

Lapland University

Tourism Research

Developing Green Care Tourism in Finnish Lapland

Cooperation and networking among tourism entrepreneurs

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ABSTRACT

There is a wide discussion on cooperation and networking in today's business world. There is considerable amount of research on cooperation or some of its close connected concepts such as collaboration, partnership or strategic alliances. Still, the way companies or entrepreneurs engage to cooperation in the tourism and service sector has implications for further studies. This study focuses on examining cooperation among tourism entrepreneurs in Finnish Lapland. Research questions concentrate on finding out how the small tourism entrepreneurs engage to cooperation? What are the determinants, the operative actions or the benefits that the entrepreneurs identify? And what part trust and commitment have in cooperative relations? Therefore, this study does not solely concentrate on the economical or strategic perspectives on cooperation but takes into account other factors such as location, social interaction and relationships, and trust. In this qualitative research, the data was collected by interviewing four tourism entrepreneurs in Finnish Lapland, Meltosjärvi village. The main results show that cooperation is based on relationships between individuals or groups, trust and commitment, and not solely on the economical benefits. Also, this study demonstrates that cooperation and network formation should start from micro-level, in this case, the entrepreneurs.

Key words: cooperation, business networks, Finnish Lapland, Green Care Tourism

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1. INTRODUCTION

A large number of small and medium-sized tourism companies (SME's) are operating in rural areas in Finnish Lapland. Today, inter-organizational cooperation is considered one of the key factors in successful business, especially in rural areas. Cooperation and networking have gained more attention in the last few decades, globally, nationally and regionally. Academics have been giving more emphasis on research on cooperation related to regional development, competition and sustainability. Also, practitioners have stressed the importance of working together rather than doing all by themselves. Cooperation, not being a new and innovative idea, still remains a challenge in rural areas in particular.

Cooperation is a process that evolves over time. To develop a reliable and active network is a long process that might take years, but ultimately with the help of the other companies, it will achieve a prominent competitive advantage in the market (see Porter, 1990.) The aim of this paper is to collect information about cooperation in a local Green Care Lapland network through interviews of four tourism entrepreneurs operating in Meltosjärvi village located in Finnish Lapland.

In this paper, cooperation and network will be examined both in general and in the context of Finnish Lapland. The prominent part of the theoretical framework is the geographic location which is defined as a *rural area* in this study. In the European Union (later EU), approximately 91% of the total territory is accounted as rural areas, and 56 % of the population lives in the countryside. Therefore, developing rural areas and supporting rural planning and policy making is a priority for EU. (Rural Development policy 2007 - 2013.)

The main concepts, cooperation and network support one another and therefore create a coherent framework for this study. Networks are all around us. For example we all belong to various networks that are formed both consciously and unconsciously. Networks appear in our private lives as in business. Although, networks differ in many ways, every business network has an underlying purpose, but still all the networks are systems of human relationships (Anklam, 2007, p. 5). And by cooperating these various networks are formed.

Research on cooperation and networking in the tourism sector is an interesting topic because of its dynamic and ever changing nature. The tourism sector is often characterized as a dynamic and wide-spread since it links diverse products and services together. It is not solely a single industry, but instead an amalgam of industry sectors. (Edgell, DelMastro Allen,

Smith & Swanson, 2008, p. 2.) Therefore, the nature of tourism industry makes the discussion on cooperation and network formation truly interesting and current. For these reasons, it has gained my interest during my studies.

The development and growth towards a profitable tourism business has been crucial for livelihood in rural areas. The potential of rural tourism has been widely recognized globally. Most often, rural tourism is characterized by nature-based products and services, local community's involvement, domination of small- and medium sized tourism companies which are mostly family-oriented, and the location in rural areas away from tourism destinations and big city centers (Rural tourism, 2008.) However, rural areas have not always been recognized as tourism destinations but during the past few decades there has been a greater awareness towards business practices in rural areas (Roberts & Hall, 2001, p. 4).

In this paper, rural areas constitute in the theoretical framework through the empirical case study and will be discussed further throughout the paper. Estimating the amount of rural areas world-wide is difficult, because of the diverse nature of the concept rural in general. The concept rural area is widely understood and contextual but a common rural development policy has been in the making by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development department. According to one classification, areas with a population density below 150 inhabitants per km² are rural. (Rural Development policy 2007 - 2013.) For the purposes of the research objectives, it is important to simply understand the nature of the area in the case study which is considered rural area in the context of both EU and Finland.

