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The social sustainability of hunting tourism in Finland

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1. Background

Hunting has a long tradition in the Finnish society and it still has a significant role in a lifestyle of many Finnish people. There are 300 000 hunting license holders in Finland making the amount of hunters approximately 6 % of the total population (Metsästäjien Keskusjärjestö 2003, Sievänen 2001). Hunting is most popular in Eastern and Northern Finland where there are municipalities where up to 38 % of the total population has passed the hunting exam (Keskinarkaus, 2008). The amount of hunters has been relatively stable during the last years. However, the amount of rural hunters is gradually decreasing due to the socio-demographic changes in the rural regions.

The majority of Finnish hunters are members of hunting clubs (Pellikka et al., 2007). In addition two national organizations, The Union of Finnish Hunters (MLL) and the Hunters' Central Organization (MKJ), have their unique roles in managing and representing Finnish hunters. All hunters are members of MKJ that has a law-stated role in game and hunter management. MLL on the other hand is a voluntary union with approximately 150 000 (50 % of Finnish hunters) members. Both of these organizations have a very strong position in the Finnish hunting policy process as they are consulted with proposed changes to hunting regulations, and their standpoint towards hunting tourism thus affects the institutional environment of the entrepreneurs.

The traditional role of hunting, the structure of land ownership and the extensive hunting club activities have provided reasonably good possibilities for leisure hunting for all social classes. In general, hunting rights are bound to landowning, but only approximately 40% of Finnish hunters are land owners (Ermala & Leinonen, 1995). The landowners typically rent the hunting rights to the local hunting club (over 4000 in the whole country) for nominal compensation. Renting hunting areas enables the formation of larger and more feasible hunting areas than the land area of just one owner may offer. In addition to hunting, the hunting clubs take care of game management, population level evaluations and surveillance of hunting on areas in their control. The clubs may also sell hunting licenses to external customers if so agreed.

Hunting is also possible on State land, which is mainly located in Northern and Eastern Finland. The residents of Northern Finland have free small game hunting rights on State land in their home municipality. This right is protected by law (ML 615/1993) and is a historically long tradition with wide use and continuing strong support. Local hunting rights only apply to residents of the rural North and the issue is politically very delicate and often seen as compensation for "harsh living condition in the arctic northern areas". The free hunting right is very strongly defended by the Northern residents, whenever it is publicly discussed or debated. Residents of other parts of Finland and foreign hunters are required to buy a license to hunt on State land. Most of the hunters on state land are domestic hunters since there were less than 2000 foreign hunters in 2007 (less than 1 % of hunting cards). Almost one third of all Finnish hunters (equals almost 100 000 hunters) use state's land areas for hunting (Liukkonen et al 2007). About 40 000 small game licenses were sold to State land in 2008.

Metsähallitus (Forest and Park Service) is a state enterprise that administers about 12 million hectares of state-owned land and water areas. It also distributes hunting licenses and estimates the hunting quotas based on game population calculations and the amount the locals hunt. The remaining small game hunting quota is sold to permit hunters (hunters obligated to buy a license to hunt on State land) through the centralized system by Villi Pohjola (Wild North). Villi Pohjola is also a state enterprise and holds the sole rights to distribute State licenses. The licenses for the most popular hunting grounds are extremely competed and can be sold out within an hour from the start of the sales.

In addition to the centralized sales system, Metsähallitus used to contract several entrepreneurs to sell hunting licenses to their hunting grounds. This system was abolished when the law governing Metsähallitus changed in 2005. According to the new interpretation, hunting license decisions are official state authority decisions that cannot be passed on to entrepreneurs. This seized the growth the previously existing hunting tourism sector on state land and left entrepreneurs in an unsecure standpoint regarding their key resource, since the entrepreneurs are not allowed to sell licenses or buy "blank" permits for their customers. The license holder must be named upon buying. Therefore, hunting tourism entrepreneurs' business activities on state land are currently limited to providing basic tourism and guide services.

The Finnish hunting culture is typical Northern hunting culture (see e.g. Willebrand, 2008; Liukkonen et al 2007; Heberlein 2000; Matilainen et. al., 2007) where maintaining ecological sustainability, the social nature of the hunting event and appreciation of the wilderness are central elements (Nygård & Uthard, 2009). The most important motives for hunting named by the Finnish hunters are peace and quiet of the forest, dog training, a sense of community and social contacts, nature experiences, physical exercise, gaining meat, game management and prohibiting damages caused by oversized game populations, rather than shooting (Metsästäjien Keskusjärjestö 2003, Petäjistö et al 2004, Valkeajärvi et al 2004, Nygård & Uthard, 2009; Liukkonen et al 2007). Also the ethical code for the Union of Finnish hunters specifically states that the amount of game must not be the primary goal in hunting. Hunting in Finland is based on natural game populations and game management focuses on ecologically sustainable harvesting. It has been stated in several general discussions that the hunting tourism in Finland can only be developed by respecting the Finnish hunting culture.

1.1 Hunting tourism in Finland

There are approximately 150 hunting tourism companies in Finland. This includes professional hunting tourism companies selling high quality hunting packages and rural tourism companies offering a hunting possibility as an additional activity. Most of the companies are located in the Northern, Eastern and Central parts of Finland and operate on a seasonal basis. Hunting tourism entrepreneurs don't necessarily own the land used in their business activities but operate on state land, hunting clubs' land areas or private land. Hunting tourism exists primarily for small game (grouse-species, mountain hare and waterfowl) although large game (moose, bear) is also hunted. It is argued that hunting tourism could improve the nature tourism sector especially in rural regions by continuing the season in the autumns and diversifying tourism services. There is currently more demand for than supply of hunting tourism products.

Recently there has been a lot of political discussion over hunting licenses on State land. The entrepreneurs claim that in order to maintain economically sustainable business activities, which could also have an influence on the regional economics of rural areas, they should be granted a certain quota of the licenses for the use of their customers. From a purely economic standpoint, a hunting license can be seen as a key resource in the production of a hunting product. To maximize the economic benefit, it could also be argued that the entrepreneur should have the possibility to price the license freely. However, the issue of hunting license access in Finland or development of hunting tourism in general is far more complex than purely an economic issue. Independent hunters argue that licenses sold to entrepreneurs diminish their hunting possibilities. The law, hunting traditions, stakeholder groups and personal feelings all dictate who has a primary hunting right on State land and also how strongly hunting tourism should be developed on private land areas. There is no consensus on whose interests should be prioritized and

due to the ecological limitations, licenses to one group are deducted from the licenses sold to another group.

A central matter of concern for the companies, in addition to adapting to the ecological population fluctuations, is social sustainability. The views of key stakeholder groups, such as landowners and local hunters must be acknowledged for the sustainability of the operations and local communities in the long run. The general public's view of hunting tourism is delicate but especially the attitudes of the key stakeholders can significantly influence the development of the sector. Landowners have right to withdraw access to the game resource. Local hunters on the other hand can influence the decisions of landowners. Also via the strong role of national hunting organizations, recreational hunters have significant power and influence over the hunting regulations especially on State land. Hunters' organizations have a very strong role in Finland in safeguarding the interest of individual hunters (Matilainen et. al., 2007). Their stance towards professional hunting tourism and towards potential changes in hunting license policy, have significant effect on the development of the operational environment of professional hunting tourism companies. Policy makers create a part of the institutional framework and thus similarly affect the operating possibilities through institutions. Traditionally, the political pressure to safeguard equal hunting opportunities has been high and even the current wording of the hunting law mentions that the hunting possibilities on state land should be granted primarily to those hunters without other reasonable hunting possibility.

The Finnish hunting culture should be a main consideration in developing the hunting tourism sector because this facilitates development activities that do not interfere with the local customs and traditions. Using the existing hunting culture as a starting point also maintains social relations instead of forcing a new model of hunting into a local culture. The affects of hunting tourism on the land use and hunting possibilities of the local people should be understood. Also the consequences of professional hunting tourism on recreational hunting through the hunting license sales must be considered. Game populations maintained for hunting tourism should not have a negative influence on the livelihood of local people (e.g. damages to forests). In Lapland, the livelihood of the Sámi people must also be taken into consideration. Sustainability in all its forms (ecological, social, economic) must be taken into account.

In this study, the aim is to find out the opinions of four critical interest groups towards hunting tourism: landowners, local/recreational hunters, policy makers related to rural development and hunting tourism entrepreneurs. The aim is to estimate what kind of social concerns influence the sector, how the future potential of hunting tourism is seen by different actors and under what conditions can both sector development and social sustainability be achieved.

