

8 Summary (Marja Uusitalo, Pertti Sarala ja Seija Tuulentie)

8.1 Ounasselkä – The Backbone of the Ounasselkä Landscape Ecosystem

This landscape report which is called “Living Tourism Landscape” is produced by the group of specialist of different scientific topics in the LANDSCAPE LAB project funded by EU LIFE Environment fund. It examines the basic elements of the landscape of the fell area of Ounasselkä, which is located in Western Lapland in Finland. The emphasis is on the tourist centres of Levi (Kittilä municipality) and Ylläs (Kolari municipality). The study uses diverse data and the means of several different disciplines. The report identifies both common regional features and local special characteristics. Finnish Lapland can be regarded as being one of the most attractive nature-tourism destinations in all of Europe. Tourism is extremely important for the economy of Lapland, as well as for many other peripheral regions. Because of increasing tourism and the importance of natural landscape, the issues concerning sustainability of tourism have been of specific interest in this landscape report. The report focuses on the fell region of Ounasselkä and discusses the expansion strategies of the tourist centres located in Levi and Ylläs on the basis of the research results.

The foundation for the landscape of Ounasselkä consists of the valleys of Muonionjoki and Tornionjoki rivers and of the large watershed area between these rivers. Indeed, the fell chain of Ounasselkä and the tops of highland ridges form the backbone of this landscape ecosystem and combine the different features. Various geological factors and other natural components form the background for the diversity that provides excellent preconditions for the development of tourism in Western Lapland. The area is traversed from north to south by a fell chain with a east-to-west oriented fell chain forming an eastward spur to the centre of Levi. The fells impart a special feature to this landscape and create a powerful contrast to the mire, lake and coniferous forest landscapes of the low lands.

The soil consists of a mosaic of moraine formations and mires with the proportion of sorted material being relatively small. The preservation of fells, fairly high in places (over 700 m a.s.l.), has been made possible by the area being located in the centre of a region repeatedly covered by ice sheets. The movement of and erosion caused by the glaciers have been minor, and as a consequence the weathering crust of bedrock, even dozens of metres in thickness, and the till layers deposited by several glaciation stages are preserved in this area. Several glacial formations, e.g. moraine ridges, eskers, gorges, and marginal meltwater deposits along the slopes of fells remain as signs of the final stage of the most recent Weichselian Ice Age.

Long, cold winters and cool, short summers are typical features of the climate of the Ounasselkä area, but these contrasting weather phenomena provide variation to the conditions. At times the Eurasian continental climate impacts on the area with the record-low temperatures in winter and heat waves in the summer. In regard both to flora and fauna, the Ounasselkä area is quite diverse. The flora is characterised by arctic species thriving on the bare fell tops and in elevated boulder screes, while in the valleys between the fells one can find southern herb-rich forest species occurring on the northern limit of their distribution. The same applies to the fauna: southern, eastern and northern fauna species meet here. For example, the number of bird species is large with 115 of the 235 regular nesting birds of Finland occurring here. The tourist centres' species numbers are beginning to resemble those of other densely populated areas.

The tourist centres of Levi, Ylläs, Pallas and Olos are situated in the area. Together they make up an important tourism concentration. Tourism has roots of long standing when viewed in the Finnish context as it began in the 1930s and gradually developed into an important industry. Forestry is still the foremost of the land use forms practised in the area. More than half of the 10,000 km² of forestry land in the area are in multiple use while the rest is dedicated to forestry. The transformation of the tourist centres into small holiday towns started in the 1960s, and this development quickened its pace since the onset of the recession of the early 1990s. The municipal centres of Kolari, Kittilä, Enontekiö and Muonio are also situated in the area. The main attractions in the tourist centres are their proximity to nature, diversity of activities offering, good nature trails, services structure and good connections by road and by air. During the last few decades, the emphasis in the activities has been on winter tourism, but during the past ten years summertime tourism has also increased along with the increase in services offering and the building of visitor centres and nature trails.

8.2 Ylläs – Amidst Villages

The study finds that Ylläs is highly suitable for nature tourism and its development as regards its geological features. Good accessibility, good signposting, and the adjacent national park offer excellent possibilities for visitors to get to know the local geology.

However, the rapid pace of building and new enlarging directions threaten the pristine nature. Extraction of soil for building purposes and the draining of mires can lead to the spoiling of esker formations and mires. The landscape structure of Ylläs includes a lot of fell-top and upper-slope areas. These areas tolerate building and other use less well than the lower slopes. The lack of lower slopes imposes restrictions to expanding the tourist centres in Ylläs.