The main research question in this paper is – *How do small tourism companies engage to cooperation in rural areas?* Supporting questions were asked to gain a profound understanding on cooperation in the Green Care Lapland -network (GCL) through the case study. What are the determinants of cooperation? What operative actions entrepreneurs conduct in the network? How do the companies commit to the cooperation and what role trust plays in the network? What benefits the entrepreneurs gain from the cooperation in GCL -network? The objective for this research is to answer these questions through the analysis of the collected data.

In chapter 2 the theoretical framework and the main concepts are introduced. Theoretical framework is a wide literature review on the concepts of cooperation both in general and in the tourism and service sector, nature of different networks, and the relationship between these two. The empirical case study and the Green Care Lapland -projects are introduced in

chapter 3. In Chapter 4 the research methodology is introduced concentrating on the collection of the data, semi-structured interviews, and the analysis process, content analysis. In Chapter 5, the results from the analysis are introduced in detail according to four categorized themes. Discussion is extended to chapter 6 where further research implications are also discussed.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Cooperation

Cooperation is fairly new interest in business literature. It started getting more attention in the end of the 1970's, and towards 1990's it was recognized in business discussions among both academics and practitioners. Now, there is a considerable amount of literature on cooperation between firms and organizations both in public and private sectors. Especially during the end of 1990's, in Finland, there was an increase in literature published on inter-organizational cooperation. However, research on cooperation in service and tourism sectors did not start getting attention before the end of 1990's, during this millennium to this day (Komppula, 1996, pp. 19-20.)

Different branches of cooperation research are wide, and it has been studied from variety of different viewpoints such as cooperation as a business strategy (e.g. Porter, 1990; Lemmetyinen, 2009), the determinants of cooperation (e.g. Oliver, 1990; Komppula 1996; 2000; Czernek 2013), the public policy and cooperation (e.g. Hall, 1999), sustainable tourism development through cooperation (e.g. Björk & Virtanen, 2007, Jamal & Stronza, 2009; García-Rosell, 2009), coopetition (Kylänen & Rusko, 2011) and commitment and trust in cooperative relationships (e.g. Pesämaa & Hair, 2007; 2008).

There are different terms used about joint efforts for example cooperation, collaboration, partnership, consortium or strategic alliances (World tourism organization, 2003, p. 2; Porter, 1990, pp. 65-67). These, similar but still distinct concepts, require closer viewing to gain better understanding of the wider discussion about cooperative actions between different stakeholders. In this paper, cooperation was chosen as a main concept hence of the wide usage of it in both academic literature and in everyday life. It was a familiar concept to the

entrepreneurs interviewed which made the interaction easier and diminished the possibility of misunderstandings.

Still, it is important to take a look at other, almost synonymous terms. Partnership and collaboration are commonly used as a general description for joint efforts. Nevertheless, collaboration seems to have a much richer meaning in the business and inter-organizational relations literature. In everyday use, collaboration and cooperation tend to be synonyms. (Jamal & Stronza, 2009, p. 169.) According to Lemmetyinen (2010, p. 18) cooperation is “an inter-organizational, formal and informal action that balances divergent concerns of network actors”. While there are differences between the terms collaboration and cooperation according to some, in this study, they are used synonymously (see Arhio, 2004, p.18).

Cooperation can be examined through three types of integrations; *horizontal*, *vertical* and *territorial*. Horizontal integration means cooperation between two or more companies or organizations that have similar products or services. Vertical integration refers to cooperation between two or more companies or organizations that are from different sectors and have different services or products. Vertical cooperation is often a rule rather than exception in tourism sector. In other words, vertical cooperation means cooperation between different business sector and horizontal cooperation refers to cooperation inside one sector. Territorial integration differs from these two slightly since it refers to two or more companies or organizations cooperating in the same geographic location in same or different branches. (Komppula, 1996, p. 17; Sznajder & Przezborska & Scrimgeour, 2009, pp. 122-131.)

Komppula (1996) studied horizontal cooperation between tourism companies in her case study which was situated in Lieksa, Eastern part of Finland. Before, there was not a lot of research on cooperation from the tourism field. Komppula examined the determinants of relationship formation or cooperation (necessity, asymmetry, reciprocity, efficiency, stability and reliability), applied from Oliver’s (1990) earlier study. These determinants form a partial theoretical framework for the analysis in chapter 5.1. These determinants of cooperation are introduced in detail later in this paper. In her study, Komppula examined both bilateral and multilateral cooperation and relationships, defining the determinants and the obstacles for cooperation.