2. Material and methods

This study is based on inductive analysis (see Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990) of the social framework of hunting tourism, based on opinions of four critical interest groups of the hunting tourism sector. The following were chosen as critical interest groups on a national level were chosen: landowners, local/recreational hunters, policy makers related to rural development and hunting tourism entrepreneurs. The critical interest groups were chosen based on previous literature and studies (e.g. Matilainen et al 2007) and discussions with the experts in the sector. The choices were based on the following argumentation:

Landowners:

- as mostly local people they form the immediate social circle of the hunting tourism companies
- according to the law, they hold the hunting rights on their land
- without their consent, access to hunting grounds is impossible
- they can dictate the cost of a key resource and are thus a relevant group regarding profit allocation

Local and recreational hunters:

- local hunters as local people they form the immediate social circle of the hunting tourism companies
- local hunters have a strong influence on local landowners and they can be landowners themselves
- recreational hunters have a strong political influence on the hunting organization on a national level
- the legislation guarantees primary hunting opportunity on State land to local hunters in the North and hunters without other reasonable hunting opportunity
- local hunters can be subcontractors to the hunting tourism enterprises through hunting clubs

Policy makers related to rural development

- decide on the development activities and their allocation in the region/municipality
- reflect the opinion of the local general public

Hunting tourism entrepreneurs

- hunting tourism activities provide a part of their livelihood
- uphold viability of rural regions
- are the driving force of the professional hunting tourism sector

In addition to these interest groups, three other groups were considered to possibly influence the development of hunting tourism. These are the general public, environmental NGOs and permit/independent hunters. Due to the research resources, the general public was seen as a group that is too vast to be reached reliably. The majority of the general public also isn't acquainted with hunting nor hunting tourism and mostly don't have an opinion of it. Surveying this group was seen to bring too vague results regarding the actual social challenges apparent on the local level. All interest groups were therefore asked for their opinion on the general attitudes towards hunting and hunting tourism. Especially policy makers can be seen as representatives of the general public. Permit hunters (private hunters hunting on State land areas with a purchased license) form a large recreational hunter group which is also a significant interest group concerning professional hunting tourism since both entrepreneurs and permit

hunters compete for the same license quota. At the same time the permit hunters form a large potential domestic customer group. To acknowledge the views of this group, national hunter's organizations were selected to be interviewed as representatives of also local/recreational hunters and previous studies were consulted to ensure that their concerns are addressed. Environmental NGOs could potentially have a significant role in shaping the business environment of hunting tourism. However, the acceptance of hunting in general is relatively good in Finland and since a big part of hunting tourism in Finland is independent tourism by permit hunters, the NGOs have not taken any strong, public position towards this topic. Therefore, this group was not selected as separate key interest group but instead their opinion was seen to be reflected in the general opinion. These aspects must nevertheless be taken into consideration when interpreting the research results.

The data is based on 27 face-to-face or phone interviews conducted with the key informants of each chosen stakeholder group. The interviewed actors for each interest group have been presented in table 1. The sampling of the interviewees was made by a purposive sampling approach in order to ensure manageable and informative data (see Patton 2002). In order to get a comprehensive picture of the opinions of interest group, the interviewees were chosen so that they represent different spatial levels from local to national. The aim was to find the key informants related to each interest group and in order to achieve this, in addition to purposive sampling, the so called snowball tactic was used. The interviewees were asked, whether some other key informant from their interest groups should also be interviewed. The classification of the interviewees to different interest groups was somewhat overlapping. In table 1, the interviewees have been categorized according to the interest group that they primarily represent.

The interviews were conducted during autumn 2008 and spring 2009. The length of the interviews varied from 28 minutes to 92 minutes. All interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewee and later fully transcribed in order to guarantee a rich data and to allow precise analysis. The interviews were based on a joint transnational semi-structured framework of themes developed together with other North Hunt –project partners and used in all participating countries (Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Scotland). The purpose of the themes was to allow fluent conversation while ensuring that all the main issues are discussed with every interviewee (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 1982) in order to gain comparable data. In addition to the joint transnational interview framework, some national themes were added to the interview guide in order to get deeper understanding on the country specific issues.

Table 1. *The interviewed representatives of different interest groups*

Landowners	Local and recreational hunters	Policy makers and rural developers	Hunting tourism enterprises
A representative of a union representing landowners, national actor	A representative of a hunters organization, national actor	A representative of the Ministry, national actor	A representative of Finnish Entrepreneurs, national actor
A representative of State land, national actor	A representative of a hunters union, national actor	A representative of the Sámi, national actor	A nationwide nature tourism company
A representative of a collective forest, local actor	A representative of a game management association, local actor	A representative of Finnish tourism, national actor	A representative of a network of hunting tourism companies, regional actor
A private landowner, local actor	A representative of a hunting club, local actor	A representative of a Regional council, regional actor	A hunting tourism company, local actor
A private landowner, local actor	A representative of a hunting club, local actor	A representative of a Joint Authority, regional actor	A hunting tourism company, local actor
A private landowner, local actor	A representative of a game management association, local actor		A hunting tourism company, local actor
A private landowner, local actor	A representative of a hunting club, local actor		A hunting tourism company, local actor
	A representative of a hunting club, local actor		A hunting tourism company, local actor

2.1 Data analyzing

The data was analyzed by using a common transnational analyzing framework in order to find out the relevant issues related social sustainability of hunting tourism. The whole analysing process was synchronised and agreed on jointly with the transnational research team via personal and video meetings. To ensure the quality of the national results, all phases of the analysis and interpretation of the data were a collaborative and iterative effort by the national research team. In case of any disagreements the data was jointly reanalyzed until a shared interpretation was reached. Although rather laborious, this way of utilizing analyst triangulation is often considered to increase the credibility of the research (Patton 2002) and also as Eisenhardt (1989) argues the use of more researchers builds confidence in the findings and increases the likelihood of surprising findings. The interviews covered topics like personal and anticipated public feelings of the interest group towards hunting tourism, expected positive and negative consequences of hunting tourism, arguments for and against hunting tourism, hunting tourism potential, and frame conditions for expanding and developing hunting tourism. In addition each interest group was asked group specific questions in order to find out issues especially important for the interest group in question.

The actual analysis included two different phases. Firstly, the interviews were read through several times and interview extracts for the joint analysing framework were selected and analysed. In the second phase, the sections of analysing framework were combined to more general themes describing the opinions towards hunting tourism. To ensure the transparency of the data analysis, a number of interview citations are presented in the main body of text in order to make it easier for the reader to evaluate the interpretations that have been made.

3. Results

3.1 How hunting tourism is perceived

Some interviewees expressed their personal feelings toward hunting tourism and others spoke of their interest groups' views or the opinions of locals and the general public. The interviewees emphasized that some of their personal opinions could never be voiced publicly and referred to the disastrous consequences of some ideas such as suggesting that the free hunting rights of locals be abolished. The respondents demonstrated ambivalence towards some developments by talking about them from many different perspectives and sometimes concluding „I don't know what would be the right or wrong course of action“. This demonstrated the complexity and the delicacy of the hunting phenomenon.

There was a consensus that a limit exists to the expansion of hunting tourism and even those who supported hunting tourism gave many conditions to its expansion. The interviewees were permissive to different models of hunting. Hunting tourism as a business opportunity was seen as marginal but possible minding some conditions. Making a living off hunting tourism was not seen as an easy living due to the social and economic pressure combined with ecological uncertainties. The interviewees noted that the areas hunting tourism takes place can rarely be used for other kinds of tourism and therefore livelihood alternatives are hard to find.

3.2 The concept of hunting tourism

“Hunting tourism is travelling that includes the possibility to go hunting. It doesn't have to be the only purpose of the trip but it can be one part of it. Accommodation is also an essential element as well as often catering and the hunting activity itself and services related to the hunt.”

The interviewees in general saw hunting tourism as both foreign and domestic tourism, in which hunting was one of the main motives for the trip, but not necessarily the only motive nor the only activity. The use of local services was highlighted and it was seen that the local culture is closely connected to the hunting tourism. The respondents saw guide services as one central part of the hunting tourism product in addition to the more traditional elements of accommodation and catering services. The representatives of hunters emphasized the role of domestic tourism, when most of the other respondents did not separate domestic and foreign tourists so distinguishably. Both entrepreneurs and hunting clubs were mentioned as providers of hunting tourism. Pure nature and the special characteristics of the natural environment were mentioned as main elements of hunting tourism. The interviewees emphasized the central role of an authentic nature in the experience. Different game species were also mentioned, but not highlighted in hunting tourism definitions.

“Hunting tourism includes good accommodation, good food, a good guide and good hunting grounds. Pure nature.”

3.3 Public opinion regarding hunting tourism

The respondents were asked how they saw the atmosphere regarding hunting both in their area as well as nationally. The respondents also pondered, what are the issues that affect how the locals and the general public see hunting tourism.

