonality; they suggest constraints theory as one way of understanding this phenomenon. Constraints theory seeks to recognize the factors that hinder participation or that have to be negotiated to achieve participation, such as in tourism (Crawford and Godbey, 1987). The aim here is thus also to explore the seasonal destination image constraints that prevent tourists from considering a destination (Hinch et al., 2001), thereby pointing to seasonality as a factor in tourists' evaluations of vacation destinations (Decrop, 2010). In doing so, I question the notion that "cultural ideas surrounding snow, ice and cold have begun to change" from predominantly negative to more positive connotations (Hansson and Norberg, 2009: 13) and ask whether the

polar night, icy darkness, and harshness have transformed winter landscapes from disenchanting to more enchanting (cf. Ritzer, 2010).

The emphasis is on feelings towards winter destinations. This does not mean a neglect of cognitive evaluations. Feelings towards a destination are shaped by knowledge after all (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999). However, as mind and thought are not always separated from body and emotions, they can also co-exist and they are contextual (Peile, 1998). Tourists' feelings towards Subarctic winter might thus also be based on cognition. However, as demonstrated by Baloglu and Brinberg (1997), it is possible to separate affect from cognition when studying tourists' perceptions. Kim and Yoon (2003), for instance, argue that feelings have a greater impact on building a destination image than external sources of stimuli. I continue this article by setting the stage contextually, theoretically, and methodologically. Then, I address and discuss the findings.

Northern Norway as a Subarctic Winter Destination

Although Northern Norway (the counties Nordland, Troms, and Finnmark, situated from 65° to 71° N) has always attracted some tourists, travellers, and explorers, winter remained the off-season until the late 2000s (Borch, 2012; Jæger and Viken, 2014). For instance, the number of international hotel-guest nights in the winter (January to April) increased from some 44,000 in 2000 to almost 150,000 in 2013 (Statistikknett, 2014) and the number of winter cruise passengers on Hurtigruten (a coastal steamer) increased by 270 percent between 2005 and 2010 (Borch, 2012).

One starting point for this growth was a "winter project" run by Finnmark Reiseliv (a county destination marketing organization) from 2002 to 2010 (Jenssen, 2005). Inspired by the success of winter tourism in Finnish Lapland (see Kaján and Saarinen, 2014), this project endorsed the development of a scheduled winter activity program and invested in international marketing campaigns (Juliussen, 2010). Another important reason was Hurtigruten's branding campaign "Hunting the Light" (from the winter season 2004-2005), which was launched in the United Kingdom (UK). In conjunction with this campaign, the cruise line co-operated with land-based tour providers offering winter activities in Northern Norway (Ekeland, 2011; Borch, 2012) and from the winter season 2011-2012 it chartered flights from London to Tromsø (in the county of Troms). Also central was North Adventure, an incoming tour operator, which from 2009 sold onshore winter activities in the Alta region (in the county of Finnmark) to international cruise lines (one cruise ship in 2009 and twelve in 2014, mainly with UK customers). One explanation for the growth in the UK market was the increased awareness of and interest in the

aurora borealis (commonly referred to as the northern lights), most likely as a response to the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) documentary *Joanna Lumley in the Land of the Northern Lights*, which was first aired in the UK in 2008 and portrayed Lumley's search for the northern lights in Northern Norway (Bertella, 2013). As a consequence of this development, the tourist industry now offers scheduled snow-based products from mid-December to mid-April (NordNorsk Reiseliv, 2012) and northern lights tours from September to mid-April (Visit Tromsø, 2013).

Most of Northern Norway is situated within the Arctic, demarcated by the Arctic Circle, 66° N (fig. 1). Concerning the temperature, most parts are Subarctic (averaging over 10 °C in July) and situated below the treeline (Ryall et al., 2010). This region thus consists of the two biomes in the Circumpolar North (of North America, the Eurasian continent, Greenland, and Iceland); climatically and geographically, similarities exist with regard to plants, animals, and soil organisms (Hull, 2011).



