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# Symbolic and Embodied Involvements in a Landscape

*A Ski Ethnography of Käsivarsi, Finnish Lapland*

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**Symbolic and Embodied Involvements in a Landscape:  
A ski Ethnography of Käsivarsi, Finnish Lapland**

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## Abstract

This thesis is about a wilderness-area in Finnish Lapland, people that dwell there and how they perceive the place. The idea of ‘wilderness’ in the socio-cultural context of this research does not exclude human-involvement and one might get surprised by how much social life that includes. The area is used by many tourists and some locals for recreation. At the same time the Saami have their reindeer’s pastures in the area. I did my fieldwork in the middle of the wilderness-area by one of the small huts that provide shelter for the hikers. Through participant observation and film I followed the life of this place with the focus on the group of skiers. The huts are important meeting-places as the skiers create a symbolic community among them. In the hut, people can share experiences, stories and advices with each other. The topics of discussion concern almost exclusively Lapland and hiking. In these social situations, images about the place are produced and reproduced. However, to be able to participate in these conversations, one must roam the mountains and get to know it by feet and by heart. In the movement along the journey, following the paths, perception occurs. I discuss how engaging in the landscape through activity creates belonging and how this makes people perceive the place. The wilderness-area of Käsivarsi is an important place for many and the same people return there year after year. Both the embodied and the symbolic aspects of the being in this environment are significant in the constitution of the place.

Keywords: Finland, Lapland, Place-studies, Dwelling, Landscape, Perception of the environment, Nature.



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# 1. Introduction

In Finnish Lapland, there is a place that people long for and live for. It is the wilderness area of Käsivarsi. I will soon introduce the place in greater detail and my hope is that the reader will get to know it intimately by the end of this paper. This is a study of how Käsivarsi is perceived by the people who dwell there. I will let Raiski, a very experienced wayfarer in the area, illuminate some of the issues we are going to see in this thesis. It considers her relationship to the place; how she is unable to stay away when the spring arrives; how in her mind, in this wilderness everything is well and the soul is able to rest. My task will be to take this further and try to discover how these kind of images of this place, held by the people who dwell there, have come to be. In Raiski's words:

Right away when the snow buntings arrive to my home town, I get troubled. It troubles me and I just have to get here. And when that day comes, that is wonderful. I have seen all kinds of things and weather here, but still I have this picture from here, that the snow is shimmering, there is beautiful diamonds everywhere and no wind. Even if I have seen all other kinds of weather as well. But it is somewhere in the soul, that feeling and that picture, that here everything is well. [---] The indigenous people say, that if they travel with an airplane, they must sit a couple of days at the airport and wait, because the soul is coming after. But here the soul makes it with you all the way.

Raiski represents the group that is my main focus, the hikers, in this case skiers<sup>1</sup>, because my fieldwork was done in the late winter and early spring, when the area is still covered by snow and ice. By focusing on the skiers I am going to show *how this wilderness area is used in different ways and how its uses make people to perceive the environment*. This is my first research question, which will be answered in chapter four. Other people around us always have an impact on our perception and therefore, in chapter five, I aspire to answer the question: *What kind of community is created between the people and how is this connected to the way they perceive the place?* I will show that even though the hikers wish to get a break from the pressures of society and its rules and expectations, a structured social system, created by the people themselves, also exists in the wilderness. I will show how people roaming the mountains experience fellowship based on the common experience of dwelling there.

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<sup>1</sup> At times I am going to use the word skiers and hikers in parallel. In this context, hikers is the whole group that uses this area for recreational use and moving without motorized vehicles. In the wintertime most of them are skiing (some use a kick sledge, dog sledge, bicycle or snowshoes) while in the summer people are mostly walking.

Before I go into my analysis, regarding the research questions I have presented, I am going to give some context for the field and the background for this project. I will also present my methods and my theoretical approach. In my work, I will rely a lot on the work of Tim Ingold and his phenomenology-based ideas about dwelling and perception. I am also inspired by a newly created literary genre, ski-ethnography. Together with three historians, among them Einar Niemi, Stein P. Aasheim has covered several hundred kilometers on skis in the inner Finnmark collecting the history of the region. Their travels resulted in a book which is a meeting between nature-experience and cultural history, called “Finnmarksvidda – En skietnografisk ferd gjennom Sameland” (Aasheim 2013). Let this paper be my small contribution to this genre.

### **Fieldwork context**

My fieldwork took place in the wilderness area of Käsivarsi (see figure 1. in appendix for map), which was established in 1991 along with the other eleven wilderness areas in Finland when the Finnish wilderness-act was implemented. The purpose of the law is to “protect the wilderness character of the areas, to safeguard Sami culture and traditional subsistence uses, and to develop the potential for diversified use of nature” (Finlex<sup>2</sup>). Already from this statement, one can see, that the concept of wilderness in this context, does not exclude human involvement and subsistence use, rather it is an essential part of the ‘wilderness-character’ that the act is set to preserve.

A trekking-trail that is part of the 800-kilometer-long North Calotte Route meanders through this area. Annually about 10 000 visits are made there (Ohenoja and Leppänen 2010). Along the trail, at about ten kilometer intervals are open wilderness huts. These huts are maintained by the state-owned national forest and park-service, *Metsähallitus*, and hikers can use them for free. I did my fieldwork by one of these huts. The place where the hut is located is a valley called Meeko. The valley is characterized by the surrounding mountains, which are rugged and rocky. About 500 meters from the wilderness hut, there are a couple of other small wilderness-cabins, one for the border patrol and one which people can reserve for an overnight stay. Meeko is situated about 30 kilometers from the nearest village, Kilpisjärvi.

All Finnish mountains (except for one) which are higher than a thousand meters above sea level are in this area. They are however not really called ‘mountains’ but rather Fells, *tunturit*, because of their wide and round shape different from the alpine landscape that is on the other

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/1991/19910062> 12.12.2015

side of the national borders in Norway and Sweden. Halti is the highest of the fells and rises 1324 meters above sea level on the Finnish side, though the summit of the mountain is on the Norwegian side. There has been human activity in the area since the end of ice age about 10 000 years ago (Tolvanen 2011) and that activity has been connected merely to subsistence use until the 1930s. In the 1930s a women's gymnastics group from Helsinki, led by Kaarina Kari, were the first hikers to conquer Halti and they started the recreational use of the area (Kaikusalo 2004). On their trip, they left a book in a metal box, where they wrote their names. After that, over 100 000 people have written their name in the book that lies at the highest point of Finland. Halti is the main destination for many visitors. The number of visitors coming to Kilpisjärvi and the surrounding area for recreation increased notably after the Second World War as the German army had built a road to Kilpisjärvi during the continuation war in 1941 (Järvinen 2004). The village of Kilpisjärvi is located on the border between Sweden and Norway and the livelihood of its approximately 100 residents comes mainly from tourism. Kilpisjärvi is important in my project because it is the starting point for all the trips to the wilderness. The wilderness area is in the municipality of Enontekiö, which is Sami homeland. The Raittijärvi herding district has their reindeer pasturing in the wilderness area.

In Finland, it is permitted to drive a snowmobile on the tracks meant for snowmobile driving. In the wilderness areas, this is restricted due to the wilderness act. In Käsivarsi wilderness, it is possible to get a permit to drive the snow mobile on track, if one is with a local guide or if one has rented a base in the area. Residents in the municipality get a permit automatically and the reindeer herders owning reindeer in the area can drive freely.

As said, the route and huts are maintained by the national forestry service, *Metsähallitus*. It is this organization which ensures there is gas and firewood in the huts. They also manage and control fishing licenses, permits for driving a snow scooter and the like. The presence of authorities in the wilderness area is visible in other ways as well. The police, the customs and the border personnel co-operate in the area in the most popular months of the spring. Their job is to see that the wilderness-act is not broken by anybody and to act as security in case of bad weather or someone getting lost. In addition, they keep an eye on the border between Finland and Norway.

### **Personal motivation**

I grew up a two-hour drive from Kilpisjärvi, the village that serves as a port to the wilderness area. Going on trips to this place is part of my childhood memories. It is easy to take things for

granted in the environment one grows up in. As a child, traffic lights, escalators and MacDonald's were exciting and exotic for my siblings and I and if we sometimes got into an elevator, the competition for who got to press the button was intense. On the other hand, seeing reindeer, snow and silent nature were everyday life for me. Even if I enjoyed and appreciated being in the mountains, I might have taken a lot of it for granted. When we were in the mountains of Käsivarsi, we were always in our group and not much interacting with the hikers for instance. It wasn't until I went to study social anthropology for three years and then come back, that I realized that this place was rather interesting. I understood, that there was a community in the wilderness. One memory stands out - I was having a break from skiing in one of the open huts and was listening to the conversation between the hikers in the hut, whom I did not know. The way they talked caught my attention. I do not remember how many persons were in the hut or who they were, but I remember that the conversation was concerning the movements of other skiers in the area. I was surprised how well they seemed to be on track of where other people were. They were talking about who was coming to the area at what time and who went to which direction and it seemed like they were able to place persons in the vast wilderness area with relatively long distances. I also noticed that the people were referring to other skiers with special nicknames. I remember one of them: *Tunturineuvos*. That could be translated as the Fell Councilor. It was when I heard that, that I got really interested and got the idea of coming back for fieldwork to find out more about how this community is created and how the people perceive this place.

A year later, when the idea had developed into a concrete plan and the plan into reality, I met *Tunturineuvos*. One evening, after a day of ice fishing away from the camp we arrived back to Meeko valley, which was very calm and quiet that night. Only one pair of skis rested towards the cabin wall. I wondered who they belonged to. Every time I went into the hut, I thought it was exciting to see what kind of greeting I would get and who would be inside. This time a man with white hair and mustache sat by the table eating supper and gave me a friendly and welcoming greeting. His name was Kristian. After we had talked for a while I understood that he was *Tunturineuvos*. I could tell him, that without him knowing it he had inspired me for doing this particular project.

## 2. Methodological Perspectives

I conducted my fieldwork in the spring of 2015, from the start of April to the start of May. I returned to the field in August, with intentions to stay for 20 more days to gather data and knowledge that could support my initial fieldwork. Unfortunately, on the sixth day, I had to leave from the trip because of medical reasons. The fieldwork has resulted with this text and a film called *Faces of the Wilderness*, which I will refer to several times. Both of them are representations of social reality. No film or text can mirror reality just as it is - the representations are always colored by the concepts and perceptions the researcher holds and the choices she or he makes. Reflexivity can compensate the difficulty of saying something completely objective about the social qualities of the world. Being aware of the variables that influence the research is already coming a long way and makes it possible to say something meaningful about what goes on around us (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000). I have chosen to be rather reflexive in my work and I am present and visible, in both the text and the film.

Usually, when a student or a researcher goes to do anthropological fieldwork in the traditional sense, they settle in a community and quite often live with a host family (see Briggs 1970, Kahn 1996). The community I settled in was special in a way, that its members changed all the time, still the community remained the same. It was like a flow of people whose comings and goings were overlapping each other. I had to talk to new people every day. I did not have a host family simply because nobody has a home within a 35 kilometer radius from the location of my fieldwork. However, I brought my own family and my own home with me: my newlywed husband and a tent. We put up a lavvo-tent and made a camp in the vicinity of the wilderness hut. Also, even though I was not adopted into a family like Briggs (1970) and did not have one main key informant like Rabinow (1977) I was not lost in the situation, because I was not on foreign ground. I will start this chapter by explaining how I positioned myself in the field, what my roles were and how I got access to the field and the social situations that it contained.

### **Access and positioning**

Even though the location of my fieldwork is remote and somewhat isolated, it is still a public space and because of that, it was not difficult to get access in the sense of getting a permit to be there and it was not necessary to make contact with people beforehand in order to be accepted into the society. Anyone (with the necessary knowledge and gear to survive) can enter this place and the society is a symbolic one, where the mere presence in the area can be enough for being

a 'member'. I will come back to that later. Before leaving, I nevertheless wanted to inform the national forestry (*Metsähallitus*) administrators about my project. I also had to get permits for long term-camping and for driving a snow scooter. The preparations took a lot of planning and packing, because our goal was to stay in the mountains the whole time, visiting the village only once to get more food, which we managed. Now, the next challenge would be to socialize with the crowd of potential informants. Access to people's life worlds and positioning in the field go hand in hand. Johansen (1981) says that the most important tool an anthropologist has, is his or her own person. (I brought the video-camera with me, which can be a useful tool as well). However, as painter has to know how to use her or his tool, the brush, to get the best result, the anthropologist must be able to position him or herself in the social landscape in a way that gives them access. It also requires, that we are open and reflexive about it, because the way we situate ourselves in the field, affect the knowledge that we produce. Johansen explains that the researcher must be able to find his/her observation posts and viewpoints in the social landscape. As the choice of the spot for my tent gave me a good view to certain things while closing it to some others, so too the position the researcher takes in a society opens certain areas for experience while simultaneously excluding others. Johansen talks about roles and defining ourselves in an acceptable and relatable way, and I will talk about that as well, but the tent-example shows in my opinion this in a very concrete way, where positioning in the literal sense became crucial.

We wanted to choose the site for our camp carefully, not only considering wind-and snow conditions, but also according to the fieldwork. I did not want to be too close or too far, I did not want to 'disturb' anybody, but I also wanted to be included in what was happening around the hut at all times. We set the camp around 200 meters from the hut, with a straight track leading to it and a good overview to the center of happenings. Our camp was visible but within a reasonable distance. In Meeko, I was often referred to as the one 'from that lavvo' and many people came to visit us. This is a wide and big area, but there are little spots where everything that wanders around in the fells always finds. The center for happenings, events, meetings and conversations is by the immediate nearness of the huts. I felt like I was on track of those happenings because whether I was in the tent or in the hut, I was a part of what was happening.

I could finally understand just how important the site for the camp was when we returned in the summer time. That time we let the practical reasons for our wellbeing direct the decision more than strategies for getting access to the social field. Our former camp was down in the valley

and now full of mosquitoes. Up the hill, about 500 meters from the hut, we had a river close by, less vegetation and wind that kept the worst amount of mosquitoes away. In addition, the view was amazing from that point. The only thing that this view lacked though, was the hut. During this time, I felt much more excluded from the life around the hut and we had only one visitor. I had to walk to the hut just to see if anyone was there and I felt more like an outsider. We realized we would have to move the camp closer to the hut, but did not get to do that before we unexpectedly had to leave.