3.3.1 *How the locals are seen to experience hunting tourism*

Hunting tourism was described as an extremely delicate issue. The interviewees said that Finns shun the trophy-focused hunting culture and tend to steer clear if hunting is associated with such tourism. The respondents felt that people mostly understand that hunting tourism provides income, jobs and livelihood options for the region. Direct income from hunting tourism used on promoting the conditions for local hunting (building sheds and cool rooms) was seen as a positive thing. There was criticism that the game management tasks are attended to by locals and tourists just come to enjoy the results. Respondents also said that local clubs see their own work and fees as hunting investments and refuse to let anyone use these resources.

Maybe the people understand that hunting tourism brings money to the region and that money is used for their hunting cabins and such.

Some saw that foreign tourists are seen more positively than domestic tourists due to their economic impact and the feeling of pride the locals get from seeing foreigners being interested in their area. Local hunters were also interested in providing an experience to foreign hunters. Valuing the local natural resources was seen as a two-sided phenomenon. On one hand the interviewees stated that it is a very positive thing that people from outside the region come because the locals also awaken to the attractiveness of their surroundings. People living in an area don't necessarily see it as unique and valuable because they are surrounded by the nature every day. On the other hand, locals feared that when landowners saw that people are willing to pay for land access, they would increase hunting leases for locals.

"Most likely when one learns to appreciate one's own land or forest and receive income, the price goes up."

The interviewees also mentioned that in areas with local's free hunting rights, the locals felt ownership towards the land areas and the game as well regardless of ownership. Locals feel that even state land "belongs" primarily to the people living in the area.

There are thin, red lines, they are certain areas where one hunts moose (traditional places for each group) and certain ancient traditions. So people don't understand how someone can suddenly just appear there to hunt grouse with dogs: "Why do you come here, on my land?" (on state land).

Some felt that the locals may hunt the odd bird every now and then and therefore disapprove of tourists efficiently shooting a big bag with well-trained dogs, especially in the case of grouse. In the most Northern part of Finland where willow ptarmigan hunting is still a job for a few hundred locals, the locals saw the species more as currency rather than game. It was also mentioned that locals with their free hunting rights do not understand that someone would pay to hunt "for fun". This insinuates that the locals have a more practical outlook on hunting as a necessity rather than a recreation.

“And as we in the North have the free hunting right for citizens, conflicts arise since people don’t necessarily understand why someone would pay for hunting and hunt for so called fun.”

Moose is not seen as such a precious and competed game species by the locals as for example grouse. Moose populations must also be controlled to prevent damages to e.g. forestry and traffic. The locals are well aware of this and it can affect their opinion of tourism hunting. Contradictory views were also presented and these interviewees argued that the locals didn’t want outsiders to hunt moose because they did not see how this would benefit them. Respondents said that hunting clubs had had to discuss the limits of hunting tourism as it inevitably raises debate if certain types of moose licenses are reserved primarily for tourists and local hunters get what is left.

“Arranging a moose hunt is met by “preferably not”. They are neutral, they don’t oppose it but they don’t see what the advantage is for them.”

Some locals feel that unethical hunting is practiced by the tourists and they tell stories of the tourists hunting by car and shooting unusually big numbers of grouse. Some even resist bringing guests to their hunting areas. However, a view that hunting tourism would control hunting was also present. Respondents proposed larger hunting areas to make sure that hunters don’t bump into each other. Larger areas along municipality limits also facilitate bigger groups getting a permit on the same area as the permits are not scattered on small areas. Hunters were considered to be a proactive customer group that would seek more quiet areas whenever possible.

“The Finnish hunter, when he goes to hunt, like me: when I decide to go somewhere and see a car there, I won’t stay but go a kilometer further. So the crowd automatically spreads in the woods, totally apart, they do not bump into each other.”

The respondents in some regions said that the start of the hunting season means the beginning of traffic for them. The interviewees said that people in rural areas are used to their quiet surroundings and disturbances can be a source of small grievances. All disruption in the nature is credited on the tourists no matter who caused it. Some interviewees wondered how hunting tourism could disrupt any locals in such vast areas. Most people saw that there were only a few individuals against hunting tourism and their primary reason for negative feelings was interpreted to be envy. Respondents also mentioned that locals could envy the entrepreneurs fortunes and therefore oppose hunting tourism in the area. One interviewee said that apart from envy, people do not have anything against hunting tourism.

It was also evident that people in adjacent municipalities had very different general attitudes to hunting tourism according to hunting tourism entrepreneurs. One interviewee contributed this to the different economic structure of the towns. He said that locals responded better to hunting tourism in areas that had an existing active tourism sector. People in areas where tourism was a new phenomenon, did not approve of hunting tourism either. The presence of an existing tourism sector was seen to shape people’s attitudes due to the experience of benefits. In tourism areas people see the benefits of visitors to the area through increased economic activity with service providers. The amount of tourists in an area can also affect the locals’ opinions towards tourism.

"It was a surprise for me that adjoining municipalities are so different in their attitudes towards tourism. In one municipality all tourism related issues are taken positively due to the established tourism sector and an existing tourist destination. The next municipality is very cautious and skeptical about how hunting tourism would benefit them."

Several interviewees mentioned that the locals supported hunting tourism or at least did not oppose it. This view was emphasized by saying that the locals are accustomed to receiving a livelihood from nature and thus selling a hunting opportunity was not seen as a strange phenomenon.

3.3.2 The opinions of general public's attitudes towards hunting tourism

The interviewees saw a difference between the attitudes of locals and the general public. Southern Finland was seen as more detached from nature and this in return was seen to cause ignorance and environmental activism. Interviewees felt that the people living in Northern Finland do not have strong feelings on the issue. There were also other comments on the increasing diversity of the perception of hunting in general (this will naturally effect the opinion towards hunting tourism as well). The big generation born after the wars is seen to have a natural stance towards hunting as a supplementing source of nutrition whereas the newer generation holds more environmentalists suspicious of hunting as a hobby and a livelihood. Respondents said that urban citizens have different values than those born and raised in the countryside and the nature protectionism will increase and cause opposing towards hunting whereas some people will still keep it as a hobby. The example of friends is seen as influential as many hunters are introduced to the hobby by friends or family.

"Sometimes it feels that in cities, with no contact with nature, there are more "green" oriented people than any laws allow. Unwillingly these people cause big problems and catastrophes to nature."

Many respondents noted that hunting tourism is unknown to most Finns and they neither recognize nor care about it. Respondents said that those who know what hunting is about support hunting tourism. They also reminded that this could change if the sector became a topic of wider interest. Others noted that the general strong support for hunting is due to the large amount of hunters. Hunting is familiar to all Finns because everyone knows at least one hunter and also that hunting in these nature conditions is not easy.

"Almost every Finn knows a hunter from whom they learn about hunting, what hunting is. That they trudge in the bush freezing and wet and then get a rabbit or a bird and are so happy. They bring the bag home and call and SMS their friends that "hah haa – I got it!" and then they cook a festive meal of it. And through this hunter friend everyone is familiar with hunting."

Entrepreneurs felt that hunting tourism is seen as a marginal activity and quite a challenging way to make a living. Some also noted that international marketing is easily affected by incidents with large media attention. Some also speculated that Finns understand hunting and pay no attention to isolated incidents, but Mid-European might be more sensitive. People may question the need for hunting and the interviewees mentioned that opposition toward hunting tourism could increase if hunting is beginning to be deemed immoral. The interviewees mentioned that international trends will affect the acceptance of hunting in Finland also. The animal rights movement might question the justification of hunting as a hobby. It was noted that even with general acceptance hunting tourism is a niche market that can't be marketed to a wide target group.

“There are negative issues if you look at international trends with animal rights groups and the justification of hunting for recreation.”

3.4 Effects of hunting and hunting tourism on other land-use alternatives

The majority view was that hunting and other forms of forest use only support each other or have no effect. Respondents said that there are a lot of wilderness areas in Finland and therefore hunting tourism activities should not affect other land use or local hunting in a disturbing way. The respondents even seemed surprised by the question and checked how hunting and other land use could possibly be incompatible. They said that hunters use the forest during a period when there are very few other people in the woods. Some saw that hunting still disturbs alternative land use less than other forms of tourism since hunters move in small groups and don't make noise.

3.4.1 Effects on other recreation

The interviewees said that the tourism pressure from hunting is more evenly distributed than the location-focused attractions. Hunters mentioned that they attempt to use areas that are empty from other people. Hunting clubs especially in the North have such vast areas that they did not see moving to another location as problematic. Hunters also acknowledged that tourists may not want to experience hunting in any way during their outdoor activities and said that they avoid even bringing gun fire sounds to the vicinity of nature paths.