Figure 1. Norway and Northern Europe. Source: "Kartgrunnlag: Kartverket (Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike 3.0)". <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.no>

Contrary to the Arctic, the Subarctic has extreme seasonal temperature variations (warm summers and cold winters) and, due to the relatively warm North Atlantic Current, an extension of the Gulf Stream, the Subarctic is at higher latitudes in Norway compared with, for instance, North America (Hull, 2011). Moreover, the climate in Northern Norway varies according to the coastal and interior areas as well as the latitude. The coastal areas have a much milder climate, whereas the interior areas of Troms and Finnmark have an Arctic climate (Visit Norway, 2014). Winter is defined as the months when the average temperature is below 0 °C; thus, the precipitation falls as snow (Harstveit, 2009). In the coldest areas of Northern Norway, such as the inland of Finnmark, the winter starts in November and ends in April; and in the mildest areas (the southern parts of Nordland), winter is between December and March (Dannevig and Harstveit, 2013). With the exception of the southern parts of Nordland, situated below the Arctic Circle, the polar night—when the sun does not rise above the horizon—lasts between one and two months before and after New Year (Yr, 2014). In Northern Norway, this does not denote total darkness; there are a few hours of twilight around noon.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The recent growth of winter tourism in Northern Norway suggests that the public and industry initiatives have had positive effects on shaping tourists' awareness of this region as a winter destination. However, even though the number of onshore guest nights has tripled in a decade, much progress is still required to reach the numbers in Finnish Lapland (2.5 million winter guest nights in 2008) (Lapin liitto, 2009). This suggests, on the one hand, that people's perceptions have become more positive and, on the other hand, that barriers still exist. The conceptual background to this article thus draws on theories on about destination image and constraints theory.

Since the early 1970s, destination image has been a highly popular topic among tourism researchers and numerous articles and book chapters have been published on the subject (see Pike, 2002; Stepchenkova and Mills, 2010 for meta-analyses). Over the years, a myriad of definitions have been proposed (Tasci et al., 2007), which suggests that it is a complex construct to investigate (Tasci and Gartner, 2007). Here, destination image is defined as "not only the perceptions of individual destination attributes but also the holistic impressions made by the destination" (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991: 8). This approach suggests that destination image consists of a continuum of functional and psychological characteristics as well as common and unique features. Moreover, people's perceptions are shaped by cognition, affect, and

action (Mazursky and Jacoby, 1986; Gartner, 1993; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999). Destination images held by tourists are therefore a mixture of beliefs/knowledge, feelings, and travel behaviour/intentions.

The main aim here is to focus on the affective dimension by exploring the reasons that tourists give for loving and hating it and for liking and disliking it (Mazursky and Jacoby, 1986). This does not mean a neglect of cognition and travel experiences, but an emphasis that affect is important in the triggering phase of tourists' destination choices (Dahl, 2014)—both positively, for instance by making it part of tourists' evoked set and dream set, and negatively, by making it part of their exclusion set (Woodside and Sherrell, 1977; Woodside and Lysonski, 1989; Pike, 2006; Decrop, 2010). The evoked set and dream set, for instance, consist of destinations that tourists are attracted to spontaneously or dream about visiting (Decrop, 2010).

Affect refers to the feelings that tourists verbally attribute to a place, ranging from unpleasant to pleasant and from sleepy to arousing (Russell and Pratt, 1980), or from bad to good and from dynamic to static (Hanyu, 1993). Affect is thus embedded in the adjectives that tourists use to describe the qualities of a destination: peaceful, beautiful, exciting, majestic, enjoyable, hectic, frightening, frustrating, ugly, fearful, desolated, and so on. These various terms do not cluster around the two axes, but are a combination of, for instance, pleasant and arousing, such as exciting, and of unpleasant and unarousing, such as boring (Russell and Pratt, 1980). Moreover, peaceful and frightening are the combination of pleasant and unarousing, and of unpleasant and arousing, respectively. The intensity of positive and negative feelings also varies and is expressed by tourists with verbs: love and hate, for instance, demonstrate high intensity, whereas like and dislike suggest low intensity (Tasci et al., 2007). This type of framework has been used in studies on the effects of affect on destination image (see, for instance, Lin et al., 2007; Yüksel and Akgül, 2007). It led Baloglu and Brinberg (1997) to conclude that Egypt, Morocco, Spain, Italy, France, Greece, and Portugal have positive affective images, whereas Turkey, Israel, Algeria, and Tunisia have negative affective images.