However, I was not only situated in the physical landscape, but also in the social. The ways I chose to present myself, the sides of myself and the roles I chose to emphasize, unconsciously or consciously; all those things affected the meetings with my informants and the outcome of those meetings. My biggest challenge was that I met new people every day and I did not have a lot of time to get to know them. Every day I had to introduce myself and in a way start from scratch. In that situation, it helped me that I had some knowledge about the culture in question from before. I approached people in the way that is usual in the context of a wilderness area and the wilderness hut and the culture in Lapland in general. That might have been my pitfall or a strength as a researcher. It felt better to adopt the ways of behaving I observed around me, but because of that I do not have background information about many of my informants. In this context, name, age and occupation have little importance, at least if you listen to what the people say and observe the conversations between them. What matters is what happens in this place, inside the frames they have set for the 'wilderness-experience'. I know that my role as a researcher would have allowed me to ask questions that normally are out of topic or even taboo, but my instinct told me to 'go with the flow'. For instance, I would approach people with some small talk about the weather or a question about where they were coming from that day. Most of the time this led to a longer conversation and me maybe filming them. In this place it is normal to spend the night in the same little hut and talk together for hours and not know the name of the other person. If the people themselves stressed that it does not matter who you are in the 'normal life', because here everybody is the same, then maybe I can still write a comprehensive thesis even though I do not know the name or background of all the people I talked to. Even though I only met people for a short period, they were open and easy to talk to. More than once I hugged goodbye with someone I had known just for a day or two. As I reflect on it now, I see that I tried to 'fit in' as well as possible despite my 'researcher'-role. For instance, I would always ski when I was with the skiers, not drive the snow scooter, but if I saw locals, I would go to meet them with the snow scooter.

## **Anthropology at home**

The first time I visited the wilderness around Kilpisjärvi was so long ago that I do not really remember the trip. Since then I have made some trips in the springtime with my friends to the area. I knew the place, but not so much the people. As those trips are my childhood memories, I did not really have an insight to the social realities of the hiking community. I come from the neighboring municipality to Enontekiö, where this wilderness area is situated and even if I did my fieldwork 'at home', the group I have focused on, hikers mostly from the South of Finland, was not a very familiar group for me. However, we shared a lot, the language and other things that is included in the Finnish culture and identity, and our interest for nature, hiking and the place itself.

The fieldwork is a meeting place between the informant and the researcher (Rudie 1997) and in that meeting the researcher shall learn to see the world of the informants with their eyes. Doing anthropology at home has been a debated issue. However today, it is not the cultural differences between the study subject and the researcher that most often define their relationship, but more and more it is the contrast in different positioning (Rudie 1997). Even though I chose to position myself close with the informants, I of course explained them my project and my role as a student doing research. I also think that with me I have had a perception of an outsider, which I have gained by living in Norway for eight years and through studying anthropology and embracing the theoretical mindsets that the discipline holds. This I hope have given me some distance, which makes me capable of not taking things for granted.

Rudie (1997) writes that when one is doing fieldwork one first must go through the process of 'mapping' to then go over to 'text-reading'. Mapping is about trying to grasp the social organization in an unknown terrain. Text reading is the metaphor for trying to interpret the terrain one has got a hold on of in the former process. I think I could say that I entered the field with a map in my hands quite ready to do text reading.

## **My methods**

### *Informants*

Even though I first was interested in making a study of all the user groups in the area, I quickly found out that the people who were there skiing in their free time was the group which was the easiest to get to know. I chose to focus on them, because they were the ones I would meet in the hut every day. I did not meet as many locals as visitors and my material is not as rich when it comes to other groups, that is why I focused on the group of hikers. Almost all the locals I

talked to were men between 50 to 70 years old. They were either working as a guide, as a state official or as a reindeer herder. I also talked to some few locals that use their free time ice-fishing in the area. In the group of hikers, men between 50 and 65 years were the biggest group. Women in the same age group was the next biggest group. In addition, I met younger people as well, of both gender. Most of the skiers were from the South of Finland. Common to almost all my informants was that they return to this place year after year, many of them were experienced wayfarers or had been working in the area for years or decades. The citations from my informants are translated from Finnish to English by me and I have translated them as directly as possible.

### *My methods*

My three main methods for collecting material to my thesis and film were participant observation, interviews and filming. I have also been reading internet forums, internet blogs and official rapports concerning the use of the area. Participant observation and interview were overlapping in my case, since my interviews were of the open and informal kind. I would spend time in the hut talking with people and just listening to conversations. Sometimes I directed the conversations with asking a question every now and then and people would start to talk about the topic together. I also used to go skiing with some of the people. In addition, I participated in ice-fishing with a couple of people. During fieldwork, I wrote a diary and field notes daily. Those have proved themselves to be useful in the process of writing this thesis. I have also used a couple of travel-journals I received from my informants in the analysis and as empirical material in this text. Instead of following certain actors in different social situations and arenas, I have stayed at one place and one arena interacting with different actors and following different activities.

### **The film and the text**

We have talked about positioning in this chapter. I was filming during my whole fieldwork and also the camera was giving me a certain position. Collier and Collier (1986) argue that the camera can give the researcher a good position because it creates interactivity, the researcher is not just a passive observer, but has a visible task of their own. They also say that the camera can work as a ‘can opener’ in the meeting with the informants. For me the camera brought challenges as well, especially since I did not know the people I was filming from before. It was hard to focus on both getting to know the person and the technicalities of filming at the same time.

In our production of knowledge, it is always a question of the relationship between emic and etic. How close to the subject's perception of things are the researcher's terms and analyses? McDougall (1998:156) points out that in film, the emic is easier more present than in a text. The story of the subjects leaks through in the images, we can see a more nuanced image of them including seeing their face expressions and hearing exactly what they are saying. It is hard to say what tells more, a thirty minute film or almost 30 000 words, but it is certain that the film and the text both complement each other. If the ethnographer concentrates merely on the content - what is said – they may miss important information (Davies 2008). This is why film material is of great benefit when analyzing research findings. According to MacDougall (1998:259) text is able to show us “the rules of the social and cultural institutions by which [people] live” in a way that pictures are not. In my case, I think some of the film's contributions in relation to the text is that it shows what the place looks like and it gives an image of the way the different user groups relate to each other. We can see a meeting between local anglers and skiing tourists, we can hear how the snowmobile tourists talk about the skiers and how the reindeer herder reacts to the other users of the place he lives in.

All ethnographic films are representations (Henley 2006). The representation consists of many choices, all from when to bring the camera to a scene, when to press the record button, how to frame the picture and not least the process in the editing room, which is all about choices. The choices I have made are based on the discoveries I made in the field, while the material also allowed me to make more discoveries afterwards.

In the writing process, I have been glad that the readers will have a possibility to get a visual experience of what I am writing about. When I was showing my film in Finland a woman in the audience said that she has always wanted to go to this place, and thanked me for now having taken her there. The discoveries we make continue when the film is shown to the audience (See Arntsen and Holtedahl 2005). I have until now shown my film in two different nature park-centers and the audience has mainly been people that have a relationship to the place. The reception of the film was good and the comments from the audience told me about how important the place is for many. Somebody immediately after seeing the film started to share a story of a dramatic injury and a rescue operation that had happened to him in that place and many others thanked me for making this film.

### 3. Theoretical Approach

#### **Making oneself at home in the world: Dwelling**

Gro B. Ween and Rune Flikke (2009) compare two theoretical approaches in contemporary, anthropological studies of nature. Those are the phenomenological approach and what is called the “performative turn”. The common factor in these perspectives on the studies of nature is the focus on the body and embodying. According to these ways of thinking, nature is produced through interaction between human and non-human agents. Actor-network-theory is a part of the “performative turn”. It has a pliable sight on nature: Practices constitute and define the nature. This means that nature has multiple meanings. Nature should not be taken for granted and seen as limited and homogenous. Central to this theory is that performance is embodied in acts and it is not only humans that are actors, also non-humans perform and have agency. As in the phenomenological approach, the body is the base of our experience.

People’s experience of the world is important in the school of phenomenology. When it comes to place, localities are constructed, maintained and changed by practice. In phenomenological approach to perceiving the environment, the body is a locality that creates the base for our sensory interaction with the world around us. The word interaction is important, because according to this view, the relationships in the environment are mutual. Nature is constructing culture and culture is constructing nature. For instance Tim Ingold is trying to break the dualistic view that opposes nature and culture, subject and object, substance and form, mind and body. Nature is according to him not something external and stable, separated from people. Inspired by Martin Heidegger, Ingold has developed a ‘dwelling’-perspective. This perspective also implies that nature and culture are inseparable. It implies that people make their environment a place of belonging through building and living their lives there.

Ingold (2000) contrasts the dwelling perspective against what he calls the building perspective. The biggest difference between the two is that according to the building perspective - worlds are made before being lived in, whereas Ingold believes that it is through being in the world, through being inhabited, that the world becomes a meaningful environment for people. “Being in the world” instead of “confronting a world out there” (Ingold 2000:173). “In dwelling in the world, we do not act upon it, or do things to it, we move along with it” (Ingold 2000:200). Ingold has studied hunter-gatherer-communities, and says we have something to learn from their view of the world; that is the immersion in the world in where both humans, animals and

spiritual beings are included. A central point in this perspective is the bodily experience of the world, the embodiment of perception, already mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. Merleau-Ponty (1962:82) writes that “The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature to be involved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them”. The body is the source of action and activity, participating in the world. And activity is the precondition to perceiving according to Ingold: To attend is to perceive. Places get meaning through action and practice as we engage in the surroundings. This implies that people perceive the environment differently depending on the activities they are engaged with. Attending to the world with different ways gives different points of views.

Ingold calls the sector of actions in the environment ‘taskscape’. For instance, in the wilderness area, people move around with different means creating the taskscape of the area. In my point of view, one can be as concrete as to say that whether one is skiing or driving a snow mobile affects how one sees the environment around them. I think this quote from Ingold (2000:193) sums up what I am after, very well:

A place owes its character to the experiences it affords to those who spend time there – to the sights, sounds and indeed smells that constitute its specific ambience. And these, in turn, depend on the kinds of activities in which its inhabitants engage. It is from this relational context of people’s engagement with the world, in the business of dwelling, that each place draws its unique significance.

Dwelling-perspective deals with how we engage in the world and with the world, how action is the basis of perception, how people make places their own. Through this all people give meaning to places.

Tim Ingold’s (1992) term ‘affordance’ can also be useful for my analysis. I understand this term as the qualities the landscape has to offer to whoever dwells in it. For us to take a place in use, it has to offer us something. For instance, the hut is this kind of quality and offers, among other things, shelter. Snow to be skied on and open water holes in the ice to get drinking water from are things that make it possible to roam the wilderness. The other side of the coin is how one chooses to use the qualities that the environment has to offer. This Ingold calls effectivity and it depends on the activities the actor is engaged with in its attendance to the surroundings. I will discuss this closer in the next chapter.

## **Senses of place**

Several authors in the last 20 years have been promoting place, as something more than just a physical location for anthropological studies (see Rodman 1992). For instance, Feld and Basso (1996) in their book *Senses of Place* have collected essays that follow this idea of place as a vital aspect of the social life. As Geertz (1996:262) states in the afterword of the book: “No one lives in the world in general”. In the introduction of the book, the authors write:

Senses of place: the terrain covered here includes the relation of sensation to emplacement; the experiential and expressive ways places are known, imagined, yearned for, held, remembered, voiced, lived, contested, and struggled over; and the multiple ways places are metonymically and metaphorically tied to identities. We begin by asking how people are dwelling and how ethnographic accounts of their modes of dwelling might enrich our sense of why places, however vague, are lived out in deeply meaningful ways (Feld and Basso 1996:11).

This quote is inspiring for me and it includes many aspects of what I want to explore in my thesis. Places are important to people. We can feel belonging to a group, to a religion, to an occupation for example. I think one of the most important and strongest ‘belongings’ we have is to places. What is it about the place I am studying that makes it unique and so important to people that go there? What gives them the feeling of belonging? (Maybe that they know other people there, maybe the fact that they know the path, they know how to move in the landscape, the good feeling being there gives, the memories from earlier trips and so on). To repeat what Feld and Basso write: people yearn for, remember, hold, live, voice, struggle over and contest this place. How they express this is what I am going to show.

The next point is also important to my thesis: “the multiple ways places are metonymically and metaphorically tied to identities”. I will show that people negotiate their identities also here and they are concerned with the social relations that take place along these paths. I think this is relevant, because the social life and the ways people experience and express their identity in this wilderness affects how they perceive this environment. Also Casey (1996) writes that when we construct places we also construct identities. Rodman (1992) joins in by saying that place is crucial to identity, and that concentric circles of identity are expressed in place.

Edward S. Casey is also concerned with the phenomenological account of place. I think his thoughts are quite compatible with Ingold’s ideas. He writes: “Places not only are, they happen”. I understand this to refer to the idea, that places are given meaning through activity and attending. Also Casey seems to have a mutual view on the relationship between humans and their environment. He says that “just as there are no places without the bodies that sustain

and vivify them, so there are no lived bodies without the places they inhabit and traverse”. For Casey place is the most fundamental form for embodied experience because people always are in places, and when we talk about places, we constitute meaning to them. I am going to show how people talk about the wilderness area of Käsivarsi as a place and how this place “happens” also through those conversations.

Casey writes about perspectives on place, that claim place to be merely an extension of space, as if there is an empty space prior to place. He is not agreeing with the view that human experience starts from a “mute and blank space” to which meaning is added. He rather believes along with the aboriginal Pintupi and Kaluli that the world comes in its physical traits, in hills and valleys and so on, place comes before space. According to Casey place is not an empty surface to which culture is to be attached to. This should be compatible with Ingold’s dwelling-perspective, which he contrasts to the building perspective and which states that the world is not an external surface we act upon, but rather a whole where we are immersed.

Casey states that places are regional. He explains how place can exist in different regions, physical, psychical, cultural or historical for instance. I think places are regional also in the sense of one place is connected to the bigger picture. Places are part of, products of, and constituters of regions and should be seen in that context. The wilderness area of Käsivarsi for instance is a part of Lapland, both Finnish and Nordic.

### **Landscape and the visual**

The critiques on the western sciences’ weight on the visual and sight as the privileged sense, emphasize that the focus on the visual contributes to objectifying the world around us (Willerslev 2004). This concerns also the view on nature. The critiques say, that when sight is given the dominance, nature becomes an object and gets reduced to an esthetic experience. Franklin (2001) says we should instead of focusing on the visual in nature, look at the diversity of bodily activities that constitute nature. Hirsch (1995) wants to move away from the approach to landscape as something static, absolute and predominantly esthetic and visual and to move towards a more dynamic understanding of landscape as a cultural process.

This is a question of representation in sciences and I agree with the arguments above, but these kind of theories are often distant to people’s realities. From the point of view of my informants, the ‘beautiful view’ was an important part of their relationship to the landscape. The scenery was often on their lips and many said that it was one of the main reasons for coming to the area.

Is my film material objectifying or romanticizing nature because of its many scenery-scenes? An episodic film like mine, with many different characters and stories, needs in my opinion some breathing space and the nature-depictions provide that. However, I think those pictures are also important, because they can give the viewer of the movie a sense of the place. In my film, I do not have a main protagonist, or if I do, it is not a person. It is the landscape and the hut, that are present in the movie all the time, while the people come and go. I wanted to let the mountains, the birds and the winds tell the story of the place in addition to all the different 'faces' we meet in the wilderness. Taylor (1996) writes, that one specialty with ethnographic film in relation to writing, is that in film the natural is as present as the cultural and that should be cherished.