“Well it depends on the scale but in my view it could easily be consolidated with other land use and tourism. Certain areas would have to be agreed where hunting tourism would be conducted. Area-wise it is quite a small portion of the potential we have.”

The interviewees noted that berry pickers and hunters have always coexisted without any problems and hunters only wish that people in the forests during hunting season would remember to wear visibility vests for security reasons. There were also views that mushrooms are the only thing in the forest in addition to moose during the hunting season and therefore there is no clash of different user groups.

“Everyone circles the same areas but it has never been a problem. A berry picker has never been on my way during a hunt and likewise when I have been berry picking, hunters have not bothered me.”

3.4.2 Effects on other livelihoods

Locals had experience of reindeer herding and didn't experience reindeer herding and hunting to be problematic to combine although the requirements of reindeer herding were mentioned to be alien to permit hunters from outside the reindeer herding area. Permit hunters may cause disturbance to the reindeer with hunting dogs that may treat the reindeer as game. Farming and hunting were mentioned to be ill-assorted and hunters at least need to remember not to walk through the crop or park in a way that blocks access to fields.

Bear viewing and hunting were not seen to match well together, especially at the end of August, which is parallel season for both bear watching and bear hunting. Shooting a bear in the vicinity of a carcass is illegal and a condensation of viewing cabins in a bear populated area was bound to evoke conflict between hunters and entrepreneurs. On the other hand wildlife watching entrepreneurs argued that gunfire sound frightens the bears. Hunting tourism and wildlife viewing were not seen as automatically incompatible although the ecological consequences of bear viewing were discussed in the Eastern part where hunters feared that feeding the bears for viewing can lead to remarkable conflicts between bears and human, when the density of bears grow extremely high in some areas and the bears get accustomed to humans.

“There are such problems especially regarding bears: they have been so fully catered that border officials agree that it is only a time before something happens. Before the first funeral.”

“It is apparent that fed bears become tame and some, I would not say “fine” day, there will be an accident. We are making the same mistakes that have been done on the other side of the ocean.”

In addition to wildlife viewing and reindeer herding also forestry, mining and other tourism must be reconciled with hunting tourism in the same geographical area. This however was not seen as problematic and other considerations than reindeer herding and wildlife viewing were hardly mentioned in the interviews. One respondent noted that locals can't afford to be too radical in prioritizing different forms of land use since each provides different kinds of livelihoods and income. He therefore saw hunting tourism as compatible with reindeer herding and other nature tourism.

“It is a two-sided issue because it benefits hunting tourism entrepreneurs who need to make a living. And grouse trappers and reindeer herders need to do their job. All are using the same land with the same rights and you can't be too strict in prohibiting certain livelihoods.”

3.5 Effects of hunting tourism on local hunting

Since locals in the rural North have the law-protected right to hunt on state land in their own municipality and hunting is a very popular recreational activity, local hunting was widely discussed in the interviews. The importance of the locals' stance towards hunting tourism was repeated frequently by the interviewees.

3.5.1 Hunting clubs

The hunting conditions of locals were mostly discussed in connection with hunting clubs since hunting clubs are the social cores of some rural villages. Also a third of Finnish hunters hold a membership in at least one hunting club (Svensberg & Vikberg, 2007). Hunting clubs were seen to have very unique and individual cultures and the interviewees said that one should not aim to change the culture of the clubs. The respondents noted that hunting clubs must have an opportunity to hunt in peace and the hobby must not turn into a burden, which could happen, if the hunting club would focus strongly on organizing customer hunts. There were comments, where the interviewees emphasized that hunting is one of the last social activities in the rural areas and people are not ready to give it up for commercial reasons.

Moose hunting, which is done in groups and mostly coordinated through local hunting clubs, was highlighted as an event where people get together and have a chance to socialize with each others.

“Our members have at least so far felt that hunting is one of the few countryside recreational activities that they have and the message has been that they don’t want to give it up for outsiders, at least not on a large scale.”

The interviewees said that some hunting clubs are open to hunting tourism and others are not. This seemed to be dependent on the opinions of the most active members and also the resistance of the older generation of hunters. Some said that in a club there will always be those individuals that oppose changes. According to the interviews, some individuals also oppose the idea that some outsider would use resources paid for by the local hunters.

Some hunting clubs were willing to take hunting tourists for a limited time in the beginning of the season but were not ready to commit to a longer season because hunting is a hobby for them. According to the interviewees, there were internal discussions in the hunting clubs about the rules or sacrifices to be made for tourist hunters. Some individuals were bitter that bulls with antlers were primarily for tourists who did not bother to shoot cows that were thus left for locals. On the other hand, this system ensured maximum income for the hunting clubs and this was used as a justification for the system. There were views that the locals preferred the income over the antlers. Differing views on rules of who is allowed to shoot antlers was sealed through a closed vote and the majority of members supported the additional gain from tourism, even if they would have to pass on the chance to shoot bulls during tourist season. The contemporary amount of moose also contributes to the view that tourists may participate in the hunt as well since most hunting club members have already shot numerous moose. In the present systems the meat also remains with the club members and the hide goes to the hunter. Other clubs had done exactly the opposite and protected the beginning of the season for locals. They took customers later in the season when the locals had had a chance to use their vacation-time to hunt. There were also clubs that had agreed to help other clubs in case they received a customer rush, but did not engage in direct hunting tourism activities.

“We (hunting club) have spoken of it (hunting tourism) and decisions have been made, too. If tourists come, the board is authorized to agree on the activities with the hunting leader.”

“Let’s say the bad influence could be that, well the clubs and locals must have their own time, too. It can’t be that there are tourists 7 weeks of the season and they have 3 weeks in peace. It can’t be too laborious.”

“It causes bad blood, at least griping if the tourists shoot a big antler from under the local’s nose. But when we had such problems with one group, we decided that we officially start hunting later and the first week is voluntary and locals may only shoot calves. All big moose are reserved for tourists. And there were complaints about why they don’t shoot the cows. But the outcome was that with 4 foreign hunters shooting bulls and no time wasted on shooting cows and taking them to the cooler rooms, the foreigners shot 5 bulls which meant about 4000 Euros to the hunting club. So it goes through such positive examples but the system must always be told and followed.”

Entrepreneurs mentioned that hunting clubs are not businesses so they work differently. The entrepreneurs mentioned that the hunting club members must have the will to provide a fulfilling experience to

the customer and the locals' knowledge of the hunting grounds plays a key role in assuring a rewarding hunting. The entrepreneurs noted that in the same area different hunting clubs had the opposite view towards hunting tourism. Others were willing to have tourists and make arrangements to ensure they deliver the product the visitor has paid for while others only wanted the tourist income but were unwilling to adjust their activities to accommodate the tourists. Some clubs expressed an interest to start hunting tourism on the condition that the entrepreneur would invest in their physical structures but for the entrepreneurs this presented a problem of continuity for hunting clubs as voluntary organizations could not be guaranteed to commit to a long-term contract.

"It could be seen that the attitude of this club was that tourists could come and just be there as long as they don't disturb."

Entrepreneurs still chose to cooperate with hunting clubs and said that they could always apply for moose hunting areas of their own for their customers, but chose not to compete with the hunting clubs over the same areas. The entrepreneurs mentioned that they didn't wish to provoke envy. The entrepreneurs also saw that local acceptance to hunting tourism arise from the locals seeing that the profits benefit them. In addition the local hunters hold many roles as local land owners and local habitants so land-owner acceptance is closely tied to hunting club acceptance of hunting tourism.

On some areas where the moose license was sought as a shared license batch, economic benefit was distributed to the hunting club whose guest the tourist was as well as the hunting club on whose area the moose was shot. The respondents said that money activates and through additional resources hunting clubs were willing to invest in game management. Jointly owned forests had same rules for member hunters and outsiders: all had to apply for a license through closed bids. This was seen as a fair system as it would maximize the financial gain for all members, hunters or not.

"Money matters. Without financing you can't build a shed or buy meat boxes or electricity. When there is money, then people realize "Could we do this? Should we take out more food to the game?"

Respondents said that a „not in my backyard“-phenomenon was apparent: that hunting tourism in general is ok as long as it is done „somewhere else“. Some saw that hunting tourism would not interfere with local hunting in any way but with the attitudes of locals of which some fear all outside influences. On private land hunting tourism in general is less controversial than on state land. People accept that landowners control their resource and that all hunters need to gain the landowner's approval, local or not.

The risk with hunting tourism was seen to be that it could encourage unethical hunting practices if participants try to ensure bag for the customers. The interviewees saw no problem of crowding in the forests as the Finnish hunter prefers to avoid other people in the woods and therefore naturally seeks quiet surrounding. The interviewees did not wish for the amount of hunters in an area to increase.