One way of exploring why tourists select or avoid a destination is found in constraints theory (Crawford and Godbey, 1987; Crawford et al., 1991). According to this theory, constraints exist at three hierarchical levels (Godbey et al., 2010): intrapersonal (such as a lack of interest, stress, depression, religiosity); interpersonal (a lack of travel companionship); and structural (a lack of time and money, the season, the climate). The hierarchical side of leisure constraints proposed by Crawford et al. (1991), in which people first negotiate intrapersonal constraints, then interpersonal constraints, and

finally structural constraints, is less relevant here. The aim of the study is to identify the various types embedded in the tourists' feelings towards Northern Norway as a potential winter destination. This is in line with Henderson and Bialeschki's (1993) expanded model in which constraints are found to be dynamic and integrated.

Intra- and interpersonal constraints are considered antecedent constraints as they influence the formation of holiday preferences and desires, whereas structural constraints are intervening barriers, restraining people from taking a winter holiday, for instance, in Subarctic destinations (Hinch and Jackson, 2000). The climate, including such elements as the low temperature, cold winds, and little daylight, is part of the structural constraints, as are also a lack of appropriate clothing and equipment. At the same time, the climate is an antecedent constraint if it is linked to tourists' attitudes and preferences, for instance when they desire a skiing holiday or a beach holiday. Moreover, natural factors are understood as regular and recurring variations in climate related to temperature, precipitation, sunlight, and daylight, which are more marked in Arctic latitudes (Butler, 2001). However, natural structural factors are not static. For instance, a study that compared the weather preferences of summer tourists in Northern Norway with regional climate statistics and projections for the period 2071–2100 (Førland et al., 2013) predicts that more rainy days and a reduction of visibility are to be expected. If such climatic changes occur, this research proposes that it will be more difficult for summer tourists to see mountain peaks from a distance and to experience the midnight sun; in the winter, the changes will reduce tourists' chances of seeing the northern lights.

In addition to natural factors, institutional factors, such as religious and industrial holidays, also create seasonal constraints (Hinch et al., 2001). Butler (2001) identified three other institutional factors: social seasonality refers to the social necessity to visit specific destinations at specific times of the year; sporting seasonality means that specific activities, such as skiing, are performed in the winter; and inertia is the persistence of tradition. For instance, many people continue to holiday in the summer even though they are not bound by work and family commitments. Based on this framework, Hinch et al. (2001) studied how natural and institutional factors constrained future visitation to Fort Edmonton Park, Canada, at different times of the year. Here, institutional factors were more linked to structural constraints, whereas natural factors were prominently antecedent constraints; in particular, the temperature and precipitation influenced seasonal visitation preferences. Tourists were thus less motivated to visit the park in the winter due to such natural factors, which explains why the park is only open in the summer.

A few studies have drawn on constraints theory to assess tourists' images and how the combination of images influences decision making (Gilbert and Hudson, 2000; Um and Crompton, 2000; Hong et al., 2006). One of these studies demonstrated that affective image and constraints influenced the selection of national parks and that the antecedent constraints (e.g., too crowded, nobody to go with and physically to constraining) were greater than the structural constraints (e.g., inconvenient transportation, lack of proper accommodation and to high travel expenses) (Hong et al., 2006). Although not basing his study on constraints theory, but rather on image and myths, Fischer's (2007) investigation of Berliners' perceptions of the polar region in the winter concluded that the "summer category" identified it as an empty and disturbing scene that made them feel excluded and encapsulated; it was a remote and desolated area that did not appeal to them as a destination for self-representations. The "alpine category" was also constrained by Arctic regions in the sense that it was a useless scene without action, drama, and audience; the destination was too undeveloped and did not fulfil their primary interests in alpine skiing. The last category, "north," however, had positive associations and feelings towards a remote Arctic winter landscape; it represented a scenic frame for self-realization and simpler, more authentic lifestyles.

Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted by two researchers interviewing tourists over five days in July 2013. The interviews were conducted on the Monolith Plateau in Vigelandsparken, Oslo, in southern Norway. This sculpture park is one of the most visited attractions in Norway's capital, and it is free of charge (Store norske leksikon, 2013). This, combined with the facts that the Monolith Plateau is the focal point of the park, with 212 bronze and granite sculptures, and that the circular stairs towards the Monolith give tourists the opportunity to sit down (Vigeland Museum, 2014), made it an appropriate venue for interviewing summer tourists.