### **Summary of the chapter**

When we now have been talking about the construction of places and environments, I would like to bring us back to thinking about reflexivity. The writers of the book *Å Finne Sted* (Berg, Dale, Førde and Kramvig) point out that our methods also contribute to the constructing of the realities they are set to discover. They say that the knowledge we produce is also contributing to the construction of places, it influences how places are experienced and interpreted. I think this is important to keep in mind.

In my thesis I want to take a view on place and landscape, which sees them as participants in the socio-cultural life and vice versa, the socio-cultural life has an impact on the environment. I think that phenomenological approach to this is suitable, I see the focus on the embodiment and the direct experience with the world as its strengths. Further, I find Tim Ingold's work interesting and useful and I am going to try to adapt the dwelling-perspective into my work. I think the strength in this theory is also, that it does not suppose that environments are merely social constructions. It does not assume that the world is an empty surface on which we impose significance. It is about 'being in the world' and making it our home.

I want to mention, that bureaucracy also produces and constitutes environments (Ween 2009). The wilderness-area is steered and maintained by the finish state, and the bureaucracies are visible in many ways, for instance in the form of the officers, the readymade firewood in the hut-garage, the storm-secured roof of the hut, the signs on the path and the map that lies inside the hut. This kind of governance affects what kind of place this becomes and how people experience it. One can also look into what kind of agency legal documents, brochures and tourist-advertisements have in creating this place (see Ween 2009). This could make a whole

thesis in itself, but there is no room for discussing this point of view more in this one. I have hold myself very much on the micro-level in this study.

The way Ingold handles perception does not have a lot of focus on the social aspect of it. My argument is however, that the social networks are of great significance to the users of this area. That is why, in the empirical section, I will dedicate a chapter to the social aspect of this place to show that perception in addition to being direct, springing from being in touch with the surroundings, also develops from social interaction through a shared experience in the landscape.

#### 4. Use and Perception of the Wilderness Area of Käsivarsi

Saivaara, a mountain that has a special shape serves as a landmark to the valley of Meeko. It is also a common topic of conversation for people that meet in the valley. One day an organized snowmobile tour was having a coffee break by the Meeko hut. The guide was telling about the mountain to his customers, who were all old enough that they can remember having the Soviet Union as a neighbor and how the president of Finland, Urho Kalevi Kekkonen was negotiating with the Soviet-leaders. He was telling that there is a memorial plaque for Kekkonen on the top of Saivaara. In that plaque there is a picture of the skiing president followed by ten assistants. They were said to be carrying all his equipment. It is engraved on the plaque that “Every year since 1968 he has been skiing on these mighty hills”. The guide continued to tell, that from a certain angle the mountain actually looks like the profile of Kekkonen – next to the profile of Leonid Brežnev. The customers on the snowmobile excursion laughed. If the tourist guide had told the same thing to the two children that were playing in front of the hut, they would most likely not have laughed, nor even understood. They had their own perception of the mountain. “Doesn’t that mountain look like slippers?”, the nine-year old girl asked her six-year old sister, who agreed with her. Later when they were skiing with their parents, the parents who had not heard the earlier comments of their children, discussed how the mountain looked different every time. “Somebody said it looks like a boat that is turned upside down”, said the father.

I found these descriptions of the mountain interesting and I have included two of them in the film. They are examples of what I observed in the field of how people made sense of things in the nature referring to things that are familiar to them in the everyday life. They are also examples of how people in the same time and space can perceive differently and see different things, because of the differences of what is familiar to them in the everyday-life. So, when we

talk about perception, we must remember that all the formal experiences and activities shape how we see things in the moment. This is also important when comparing different user groups, because they often come from different backgrounds. The hikers are mostly visitors from other places in Finland, often from the South. The ones driving a snowmobile, except the tourists on excursion, have often a local background. I think it can be difficult to separate what part of the perception is affected by the activities carried in the landscape and what is the result of other processes and systems. Even if background is important for the way a place is experienced, I have not been able to follow my informants in other social arenas of their lives. My main focus is on how the actors and the surroundings interact in a way that results in perception.

One can move on the mountains in different ways, as long as one is moving. Being in this area is about movement. In the wintertime, there are two main means of transportation in the area: skis and snowmobile. I am going to focus on the group of hikers and especially the ones that are skiing. My assumption here is that the activities one engages in are crucial for the way the place is experienced. The kind of activities people do, the way they engage in the landscape, makes people perceive things in different ways. A woman, who was part of the tourist group introduced in the beginning of this chapter and was there just for some hours, travelling in the snowmobile sledge, was astonished by the variety of all the activities she had seen in the wilderness. “It is wonderful how many travelers there are here. Using snow shoes, skis, snowmobiles, and even kick sledges, moving around the mountains”, she said. Two ladies that were in her company discussed the skiers they had observed on their trip.

-I would get lost if I was left here alone, said the first one.

-I agree! But I saw that people are skiing alone, said the other.

-They are brave.

-I guess they have brought maps along so they know where to go.

These ladies were watching the skiers from the outside, with curiosity and astonishment. They were in the same place and time as the skiers and they had travelled the same route that most of them had, but I think their experiences were rather different. In this chapter, we will go into the world of the skiers using the other user-groups as a comparison point.

### **Feet on the ground: Perceiving with skis on**

When I listened to people telling about their experiences from the skiing trips, I was amazed by how detailed their narration was. Even if they talked about something that had happened years

ago, they colored the story with detailed description of the surroundings. They remembered how much snow it had been, what the weather had been like and which route they had picked. I will give an example from a travel journal written by a man that comes to ski there every year, *Tunturineuvos*, whom I mentioned in the introduction. This is his description from his trip during the time I was doing the fieldwork.

I continued my trip and at first I was following the stick-route, at times besides it, where the surface of the snow was smooth and hard. Here I may mention that the snow is hard enough for walking, despite the places where there is brushwood under the snow. I turned off the path and followed the riverside of Vuomakka. There was no turquoise ice to be seen yet, as in the earlier years. It was very wintery. Reindeer tracks were everywhere.

This can be seen as an example of the one side of the ‘double awareness’ which Ingold and Lee (2006) say walking enables one to have. We can read how the skier continuously pays attention to the landscape around him. The pace of walking makes it possible for the walker to get a clear impression of the surroundings and to notice details. When there is no snow, walking is the main activity in this area. However, I am mostly occupied with the winter activities and I think that this idea about double awareness applies also to skiing.

So, when one is skiing in the mountains, one must be aware of the surroundings in a detailed way. This awareness comes both from looking around and through the body. One must steer the skis according to the shapes of the ground and be aware of the textures of the ground, the bumps and lumps and the like. Also the quality of the snow is important for the movement. The skier judges the roughness or softness of the snow covered ground, if it is flat or uneven, sticky or icy and so on with her or his eyes and with the feet that feel out the conditions (Lee 2008). A misjudgment can lead to a fall.

The other side of the double awareness which walking enables is the way in which one can turn inwards to one’s self and the thoughts that are stored in the mind. Legat (2008:47) says it this way: “To walk is to pay close and careful attention to one’s surroundings while thinking with the multitude of stories one has heard”. People’s descriptions about the activity of skiing revealed that the ‘inner’ experience is important to them. They often connected that to silence, peace and the feeling of freedom. One of the first nights of my fieldwork when the nights were still dark North from the arctic circle (towards the summer, the nights get lighter and lighter), three hikers were talking in the hut in candle light; one couple named Jokke and Tytti, who make a trip here every year, and a man named Topi, who we will hear more about later. Jokke said:

Well, it is the silence, the kind of when you ski and do not think about anything. When you spend a week here, you will not whine about everything when you get back. You value the comforts that are there and I appreciate the silence, my brain gets to rest from that information flood which is out there.

Topi continued:

I have not been here for a long time and on the first day when I was skiing, when the sounds of the snowmobiles had past, I thought to myself, how wonderful. I have not heard this kind of silence in 20 years. There is no sound to be heard anywhere. In the South, it is never like that. When I ski here, like now in the blizzard, it feels like I'm on some other planet, I do not feel like I am on The Earth. It is so different, the snow blows on the surface, the wind is howling. It is a very different world. That is the thing, you get to let go, totally.

Let the woman called Tytti conclude. "The phenomenon happens that when the active thinking stops, the deep thinking puts things in the right order", she said.

There was a certain spirituality to be observed in the speech of the people I met. This was visible regardless whether listening to a local reindeer herder or a tourist from the South of Finland. As we have seen in the quotes above, people often emphasized that while skiing, 'unnecessary' thoughts go away. Some people said that this happens because of the physical toughness of skiing. This is what goes inside of the head of *Tunturineuvos*, while he is skiing and looking at the contours of the snow and reindeer tracks:

Often I think about if there will be people I know in the next hut. But, I do not know if I think about anything special. Sometimes I get excited when I see something wonderful or something beautiful, or some rare bird, like yesterday I saw two eagles. I travel alone; I might start to talk to myself when I get excited. I think one can learn the skill here, to talk to oneself.

Topi had had a twenty year break from his trips to this place. Now he was back and in the opening-scene of the film he describes how he felt the need to come after a divorce and losing his father. "I thought I would think about all kinds of things here, but I do not think about anything here! I just ski with an empty head", he said.

When it comes to the feeling of freedom, I will come back to that later, but I will let this woman, named Tarja, introduce it to you. She said: "It is so that when you come down the hill here, you are ageless...I go slowly and I am free".

### **Do not pass by your luck: The senses of belonging**

I was spending the evening with five women in the reservation cabin. One of them was Tarja and she was telling about her old hiking friends, who still meet every year in Kilpisjärvi, but nowadays stay in the village during the holiday. "I will give them a speech, because I feel I am

one of the oldest. I mean, a friend of Lapland must step on the path! There is no way that they should start going with a bus just to watch sceneries. No, that is not necessary. As long as you have healthy heart and feet”. She continued by talking about Hurtigruten, the cruise ship, that goes along the Norwegian coast. Tarja said that she could do that trip when she is a pensioner, but right now, it feels like an impossible thought to do it. “How can people go there to that ship to sit and all the time pass by their luck...It [the ship] should be stopped there and people should put their feet in the landscape. What is that then [sitting in the cruise ship], it is like being in the movies”.

What she was talking about can be seen as the difference between being intimate and having a close-up engagement with the surroundings versus having nature at distance and beholding it as view (Lee 2008:107). Olwig (2008) calls this doing landscape versus performing on the landscape. According to him, a sense of belonging arises from the first type of relating to the environment. The merging of body and senses that occurs in dwelling makes us belong to the land. Olwig suggests that this sense of belonging has its origin in the ancient activity of following herd animals. This is something the Sami reindeer herders continue to do this day in this area. Their attachment to the land was visible in the speech of those of them I encountered.

In addition, I got the image that for many ski tourists, the presence of the reindeer and the reindeer herders strengthened the feeling of being in a wilderness and interacting with the reindeer herders strengthened their feeling of belonging. For example, one of my informants, Leo, told me that knowing that he is in the Sami-land has an importance, a kind of importance as the ptarmigan<sup>3</sup>. He said that the sound of ptarmigan is compelling to him and it gives the feeling of wilderness. He always has to stop to listen to it and try to see where the bird is. It was the same way for him with the presence of the Sami. “When you think about it, you know somehow you are submitted to the nature”, he said. Maybe because the reindeer herders have a strong bond with the land and through them, the visitors can get a piece of that feeling as well. Per-Oula, a reindeer herder of the younger generation described the reindeer herders’ relationship to the landscape in a way that to me tells about a very direct engagement with it.

It is worth respecting those mountains, they are not very small. They determine quite much a human’s life these big mountains. With that we live. And the reindeer determines our life and how this life of ours works. It is so that we respect that greatly. That day it [the mountain] puts the hood over, the fog

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<sup>3</sup> The ptarmigan is a grouse-bird living in tundra and cold areas. It gets white in the winter. It is iconic in the area and its sound is familiar for everyone who has been in the mountains of Kilpisjärvi. We can both see and hear the bird several times in my film.

comes, well then it wants to be left alone. And we let it be. We stay home. There is not that much better response to them [the mountains]. They direct us, not the other way around. That is how the mountains is. That is what directs the pace of our life.

During the night in the reservation cabin with the five women, one of them, who has made countless trips in the area, expressed her wish to belong to the place even after her death. “I have expressed my will to my children, that they do not need to hold a big funeral, but to bring my ashes to the slope of Halti. And if the EU denies it, then they should sin”.

### **Different wishes: Affordance and effectivity**

I met Ant-Oula, one of the elderly reindeer owners, whose pastures are in the wilderness area in his home by the road. He has two homes, one in the village by the road and one in a little Sami village inside the wilderness area, where no roads lead. He was talking to me about the life of a reindeer herder in this area. He explained that the quality of the snow is of great importance to them. This has to do with the reindeer’s ability to find food under the snow. If there is a warm period and the snow gets soft and afterwards a cold period comes and freezes the snow, it becomes extremely hard and that has consequences for the reindeer and their owners. The reindeer is not able to dig through the snow to find food. The reindeer herder must then feed them with forage. This creates extra costs and demands a lot of time from the herder. The spring of 2015, when I did my fieldwork was one of these springs where the snow was hard all the way through because of a cold period following a warm one. “I had to feed my reindeer even though the reindeer should feed me”, said Ant-Oula.

In a travel journal, a hiker describes a meeting in the mountains with a local reindeer herder. He writes that they were laughing about how contrary their wishes were. The hiker hopes for hard snow cover while the reindeer herder wants soft snow. Skiing is much easier when the snow carries the skier. It requires much more power to pull the sledge in a deep snow than on a hard surface. In periods of hard snow, the reindeer travels fast, whereas in soft snow-conditions they stay longer in the same place and are able to find food by themselves.

What the nature has to offer the user is of great importance and affects the relationship to the environment. Ingold (1992) calls this affordance. Again we see how perception is tied to activities. The hiker and the reindeer herder hope for different things from the environment, but they can only hope that the snow stays hard or soft, they cannot affect it themselves. Snow guarantee, a lot of light, not too steep hills, open landscape, open places in the rivers to get water, beautiful scenery - according to the hikers, these were the qualities that offer a good

experience for them and are some of the main reasons for coming to the area. For the fishers, the lakes offer thick enough ice and a rich fish population.

As explained in the theory-chapter, a pair term to affordance is effectivity, which means the ways we choose to make use of the possibilities the surroundings create for us. On a windy day, especially if the wind does not come from the back, a skier would usually not use the wind for anything, but rather seek shelter from it on breaks. However, the snow kiter (one of them whom we meet in the film) would harvest the wind in the kite and let it carry her or him forward. On a windy day, the snow kiter sees possibilities in the environment that the skier does not.