The interviewees mostly saw that professional snaring is such a marginal phenomenon these days that hunting tourism didn't have any effect of local, professional hunting. Bear hunting was also seen as a less interesting activity for locals and since it is individual or small-group hunting, it was not experienced to affect the local community or local hunters in any negative way. The interviewees emphasized that hunting tourism should be conducted openly and non-secretively but in such a way that it does not disturb locals.

In Northern Finland the reason for the strongest resistance was named to be fear for local hunting rights. The respondents in the free hunting right zone highlighted that under no conditions can the hunting of locals be restricted in any way without serious consequences to the social and ecological sustainability of hunting. The primary reason to object hunting tourism was also a fear that it would eventually lead to economic objectives being prioritized over social ones. Locals in the North saw that their hunting opportunities must be the first priority and the remainder can be sustainably distributed to tourists.

3.6 Hunting tourism and landownership

The general attitude and the attitude of landowners towards hunting were also seen as restraints to expanding hunting tourism. Some respondents said that business-based hunting tourism does not fit into the current system of giving hunting ground access to local hunters for free and turning hunting into a business would lead to the need of formal, written contracts of land use and responsibilities. This also raises a question of to what extent can the hunting privileges be used commercially e.g. by a local hunting club: are they granted only for the own use of local people or to be used as the license holder sees fit. Can hunting privileges be forwarded to customers and can financial gain be derived from another person's legal resource?

The interviewees worried that hunting tourism would result in higher hunting prices for all. Mostly this concern related to the landowners seeing the value of their resource and aspiring for a greater monetary profit. The other fear was that landowners would not approve of hunting tourism at all and would withdraw their lands from the use of local hunters as well. There was also anxiety that landowners would want to become hunting entrepreneurs themselves and use their lands themselves.

"If one landowner breaks from the tradition and starts to organize hunting tourism, there is a great risk that the neighboring landowner will join and terminate land leases to the hunting clubs."

Close cooperation with key stakeholders was mentioned as a key to fluent activities and a positive atmosphere around hunting tourism. Hunting tourism entrepreneurs thought that the attitudes might shift if the volume changed significantly, but now with small-scale hunting tourism the landowners haven't necessarily demanded a written contract. One model mentioned was that a third of the profits from hunting tourism should be allocated to the entrepreneurs, one third to the hunting club and one third to the landowner. The problem is that with the amount of landowners in a hunting area, the remainder per landowners would be a maximum of few Euros and cause huge calculating processes and distribution models.

But distributing a third [of the profits] to the landowners would mean allocating 0,50 Euros to each. I don't know how. Maybe throwing a good, big party that everyone enjoys: properly with a band and everything. Maybe that would be the way. Under no conditions would it be reasonable to allocate 50 cents here and there.

Interviewees with experience of hunting tourism remembered cases where landowners had seized renting land for hunting after unwanted conduct by renters i.e. tourists and also due to local pressure. One landowner on the other hand saw, that the hunters do a favor him and not the other way round. By controlling the amount of moose the hunters minimize forest damages caused by the moose. Some hunting clubs had experience of land owners trying to increase the prices of hunting area leases. When the church as a major landowner in the area attempted this, the resistance was so strong that the hunters threatened to leave the church.

There were fears that with the increasing population with „green“ attitudes, access to hunting grounds would decrease as land owners will no longer give hunting rights local hunting clubs and hunting grounds will become increasingly scattered. Growing away from nature was seen as the cause for negative attitudes towards hunting.

3.7 Consequences of hunting tourism and conditions for developing it sustainably

3.7.1 Ecological consequences

Hunting tourism was not seen as a risk to ecological sustainability as population levels are carefully monitored and hunting can always be regulated through necessary restrictions. The system for ecological sustainability management exists and seems to enjoy vast trust. The respondents spoke of the ecological limits in an unquestioned and absolute manner. They saw that the license amounts decided by the common system gave accurate information of the sustainable levels of harvest and spoke of hunting tourism by allocating that amount between different interest groups. No-one suggested increasing the amount of licenses although some pondered methods of retaining more accurate population level data. There were also fears that the diminishing amount of local hunters would eventually reduce the amount of census data as well, since in the existing system the local hunters voluntarily collect it.

“The game stock calculations by game triangles will stop any day now... Small game hunting is quite insignificant in the end.”

The interviewees reminded that the amount of licenses sold must be carefully monitored and strictly regulated so hunting remains within ecologically sustainable limits. The respondents did not see this as a problem, though. They had faith in the sustainability of the current system and only highlighted, that any increases in the amount of hunters can't be done by increasing bag limits.

All interviewees saw the amount of natural game as the ultimate limit to hunting tourism expansion. It was also mentioned that news of any unethical behavior by the tourists or hunting tourism entrepreneurs would spread like wildfire and easily stain the whole image of Finnish hunting. The interviewees said that hunting tourism can't be developed from a purely customer-driven aspect, but the local culture must be taken into account. The uniqueness of the exotic, Northern hunting must be preserved and hunting must maintain high moral standards.

“People here have a very respectful attitude towards the law and they know that when something is forbidden, there is a logical reason for the regulation and also if something is permitted, there is a reason for that, too. So we can't be tempted to go into a customer-driven solution of shooting capercaillie from the road ... That's killing.”

The interviewees also discussed the appropriateness of the timing and the length of the hunting seasons as well as the size of the hunting areas. Respondents mainly felt, that grouse and moose hunting should begin earlier on autumn, when the weather conditions are still pleasant. Some criticized the system of strict hunting limits, even when game populations are high. Respondents also required the consensus data earlier and felt that data received in the summer is way too late for planning hunting. In addition,

there were some concerns, that hunting tourism could have more difficulties in adapting to game population diminutions than recreational hunters.

The challenge is that entrepreneurs wish to have more guaranteed licenses for their customers and the issue of who gets the licenses is under continuing debate. Some entrepreneurs saw that during the years of low grouse population levels, the licenses should be sold through the entrepreneurs not to complicate their business conditions any further.¹ The locals in the North on the other hand argued that they should have the primary right to hunt on low population years. This right is already secured to the habitant of Lapland and eastern Finland, but not to the locals in other areas.

The interviewees saw that the population must be managed to prevent traffic accidents as well as forest destructions. The current moose calculation system was seen to be vague, but this did not risk the ecological sustainability due to the high population of moose and adjusting the licenses yearly according to sightings.

“In moose hunting the sighting reports lead to the (population) results. And people have the conception that they should rather be undermarked, that if they mark the correct amount, there will be more outsiders.”

“How could the license system work better. A few years ago we took the premeditated risk that we will now really hunt moose. And some people said that „Crazy! They will cease now.“ And they still haven’t, even though we have harvested them for almost ten years. Although now licenses have been cut down so it was a success. But unless the population hadn’t been harvested heavily, perhaps something else than hunters would stop the moose. There would be a lot of serious traffic accidents and nature takes care of overpopulation eventually. By a disease or something.”

“There are municipalities in Lapland where the moose hunters age and eventually drop out. Even with current population levels, if they are not heavily harvested, there are no more hunters to harvest them. It is already quite laborious to cull them and there are hunting teams where the members can’t join the hunt anymore. They get their share of the meat but they are not active hunters anymore.”

Reindeer is not hunted in Finland as it is seen as a domestic animal, but reindeer hunting was proposed by a few interviewees. They based their argument on ecological reasons in addition to the economic ones. They saw that the current huge numbers of reindeer cause remarkable erosion.

“The pastures are fairly worn and there is hardly any lichen anywhere. And the measuring worm destroys the birches at quite a speed. We should forest radical thoughts and start to think of the fact that the amount of reindeer should be cut and profits increased – but how?”

The areal pressure of hunting tourism was one concern: a group of tourists should not be taken to the same location of consecutive days, because this will risk ecological sustainability of the game populations in the area as well customer satisfaction. Grouse populations were seen primarily to fluctuate due to the number of small predators (especially foxes), global warming and forest management solutions rather than hunting pressure, though. Many said that grouse populations have a pattern of fluctuating and limiting hunting on a low level year is reasonable and sufficient for sustainability.

¹ The large group of Finnish independent hunters can be expected to strongly protest this, but they are represented in this study by their associations which haven’t been asked to comment this model. The independent hunters’ views have been presented in a paper by Keskinarkaus & Matilainen at the ESRS congress in Vaasa in 2009.