A convenience sampling strategy was employed (Berg and Lune, 2012). We approached visitors who had finished taking photos and admiring the sculptures. In total, with 167 tourists, we conducted 116 interviews, eleven of which were incomplete due to technical difficulties and due to the participants not having time. The analyzed sample therefore consisted of 105 interviews and 156 participants. The sample included a mixture of individuals (fifty-six interviews); two people (couples, friends; forty-seven interviews); and families (two interviews). The unit of analysis, however,

was kept on the individual level as the participants interviewed together sometimes expressed different feelings towards the topics investigated.

The qualitative interviews were semi-standardized in the sense that the interview guide consisted of a set of issues to be explored and that the wording and order of the questions were flexible (Patton, 1990; Berg and Lune, 2012). In addition to asking about the attractiveness of Northern Norway as a potential winter destination, we mapped the respondents' previous travel experience in Nordic countries, as well as their winter holiday destinations during the last three years. Moreover, we asked about socio-demographic factors such as gender, age, nationality, place of residence, marital status, level of education, and occupation. Adjustments were made to the interview guide after two pilots (Seidman, 2013). When piloting, we found it difficult to interview more than two people at once, so we decided to keep the family units to a minimum.

The final interview guide consisted of eight questions regarding the perceptions of Northern Norway as a winter destination. To elicit responses from the tourists, we used four pictures of winter landscapes/winter activities and two maps of Norway/Northern Norway as a projective technique (Chrzanowska, 2002). Additionally, we asked the tourists why they had travelled to Norway this summer. As the data collection evolved and we discussed interesting issues, thereby partly drawing on the principles of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), we employed theoretical sampling to gain a better understanding of people's perceptions, in particular those related to climatic issues.

The data collection was ethical since we secured informed consent by presenting the project and what participation entailed (Berg and Lune, 2012). The participants remained anonymous, as we never asked for identifiable information. They were also given a business card with contact information and the project's website address. We encouraged them to email us if they had further questions or if they wanted to withdraw the interview, which none of them did. All the interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim.

Each interview lasted between three and twenty-four minutes; the average interview lasted some eleven minutes. The interviews were conducted in Norwegian, English, and German. The data were analyzed with the program Atlas.ti. When analyzing the data coding, the principles from grounded theory were applied (Charmaz, 2006): open, focused, and axial coding. Additionally, summative content analysis of the manifest content was undertaken (Berg and Lune, 2012). This meant that central words were counted.

When reflecting on the method and its limitations, a weakness was apparent in that some of the interviews were very short. This made it difficult to extract profound meanings and obtain data that were “detailed, focused and full” (Charmaz, 2006: 14). However, when undertaking impromptu data collection at a tourist site, it is impossible to know how much time tourists are willing to invest. When recruiting the participants, language problems made it difficult to interview Asian-speaking tourists. Moreover, limited on-site time made it impossible to recruit cruise ship tourists on guided tours. Interviewing two persons at the same time was also a challenge. Sometimes one of them was more talkative; the lack of time made it difficult to repeat the questions; and some couples tended to finish each other’s sentences. However, as many tourists were with travel companions, we did not ask for individual interviews for fear of rejection, although, in hindsight, this strategy might have produced richer data. The venue for data collection, however, secured a constant flow of tourists, but there was no guarantee that they had visited Northern Norway on this or a previous trip. We therefore risked a sample that knew little about the destination, regardless of the season. Finally, being a qualitative study, the sample was too small to be representative; it therefore only gave glimpses of the participants’ emotional perceptions.

Table 1 shows that the research participants came from many parts of the world. Still, European tourists dominated, in particular those from German-speaking countries, Norway, and the United States. The large number of German-speaking tourists was to be expected as these are typical foreign summer tourists in Norway (Farstad et al., 2011). There were also a few more females than males and some 60 percent of the tourists were over fifty years of age. The sample was therefore a few years older than the average foreign tourist in Norway (Innovasjon Norge, 2013).