Chains of affordance can be traced as well. The lichen provides food for the reindeer and the reindeer provides livelihood for the reindeer herders. For the dog musher, the existence of reindeer creates challenges, as they need to avoid them as dogs will easily disturb the reindeer. In the same way, the Sami reindeer herders are not very happy about the presence of the sledge-dogs in the pastures. If a dog gets loose, it can even kill a reindeer. As much as the activities we engage in affect the way we see the surroundings, so do they determine what in the nature becomes relevant for us and how we choose to use it. As the movements of the reindeer herder go together with the movements of the reindeer, so are their wishes connected to the welfare of the reindeer. This was evident in the speech of the reindeer herders I met.

The different wishes can sometimes lead and has led to conflicts in the area. I have already mentioned the co-existence of reindeer and sledge-dogs as one example of it. The use of snowmobile in the area has also been a theme for discussions and a source of conflict. The hikers have not always been so positive about the motorized use in the area, but the people I talked to did not have a lot against it, even if they thought the noise was disturbing. They seemed to have a kind of ambivalent relationship to the snowmobile traffic; on one hand it breaks the peace and silence of the nature, but on the other hand the presence of the scooters brings more safety and the tracks they make ease the heaviness of the skiing. What the hikers seemed to be occupied with was the fact that the registration book on the top of Halti is getting filled by people that go there by snowmobile. Writing one's name in the book is an important part of the trip, and many people even remember the registration number, they wrote their name next to. One of my informants told me this:

I heard that there are already 117 000 names there [in the Halti-book] and I think that there should be an own book for those who go with snowmobile. Because more than half of the 100 000 has gone there has gone with a snowmobile. I do not like that at all. I told that once to one group, who went there in the sledge. They waited there for the weather to clear up to get visibility, because the top was in the

clouds. I said to them, that Kaarina Kari would probably turn in her grave if she saw what kind of people here is. Kaarina Kari was the one who at 1930's took the book up there, the first book, that is where this all started from. They just stared at me, they did not understand. I do not think they knew who Kaarina Kari is.

Another man said this:

Sometimes it just feels when it is sunny and you are under Halti and you climb up and you have skied up there and you make a mark in the book and suddenly there comes five snowmobiles and forty people and all of them write their name in the book and Halti is conquered. Then I sometimes feel, that I do not know if that is necessary.

This shows something about the meaning of Halti as a symbol. There is something sacred about it, not only for the Sami, to whom to it has been a sacred place (Paulaharju 1932), but also to others that come there. For the hikers, it is a symbol of an ultimate nature-experience, which involves embodiment. Based on their opinions on the matter, it seems, that for them it means devaluation of the mountain, that anyone can come there with no effort at all. It is interesting that the hikers might accept the snow scooters driving in the area, as long as they do not go all the way to the top of Halti. And if they have to accept motorized visits to Finland's highest mountain, then there should at least be two separate books, they think.

I do not have space to go deeper into the discussions about snowmobile use and other disagreements that exist between the users of the area, but now the reader is aware that those kind of processes exist and how they are part of the environment and contribute to the constituting of the specific experience the traveler has.

### **Dimensions and distances**

Let us get back to the reservation cabin with the group of five women for a moment. The same woman, Tarja - who talked about Hurtigruten and stepping to the path - also told about a woman who owns a guesthouse in Kilpisjärvi, which she visits every year. The lady usually always sits in the guest house. Tarja told us that she goes to talk to this lady every time and always tries to tell her that she should go outside and walk around. "I said to her: You do not need to walk more than 20 minutes up the hill and things start to stand out for you already. It was a gray day. So, when you go up, you see different looking layers in the clouds and you instantly see lights and colors and shades in the clouds, if you just move a little bit", Tarja said.

Tarja seems to be agreeing with Ingold about movement being the essence of perception. By changing one's viewpoint just a little bit, one can see new dimensions and different lights and

colors as this woman is saying. Thus, perspective, distance and dimensions are important factors when it comes to perception of the environment.

Many people talked about the dimensions and how hard they are to grasp because of the wideness and the whiteness of the landscape. Losing the sense of dimensions makes one easily lose touch with the ground, which is important for staying up and going forward. Because there are no trees on the fells, the light is very powerful and that has an impact on moving forward in the landscape. Sometimes the light is flat or everything is white and one is not able to separate the horizon anymore. In these whiteouts, it is hard to hold the balance when skiing, because the dimensions become invisible, judgment of the eye is disabled and the feet go before the information one gets by sight. I remember myself being in this area as a child. I was in the mountains and would do what Tarja suggested; just walk some meters up the hill. A new world opened up before my eyes. I looked down from the hillside and played with the dimensions. The snow had blown off from some parts of the field revealing some bare ground and rocks. I imagined the rocks to be mountains and the moss and other measly plants made up a forest. Alternatively, the rocks formed whole countries and continents and before my eyes lied a map of the world with some rocks together in the shape of Africa and a big one like South America.

In such open, wide and white landscape, it is easy to get confused with the dimensions. Small can look big and big can look small. A group of women who were skiing together discussed this in the hut. “When I ski here, I often think that I see the hut when it actually is a rock”, said one of them. Another one continued: “Like this morning I said: Girls look, a snowmobile, let us go there and see, some person is sitting there. But it was a rock! And I was thinking why that person is sitting there and what is he thinking about”.

The feeling of space was one of the things the skiers mentioned as an important part of the experience. According to them, that is one of the factors, which takes the feeling of hurry away. A pensioner-couple, who has been skiing in the area for decades, making several trips a year had now brought their son and grandchildren with them. The grandmother said this:

- I think the feeling of space is one thing, since I have never liked to hike in the Forest-Lapland very much. Actually I started to like hiking first when I found this place, where there is wideness. Where you can see far and a lot. I guess it is a similar feeling than sailors have, when there is nothing nowhere. That is some kind of a charm.

- And then the smallness of a human becomes visible here, how small you are. It is better not to fight against this nature, because..., said her son.

- ... you come off second best, said the grandfather.

I found out during my fieldwork that the feeling of rush and hurry is something the hikers come to take a break from. According to several of them, the dimensions and distances of the landscape in this place contribute to the feeling of ease. One of my informants, called Leo described it this way:

Indeed, it is the wideness. The distances here are like that, one never comprehends them. Even if you can see something, it is far away. That is one element that takes off the feeling of hurry. You can be calm; there is no pressure or hurry. I just ski and my only goal is to find a place for the night. That is one factor that attracts here. [---]I think the unhurried feeling comes from that you see that there is the mountain and even after an hour, it is still there. The dimensions disappear, the distances are big. The size disappears and it is always a surprise when you come back after a while and you see how big the mountains are.

All these statements tell us how place and our experience of it is constructed also through dimensions and distances and how we comprehend them.

### **Sitting is doing**

If we go back to the reservation cabin again and recall what Tarja has told us, we can sum up by saying that she saw sitting still as a passive act, which would give nothing but a limited perception. The clouds remain gray and one passes by one's luck. But she also understood that sometimes one must stop and pause the movement to get even more involved in the surroundings. According to her, doing that was something she really appreciated on her trips. "It is just wonderful, these different qualities of snow. I go a lot by myself, so I can just stand. And I stand and I examine how the wind has made those snow patterns. They are extraordinary then. They are like solidified waves, or like spoons. [I wonder] how the snow does that. These are the kind of things I wonder about".

We have stated that belonging is doing (Olwig 2008). I will now shortly examine the idea of sitting, connected to perceiving and belonging. I have said that in this area, all the people are in movement. That is true, because they are on a trip, on a journey. However, it happens along the way, that sitting is an important posture. I think also that can be seen as "doing the landscape" instead of "performing on landscape" in a way that creates the feeling of belonging (Olwig 2008). This is especially true in ice fishing. Even if the fisher is sitting still, he is performing a task and he is engaged with the surroundings with the aim of getting a catch. The little fishing pole and the fishing line going from it through the ice and into the world under the ice are an extension of his arm and when the fish bites, it pulls the arm of the angler towards the water for a moment and he can feel the life under the ice in his body. Even if sitting on the ice might seem passive at first, this is in my opinion doing landscape.

I have another example, which is from the valley of Meeko, by the hut. One day one of the timber walls, the one facing South, bathed in sun. The wind was coming from North; the rest of the cabin had offered itself to the wind, so that this sunny wall could remain quiet and warm. The hut was surrounded by white ground and blue sky. Here I met Leo, I found him sitting on a bench leaning to the sunny timber wall. He immediately started to reflect upon his numerous trips to this place. It became clear that it was significant that he was sitting by this cabin wall. It was not a coincidence. He told me, that this exact spot is his favorite place in the whole area. He has to come to sit by this wall every year and according to him that is the first place where the sun warms in the spring. He told that he does not leave the spot before the sun disappears behind the clouds or the horizon. “This wall of Meeko is of that kind, that I always remember it at home and think that I have to get to go sit there in the spring, and here I sit again”, Leo said. The act of sitting by this particular bench is full of meaning for Leo<sup>4</sup>.

As we have seen, according to Olwig, there are two ways of relating to landscape. One can attend to it with all the senses, both eyes open or one can see it in the sense of scenery, from a fixed viewpoint, with a monocular vision. “The first modality engenders a sense of belonging that generates landscape as the place of dwelling and doing in the body politic of a community, whereas the second constructs a feeling of possession and staged performance in a hierarchical social space” (Oliwig 2008: 82). I have showed examples of what I see as the first type of reacting to the surroundings, even if it at first might seem passive. Standing and examining the formations made by nature, sitting on the ice and fishing, sitting by the cabin wall for hours letting the sun tan your face and watching people pass by, talk to some of them. I argue that these are activities, which also along hiking create the feeling of belonging to the land instead of the land belonging to them.

### **On a highway to Halti: Paths and routes**

Inspired by Gibson, Tim Ingold (2000:238) writes that perception of environment does not happen from multiple viewpoints but along a path of observation. This points to a mobile dimension of constituting places. I regard this as an interesting point of view since all of my informants were in movement. According to Ingold, movement is the very essence of perception. When someone skis through valleys and hills, ups and downs, she feels it in the muscles and the topography becomes incorporated in the body. The contours of the land enter

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<sup>4</sup> See figure 2 in appendix for picture.

into our ‘muscular consciousness’ (Ingold 2000:23). Paths for Ingold are “taskscape made visible”. Would we look at this area from high above, so that we could see it all at once, we would see a pattern of tracks, which would reveal where most people have moved. In winter time it is both easier to leave a visible footprint and to lose it. The snow is a surface on which every movement becomes inevitably marked through footprints and tracks. It is however not long-lasting, the next snowfall, wind or heat from the sun can cover it, wipe it away or melt the tracks. Making a visible mark or not, every step is a part of a journey and a route taken.

In their journeys along paths and tracks, however, people also move from place to place. To reach a place, you need cross no boundary, but you must follow some kind of path. Thus there can be no places without paths, along which people arrive and depart; and no paths without places, that constitute their destinations and points of departure (Ingold 2000:204).

To acknowledge the role of paths is important in the case of my study, because paths are indeed very important actors in the constitution of this place. There are of course several paths; those trampled by the reindeer, those that only the local reindeer herder knows, those that somebody just made in the snow to make a shortcut. Then there is the main path, which some want to follow all the time, some with a snowmobile are not allowed to go aside, some want to avoid and some want to cross every now and then. The main track is central for the social life of the place. That is where one meets the most people and especially, it leads to the huts. In fact, there would be no hut without any paths leading there. To be on this track is to be in the safe zone in the wilderness. That is because this is the most trafficked way, both by motorized and non-motorized vehicles. The sticks along the whole track help to know where to go even in a bad weather with no visibility. This is why the track is also called the ‘stick-route’. Along this route, there are five popular huts and it leads to a favored destination by visitors. Follow this track from Kilpisjärvi and you will eventually find yourself on the top of Finland’s highest mountain, Halti.

Leo, who was sitting by the cabin wall poured out more tee from his thermos and said: “Of course those kind of routes with signposts create safety, but when one has been going here for years one dares to move elsewhere as well. If one wants to see people, then one stays on this route, if one does not want to see people, then one goes aside and gets to be in peace”.

I claim, that it gives social status among the hikers to be able to navigate outside the track and to ‘discover’ new places in the area, because it requires more skills and knowledge than following the signs and the sticks along the main track. It seems to me that stepping outside the track and making one’s own routes is considered as more wilderness-like, than staying on the

‘trafficked’ route. I read in a travel journal about a man, who told the writer of the journal, that he knew these fells well and he had not been up to Halti for 15 years, because the ‘stick-route’ leads there. The most experienced hikers liked to stress that they found their own routes while others did not have any problems admitting, that they would not dare to go aside the main route. This is also connected to identity and how the routes one takes affects the self-presentation of a person and how he or she is seen by others. I will come back to that. But first about wayfinding.

### *Wayfinding and routing*

We were sitting by the kitchen table in Ant-Oula’s home. I had been back from the mountains for almost a month, but his storytelling took me back there. He was telling me about how the reindeer herders navigate in the wide landscape. He was living by the Lappish saying “If a Lappish man gets lost, he goes home”.

It is all in the head. Sometimes if I get lost, then I just go home. We have that saying. But nowadays the GPS is in use. But I have said to my sons, that they should not take those things to use. That you must get to know the pastures. If you start to use it, then you cannot do anything without it. Since we were little boys... We have even the rocks, if there is a little bit bigger rock, we recognize from it where we are. Then there are the rivers, we know them. One can say it is our backyard, we know the place. Of course, sometimes you may stray just a little bit, if there is a lot of snow and everything is white. Then you do not have any point of reference. But then you should not move either, if you lost the point of reference. Then wait a little bit and you will be fine.

Ant-Oula and his family’s dwelling in the landscape is central to route-making in a way as Lee and Ingold (2006:78) write: “...immersing in a lifeworld must be a precondition for finding one’s way through it”. Ant-Oula’s memories and previous experiences are his compass. The Sami do not do navigation, but wayfinding. Ingold (2000) makes a distinction between these two. When navigating, with the use of a map or so alike, one can specify one’s current location independently of where one has been, or where one is going. Wayfinding again, requires an experiential knowledge of the region one is situated in. Knowing how to reach a place and go further to other places from there is based on narratives of past movement. Hence there is a difference between a visitor’s journey and a journey made by a local. That “the native inhabitant may be unable to specify his location in space, in terms of any independent system of coordinates, and yet will still insist with good cause that he knows where he is” (Ingold 2000: 217) seems to hold true. Ant-Oulas nephew, Per-Oula, put it this way when I asked how he finds his way in the mountains:

-Well, it depends on the situation how... They [the places] are quite well in the head. But sometimes one needs a map as well. Not that I know how to read a map.

- What do you do then?

- Well, I know where I am, I know that and I know where I have to go. And I have a purpose for where I am going. I have the destination when I start to drive in the morning. I always have a destination and I know that I am at this place and the next place is that, that is how I know it.