Sandy till is the most common soil type in the area, and it generally forms a solid base for building purposes. Roads and municipal engineering can be built without special measures being necessary. The coarse-grained sorted soils in the proximity of the northern and eastern shoreline of Lake Äkäslompolo and adjoining the area of Lake Ylläsjärvi provide the best and most advantageous soil for building purposes and form a good aquifer. The fine-grained soils of low-lying areas, fine sand and silt and also peat are difficult from the point of view of building or even useless for construction. Ylläs has plenty of pine forests on dry upland soils, which are poorly or fairly poorly tolerant to trampling. Nevertheless, the trails in the Ylläs area are mostly in good condition, although the sensitive areas do reveal significant wear along the non-covered stretches.

The cornerstones of the tourism structure at Ylläs are the village centres located around Yllästunturi, which are relatively far away from one another and different, and therefore form independent centres. The villagers have begun to practise cooperation in land use during the past few years and land use has been directed mainly by shoreline zoning plans. The implementation of municipal engineering in the zoned areas has been for a long time lacked a comprehensive plan and the zoned areas have characterised by the relative sparse dispersal of buildings. The main challenges on both sides of Yllästunturi are connected to the placing of downhill skiing facilities and earth construction. The locating of new holiday apartments and buildings serving tourism on the upper slopes, within the protection forest zone or above it are further concerns. The impacts of construction on the diverse landscape of Ylläs could be considerable. The cultural environments are more fragmented in Äkäslompolo than in the village of Ylläsjärvi, whose traditional cultivated landscape is threatened by natural forest regeneration. The soundscapes

are diverse and mainly nature-dominated with incidents of noise level being exceeded being minor.

At Ylläs, both the local people and the tourists appreciate similar matters: the national park, nearby fells, the village structure, and the new landscape road connecting the villages. The concerns for both groups include receding of the natural environment, changes in the village structure as a consequence of vigorous building activity, the noise produced by snowmobiling, and the locating of trails required by snowmobiling and other new functions.

8.3 Levi – Tourism Activity Centre

Among the strengths of Levi from the viewpoint of geological tourism are its good connections by road and by air, and its excellent system of trails. The lack of a visitor centre and the destruction of the original ecosystem in many places make Levi less interesting for tourists interested in nature sites; neither does it possess geological attractiveness equal to that of Ylläs. The landscape structure at Levi has more lower slopes than Ylläs. These sites are the most tolerant to change and the holiday houses in Levi are concentrated along the lower slopes. Consequently there are more potential building sites near the centre of Levi. The soil in these areas is composed of sandy till and it ranges from good or moderate for building purposes. However, the rock outcrops and boulder fields on the upper parts of slopes in Levi are poor as regards their suitability for construction and building costs. The Levi area is characterised by dryish upland soils with pine forest cover and they are fairly intolerant as regards trampling and the trails are therefore quite worn out in places. Moreover, the trail locatings of Levitunturi are problematic because of the abundant building activity. Kätkätunturi has more of the traditional nature trails and there are no ski runs nor is there marked construction in this area.

Compared to Ylläs, local planning in Levi has been more long-term and more comprehensive thanks to the active land-use policy of the municipality. This is why, among other things, building in the area has been rapid and districts have been mainly constructed with greater building-site effectiveness. This being so, the image of Levi's cultural environment is more urban and at the same time more uniform. Along with this, Levi has been developed into a centre providing diverse activities.

Strengths of Levi are diverse natural landscapes and the fact that Ounasselkä ridge are more readily to be viewed here than is the case in Ylläs. Problems of Levi associated with the landscape image are the incompleteness caused by construction and dense spacing which split green areas. These problems are typical of urban densely populated areas. The culture environments are small in size and fragmented, and the traditional village landscape is disappearing from Levi. The soundscapes study revealed Levi to be fairly noisy, although the soundscapes were versatile.

Both local people and tourists appreciated natural landscapes of Levi, and especially Kätkätunturi was deemed to be an invaluable area. Among the threats are the disappearance of open structure typical to original villages and natural landscapes. Moreover, Kätkätunturi is problematic from the local landowners' viewpoint. There are demands for obtaining economic benefits from both forestry and tourism.

8.4 Landscape analyses as safeguards of sustainable development

This landscape report shows that even though tourist centres resemble urban areas, they are very different from the point of view of planning. Special nature values, tourism seasons, which put a rhythm to local life, and traditional village communities, whose life tourists are transforming, are essential features of these centres. The planner must know these features well in order to achieve ecological, economical and social and cultural sustainability and to carry out the European Landscape Convention. Landscape, as a foundation stone of tourism, should be the starting point in development work. Landscape analysis based on research can be used in establishing a sustainable base for the development of tourism.

The important thing is for the various developer parties in tourism to co-operate and take into account the views of the various interest groups so that consensus might be reached in regard to the direction of development. Ounasselkä landscape has features in common with all the centres. These common features could be a good ground for co-operation. There are lots of potential to utilize local nature and culture in production of new tourism products in the area. At the same time there should be a discussion on the expansion of tourism, its impacts on nature, landscape and culture, and on acceptable limits of changes.