Findings

Fifty-four of the 156 research participants had holidayed in Northern Norway this summer or on previous visits; thirty-seven of these were domestic and international tourists, nine had lived/live there (Norwegians only), five had visited on business trips, and three had been there in the army (Norwegians only). Only five of them had been tourists in the winter. Most of the tourists’ affective perceptions were thus based on image formation agents, such as promotional material, television programs, and word of mouth (Gartner, 1994). With the exception of the five who had primary images formed by actual visitation, the rest had therefore been exposed to secondary images only (Phelps, 1986). On the basis of these images, I will discuss the tourists’

feelings towards winter landscapes and activities by separating those who were positive towards visiting the region in the winter, those who were negative, and those who were ambivalent (table 2).

Table 1. Participant profile (n=156)

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Country of Origin		
Norway	20	13
Other Scandinavia	15	10
German-speaking	42	27
Netherlands/Belgium	12	8
UK	13	8
Spain, France, Italy	4	3
Hungary	1	1
Ukraine	1	1
Canada	8	5
USA	16	10
Australia	5	3
New Zealand	5	3
Brazil/Colombia	2	1
China/Taiwan	4	3
Iran	2	2
Philippines/Thailand/Korea	5	3
India	1	1
Gender		
Male	64	41
Female	92	59
Age		
19–20 years	3	2
21–30 years	22	14
31–40 years	18	12
41–50 years	22	14
51–60 years	35	22
61–70 years	45	29
71 years & older	11	7

Table 2. Interest in Northern Norway as a potential winter destination, by nationality (n=156)

Nationality		Frequency		
		Yes	No	Maybe
Norway		8	8	4
Other Scandinavian countries		7	4	4
German-speaking countries		22	13	7
Netherlands/Belgium		1	8	3
UK		4	6	3
Spain, France, Italy		3	1	-
Hungary		1	-	-
Ukraine		-	-	1
Canada		1	5	2
USA		6	6	4
Australia		2	2	1
New Zealand		1	4	-
Brazil/Colombia		1	1	-
China/Taiwan		-	3	1
Iran		-	-	2
Philippines/Thailand/Korea		4	1	-
India		-	1	-
		61	63	32

Winter People

I have labelled the first category of participants “winter people” due to their positive emotional perceptions of cold and snowy landscapes, in which they could see themselves performing winter activities and gazing at the northern lights. Thus, 39 percent of the interviewees answered that they would like to return in the winter to visit Northern Norway. These tourists came from twenty-one different countries and from many parts of the world (see table 2). When communicating affective images, the tourists voiced a fascination for natural resources, natural environments, the atmosphere of the place, and recreational activities (Beerli and Martín, 2004). For instance, twenty-seven of them were attracted by snow, twenty-two by coldness, and/or eighteen by darkness; thus, these climatic conditions formed the landscape in positive ways. The cold and darkness evoked feelings such as excitement, romance, and melancholia. As an example, one young German woman really liked how darkness and snow created a special atmosphere and light and said, “So despite the darkness there is still much light through the snow and these little lights. That makes it so cozy and you feel secure, somehow.”

Moreover, the winter landscapes of Northern Norway represented something unique. For instance, several of the German-speaking tourists

enjoyed cold winter weather, but the climatic changes during the last few years had reduced their opportunity to experience this at home. These tourists thus longed for “real” winter. This longing was linked not only to climate change, but also to the way in which the remote and uninhabited landscapes of the North enabled an escape from modern, hectic lifestyles. One Italian woman, for instance, was attracted by the opportunity to “find” herself anew:

The appeal of seeing a pristine region, where there is no mass tourism. I want to make a trip, where I can connect more to myself. We live in a hectic world. I associate this area, which I do not know, with calm and serenity, and to be in nature. To be in the midst of nature away from the hustle and bustle.

Some of the participants believed that winter landscapes also affected the locals and were interested in how these landscapes formed the mentality of the locals. One young man from France, for instance, talked about his fascination with “the big landscapes” of Nordic countries and the “quiet people,” which evoked melancholic feelings that he responded to positively.

Moreover, forty-three of these tourists were fascinated by the potential to see the northern lights. The lights were described as amazing, beautiful, mystic, magical, evasive, and exceptional. Here, some of the participants also linked them to the uniqueness of the place and referred to them as something they dreamt about seeing once in their life. For some of them, it was the only reason for travelling north in the winter. Only a few had seen the northern lights in other destinations; however, most of them had seen pictures and television programs. Despite using adjectives such as amazing and magical, most of these tourists had problems with expressing the deeper feelings that seeing the northern lights would evoke. As an example, one middle-aged German woman explained that it was difficult to describe the feelings: “I do not know, you see it on TV a lot, but I’ve never seen it in nature. I imagine that it is very, very emotional. I do not know how to describe it.”