Many of the visitors in the other hand navigate using help from maps and other resources. Their navigation is a planned and structured process where one first visualizes the landscape through a map (Lorimer and Lund 2003). Afterwards they continue to use the map, with help from a compass or GPS in the field. Also they make estimations with visual observations all the way. I have observed the detailed planning of a route in the conversations between the skiers and in the blogs and travel-journals I have read. The travel journals consist mainly of detailed descriptions of choices about the route in addition to descriptions of meetings with other people. Planning the route is a big part of the trip and starts already before the trip and continues during it. People who have been here before of course also use the previous routes and experiences as a reference point and discussing and exchanging information with other travelers along a way is a big part of the process. By creating routes, the skiers inscribe their lives into the landscape (Lee and Ingold 2006). Here is an example from *Tunturineuvos*' travel journal:

I skied outside the trail past the police cabin and took a short cut towards 'my own climb'. On the track, I would have had to start the climb much lower down. I chose gradual rises as I went. After the last uphill before *Pihtsus* I went beside the track and when the fall started I moved to the track, which was relatively smooth and easy to ride down.

I want to remind the reader of the assumption, that route-making is tied to identities. This man, who has been skiing in these mountains for years is familiar with the route, I imagine him feeling like meeting an old friend every time he encounters the route and all the different parts of it, like his "own climb".

The routes may change along the way as people take different factors as weather conditions and their current mood into consideration as they go. There is no doubt that how the route turns out affects how one perceives the environment. Different things to see, different points of views, different snow conditions and so on. Maybe somebody will see *Saivaara* as a boat turned upside down, but never see *Kekkonen* watching South and *Brezhnev* looking North, because they choose different ways go around the mountain. As said, perception happens along a path of observation.

*Identity*

“Identity is shared experience of inhabiting particular places and following particular paths in an environment” (Ingold 2000:48). This quote and the following paragraph primes the discussion I am going to provide in chapter five, which focuses more in the symbolic and social dimensions of this place. Ingold uses a hunter-gatherer group named *Pintupi* to show how the network of places, linked by paths is also a network between persons. He says that this understanding of the landscape as a course to be followed is far from the western thought of the natural environment as something to be overcome and encountered. Nevertheless, I think his description of the *Pintupi*, namely how “*who one is*” becomes a kind of record of “*where one has come from and where one has been*” - suits particularly well the situation in the mountains. Especially if one listens to the conversations between people, which regularly start with the question of where one has been and where one is going. “Where are you coming from?” followed by “Where are you going next?” is often the first question after greeting another person on the track or in the hut. Knowing where the other person is coming from can provide the other for tips and information that help planning the coming route. Thus, describing the route one has taken and will take opens up and gives direction for further discussion.

In this place, there is a social obligation to greet everyone one encounters. In this situation it is likely that despite the brief greeting, one has very little information about the people one meets. Here people are stripped for social status symbols that apply in the everyday life (the outdoor clothes and gear do not work as an indicator of social class and rank as such). The questions dealing with ‘whence’ and ‘where to’ help to place the fellow hiker in a system of meanings.

I thus argue that the *Pintupi* way of thinking about a network of places being a network of people (and that those people are characterized by this network of places, connected by paths) also applies in Käsivarsi. Of course, we need to remember that the network of places that becomes important here is the one that is situated in the wilderness-area. It is not one’s life-history of places that is relevant here when making an impression about a person.

### **Summary of the chapter**

In this chapter, I have shown how people can directly relate to nature through dwelling and embodiment. I have talked about how direct engagement with the surroundings results in belonging and how the activities we do affect our perception and hopes about what the environment has to offer. I have mentioned identity as a part of this, connected to routes and paths, but I will show that there is more to it. My argument is that the way we experience a place does not only happen through direct interaction with the environment, it is also partly

socially constructed. In the next chapter we will see in more detail what kind of community there is in the wilderness and how people form common ideas and symbols that contribute to the constitution of the place. I propose that the travelers come to this area for a break from their initial communities, but here they take part in and co-create a new, symbolic community, which is a large part of their experience. Even here one is not free from social codes and norms and people cannot escape the need for self-presentation (See Goffman 1959).

## 5. Together in the Wilderness: The Symbolic Community

One of the skiers I met, an experienced traveler in the area, offered me parts of his travel journals of many years. In the message to me attached to the journals he writes that his experience is that: "...either people of the same character - people that think alike- happen to come to the fells, or the surrounding nature directs people to act in a certain way, so that a person met in the mountains is a friend, your equal wayfarer. [...] The mountain wind has blown people's prejudices away. People relate to each other mainly in a sincere and friendly way".

In this chapter, I am going to argue that there is a community in this wilderness and that inside this community and in the interaction and symbolic exchanges, perception of the place is constructed. Based on the quote above and other observations I have made, which I will present in the following, I assume that this community is based on the idea of sameness and equality (See Lien 2001). I think that the idea of something uniting the people, that they have something essential in common, results in communality. Here the 'something in common' is the being in the same place, the place that is important for its users. This is connected to the nature, as we see in the following quote, where the writer says that the reason for friendship is the mountains, either because they tempt similar people to come or because it 'directs' people to act in similar ways.

Remember the family, who was skiing together with three generations. The night they were in Meeko, the hut was full of people. The grandmother of the family reflected on the social dimension of being in the wilderness in this way:

Here is the peace of the wilderness and that, but also a certain communality, which attracts as well. We are people from three different groups now and everybody fits well here. And it is not really interesting where everybody is from, it does not matter. You just meet people, some you meet only that one time, some several times, but that certain communality is born in this landscape. Between those who are here. That is that one attractive factor as well. Otherwise, if one only wants that nature and peace, then one would just go alone somewhere there, and go a long way round these huts.

As this woman says, some of the people are met only once, some several times, but “a certain communality is born in [the] landscape” regardless of who one meets. In his book “The Symbolic Construction of Community”, Anthony Cohen (1985) deals with community as a symbolically constructed system of norms, values, and moral codes and where its members can get a sense of identity. According to Cohen, a community in its whole has a symbolic dimension. The symbols that create this dimension are mental constructs. They are often ideas rather than being physically or visually formed, and the meanings attached to them vary among the members.

Thus although they recognize important differences among themselves, they also suppose themselves to be more like each other than like the members of other communities. This is precisely because, although the meanings they attach to the symbols may differ, they share the symbols. Indeed, their common ownership of symbols may be so intense that they may be quite unaware or unconcerned that they attach to them meanings which differ from those of their fellows (Cohen 1985:21).

Even if people I met were occupied with the community-aspect of the wilderness-trip, they seemed to still want to keep the trip as their own. Most people were eager to talk to each other in the hut and share experiences. People often emphasized how nice it was to meet new and old friends every year. Topi, who was also travelling by himself, said to me: “Even if you come here alone, you are still not alone”. He meant this in a positive way. Two people might have the exact same route, which resulted in that they ended up at the same hut with each other every night and got to know each other. However, I got a strong impression that people did not ski together. I observed people leaving in turns from the hut in the mornings. While the first ones to leave made themselves ready, the others would still lie in the sleeping bag or drink their morning coffee as they waited for “their turn”. The practical reason for that is that the space in the hut is limited. Still, it seems like people want to travel by themselves, but still be in the community. To have the freedom and to have the communication with others, to have ‘the best of both worlds’. Waiting for one’s turn in the hut is one example of the ‘rules’ that are unspoken, but which the people get socialized into by being in the area.

According to Cohen (1985:21). the symbols are “...ideal media through which people can speak a ‘common’ language, behave in apparently similar ways, participate in the ‘same’ rituals, pray to the ‘same’ gods, wear similar clothes, and so forth, without subordinating themselves to a tyranny of orthodoxy”. Thus, individuality and communality are compatible.

Cohen writes that even if the meanings of the symbols are partly subjective, symbols are there to help people to have something to think with. I can see the relevance of that in this area.

People meet new people every day and the meetings are often rather short. Inside the ‘community’ people change all the time. People do not wear symbols for social status as we know it, and still they must quickly place each other in categories to be able to communicate with each other.

### **“It is not about what you do, but who you are”: The idea of sameness**

I have already mentioned how the people on the mountains consider themselves equal. They have an idea about sameness and they do not talk much about things that consider the life beyond the wilderness, especially work is a topic that people do not discuss. I will be mentioning these things several times further on, so now I want to explain what it is about in more detail. Coming to Käsivarsi is a break with the life as usual for the visitors. This shows also in that when I asked what were the things that they think about while skiing, a common answer was “at least not about work”. Work was also not a topic when people talked to each other. I understood that one’s occupation is not something you ask about. People spent a night in the same little cabin having long talks, still not knowing what the other one was doing for living, or maybe even not knowing their name. One hiker said to me “In the hut you don’t talk about work, you talk about Lapland”.

My informant Leo, connected being a nice person in the context of the mountain trip with not asking about occupation. He also says that here every one is equal, no matter their background:

You meet really nice people here, I mean the world is full of nice people, but here everyone you meet is so congenial. Only once have I had to explain to someone what I do or what I am in civilian life. Everyone here is equal, regardless of education or occupation. All are skiers, all are hikers and everyone can learn something from each other. In that way, this is a great culture.

In our society, when we meet a new person, it is very common to open up the conversation with the question “What do you do?” We are almost dependent on getting an answer to this question to be able to place the person into our categories and get some idea about the kind of person we are talking to. I assume this is the kind of society skiers want to take a break from, when they leave for their trips. The locals are the exception, since they often are *at work*, when they are in the mountains. The reindeer herder is known as a reindeer herder and the tourist guide is known as a tourist guide. Otherwise talking about work can be seen as a polluting element, a threat to the fresh, clean air that all of the people want to breathe. Not asking each other what people work with is a way to respect their private life. What I find interesting here, is that usually “private life” is the one outside of work. Work tends to belong to the public sphere in our lives,

whilst what people do in their free time, is concerned as a more private matter. It seems like here most of the things that do not concern Lapland are considered private.

Even if there are differences in outdoor gear and clothes, social class is not quite visible in the appearance of people. It really seemed like that did not matter - people treated each other as equals and they also emphasized this themselves and this idea seemed to be important for them. One man, Juha, who has spent time in the area every spring for 44 years, said passionately to the people he was talking to that “Here everyone is equal. Here no one is a lord or a fool. No one”. One day the border guard had with him a supreme commander on duty. After he had introduced him to me I was embarrassed because I did not know how to behave in the presence of a commander from the army. For my relief, almost like he heard my thoughts, the border guard said that when they come to the road again, the commander is a big man, but here he is just like everybody else. The commander expressed his agreement to this, saying that he had to get his drinking water with a bucket and slosh in the deep snow as everybody else.

Some people connected the idea of sameness to the character of Lapland, the fells and nature in general. This is how Raiski, one of the five women in the reservation hut described it.

Usually when people come to the nature, they take it easier. They do not stress a lot. That is the hiking culture. People greet and talk to each other. Usually it is asking how you are, where have you been, where are you going and do you know the weather forecast. Usually the topic of discussion has to do with the nature. People are not interested even in what you do for work, but they are interested in *who you are*. The most important things are if you have slept, if you have an appetite and is your stomach working. That is what you ask people about. Those basic things about life are the ones that matter. All else is irrelevant.

Other rules apply to the wilderness than in the city. For instance, one is socially obligated to greet everybody one meets in the fells. As we have seen, also in the quote above, people usually ask each other about their comings and goings. But as one man said, when we were talking about how strangers are friendly with each other in this place: “Try to go to a stranger in the streets of Helsinki and ask where they are going and you will get punched in the face”. Topi, who had come from the South of Finland for his trip, reflected on the same topic. For him people are the same here, because they readjust their behavior to one that suits the place.

Even the people are so different here. I feel that when they come to Lapland, they take on a Lapland attitude. They are not so strict. That unites the people and they do not complain about things. I feel like when they go to the South they take another kind of Southern attitude. It is the same thing wherever you go. At home you are a home-person, at work you are a work-person and I guess in Lapland you are a Lapland-person.

Cohen (1985) says that even though a community might seem equalitarian to the researcher, there is always a differentiation that lies under the surface. That is true in this place as well. Gear is compared, the amount of experience is talked about and communicated in different ways and one must know how to behave, otherwise one gets social sanctions. However, what is interesting here is how the members of this community hold in their minds a mental image of their affinity and how the idea of sameness might strengthen the feeling of fellowship (Cohen 1985:36). Even though the idea has different meanings to different members, it holds this community together.

### **The hut: A safe and social haven**

The huts and cabins of this area are the part of the environment, which is usually described as 'built'. Buildings "are never complete, but continually under construction, and have life-histories of involvement with both their human and non-human inhabitants" (Ingold 2000:154). The life history of the hut in the Meeko valley as a building started in 1963 when it was built (even though the materials which it was built from pre-date this by quite a lot). Since then many winds have hit it, it has been repaired and upgraded, thousands of feet have worn the floor, countless mice have found crumbs to eat inside it and many people have laid their heads down to sleep there. Half of the year, when the sun, the snow or the beautiful fall colors invite people to the paths which lead to the hut, it becomes the house of many people. In the deep winter, snow, wind and darkness are its main company as not so many people seek to the wilderness at that time of the year. The dwelling perspective holds the idea that "the forms people build, whether in the imagination or on the ground, only arise within the current of their life activities" (Ingold 2000:185). The hut is built on the ground and is a *container* of the life activities that constitute it. This idea comes from Ingold, who also notes that strictly the building contains just certain life activities, because 'there are other kinds of activities that go on outside the house or in the open air'. Let us look upon some of the life activities in the hut, in what I consider to be its two main functions. Firstly, it is an important meeting place and secondly, it is a shelter. Let us start by describing the wilderness hut as a meeting place.

#### *Meeting place*

The true story of Christopher MacCandless has been told in a book (Krauker 1996) and a feature film<sup>5</sup>. He had left the society behind him and left to the Alaskan wilderness, to seek the ultimate

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<sup>5</sup> *Into The Wild*. Directed by Sean Penn, 2007

adventure and freedom. He was however not able to survive in the wilderness and at some point before his death he doodled the words “Happiness is only real when shared” in a book. In the hut, the travelers get the chance to ‘share their happiness’. This becomes especially important, because of the thought that people here are alike and they all share the appreciation for the nature and the place. It is important to exchange experiences there and then, because once one is back in Helsinki, no one will think he or she looks cool with a “match tan” (imagine a match, white stick, brown tip). In the mountains however, I claim that that kind of tan is one of the important indicators on how much you have been on the mountains and with that comes prestige. People commented each other’s tans frequently. An illustration of how the color of the face gives status is found in a travel journal written by a pensioner man.

Two border guards arrived to the spot, a captain and an older border guard. We talked for a long time. We came to talk about rescue operations of people that had gotten lost and I said that I hope they would not ever have to go search for me. They answered that based on the color of my face they will not need to go look for me. They said that I am an experienced wayfarer here.