The entrepreneurs did not conduct game population calculations, but they did in some areas participate in game management by hunting small predator species. Hunting tourism in the East was seen to be hindered by the wolf population, which some respondents argue to prevent hunting with dogs. Poaching was seen to be a notable ecological sustainability issue, however, not due to hunting tourism, but rather the collision of large carnivores and reindeer herding. The amount of large carnivores was seen as the cause for more positive attitudes towards hunters. Hunters are no longer seen as blood-thirsty and sneaky killers, but as people involved in game management.

“Well the worst case scenario would be that there would be rich tourists who want to rent snowmobiles and run the reindeer over. I would think that would be the horror image. That they wouldn’t hunt in the Northern manner. And also if the product grew so much that game populations couldn’t manage it. One risk would also be if the locals saw that their game is taken. Let’s keep in mind that it must be sustainable for the nature.”

“It has been noticed that when the game population levels are low, the bag amounts are low and the other way around. Hunting does not regulate game population levels but game population levels regulate hunting.”

On the positive ecological side, the meat attained from hunting was seen to have a smaller ecological footprint than meat produced and transported elsewhere. The ecological risk of hunting tourism was mainly seen to be unethical hunting practices. There were also comments of the garbage that tourists leave in the woods. The vast wilderness areas were mentioned as a Finnish strength by many but in some areas the scattered hunting grounds presented a challenge.

“We are accustomed to hunting natural game, game produced by the nature.”

3.7.2 Economic consequences

The economic consequences of hunting tourism were mostly based on estimations of revenue it could bring to rural areas. The respondents cited figures they had heard or had experience of regarding hunting tourism to evaluate the economic significance of the sector. Economic issues were therefore seen as central when arguing for or against hunting tourism as a business. The changing rural living conditions were recognized by the respondents. They said that locals see how jobs have practically disappeared and admit that alternatives are essential. Existing tourism thus need to develop into potential new employees. Reindeer herding or living off natural resources no longer attracts youth. Hunting tourism was also seen as a tool to bring skilled workers back to the regions. One positive effect of hunting tourism was seen to be the signal it sends to locals, that their surrounding are valuable and the indication it gives to youth, that livelihoods in the rural areas are actually possible.

“When you think what kind of a country Finland is, terrain-wise and about the amount of forests, hunting tourism is one livelihood what people live off. There are a lot of areas like this and hunting tourism brings a big portion of business here.”

“It is important for the whole municipality. Now that the big generations are retiring and need services, if there are no resources, there are no services. If we arrange things so that more tax income flows to the area, then all increases through tourism are welcomed because then we can create service for the area.”

The positive economic impact for the locals would be increased services, increased job opportunities, increased economic activity in the region, more customers for businesses and financing for hunting clubs. The number of businesses could also rise, but there was no consensus on this and also on whether the number of businesses could be increased, without compromising social sustainability, which now is largely positive or neutral due to the minimal volume of the activities. The amount of customers was also seen to rise with more professional services being offered.

“In these small municipalities it is important to get people here, to bring money.”

The entrepreneurs highlighted the role of financial motives for the hunting clubs concerning the willingness to develop hunting tourism activities. One interviewee emphasized the importance of clarifying the gain to the local hunting club by immediately calculating the value of the hunt: day fee, shooting fee and trophy fee and transferring the money right away after hunting event. He also liked to remember the hunting clubs with gifts to upkeep social relations. Hunting clubs were also seen to economically gain from hunting tourism through released price pressure: investments funded by tourists would restrain the need to raise membership fees to finance the needed structures.

Although the customers using professional hunting tourism services bring more money to the hunting tourism companies and services, they are said to spend less on the area than independent tourists. Due to their tight arranged schedules they may have rare opportunities to spend time or money elsewhere than in the entrepreneur's facilities. Some entrepreneurs mentioned that they take their customers to the local shopping centers, in which the foreign tourists and their families spend considerable sums. One estimate was that for every three hunters there is an extra person accompanying the trip as a regular tourist. These persons usually spend time in other activities and shopping while the hunters are in the woods.

Domestic tourists were seen as quite stingy and unwilling to pay for anything. As a trend though, people were seen to be more and more willing to pay for services and understand that other people's time is worth money. The prices of hunting tourism services were seen as low compared to what the foreign tourists were willing to pay, but expensive compared to what domestic hunters are accustomed to pay.

Pricing was mentioned as an economic challenge for the sector, since the entrepreneurs were quite confused by questions such as “How much does a grouse cost?” They also mentioned that a considerable investment could be needed because owning a large, coherent hunting area is a prerequisite for a successful business on a wider scale. Otherwise the entrepreneur takes a huge risk in investing in a business that is totally dependent on other owners' resources and the good will of others. The entrepreneurs wished that the sector would be seen as a part of the tourism sector also in regional development plans. In addition, the entrepreneurs mentioned the prices of subcontracting such as transportation to be one challenge for them in designing the hunting tourism package.

For the entrepreneurs, the economic impact of hunting tourism would be increased revenues. Hunting tourism through entrepreneurs was also seen to diversify economic activity of the region, since entrepreneurs could inform the hunters of other services. The customers of entrepreneurs were seen as more likely to spend the night in a rented cabin instead of a tent and buy catering services instead of cooking themselves. Hunting tourism was also seen as an additional activity for rural tourism companies and a method to extend the season.

The negative consequence of the current license system is that in addition to losing customers because they can't be guaranteed a license, the entrepreneurs may also lose the income of the whole party since the whole group usually cancels if some of the members are able to attain a license and others are not. A system where neither the hunters nor the entrepreneurs know whether the hunting trip will take place is neither customer nor entrepreneur -friendly.

"Hunting tourism is a livelihood for us. The season would be way too short to live off professionally if hunting tourism was taken away. It would be a hobby then."

Demolishing Wild North's sole right to distribute state licenses was seen as one solution to relieve financial pressure on the sector since Wild North now competes with SME's in the sector. Packaging the license with other services is considered illegal but since Wild North sells both the licenses and hunting tourism services with considerably marketing and land access resources, it was seen to hinder the development of other entrepreneurs in the sector.

"Hunting tourism, just like tourism in general, must provide revenue for the region and the locals. Perhaps the best way to develop the sector would be to abolish Wild North's monopoly position and arrange tourism by private entrepreneurs co-operating. I think the regional economic effects would be greater this way."

There were many views that the current hunting tourism activities on state land should be legalized to facilitate economic development in the area. The respondents hoped for an equal system, where the hunting tourism opportunities regarding licenses would not be only in the hand of a few actors.

"Small entrepreneurs have criticized Metsähallitus because in the previous system they were permitted to sell licenses but now the licenses must be attained from Wild North."

"Hunting tourism on state land will grow and Wild North as an organization with a ready sales organization and channels, which have been built with the tax payers' money, could be a key actor in selling the services as a travel agent for the entrepreneurs. Not like now when they practice hunting tourism themselves and often compete with local SME's."

The economic impact of hunting tourism for the landowners was generally low, but some jointly owned forests maximized the financial value of all activities including hunting rights. The value of the license for State was also estimated to rise as entrepreneurs would be willing to pay more for the license, if they had a right to package it with a hunting service. The entrepreneurs would then carry the risk for the license being sold. The entrepreneurs noted that they can't be expected to compensate every landowner monetarily and if every actor decides to maximize their income through this business sector, it can't be profitable anymore. Rumors of the magnitude of the financial gain from hunting tourism created local discussions on how to receive a share of the income.

It was mentioned that positive experiences from hunting tourism could expand to tourism in general both from the economic perspective as well as others. Some interviewees felt that increased hunting tourism should go through entrepreneurs and hunting packages since this way tourist hunting could be controlled better and financial value to the region better secured. A development scenario, where all licenses would be allocated to customers of professional hunting tourism businesses, was not seen likely and therefore, even in the most optimistic statements, only a certain portion of licenses could be given to the customers of hunting tourism enterprises. There was a pretty common view that hunting tourism has restricted potential, but not with the rules of the liberal economy. Several interviewees mentioned

that all tourists in rural areas have significant impact on the economy, but hunting as a sector will not be a bonanza for anyone. The respondents saw that a few, selected entrepreneurs could act within sustainable limits, but the hunting activities or the number of entrepreneurs could not grow freely.

3.7.3 Social consequences

The importance of selling Finnish hunting in its traditional form was central starting point in the interviews. The respondents spoke of the whole experience of hunting in Finland: sitting by the campfire, spending time with friends, walking in the wilderness and enjoying the scenery. The primary focus of the hunt must not be on the bag, but game must still be present to make the walk in the forests a hunting trip. The tourists should be provided with realistic expectations of weather conditions and bag probabilities. The psychological meaning of hunting was also mentioned as a positive side on hunting: the experience of hunting is lived again, when preparing a meal from the valuable bag.