However, a middle-aged Norwegian woman, who had seen this celestial phenomenon at home a few times, in the southern parts of the country, would really like to travel to the North to experience it in a more remote and darker place. On the few occasions that she had seen the northern lights, she had felt mesmerized and happy; to her, this represented a magical experience: “I would like to ... come to a deserted place where there are no other lights than the starry sky and the northern lights. ... (at home), we are completely blown away, we go a bit crazy.” When asked why she felt this way, she responded:

“It is bliss to see it. You become happy inside. I am completely spellbound. I think it’s absolutely magical. The colours and play of lights, it’s something ... We feel totally like [excitable] Americans then, me and my daughters.”

In addition to positive feelings towards nature resources, natural environments, and the atmosphere of the place, many of the participants interested in travelling to Northern Norway in the winter also enjoyed outdoor activities in the snow. For instance, twenty-eight tourists found pleasure in skiing, twenty were interested in dog sledding (fig. 2), and eleven enjoyed hiking. To sum up, their affective perceptions were marked by the uniqueness of the place (Echnter and Ritchie, 1991): different landscapes and climate, locals with a different mentality, small-scale tourism, and the northern lights. This winter destination also represented an escape from home and offered new aesthetic experiences. The findings bear traces of positive perceptions of winter as a space for romance, recreation, and remembering (Gopnik, 2011).



Figure 2. Dogsledding in Northern Norway. Photo: Colourbox.com

Summer People

Of the interviewees, 40 percent answered that they did not want to travel back to Norway in the winter to visit Northern Norway. I have labelled these tourists “summer people,” not because they all referred to themselves as “not winter people” or “sun babies,” but since they preferred holidaying in the summer and visiting warm destinations in the winter. These tourists came from eighteen different countries (see table 2). The northern lights were also an important attraction to seventeen of these research participants; however,

the aurora did not evoke strong enough feelings to lure them there. When describing their reasons for not wanting to visit, they expressed a dislike of environmental resources, such as climatic conditions and how they affect infrastructure, economic factors, and the atmosphere of the place (Beerli and Martín, 2004). For instance, thirty-seven tourists expressed an aversion to coldness and seventeen found darkness unappealing on holiday. Moreover, eighteen of them disliked skiing. Although some of these participants perceived winter landscapes as beautiful due to the snow, most of them hated freezing temperatures, which would confine them indoors if they were to visit. They described the Subarctic as too cold, too lonely, too dark, too white, and too remote. For instance, the lack of daylight would not enable them to see much of the landscape. One middle-aged man from the United States equated winter holidays in Northern Norway with prison:

I am not going to a place where there is no light ... It sounds like a prison. ... I like when you have light in the day and dark in the night. But having dark in the day and night, after a couple of days, I think that will be difficult to deal with. It is all that colder; the sun is not out. I can imagine that there will be times when it is so cold and the weather so inclement that you would be shut in your room ... it is possible that you will be unable to leave.

The dislike of coldness was for some of the participants not only related to structural constraints, such as the climate, but also to age (Crawford and Godbey, 1987). In particular, the oldest tourists would not be able to cope well. For instance, one older Canadian woman argued that she was “too old to be in that cold climate ... it is the thin blood and you feel the cold more.” Moreover, the aversions were partly linked to geographical factors in the sense that some of the tourists who lived in a warmer climate rejected winter destinations, but also that some of the participants from Canada, UK, and Norway felt that the winter at home was harsh enough. This was argued by one British middle-aged couple. The husband, for instance, said: “I think when it is winter for you it is also winter for us; if we would go anywhere it would be someplace warmer. We would go to the Mediterranean. We get fed up with the winter we have.” Then the wife added their shared dislike of coldness and darkness: “No, it would be cold, I don’t like the cold. ... I would rather feel warm than cold, as John [husband] said, if it is cold in England, I would rather go somewhere warm, not somewhere even colder.”