It is there and then that these things matter the most and the hut is the arena that provides an arena for communicating these things. I suggest that the huts are the most important arena where the symbolic community described above is created and where it gets its form. As said, not everything one experiences in the wilderness is important in other contexts. A person that has been visiting the area for 30 years has knowledge and status, which is not convertible to the streets of Helsinki. I know this, because several of my informants said that they do not really bother telling about their trips to people at home, because they would not understand anyway. For example, Tarja said this: “If you come from here and go to the city, you cannot always say where you have been. Either the others will get jealous because they would like to go themselves or they think you are too weird. [...] The others do not necessarily understand”. Leo, the man sitting in the sun by the cabin wall put it this way:

Now as well, when I am skiing around, I cannot just pass a hut if I see people there. It is nice to go inside, exchange a couple of words and listen to where they are coming from, where they are going, what kind of experiences they have had. Every time you learn something new and can yourself give some tips. And well, it is an experience to lie on the benches with strangers and chatter and it is not weird at all. I do not know where else you can look at a stranger’s face from ten centimeters without it being awkward.

When Leo says that it is just normal to be side by side with a stranger in the hut it gets me thinking about intimacy. I see the hut indeed as a *container* of activities (Ingold 2000). While the outdoor activities are spread all over the mountains and there is more than enough space, in the hut the task scape is canned inside the four walls and the space is limited to just the few

square meters there are inside. If we think this way, we can suggest that the wilderness hut creates a place of intimacy. Nordic people are known for their need for maintaining their ‘personal space’ or not crossing the ‘intimate zone’. But after a whole day of skiing in the wide, bright, white, probably cold and windy mountains - coming into a small, warm cabin with comfortable lighting (just the light from two small windows or a candle light) one might not be that occupied with their personal space anymore. Here it is worth noting that the hut is made for six persons, so it is rather small. The ‘bed’ is just one big bench, which is also in the daytime used for other purposes than sleeping. The reader can understand what I mean with intimacy, when I tell that once I went inside the hut, there was 14 people relaxing after a day of skiing. Some were lying on the bench taking a nap, some were sitting around the table and others were sitting on the bench. The people were from four separate groups, but the atmosphere was very relaxed and the room was filled with laughter and chattering.

### *Shelter*

I already touched upon the idea of the hut as a shelter when I described the going from the outside to inside. If we compare the mountains with the sea (actually I heard several people doing this, they said things like, ‘I think this must be how the sailors feel’ and ‘being on the mountains is like being out on the sea’) then the hut is the harbor. I suggest that people love the idea of wilderness, but they also want something to protect them from the dangers of it. The huts become these protecting places.

After what people told me, it seems to me that they want to keep the huts as simple as possible so that what they offer is really just a shelter (and in my opinion, an important social arena). I will give an example from an internet forum where the topic is hiking in Lapland and where people discussed the wilderness huts.<sup>6</sup> In the conversation under the topic “Wilderness huts” ‘Savolainen’ opens the discussion by citing to a comment in a newspaper, which calls for modernization and raising of quality of the wilderness huts. By that the writer of the newspaper comment refers to the “mountain hotels” that are in Sweden and Norway, which offer more comfort and service than the simple wilderness huts of Finnish Lapland. People on the forum reacted strongly and emotionally to this and most of them were against the idea. ‘Ikis’ writes: “The supplies of the hut are enough. There is no reason to imitate Sweden and Norway. Normal

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.vaellusnet.com/discus/messages/18/2966.html?1138009648> This is ten years old, but I have observed same kind of discussions during my fieldwork and the standard of the huts has not changed drastically in 10 years. I have translated the citations from Finnish to English.

maintenance is enough. We have our own kind of hut-culture to preserve”. ‘Sokosti writes: “I do not understand the logic: What wilderness-like is there to a place where there is a hotel? Nothing.” Another one agrees: “That bothers me, that don’t they understand, when they require those kind of things, that at the same time the whole identity of the wilderness is taken away”. The same writer concludes: “The huts offer everything a human needs to live: warmth, food (that which you bring with you) and rest”.

I think this shows how the hut affects and relieves how the travelers see the place. It is a *wilderness hut*; a cabin with more facilities would be too much for many. They feel that the whole ‘wilderness-character’ of the area is threatened, if the huts are transformed into bigger cabins or inns with facilities. The simple character of the hut symbolizes the wilderness, where one must survive without special comforts.

### *Social organization*

The huts are also a place where the social organization of this symbolic community is the most visible. It can be observed even visually. There are only a few items in the hut: a water bucket, a bucket for dirty water, a kettle and a pan, a guest book and a few more necessary items. There is only one place for each of the items and one must know where to put them. One must also know that one must get water and bring in firewood and one must know how to behave. The most important thing is to respect all the other people in the hut, both those that are with you and those that will come after you. One does this by not occupying the whole place, keeping the place tidy, keeping a quiet voice, bringing in firewood and so on. I know this because the persons who did not know the rules or just ignored them were socially sanctioned. This happened by other people complaining about them more than to them. The skiers used a word “hut-culture” when they talked about the life in the huts and in every culture, there is social rules and norms. Let me illustrate with a quote from a travel journal. The author describes a meeting between him and two other men, who shared the hut with him.

The other man came as well, made coffee. They were going to use water they had brought with them, but I said that the water in the house is enough for them as well. When he rinsed coffee grounds from his cup, he was going to the door with the intention of throwing the water outside. I taught him a little bit of hut-habits and pointed at the bucket for dirty water. “Can I use that?” he asked. “That is why it is there”, I answered.

I think the huts are central regarding to the symbolic community, because they are the place where most of the relationships are tied and as said, that is where the social organization

becomes visible. The hut is an important part of constructing the place and people's experience of it.

### **Wilderness-identities**

I will now give some examples of how people negotiate their identities and roles in this place. I think that this is closely related to what they think about the place, because it directs what they think as relevant ways to present themselves. Feld and Basso (1996) write that places are in multiple ways metonymically and metaphorically tied to identities. Impression management is the strategies individuals use to appear as they wish to appear to other people. Depending on which definition the actors give to the situation they are in, they make different parts of their status repertoire relevant in the interaction (Goffman 1959). I think Topi has understood this, let me repeat what he said: "At home you are a home-person, at work you are a work-person and I guess in Lapland you are a Lapland-person". So let us see with some examples how people present themselves as "Lapland-persons".

#### *Get recognized*

In the wilderness there is a lot of people coming and going and one meets many different persons. Since many people consider the people roaming the fells, themselves included, as a part of a community, they are willing to get to know other people. But since one talks to tens of different people during one trip, it can be hard to remember everybody and it can be hard to recognize them when you meet them again the next year or after several years. It is really coincidence that direct who meets whom. Unless they have become very good friends, people do not seem to plan the meetings. They just happen and in over a 2000 square kilometers area and a two to three-month period of time, there is plenty of room for some coincidences. With this I am leading to the point that people that feel a special bond to the place, seem to want to express themselves and make themselves visible in the 'crowd' in creative ways. These are markers on their 'mountain-identity' and these symbolic details make these people recognizable in the wilderness. For example, Leo had a thermometer attached to his sledge (figure 3). He did not even know if it works anymore, but it is not there because he would like to know the temperature at all times.

See, somehow every person must distinguish from the others. Like, it is that man who has the thermometer standing up on his sledge. That is why it is there. Look, my brother has a big German Shepherd, that is what people know him of, that he has a big German Shepherd. I do not have a German Shepherd, so I have that thermometer...Many times when you meet a person or talk in the internet, you

have met before but you do not have any idea who it is, then you can say that I am the one that had that thermometer.

The grandmother and grandfather of the family we have met earlier in the text, have been skiing in the area for decades. They are known for wearing a hat when they are hiking, a magenta hat with a flower on the side for the lady and a brown hat for the gentleman. A group of men travelling by kick sledges is self-claimed famous in the area because they are the first ones that made a trip with kick sledges to Halti and have been coming every year for 20 years. They call themselves “The kick-sledge-lads”. Another example is Kristian, *Tunturineuvos* (The Fell Councilor) A man who knows the people on the fells and whom the people know well. He wears an orange anorak with a white fur and different badges that he has sewn on the arms. The film has a scene where he tells about the anorak.

The story of this anorak started somewhere in the turn of 80s to 90s. Then I was going cross-country skiing with my future wife and since then it has been in use here. It has been my trekking-jacket for years and I have been sewing these badges on it every now and then. I have heard it is something people recognize here. From far they can tell that *Tunturineuvos* is coming.

When Kristian comes to Kilpisjärvi, he can put on his fell-identity. He puts on the famous anorak and like many other experienced hikers in the area, he has a nickname. Kristian told me he thinks a lot of people do not know his real name, they just know who *Tunturineuvos* is.

I remember one case, when I was in Kuonjar<sup>7</sup> and there were two men from Metsähallitus, they were doing some maintenance stuff, one older and one young one. The young one came to the table and took the hut’s guest book and started to read it. Then he found some part and said that well now, *Tunturineuvos* has written something again, he thinks his writings are so amusing and he always reads them if he sees them. I said that, oh how nice, now you can see *Tunturineuvos* alive.

He also told another story from some years ago when his ‘mountain-identity’ had to go through a test. His sledge had broken on the way and he eventually had to get picked up by a snowmobile. “Fortunately I had that spacesuit<sup>8</sup> on when I was sitting in the sledge so nobody could recognize me. Because we drove past many people that I had met on the trip. There I was, *Tunturineuvos*, in a humiliating ride to the road”, he said.

### *Be who you want to be*

In this place, people seem to be free of prejudices concerning occupation and other personal things. People said repeatedly that those things do not matter in the nature. That is why I would

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<sup>7</sup> Another hut 10 kilometers from Meeko.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Spacesuite’ is a silver-colored snowmobile overall.

say people have a freedom of constructing the kind of image they want to present to other people, because they do not have to include the realities of their daily lives in the picture if they do not want to. The image one builds in the wilderness applies only there, among this community. However, it is possible to have that identity also in the internet. There are several blogs and forums where people exchange opinions, advices and experiences from the area. There you can still appear with your nickname and be invisible, even once one is back in the daily life, one does not have to share the realities of it with the hiker-community. However, how ever equalitarian a society might appear, there are always systems of ranking and differentiation (Cohen 1985). In this area it was not visible in the way that people got different kind of treatment depending on their status. It was more of a symbolic kind and connected to skills and experience in the area. Gear was one topic of discussion where people had opinions and my assumption is that they set people in different categories based on their gear and clothes. Those who are for 'old school' would defend cotton instead of gore tex. In the downhill skiing environment, the newer, the more expensive and the more colorful one's equipment is, the 'cooler' and more skillful one appears to be. It seems to be the opposite in this wilderness place, where brand new equipment indicates inexperience rather than experience. Remember *Tunturineuvos* and his 20 years old anorak.

Another measurement of prestige and expertise is how many times one has been to this place. Most of the people seemed to remember exactly how many times they had been there and how long they had stayed, what was the first year they came and so on. This was a normal topic of discussion and "Have you gone here a lot" was a regular question to a new acquaintance. There is a scene in the film where two men arrive in a storm. They go inside the hut and meet Seppo. Seppo starts to tell them how much he has spent time in the area, in fact he has counted that he has spent one year of his life in the wilderness of Käsivarsi.

While the visitors are counting days and sometimes even kilometers, the locals do not do that. I asked a reindeer herder, Per Oula, how much time he spends in the wilderness area and after his answer I felt like it was a dumb question to ask. "What a question, how should I answer to that. You are here for a month, right? Well, that is quite little, I mean I live here. That is hard to answer, but let us say I live here. Let him count who wants to count. It is not in days or hours it just is. That is the rhythm of our life".

*Get crazy*

Many people expressed their attachment to the place by calling it a madness or an illness. When I asked people why they come to this place I got answers like the opening line of my film, coming from the mouth of Topi: «I must be mad». That was also Seppo's first reaction to why he returns year after year. "Madness. This does not make any sense", he said. Others would tell they always wonder why they voluntarily get themselves in a trouble like this, being in the wilderness, referring to the hard work that it is to ski for days and to be without comforts of the daily life. Some of the snow scooter tourists as well were saying how they did not understand why they would want to come to the cold mountains when they could be inside in the warmth, even if they were just on a day-trip. There is actually a word referring to people from the South who love Lapland called "Lapland-madness". "Lapland-mad" is a common identity tied to the being in the area for the visitors. I think that might be one reason for people being so interested in each other. Maybe they think, that if somebody is as 'mad' as them to come there, they must be worth talking to. Here is how Leo described his hobby as an illness.

I have told to many people that no one should come here, it is the biggest mistake one can do in life, to come skiing here for the first time. The magnet that draws here is so powerful, that one must always come back. It has never become totally clear what it is why one must come here, but something attracts, so that if one wants to cope with the disease, one should not do the first trip. Really, when the spring comes and the sun starts to shine, it is hard to stay away, the mind returns here.

The grandmother of the big family on a trip said this: "Every time I come here and start the trip, I say to myself: dear human, what is wrong with you, you should get some treatment! But when I get back to the road and to the car I am already thinking how great it was and that I must get back next year".

The words these people use have a negative denotation, but in this context words like crazy, mad and ill have positive connotations. I think when people use these words they communicate something very positive about the place. Even if they do not find a logical reasoning for always coming back, the nature and the atmosphere is so appealing to them, that they just *have* to. At the same time, they communicate something about their identity, which is also positive. With that they say, that they are capable of managing in the challenging conditions of the wilderness, they have endurance, they have what it takes.

This can also be an example of the subtle way most of the people present themselves. They will tell each other how much they have skied, how many times they have been there, a heroic story or other things that indicate their experience, but this is still done in a humble tone. People that

do not act this way, people that maybe say the same things, but in a bragging way break this norm.

### **Have you heard? The news agency of the fells**

One interesting aspect of this community is the way information travels in the wilderness without help from any satellites. Without detours via space, the information travels on the ground from man to man, and this happens fast. That the word got around fast and effectively was a known fact among the skiers and I learned this both by them pointing to it during interviews and by experiencing it myself. One can learn something about the community by looking upon what kind of things were considered worth spreading. Not the news from the ‘outside world’, but rather intern news were spread along the paths. The biggest topic of the ‘news agency of the fells’ (as some hikers call it) seems to be the movements of people, as who is coming and going where and when. I will illustrate this with empirical examples and interviews of how people were keeping track of the happenings of the mountains.

As said, the kind of news one hears in the wilderness are not the kind of news that one hears from the national broadcaster. This can confirm the thought that the skiers are purposely withdrawing from the society when they go on their skiing trip. However, the character of the information that actually is exchanged reveals that they replace the ‘society’ with a new kind, their own society with its own rules. This is similar for not talking about work. I suppose that is because both work and news are a part of the world they want to take a break from. The night I was with the five ladies in the reservation cabin, one of them, Raiski, was telling how good the life in the fells is and that led her to reflect upon the topic about information.

But can there be any healthier way of life than the one here. There is no stress pressing. The amount of information, the flood of knowledge these days coming over us is insane and burdens the mind. IS and earthquakes and everything. Here it was not even known that Kärpät won Tappara<sup>9</sup>, even if that is big news. [...] With the election, it took three days, only on Tuesday<sup>10</sup> it was asked here, I asked how it went with the election results, who got through from Lapland, that is to say, did my representative get through. So that is how it is, there is no information flood here.