“The world becomes a better place every evening when getting together after hunting.” (to socialize and talk together)

Hunting tourism was feared to increase the general amount of people in an area causing possible risks such as shooting accidents. The interviewees emphasized the need for tourists to act considerately and as if they were visiting someone’s home. This they described means not causing disturbance and not parking in such a way that complicates other land use. They also said that good hunting behavior is inherited more than learned in schools. Interestingly though the problem was related more to the domestic hunting tourists originally from the region. The interviewees noted that total strangers to the area would go to the trouble of finding out, what kind of behavior is allowed and what is not. Short-time visitors, who are impossible to track down, were seen to cause most trouble.

Interviewee 1: “Hunters must remember not to cause disturbances when moving in different places. During moose season, they can’t park in places that prevent farmers’ access to fields. They should remember ...”

Interviewee 2: “... landowner rights...”

Interviewee 1: “... proper behavior.”

Interviewee 2: “... It is, if you don’t get it from your mother’s breast, you won’t get it at all. Schools don’t teach proper conduct.”

Many interviewees mentioned “envy” as a major social constraint for hunting tourism. The respondents feared that hunting tourism could increase envy of entrepreneur’s success and jealousy of hunting ground access. The fundamental role of equal treatment of all parties clearly rose from the interviews. Any sign of secretiveness by the organizer of hunting tourism was seen to quickly lead to a negative atmosphere.

“But of course, if there are lots of non-local hunters on State land, it might provoke envy. If the game bird populations are low, people think that the locals should get them.”

One social consequence of hunting tourism is introducing international hunting to locals. Local hunters have also been proud to demonstrate Finnish game management and advance the Finnish reputation as a hunting country. It was mentioned, that locals are typically suspicious of tourists in the beginning, but quickly warm up to them when spending time together. Many mentioned how hunting tourists are talked about for a long time afterwards in a very warm and proud tone. Hunting tourism could also pro-

vide insights to locals of hunting habits elsewhere. One interviewee said that the locals were surprised by the skills of the tourist hunters, because their prejudice had been that the tourists would shoot anything at sight. The interviewees speculated that trips to foreign hunting grounds could lower the level of acceptance for hunting tourism. This development is facilitated by the increasing language-skills of locals. They also suspected that after a few visitors the opinions of the adversaries would change for the more positive, especially when they would see that the tourism provides income.

"We learn to appreciate both hunting and our municipality when we see that someone is willing to pay..."

"One very positive aspect is that hunting tourism provides an opportunity to keep the countryside inhabited. Hunting takes place in the countryside, in the middle of nature and not in urban cities. It creates opportunities for entrepreneurs when handled properly."

The interviewees saw that locals grew to appreciate their hobby through foreign tourism and seeing how people were willing to pay for what is ordinary for them. They might see the unique features of Finnish hunting, when reflecting on the stories of the foreign tourists. Finnish hunters are proud of the equality of Finnish hunting society. Hunting is not only an upper class activity and all hunters participate in handling the bag. Foreign hunters in turn attain an understanding of the context of Finnish hunting and know what is spoken of when Northern issues are decided upon in Europe.

"(Hunting tourism) is a way to promote Finland to hunters so when policy makers present Finnish hunting abroad or talk about it or justify the importance of large carnivore management, the people who have been in Finland and seen the reality and met Finnish hunters, have a more accurate view of practices than someone who thinks this is like Italy: that the rules exist but people do as they please."

The respondents also saw positive effects of hunting tourism to the whole area, not only those involving organizing hunting trip. Foreign people could be introduced to the conditions of rural life in Finland in a „cultural exchange“-way. The respondents said that it would also be good to show locals that rural areas are not just peripheral regions, but actually destinations for some. Foreign tourists were also seen to bring the locals closer to each other in trying to ensure that the tourists would return. There was also a view that outsiders in the area could make the locals put aside their old quarrels.

The interviewees pondered the role of different actors in organizing a hunting tourism event and it became evident that even though from social sustainability point of view, the hunting clubs should be involved in hunting tourism somehow, they can't be expected to carry the responsibility for customers. Hunting is a hobby for them and therefore totally based on voluntary work. Increasing hunting tourism could become a burden for the members of the clubs. Also compromising the members' own hunting possibilities to the advantage of tourists could pose a social sustainability risk.

The utmost concern regarding hunting tourism for people in the North was how it would affect the hunting opportunities of locals. Especially moose hunting is seen as a major social event without which the village would be socially remarkably poorer. The function of hunting was seen to be much more than hunting itself. Hunting is seen to be also a social medium. The equal rights and responsibilities of all hunters joining a hunt were also highlighted as preconditions for sustainability. They saw that the hunting opportunities of Finnish citizens should be secured, before selling hunting to foreign tourists. Giving land access to hunters has been axiomatic in rural areas and changes in how the landowners treat their

resource could cause social conflict. The traditional hunting areas are common knowledge to locals and in the northernmost part locals traditionally even consider all land to be for common use.

“We want to keep the untamed wilderness as a local right, regarding willow ptarmigan. As long as there are those who hunt like our ancestors did.”

The interviewees clearly wished to expand tourism but not at any price. Paying attention to the social issues and relationships was seen as essential, if not the most important, condition for developing the sector. The interviewees, including SMEs, mentioned that the entrepreneurs must pay more attention to social issues than to pure profit maximization. On the other hand the respondents also worried about the customers and said that the experience must be authentic and can't be aimed at high volume at the expense of quality.

The respondents said, that the rules and roles in hunting tourism event must be agreed upon beforehand so at the time of the hunt everything is clear and predefined: who shoots, how the bag is treated, who keeps the meat etc. Since hunting is an emotional event, situations that are ill prepared can turn into social conflicts. The image of hunting was a concern for the interviewees. They noted that any unethical hunting behavior by the tourists would not only besmirch the hunting tourism sector and the entrepreneurs, but the international image of Finnish hunting. In addition to ecological sustainability, this would have maybe even more severe consequences to social sustainability. One interview noted that international hunting tourism in Finland can be promoted, if branding is done truthfully to avoid disappointed customers and reclamations.

Definitely according to the Finnish hunting culture: we hunt the way we hunt and the foreigners, “when in Rome, do as the Romans do”.

3.8 Future trends of hunting and hunting tourism

In general the interviewees saw that the amount of local recreational hunting will decrease in the future in remote rural areas based on the socio-demographic changes (aging, immigration) in these areas. The change will not be eminent within a decade but will escalate when the currently active population ages. It was a rather common vision of all interviewees that the local hunting club members are ageing and that in the future there may be problems in controlling oversized game populations, like moose or small predators. The amount of women as hunters was seen to increase, but this will not change the declining trend of local hunters.

“It may not show clearly within ten years but after that villages will become desolate quickly.”

“The amount of local hunters has been decreasing for a long time due to ageing and the younger people moving away.”

In general it was also seen that fewer and fewer young people take up hunting as a recreation activity in the future. There will always be the active young hunter generation as well, but in general the popularity of hunting as a hobby was seen to decline. There were also fears raised concerning the proposed changes to the gun license legislation, according to which the minimum age limit for gun possession would be raised. In addition to handguns, this would influence the possession of hunting guns, which could even more direct young hunters to other hobbies.

Nevertheless, it was highlighted that there is a growing demand on hunting and hunting licenses also in the future, even the amount of local hunters might decrease. The general opinion was that there is a strong interest e.g. from the hunters from Southern Finland or Central Europe to come and hunt in Northern areas as so called permit hunters.

The interviewees also detected that the attitudes towards hunting tourism are changing gradually to more positive direction. As an explanation for this, the respondents suspected that the hunting clubs have woken up to the fact of declining size of hunting teams and were more eager than before to accept tourists as part of hunting teams. It was also mentioned that the younger generation is taking over in the boards of local hunting clubs and they generally have more positive attitude towards hunting tourist as they see it as a source of livelihood as well as a tool to keep the countryside populated. The more positive attitudes of the younger hunters were also explained by the fact a growing amount of them have themselves been in the role of the tourist. The older generation has not visited other than local hunting areas and therefore has more critical approach towards hunting tourism in general. In general the interviewees suspected that hunting tourism activities will expand in the future with the change of generation as there are fewer opposers in younger generation.

“There is a clear change but it will not show until the change of one more generation, after that there may be possibilities to operate.”

“The older generation have lived their lives on the area and have seen nothing else and they have the thought that „we don't accept visitors“.”

There were also fears that the public attitudes towards hunting in general would become more negative, when the contact to rural lifestyle is lost due to urbanization. Hunting is still widely accepted among all inhabitants in the North, but it was seen that in the Southern parts of Finland and in the cities the attitude environment is already quite different. This has direct effect also to the business environment of hunting tourism. The respondents also mentioned that those who feel most strongly against hunting, are those that usually know least about it. Also when other types of wilderness use activities continue to increase hunting as a recreation activity might suffer in having to compete with alternative land use.