Although some of the winter people also complained about the high prices in Norway, the costs did not discourage them from considering a visit to the northern regions, as they did for the summer people. Combined with

a dislike of cold and remote destinations, the level of costs was unappealing. Moreover, some of the tourists living in a warmer climate did not have the right clothes for cold weather and they were reluctant to invest in gear that they would never use again. Some of these tourists were also constrained by the financial crisis in the rest of Europe. One middle-aged German couple, for instance, believed that it was even more expensive in Northern Norway as the numbers and choices of shops were more limited. This annoyed the woman: "And the prices, those I find outrageous. We travel a lot, but ..."

Additionally, winter made travel difficult. Some of the research participants from overseas feared the hassle of flying in winter, whereas some of the Europeans were more concerned with problems like driving on snow and ice and the toll this takes on the driver. One elderly German man described it as an absurd undertaking: "The problem is the long travel in the winter; this is a real madness. You have to go several days with the car, then there is a problem with the ferry, then there are problems when it is snowy."

In sum, the summer people were restrained by structural constraints, such as high prices and seasonal natural factors. These tourists' affective perceptions of Northern Norway as a winter destination were marked by negative feelings related to natural functional attributes (Echnter and Ritchie, 1991); they were discouraged by Subarctic winter destinations. To them, winter was not associated with positive memories and they did not see it as a romantic space for exploration and recreation (Gopnik, 2011).

Ambivalent People

Of the interviewees, 20 percent expressed that they *might* return in the winter to visit Northern Norway, and I have labelled them "ambivalent people." These tourists came from fifteen different countries and from many parts of the world (see table 2). The ambivalent tourists were both empowered and constrained by cold destinations. They voiced a mixture of positive and negative feelings related to the climate and to winter attractions and activities. Although some of them were attracted by the opportunity to ski, and others wanted to experience the northern lights (fig. 3), authentic winter landscapes, ice hotels, and Sami culture, they could not make up their minds whether these were compelling enough for a visit. One Australian man would consider travelling to Northern Norway just to experience the rare aurora borealis, as it is "something that is very rare; you are not going to see it anywhere else on the earth. Something quite humbling about it at the same time."



Figure 3. Northern lights in Northern Norway. Photo: Colourbox.com

For two American friends, the northern lights were not enough of a pull, but since they both loved skiing and other winter activities, these could encourage a visit. The quote below illustrates their ambivalence:

Man – It’s emblematic of the polar regions, Arctic regions.

Woman – We don’t see them at home.

Man – Exactly.

Woman – That’s what we would like to see.

...

Man – Go specifically for that, probably not. In combination with other things.

Researcher – Skiing?

Man – Sure.

Woman – Yes. I would say the same.

Contrary to the summer people, the ambivalent people were not structurally constrained by transportation issues and high prices. Some of them, however, were not attracted by a cold climate. Like the winter people, several had such positive feelings towards the northern lights, beautiful winter landscapes, and skiing that they were not opposed to a visit. This category thus consists of a mixture of summer and winter people. Their

feelings towards Northern Norway as a potential winter destination, however, were not so strong that they completely embraced or rejected it as a potential destination. In some ways, they therefore appreciated the romantic and recreational dimensions of winter, but without committing to them (Gopnik, 2011).

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The findings demonstrated that the tourists visiting Norway in the summer had different affective perceptions of Northern Norway as a Subarctic winter destination. The winter people's feelings were a mixture of pleasant and unarousing (Russell and Pratt, 1980), particularly related to winter landscapes, climate, and people. They appreciated quietness in nature and people due to natural factors such as snow and darkness. They were attracted to spaces that were different from their hectic everyday life. In this sense, they romanticized remote and cold destinations and did not associate winter with harshness and danger. They dreamt about the romantic winter and some of them remembered winters of the past, before climate change (Gopnik, 2011). Moreover, as suggested by Fischer (2007), to the winter people, a cold destination could make a suitable frame for self-presentation. The excitement imbuing snow, darkness, and coldness thus "represent a border zone between the familiar and the exotic" (Ryall et al., 2010: xii); it symbolized a space where these tourists could transform themselves into soft adventurers and soft explorers. The winter people thus did not long for the radical winter of former polar explorers (Gopnik, 2011).