Here, she tells about the relief she feels of the burden that the information we receive daily gives. However, she also recognizes another kind of information network, that replaces the ‘normal’ one. “And in the other hand, think about how well information passes here in the fells. If that someone leaves from the road and there is someone known, so the word is quickly at the

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<sup>9</sup> Two Finnish ice-hockey teams in the Finish ice-hockey league.

<sup>10</sup> A new parliament in Finland was elected on a Sunday.

Halti-hut. So, I feel that here the information travels tens of kilometers better than in many offices through the wall”.

The fact that people are so engaged with what is going on in the area with other people supports the argument that the social aspect is important for the people and a big part of the experience. People are not merely occupied with nature. Raiski compares the fells with an office, where the ties are closer between people that are spread over hundreds of square kilometers than people where only a wall separates them. This can be similar with the phenomena that in many apartment houses people do not know their neighbors, when in a rural village everybody knows everybody.

I suggest that the circulation of information in this area is both driven by practical and safety-reasons, but it is also an important aspect of the social community. It offers things to talk about, things that are inside the norms, because it is not so popular to talk about things that concern the ‘outside world’. People are simply interested in what goes on in the area. My assumption is that talking about things happening inside this arena, strengthens the feeling of belonging to the place and the group of people that dwell in it. It strengthens the feeling of being in ‘its own world’, as many people described the place (I will illustrate this later). I observed during my fieldwork that people had good knowledge on the movements of the other people. I will now give some examples of this social aspect of the information circulation.

It was a sunny afternoon. I had just met a family of four where the children were 6 and 8 years old. These were the first children I saw on skis here. I had expected to meet small children, because the word about this family had travelled much faster than the family itself. This family appears also in the film. The day I met them, they had skied all the way from Halti and were still going to continue to Kuonjar, that makes about 35 kilometers. The father of the family was sitting by the cabin wall with a couple which had been skiing same routes than them. The father told to the couple: “Surely the story flies fast here! We had just come down from Halti to the hut [next to Halti] when two men approached us. They said that well, so you got to the top. I said, yes, we just came back, how did you know that? Everybody knows that, they answered”. They were laughing; the word of this family making it to the top of Halti had reached ‘everybody’ before they even got down from the mountain.

One of the news items that was wandering on the fells was about the young woman from university of Tromsø making some kind of research. This resulted in the fact that several people knew who I was before I met them. I also often had heard in advance about the people I met

through other people, and could expect certain persons and groups of people to come to the hut. In the film there is a scene where I realize that Seppo is ‘that Seppo’ I had heard so much about. One night after I had been on an ice-fishing trip, I went into the hut. When I opened the door, I heard a big laugh and saw four ladies and one man laughing. I had met the man and his wife a couple of days before very shortly, but the other women were new faces for me. I asked why they were laughing so much, and they explained how they had seen me from the window and said that “now she will come and interview us” and all the ladies had started to fix their hair. I said I had not come to interview them, but to ask if somebody wanted some fish. I ended up interviewing them the next night anyway, just with a voice recorder, so the women did not have to fix their hair. That night there was a married, pensioner couple and the four women that were friends in the hut, they were discussing different issues. One of the ladies said:

Oh, how the story flies here in the fells, from hut to hut I tell you! [...] If you come with a snowmobile to a hut, soon everybody knows that. Then they say, that we’ve been waiting for you, you’re the one’s that brought their stuff with the snow scooter. Like that one year we went to Halti with the snow scooter and skied back. The story went and we met it after a couple of days in Saarijärvi<sup>11</sup>, everybody knew that our stuff had been transported with the snow scooter.

As mentioned, information goes from a traveler to another also because of practical reasons and safety reasons. In this way people can get advice of places where one should go or avoid going. Here are some examples from one of the travel journals I received: “We were going through the route plans together. One of them warned that if one follows the riverbed coming down from the mountain too long, one easily is lead too far from the hut of Kaskasjoki”.

Here I met the first people for today. The same men who left a little bit before me from Kilpisjärvi were in the hut. A couple arrived to the hut as well and it seemed like the hut was starting to get full. I kept a lunch break and since the day was young and I heard there was a lot of place in the Halti hut, I continued forward.

In these quotes we can see how the meaning of paths, we have looked upon earlier, becomes significant in this context as well. The route connects places to each other creating a network. The network of places is the network of people and the network of people is the network of information. A person gathers important information from other people to plan their route. The circle closes; network of information becomes the route, the network of places.

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<sup>11</sup> The last hut on the way back to Kilpisjärvi.

As mentioned above, safety is a driving force behind the information network. I imagine this to be because people care about each other, they care about each member of the symbolic community, even if they do not know them. I suppose they think this way also, because some day it could be them that is in need of help. When it comes to helping each other, giving out supplies for instance, people marked that they do these things without expecting getting something in return, but keeping in mind that someday they may be the one that needs help. “A person that is in need of help gets it without expectation of getting a service in return. Reason enough is that, one hopes to get help themselves, if one is in the need of it sometime”. This is written in one of the travel journals. (It would be interesting to discuss the reciprocity that is in the wilderness, but that must be left for another occasion). This following conversation took place in the hut one night between the four women and a couple who appeared earlier in this chapter. It shows how knowing about other people’s movements can lead to better safety.

- We care for each other, for example we might say ‘where is he, he was supposed to come to this cabin’.

- Yes, we think like ‘he left from there, where might he be now. What if he got lost’?

- Like that one year when we left from the hut and all the others left as well, but those boys had decided to go to the reindeer herders’ hut. They were waiting for us there and we were wondering why they were waiting for us. They said that if someone asks; tell them that we went to the other cabin. And so, later someone asked if we had seen the boys and we could tell that they went to the other cabin. And they had been worried where the boys might have disappeared to, since they had promised to come there. Not all people understand how it is here. But those who come here a lot do.

I will end the description of the news agency of the fells with a quote from a travel journey.

“So that is how the information travels in the fells, sometimes you just have to wonder the speed of it. The effectivity of the news agency of the fells is worth keeping in mind, when you move on the fells. One’s own doings and failures stay in the fells wandering and telling its own story”.

### **The spring-skiing-trip as a ritual**

Can we look at the annual skiing trip to these fells as a ritual? For several hikers, it started with a first ‘unsuspecting’ trip to Lapland since when they ‘must come back whenever possible’. After their own words, they got hooked. The planning of the next trip starts when the present trip comes to an end. Also, the trip itself includes small traditions or rituals for many and often takes the same route every time. In one internet-blog<sup>12</sup>, the author posts several times about his

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<sup>12</sup> <http://timokokairankiertaja.blogspot.no/>

plans for the upcoming trip and how he cannot wait for the trip. In these posts, several weeks before the trip he mentions for instance at which cabin he will hold the “traditional pancake-day”. Another example of a tradition or ritual concerning these trips is from Leo, the man who told that every year he comes to Meeko and sits by the hut’s wall in the sun as long as the sun warms.

In classic anthropology, Van Gennep’s (1960) concept *rites des passage* is a central term. Even if it is supposed to explain the process where a person moves from a social position to another, and it is not sure we can look at this particular case of skiing trip as a transition in the sense of institutionalized, symbolic markings of changes in social position, it might be fruitful for my analysis. Let us look upon how we can apply Victor Turner’s (2010) contribution to the concept of *rites des passage* and see if it can help us say something about the community we find in these mountains. The rite of passage is divided in three parts, which constitute the process of transition. These are separation, liminality and incorporation. The concept of liminality can enlighten things concerning my descriptions about the community the skiers create among themselves. However, before the liminal phase the separation must happen. This means separation from the society, from the structure. This is true in the case of the tourists as they come here to unplug and leave the everyday life behind for a while. If we are to avoid the dualism that makes a distinction between nature and culture, this claim about separation from the society might however be disturbing. I want to make clear that I do not think that the wilderness area is not part of the society or that the nature there is untouched by culture. I do not think that this place is a limited, static area. However, I do argue that the people, especially the visitors from other parts of Finland that come here, experience a kind of freedom from the pressures and norms of the society, at least that is what they seek on their trips.

The wayfarers break with their initial societies when they set their foot on the skiing track. With them, they have only the things they need for this trip, everything else they leave behind. The needs of people depend on the context and the situation people find themselves in, because many of the ‘needs’ we have are socially and culturally created. People told me that being in the fells differs from the ‘normal life’, because here one is satisfied with little, the only things one needs are the real needs of a human being —water, food, clothes and shelter — and one starts to appreciate those things much more. Many people told that when they come back from the trip, they value every day luxuries in a new way. They told how they appreciate running water, a toilet seat and a soft bed much more after a week or two in the wilderness. They said

that it is a good thing to be able to appreciate and be grateful for these things, but that after just a day or two everything is “back to normal” and they start to take things for granted again. People entering this wilderness area mark this transition from everyday life to the mountain life by changing their clothing. Off they go to the wilderness with the sporty outdoor clothes on, with skis and sticks as an extension of their bodies and everything they need in a backpack or a sledge.

At the time I was doing my fieldwork, a new parliament was elected in Finland. Who had won the election was not a topic of discussion as far as what reached my ears, before I brought it up out of curiosity to know who was in the lead of the country then. Most of the people were also dependent on people that had been in the village while the election was held, to get the information. Before the election, somebody brought a big election sign, which was promoting one of the candidates, along the track (figure 4). Based on people’s reactions, I think that this became a “matter out of place”. If we see the trip to the wilderness area of Käsivarsi as a kind of ritual, we can also look at what Mary Douglas (1997) writes about ritual polluting. In the context of the “society”, an election sign is the most ordinary thing. However, here on the white fells, it becomes extremely visible and stands out as something that does not belong there, a polluting element to the purity of the nature. When I first saw the sign I was skiing with two foreign girls, who were on their first trip and did not have a close relationship to the place. The girls started to laugh and take pictures of the sign. Later on the same day somebody I know arrived and I could hear from afar how he was yelling when he saw the sign. He agreed with another man I asked about the sign, who said, that “It does not belong here”. I understand this as it was not just the physical appearance of a billboard that made it seem inappropriate, but also the symbolic value of the sign. It can be seen as representing politics, disagreements and social differences for instance. The authorities quickly removed the sign, and as somebody told me, they knew it was because it was considered as littering. Of course, a paradox lies here, because while the people might have seen this sign as a threat to the purity of the wilderness-concept in people’s minds, the authorities that removed it with the help of a snow scooter are not considered as such a threat. It seemed to me, that the presence of the authorities was accepted as a part of the place.

Another thing that is considered as a matter out of place and polluting the sanctity of the mountain trip is work. As I have shown earlier in this text, work is a kind of taboo. The people very seldom talk about work and they do not usually know the occupation of the person they

interact with. This is also confirming the statements of my informants who say that equality is important and titles do not matter in the mountains. It also strengthens the idea of separation, that the people separate themselves from the everyday life, when they are there. Finally, it also shows the liminality of this “ritual”, since one might think that not talking about work and not knowing what the other person does for a living implies that these relationships (*communitas*) matter and are operative only in the liminal phase, that is to say during the trip.

I heard very many people describing the place as something of its own. They called it “another world” or “another planet”. For instance, one man in his thirties from Helsinki said that there are many people in Finland, who do not know about “this world”, “It is a whole other world out here”, he said. Another comment to show this comes from Topi, who says in the film: “Yesterday Eemeli said, that he would not believe we even are in Finland, it looks so special here. I say that we are not in Finland, we are on some other planet”.

What then happens on this “own planet”, Turner calls the phase of liminality. This concept can contribute to enlightening some of the things that appear in this place, like the idea of equality and sameness or the relaxed ways of relating to strangers<sup>13</sup>. Marginality and lack of roles characterizes the liminal phase. The novices are invisible. In a way, this is true for the skiers, who in this case are the novices. Actually, they are very visible, because of the open and white terrain they are in; they are easy to spot even from a distance. But more than that, I think they can be said to be invisible. Firstly, one becomes very small in the wide landscape. Secondly, the mountain area is very big, and one can walk for days without being seen by anybody, if one likes. Lastly, I would like to say, that in a way there are no outsiders here. Those who come to this place, belong to this place. By dwelling there, they make the place their own. With this I mean, that the novices are actually invisible to outsiders. To come to the area in the winter, you need to become “one of them”, you need to wear proper clothes and have a means of transportation that suits the area, skis or snowmobile for instance.

Liminality differs from the social structure of the society. In this place one of the differences that create the feeling of separation is the lack of technology. There is generally no phone reception or electricity in the area. Many people noted the fact that the phone does not work as

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<sup>13</sup> All of this must be seen in the socio-cultural context of Finland and Northern Europe. Talking to strangers is special in Finland, but would not be considered as that in some other places of the world, for instance Southern Europe.

one of the best things about coming there. I have earlier shown how the news of the world does not concern people when they are in the wilderness. If one meets somebody who has just come from the village, they do not ask about the news. They ask about the weather forecast. I can tell this also from my own experience. When I was doing my fieldwork or on my former trips, I have not thought about what might be happening in the world. Those things just do not cross my mind very often when I am on the mountains. However, as soon as I get close to the road and approach the village and the 'civilization' I start to think what might have happened in the world "while I was away". The first thing when I get to the car is to put on the radio and listen to the news (incorporation). Some would say that it is similar when one is on holiday generally, but I would argue it is different, exactly because of the lack of impulses that make the news very available all the time. Even if one travels to a different country, one can still see the tabloids and access internet most of the time. In one blog written before a trip to this area the writer says how it is good to notice from time to time that the world revolves without him as well (Again, not only referring to separation from the society, but the whole world as this was a world of its own).

I am excited for the time to come again, when the phone does not ring, there are no e-mails coming, you do not hear the news and elsewhere too, things are going well. The election will also be held during my trip, though I get to vote in advance just before I leave. After the trip it will be great to notice again, that the world spins around without me, maybe even better than when I am there spinning it as well.<sup>14</sup>

According to Douglas (1997) "dirt is matter out of place". Things that are associated with the body and especially bodily fluids are usually seen as a kind of taboo. This could be so in the society, but in the liminal phase, these things are accepted. For instance, sweat is not a matter out of place in the wilderness, anybody might smell because of the lack of washing possibilities. People do not need to wash themselves to be accepted. What is normally a taboo is natural in nature. Therefore, because of the lack of roles and certain norms, liminality creates an anti-structure in the society, but according to Turner, a social structure reigns among the novices. A strong feeling of community occurs; this is called *communitas*. People in such a phase can easier be themselves, when they do not act in such institutionalized roles (Turner 2010:516).

*Communitas* creates intimacy and liminality offers the freedom to express this intimacy. We remember the man who said, that he does not know about any other place where one can be so close to an unknown person and it does not feel in any way awkward. As the reader knows by

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<sup>14</sup> <http://timokokairankiertaja.blogspot.no/2015/03/kuumetta.html>

now, the hut is very small and those who choose to spend a night inside, must often share the bed with other people. Breakfast is enjoyed wearing just woolen underwear among people who met each other maybe for the first time the day before.