“I'm afraid of juxtapositions such as fox hunting in England.”

In general the respondents saw that hunting tourism will expand to some extent both on State and private land areas. The growth on private land areas was seen more likely than on State's land. Development potential was especially seen in developing the professionalism of the current businesses rather than increasing the number of companies. This was also seen to increase the demand for other tourism services in the area. However, there was also a consensus that hunting tourism will never be a large nature tourism sector, but rather an additional activity to other nature tourism and one way to continue the tourism season in the autumn. All interest groups highlighted that hunting tourism should not increase total hunting pressure, but should be based on allocating the current hunting amount.

“It will never be a big business but it might be a good niche.”

“It will be a speciality more than a method to fill the autumn season.”

The entrepreneurs and policymakers based their growth estimations of the sector on the amount of foreign hunters. The increasing amount of foreign hunters was seen as one already existing trend in hunting tourism. Landowners and local hunting clubs mentioned domestic hunters as main customers of

hunting tourism products. They saw more potential in domestic hunting tourism, since domestic tourists are already accustomed to the Finnish hunting culture and local conditions. Especially people who are originally from the rural hunting regions and have moved elsewhere were seen as a very potential group to come back as tourists and also bring friends with them. Domestic tourists were also seen as a group with diverse interest in different game species and not only trophy ones.

“Hunting tourism will increase and I believe it will be seen as a business opportunity. Even though it is small for ordinary citizens but it is there.”

Moose and deer species were seen as the most potential game species concerning hunting tourism. It was apparent that population fluctuations and the current small game license policy cause too much uncertainties for hunting tourism activities based on grouse species, even though demand is high. Some respondents had ideas of new or underutilized game species regarding hunting tourism, like different deer species or beaver. Some suggested developing mountain hare or small predator based products for hunting tourism, but on the other hand recognized the common price level and location of Finland to raise basic travel and accommodation costs for the foreign hunting tourists so high that mainly only moose is the prominent game species for foreign markets. Some respondents speculated on the possibility of selling bear hunting but bear hunting was seen as very special hunting, not suitable to all customer groups and the amount of licenses is too low considering hunting tourism. In addition some newer hunting techniques, like bow-hunting, were mentioned as potential hunting tourism innovations.

The demand for hunting tourism is often established through word-of-mouth and happy customers keep coming back. The respondents saw that there is especially foreign demand for Finnish wilderness conditions with silent surroundings, lack of people and absence of roads. Finnish hunters saw that even walking and operating in the Finnish wilderness could be a challenge for foreigners but this could be used as our advantage by making sure that the tourists know what is being sold: a Finnish wilderness experience.

The interviewees saw that tourists continuously require more services in the products. The role of high quality accommodation and catering was highlighted and a clear change in the customs of hunting tourists was visible towards more luxury accommodation, food and guide services, even though at the same time there were suspicions whether domestic tourists would be interested in buying these kinds of services. Also the role of other activities in the hunting tourism products (fishing, wild life watching, sightseeing) were emphasized. The increasing amount of families as customers was seen as a clear trend. Concerning the regional economics this was seen as a very desirable since the wives and children consume other services while the hunters hunt.

“Perhaps in the direction that there is a growing need for guides and let’s say, better service. People want to accommodate comfortably. The level of service has changed. Now that people spend the day in the cold woods, other services must work.”

“Families have come along. Some just to photograph or such.”

The companies selling hunting tourism products were seen more professional than earlier and the degree of professionalism was expected raise. This professionalism was also seen as a reason for the estimated future growth of the sector.

“The professionalism will increase gradually.”

4. Conclusions

Based on the results, social sustainability can be seen as the most critical and challenging factor concerning the development of hunting tourism sector. Social sustainability is often discussed via economic and ecologic issues. Economic and ecological consequences can have direct affects on the environment but social factors are indirectly apparent through economic, ecologic and social changes. In line with the view that sustainability evaluations must encompass all elements of sustainability and no element can be treated as an independent variable, social sustainability in this report has been examined through all other aspects of sustainable development: the economic and the ecological. The key question in social sustainability is: sustainability for whom? Different social actors have their own values and goals and these are not always compatible with the objectives of another group. It has been stated that transferring corporate social sustainability to business objectives is best undertaken by using the stakeholder approach (Clarkson 1995). Therefore, also in this study the aim has been in evaluating and trying to understand the opinions of the key stakeholder groups of hunting tourism. According to the results, each stakeholder group had very heterogeneous opinions towards hunting tourism, and social sustainability can't be managed by treating the stakeholders as one unanimous group. Some issues were, however, highlighted more clearly within certain stakeholder groups.

When analyzing the results of this study, it must be noted that hunting tourism is currently a quite invisible phenomenon in Finland. As such, it is neither opposed nor promoted in public. Also the general opinion towards hunting in Finland is rather positive or neutral. The interest groups of hunting tourism see the matter of developing the sector mainly as a question of prioritizing the needs of different actors and reasonably allocating a limited amount of licenses. The interviewees mostly highlighted that hunting tourism at a certain, small scale, was acceptable, but most likely any attempts to significantly expand hunting tourism activities could compromise the social acceptance of the sector. The majority of the respondents did not want to "over commercialize" hunting and based this argument on maintaining the national hunting culture and the preserving traditional use of nature. Aggressive attempts to develop hunting tourism without safeguarding the local hunting opportunities were expected to meet strong opposition from all parties.

As a conclusion, the local people did not mind hunting tourism activities in their area or in general as long as they did not interfere with their own hunting possibilities. This can be explained by the fact that local hunters' rights are protected by law and they know that the current license policy does not threaten their hobby. In addition to local hunters and hunting clubs, a significant group of recreational hunters is the permit hunters. Permit hunters (commonly referred to as "lupametsästäjät") are the domestic hunters required to buy a license to hunt on state-owned land. This distinguishes them from the local hunters in the North, who have the hunting right due to their place of residence. Typically permit hunters are recreational hunters travelling from the Southern parts of Finland to Lapland to hunt once or twice a year. In that sense they can be seen as domestic hunting tourists, but they can also be very independent travellers and refrain from purchasing tourism services. Permit hunters and the customers of hunting tourism entrepreneurs compete for the same quota of small game hunting licenses and therefore are thus a very important stakeholder group concerning professional hunting tourism development. With strong unions their stance towards professional hunting tourism can have significant consequences for developing the sector. The permit hunters are a heterogeneous group concerning their opinions towards hunting tourism. Their interests have recently been comprehensively examined in a paper concerning the social sustainability of hunting tourism on state land (Keskinarkaus & Matilainen, 2009). A study of the attitudes of permit hunters on state land shows that the majority of permit hunters oppose the idea of allocating a certain quota of licenses to entrepreneurs, even though over half support hunting tourism in general.

Landowners, who hold the key resource of land access in hunting, were quite neutral towards the current volume of hunting tourism activities, but it was apparent in the interviews that expansions in professional hunting tourism could change the system from “automatic” land access to hunting clubs to a system where hunting land access must be more appropriately compensated. This would impede hunting for both hunting clubs and entrepreneurs.

The entrepreneurs paid great attention to the social sustainability of their business and acknowledged its significant role for their business activities. They were willing to make necessary compromises for social sustainability such as cut down the length of the hunting tourism season and refrain from applying for a moose hunting area for their customers. Instead, they chose to work with the hunting clubs even though this sometimes complicated their planning.

Policy makers saw hunting tourism as a niche business opportunity and were thus primarily interested in its economic impact. They had a very neutral stance towards hunting tourism but were very aware of the views of the different interest groups. Our hypothesis that the policy makers would represent the general public gained some support from the fact that all groups saw the opinion of the general public quite similarly.

All groups saw hunting tourism as a business opportunity that could be moderately advanced under certain conditions. Interestingly, even though the ecological sustainability is the determinant of the future of the hunting tourism sector, all interviewees had such trust in the monitoring systems that no-one saw the ecological limitations to be a matter of special concern. This would naturally change if the current system was threatened. The focus of discussion was the social sustainability of hunting tourism and the interviewees colorfully described the importance and meaning of hunting for their interest group. All groups saw the value of hunting tourism to be mainly its economic effect but were not willing to prioritize the economic arguments over social ones. Even the entrepreneurs themselves spoke of the limits within which their sector could be developed. Based on the results it can be stated that hunting tourism can't develop as a mass tourism form, not only based on ecological population limitations but also due to the social framework of the sector. The development must be in line with the values, culture and traditions of Finnish hunting to be able to have long term business potential.

5. References

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