This was not the case with the summer people, whose affective images were marked by unpleasantness and lack of arousal (Russell and Pratt, 1980). They did not desire Subarctic winter landscapes shaped by darkness and cold; to some of them, this felt more like an expensive prison. Thus, their feelings were constrained by both intrapersonal and structural barriers (Crawford and Godbey, 1987). Moreover, to these tourists, the tourist experience was about comfort and well-being, which depended upon a warm climate. For summer people who already lived in colder climates, on winter holidays it was more important to gain a short-term climatic advantage to recuperate (see also Lohmann and Kaim, 1999; Maddison, 2001), and it was more important to escape from the natural factors and climate constraints at home than to experience the aesthetic qualities of winter landscapes and the potential joy of snow-based activities.

When talking about the northern lights, the winter people's feelings were a mixture of pleasant and arousing (Russell and Pratt, 1980). This celestial phenomenon has attracted much media attention during the last few years

and has become part of many tourists' bucket lists (Weaver, 2011). In a sense, it has become a social necessity (Butler, 2001) and a marker of the uniqueness of Northern Norway (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991). When trying to explain the aesthetics of the northern lights, the descriptions were full of romantic feelings. To these tourists, polar winter landscapes were thus somewhat enchanted (cf. Ritzer, 2010); the polar night and snow shaped beautiful, mystical, and magical scenes for sensual and embodied experiences full of affect (Edensor, 2010). The seasonal antecedent and intervening constraints related to natural structural factors therefore did not evoke negative feelings (Hinch and Jackson, 2000).

The summer people, however, voiced a seasonal structural constraint in the sense that they feared snow and ice while travelling. Their feelings were a mixture of unpleasant and arousing (Russell and Pratt, 1980). Driving on snow, for instance, was scary, in particular for those not used to winter conditions. Summer people were therefore disenchanted by cold destinations (cf. Ritzer, 2010), and not even the iconic northern lights evoked strong enough feelings to change their minds. With this mind-set, they thus upheld negative cultural conceptions of darkness and coldness as harsh, frightening, and potentially deadly (Hansson and Norberg, 2009; Edensor, 2013).

In conclusion, this study shows that for tourists visiting Norway in the summer, climate and seasonality shaped the affective images in different ways. To the winter people, winter evoked positive affective images of Northern Norway. The destination offered the activities and attractions that they longed for and found magical and amazing, in particular the northern lights and the winter climate. The cold season was mostly feared, hated, and rejected by the summer people, and it was not considered enchanting at all. Although this study did not investigate the tourists' general perception of Norway, it is reasonable to assume that they had positive feelings towards this destination, as they had already decided to visit during the summer when this research was undertaken. Consequently, as some 60 percent of these tourists were identified as summer people and ambivalent people, it is reasonable to argue that seasonal constraints imbue the image of (Northern) Norway as a winter destination.

This is important knowledge for destinations with climatic seasonality. The market potential for Northern Norway among the existing visitors to Norway is found among the winter people as the northern region is part of their evoked and dream sets (Decrop, 2010). The ambivalent people, however, constitute a less likely repeat market. To them, such winter holidays are more part of their surrogate set; they might come in the winter, but "one never

knows ...” (Descrop, 2010: 100). In particular, the northern lights and skiing evoke positive feelings that please and arouse the ambivalent people (Russell and Pratt, 1980). At the same time, cold and darkness are not so exciting. As a potential segment, they seem unable to make up their minds. Finally, the summer people are not a repeat market; to them, Northern Norway in the winter is part of their exclusion set (Descrop, 2010).

Natural factors, such as snow, cold, the northern lights, and darkness, thus only appealed emotionally to winter people and to some extent ambivalent people. However, such natural seasonal conditions, it should be remembered, are threatened by climate change and might not last forever. Unlike ski resorts in the Alps, snow-making is not a viable option in Northern Norway as many winter tourism products are not based in one fixed location; for example, mobility is often involved in hunting Northern Lights (Rixen et al., 2011), and fewer nights with a clear sky will reduce the opportunities to see the northern lights (Førland et al., 2013). Nevertheless, this research has only investigated the affective perceptions of Northern Norway as a potential winter destination; more research is needed to understand the seasonal destination image fully and how it shapes travel behaviour and repeat visitation in the off-season.

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