Turner says also that there is a full equality among the novices. There are many types and degrees of privileges, obligations and submission, but in the liminal phase those kind of distinctions tend to disappear. Her social class is hidden under the outdoor clothes, or even left in the parking lot by the road. Remember how the military commander I met was 'just like everybody else'. For the people, the thing that seems to connect everyone together is the interest for the area and them just being there. *Communitas* might also explain the importance the social relations in the area have for the people. It is clear that these travelers create a temporal community between them. The temporality of this community is also a sign of the ritual character of these trips, because the relationships are mostly expressed only during the trip.

Incorporation, re-integrating happens when the hikers get back from the trip, turn on their cell-phones and must face the realities they left behind when they left for the trip. I have here made an attempt to describe how the annual skiing trip on the fells can be seen as a ritual. I think I have shown that the terms separation, liminality and *communitas* can be useful in explaining what the ski tourists experience on their trips. It is however not so convincing to call this a rite of passage because that includes the re-integrating and that the person should receive in that stage a new institutionalized role, which ranks higher than the one before the ritual. The novice, who in the liminal phase was betwixt and between, should then have a re-defined role in the society. Also, the reason why I started to think that the skiing trip could be seen as a ritual, was because for many it is made annually, in the same way every time. Should not a transitional ritual happen just once? On the other hand, this might have characteristics of a *rite des passage*, if one interprets it freely. Namely, the trip they make is a journey, they make a physical passage. Many of the people would even say they are like new when they come back. Like Topi, who told that he needed to come "empty his head" after a divorce and the recent loss of his father. Several people told how energized and fresh they always felt after a trip to the fells. Even if they do not get a new social status after the trip, the travelers have gained some prestige. They now have more experience from the area and this is highly valued among the community. This might not have any importance in the everyday-life as my informants told that people who have not been there do not understand what it is all about. Nevertheless, the discussions continue on internet forums and there all knowledge gives prestige. More than that, the

experience and knowledge one has gained on the former trip pays back next year. So, maybe we can turn this thing around. As a transitional ritual, one does not get a new role in the society one lives in in general, but one becomes incorporated in a new way to this particular place.

In the end, I will mention one statement that came from a snowmobile-tourist, which can enlighten the ritual character of going to the mountains and the wilderness and the sanctity of the ritual. This person was excited about the possibility to come see the beautiful nature and to go on the top of Halti. She did that during one day with a guide in a snow mobile safari. “This is still not a sacrilege, I think”, she said referring to the fact that she made the trip with a snowmobile. The other snowmobile-tourists around her were nodding.

### **Symbolic involvements in a landscape**

I will now summarize this chapter and present some further observations about the way people symbolically relate to the place. The construction of the place in people’s minds happens through sharing experiences, which happens through sharing symbols and ideas. There are systems of rules that are practical, for instance the first person that has come to the hut must make room for the last comer. This is actually a written rule - everybody can learn it by reading it in the instructions of the hut. However, not everyone follows this rule and those persons are complained about. There are also unwritten rules, that one can only learn by being socialized into the community. One example of how this happens is when people discuss things in the hut. For instance, I heard a conversation about the steep and long hill of Meeko, where the track goes back towards Kilpisjärvi. In the group, people talked about how they usually take off their skis on the way up this hill. When one of the women heard this she said: “I have thought that I will put the skis on the sledge, great that I now heard that that is allowed!”

However, it is not enough to adopt the set of practical norms; one must also know how to talk about things. What I found interesting is how familiar people seem to be with each other when they talk. Sometimes when I saw people meeting each other in the hut or on the skiing-track, I thought that they must know each other because of the very familiar and natural character of the conversation, but would later understand that these people met each other for the first time. The topics of discussion concern mostly Lapland. This includes nature in general, animals, weather, observations, experiences, memories, hiking-equipment and not least people. Knowledge and experience is communicated by detailed descriptions and storytelling about the place and its nature. This kind of speech is connected to the values and symbols that the people

hold and share though they might add subjective meanings to them. I think that the most important values the hikers pursue on their trips are sameness, silence, freedom, peace and nature. In addition, I think the people seem to have an idea about purity connected to all of these things. They try to keep things from soiling the purity of it all, either by avoiding things that do so, sanctioning those who do or if that is not possible, by justifying those kind of things, so that they actually become a part of the pure and sacred landscape. Examples of this is how people avoid talking about work and how they talk about people that do not fit in their image of how the place should be. An example of this is the man who said to the snowmobile-tourists that Kaarina Kari would turn in her grave if she knew “what kind of people” come to Halti.

An example of justification is in my opinion how the hikers seem to accept the presence of the authorities. There is a scene in the film where the police have come to control the snowmobile-traffic. The contrast becomes in my opinion very visible in this scene. Not one, but three police officers, clothed in blue overalls and carrying weapons, standing against the totally white landscape, in my opinion is quite a contrast and breaks the idea of wilderness. One might think that they also are a threat to the ideas of equality, freedom and silence. However, I did not hear negative things about the authorities from the mouth of the hikers. Somehow they manage to make the police and other authorities something that belongs to the authentic experience. Maybe, because also they talk about fishing and the weather more than any formalities. Or maybe the hikers do not let the uniforms fool them, the people wearing them are just like anybody else. Just as the officers from the border patrol said to be, as long as they are in the wilderness.

Just some examples of the shared symbols that I think are important in the interaction with the people and the surroundings are the “north” and “south” dichotomy and the different mountains like Halti and Saivaara. From the speech of the people, most of them living in the south of Finland, I could hear that they make a dichotomy between south and north. The north seemed to represent a carefree and leisured life, while the south represents rush and strictness. I think this becomes also visible in the way the visitors refer to their love for Lapland as a madness. It is a very different way of relating to the place than the locals and has elements of romanticizing and exotifying of the north. The locals talk about other things than just Lapland. They seem to relate to the wilderness area in a simpler way, even though the place is also important for them.

I have already talked about some of the mountains like Halti and Saivaara, where Halti is the crown of the place. “Halti is a kind of thing. It is always a challenge to go up there, whatever

the means, also with the snowmobile”, said one snowmobile-tourist on their way back from Halti. Most of the skiers would have disagreed in the last part of this statement even though they would have agreed with Halti being “a thing”. Seppo was describing Saivaara to me saying, that it is the landmark of the Meeko-valley, when he sees the mountain, then he knows he has arrived. In the village of Kilpisjärvi, there is a known mountain named Saana. In the film, we hear Seppo telling about how one of his friends cries every time she sees Saana. This for me is an example of how nature is a reality, the mountains exist there regardless of what people think of them, but the only way we can see the environment, is through our perception, concepts and pre-understandings.

I think I have managed to show that people’s experience of the place is partly socially constructed. People are constantly sharing their experiences to others and they are continuously giving advices to each other. Through these stories and advices images of the place are created. They hear about dangerous places, beautiful places, secret tips about where the eagle is nesting, good route-choices and so forth. The woman, who realized that she was not the only one that thinks that the hill up from the Meeko-valley is rough, might see it differently now, when she knows that she can walk it up without her skis without being embarrassed.

In this chapter I have described the symbolic and social dimension of the Wilderness-area of Käsivarsi. However, this is inseparable from the direct ways people relate to it. To be able to talk about the place one must first experience it by movement and activity. One cannot advise another to go ‘cross that river by that point’ if one has not been there themselves. It is through roaming and moving in the landscape that perception arises, as well as it is developed further in the meetings with other people.

## 6. Conclusion

In the relation between dwelling and the environment a place gets its ‘unique significance’ for the people that spend time there. I hope that I have managed to show something about the wilderness area of Käsivarsi as a place, how people dwell there and what is its ‘unique significance’ to them. I have learned that the place has a big importance to those who return there, year after year. The trip to the spring-fells is the highlight of the year for many who go there.

During the time I spent on the field I encountered many different people and got to join them in conversations and activities. I was able to sense the life of the wilderness hut and see it for

the container of activities it is. I learned that it was not difficult to approach new people daily, as I heard many times in the field, being in the mountains does something with the people, so that they are easy to talk to. The camera was a tool I used in the field and which has given me a lot of help also in the process of writing. The film I have made will help to disseminate the knowledge I have gained and produced from the field-experience. By seeing the film, people will get the chance to experience a visual impression of how the place and the people who dwell there look like.

My main focus has been on the skiers, coming from different places in Finland. One of my research questions was how the environment is perceived through activity and direct engagement with it. Through dwelling, people make the place their own. The experience comes through the body and movement. While skiing and pulling the sledge, one immerses oneself in the landscape and one gets a double awareness, that enables one to pay close attention to the physical surroundings at the same time as one turns inwards to one's thoughts. My informants told me that when they are in the mountains, they were able to give their mind a rest. In the quotes I have used we can read how they say that they 'do not think about anything' when they ski. Or if they think about something, the thoughts are free of worries and stress, focusing on what matters in the moment.

Even we have talked about landscape as a place of activity rather than a scenery or a view, it is not to deny, that the mountains in the white and blue landscape attract people to the area. Landscape in the esthetic sense was indeed one of the reasons for coming for many persons. They said they found the scenery stunning, and unique for Finland. However, what I have shown in this thesis, is that even if they enjoy the view, people are not only looking at it, but through their activities, they become participants in the landscape. The locals and the skiers engage with the environment in different ways and I have shown how their wishes for what the surroundings can offer differ from each other. The reindeer herders' wishes are connected to their work and the welfare of the reindeer, while the skier is in search of other kind of experiences and wishes for conditions that make skiing pleasant. It became clear that the skiers search for a break from their everyday-lives, for them this is a place of freedom and rest.

The environment offers many things to its users. At the same time the use is shaping and recreating the environment; this is a mutual process. Everybody roaming the mountains leaves their footprints in the landscape. An individual's footprints are not permanent, but together with all the others' footprints, paths and routes take form and delineate the taskscape.

The thing that first caught my attention before I started my project was that in the wilderness, it seemed like there was a community. That is why my other research question concerns the social side of the wilderness-experience. What kind of community is created between the users of the area and how are the social relations constituting to the specific experience for them? The paths and routes that are there create a network of places and this becomes a network of people. The field narratives show that the people have a strong sense of unity and equality between them. This idea of sameness is strengthened by not talking about work or other things that can hint at social differences. Even though people were saying how great it is to get to know so many people and how everybody they meet on the mountains is nice, the relationships that are built are limited to the things that concern nature and Lapland. People make sense of each other based on what they can find out about each other's relationship to the place. This means finding out how much experience and knowledge the other person has. A starting point for such discoveries is to look at the gear and clothes of the other person and to ask where they are coming from and where they are going next.

It has become clear, that what matters in the mountains is happenings and things connected to the particular experience. It is important for the hikers to get to share their ideas, stories and impressions and to get their identities confirmed while they still are on their trip. The wilderness-huts offer such an arena for these negotiations. The huts are the center of happenings and important meeting places.

Another aspect of the symbolic community I have shown, is the way information is distributed. The word travels from person to person and spreads very quickly. The things that become news are always concerning things that happen inside the wilderness-area. Keeping on top of the happenings of the area offers things to talk about in an environment where many usual topics are not concerned as interesting or suitable. The continuous flow of information and the exchange of advices is also affecting how the hikers see the place, because images of the place are created and reproduced in the conversations.

In this "other world" that is the Käsivarsi wilderness area, an embodied experience must take place and direct perceptions must be formed by moving in the environment, enabling one to talk with sincerity about the things of the fells, and to make sense of the things that are talked about. In order to be able to participate in the social dimension of the landscape, one must first roam the physical one.

## 7. Appendix

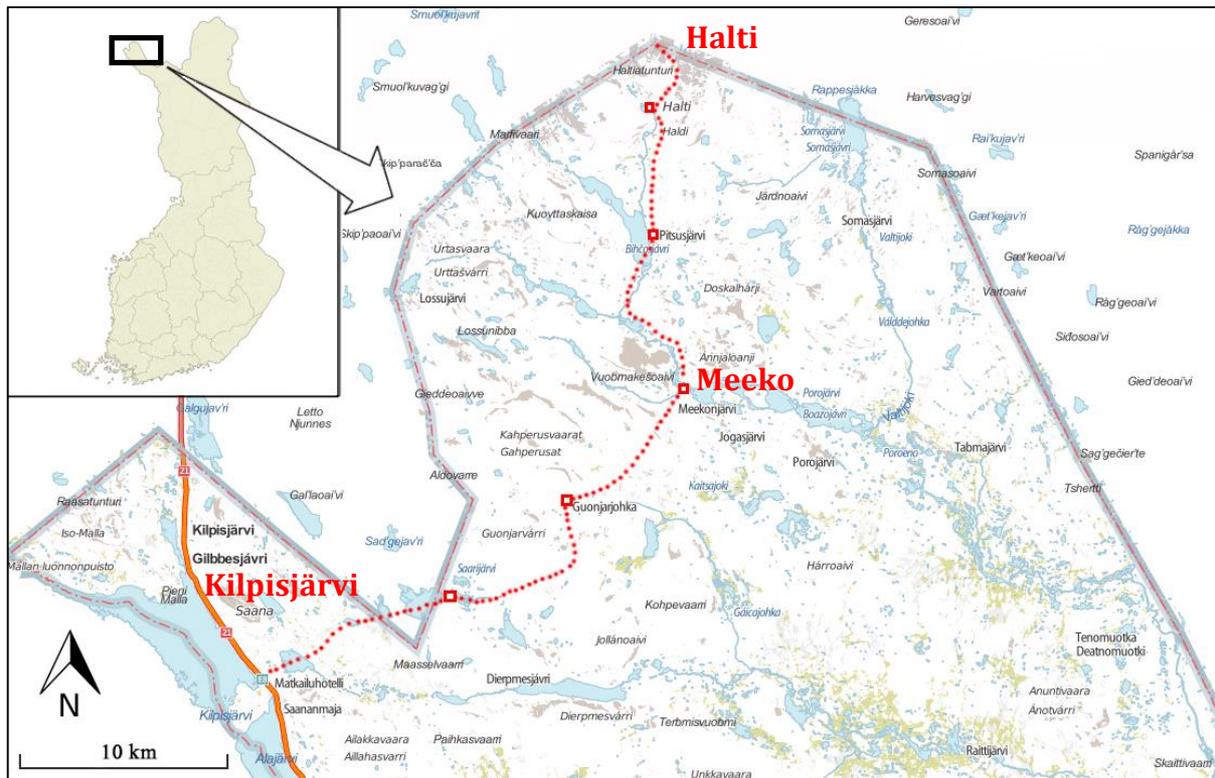


Figure 1: Study area. The red dots mark the main route. The red squares mark the huts along the route.



Figure 2: Leo sitting by the cabin wall.



Figure 3: Leo's sledge can be recognized by the thermometer.  
Otherwise this is a typical skiing sledge. An ice drill used for ice-fishing is lying on the side.



Figure 4: A girl passes by an election sign.

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