The formation of cooperative relations and partnerships depends on the circumstances, economic, cultural, organizational and structural capability of the cooperating partners (World tourism organization, 2003, p. 8). It requires deep understanding about the nature of

cooperation when examining the prerequisites and the meanings that are produced by the entrepreneurs in the specific context (Arhio, 2006, p. 47). Previous research on organizations and tourism destinations show, that there are both contract-based and informal, relation-based cooperation (Beritelli, 2010, p. 607).

In this paper, cooperation is understood as a more general concept that refers to informal or formal, between private or public sectors cooperation that is formed to some common purpose between these different stakeholders (Arhio, 2004, p. 25). Cooperation can be defined in other ways as well but in this context, where the nature of cooperation is changing according to the agreements of the entrepreneurs, it can be seen as an umbrella concept. The tourism industry is seen as dynamic and widespread, therefore the discussion on vertical and horizontal cooperation is significant. In chapter 2.2 the discussion continues on tourism networks where the cooperation amongst tourism companies link the two concepts, cooperation and networks tightly together.

Cooperation between public and private stakeholders is discussed mostly from political and economical perspectives and also, when developing new policies and practices. The relationship between public and private sector stakeholders can be complex and sometimes even nonexistent (Czernek, 2013, p. 95). Also, in this case study the relationship between the Ylitornio municipality and the private sector entrepreneurs emerged and it will be discussed further in chapter five in the results. Thus, in sustainable tourism development, where cooperation is one of the key aspects, policy planning and national characteristics should be taken into consideration (Edgell etc., 2008).

It is suggested that the need for cooperation should come from the micro level because there are many examples where commitment of different actors are loose and therefore, the cooperation does not work. Cooperation is based on more than just economic benefits. It is also tightly connected to relationships, commitment, trust, time and circumstances. In this study, the determinants, operative actions, commitment and trust, and cooperative benefits are examined as the four categories that came up in the analyzing process. They were applied to the interview questions and the analysis (see Komppula, 1996, pp. 163-166). The emphasis is on micro-level activities and interpretations of cooperation are hence highly important.

“I think actually we have moved on with this nicely because it all has started from the company’s needs. It is a little like: “Carried water doesn’t stay in the well” [Old Finnish saying]. So we have kind of from top to the bottom approach to this and it (cooperation) doesn’t work if there is no internal need for it” E2

2.2 Networks

Discussion on networks started also in the 1970’s when business practices and business sectors started slowly changing. Business was changing with rapid development of technology and mass production. The changes forced organizations and companies to start thinking other strategies to answer demands from both the industries and the consumers. (Ollus, 2000, Preword.) In organization theory, networks are linkages between different organizations and their structures of relationships (Komppula, 1996, p.35).

Anklam (2007, p. 5) introduces wide definition on networks by stating; “relationships between any collection of two or more people, groups or organizations with something in common, is a network”. In business, the definition is missing more specific characteristics such as a purpose or objective. Networks between companies are based on a purpose that benefits all involved. Hall (1999, p. 276) offers a relation between cooperation and networks by referring that “networks are the development of linkages between actors where the linkages become more formalized towards maintaining mutual interests”.

It was not until 1990’s when networking became more widespread through globalization and development in the information technology. Globalization has opened the markets and companies can acquire knowledge and resources from further than it was possible before. (Ollus, 2000, Preword.) Business sectors have experienced serious changes and especially the dynamic tourism sector where the important role of networking and cooperation has become a strategic spearhead.

Today, in tourism it is not possible to control and manage everything alone. More tourism companies are specializing into something and therefore, networking is important part of providing versatile products and services for customers. This can be considered as a global phenomenon visible also in Finnish Lapland. Most tourism companies operating today have

widespread networks that are formed for different reasons and objectives. (Ollus, 2000, Preword.)

In tourism, there has been networking as long as there has been tourism companies operating and cooperation is natural for the business. Since the 1970's to this day, networking has gained more attention in business strategies and in everyday business activities. All the time, new forms of networking are created to achieve better results, and to offer more versatile services and products for tourist. Networking is a process that is based on interaction between people with official or unofficial characteristics in achieving common goals (Axelsson, 1991, pp. 242-243).

Networks are everywhere around us. Networking is a multidimensional phenomenon and highly significant to tourism industry in general. Without heterogeneous and sometimes complicated networks, it is hard to be successful as a tourism entrepreneur especially in rural areas. Through different agreements and contracts, companies form networks that can later on turn into network of networks which are tourism clusters (Paija, 1999, p. 10).

Lemmettyinen (2010, p. 20) defines tourism business networks as “value-creating, intentional or strategic network of firms, organizations, and facilities set up to serve the specific needs and desires of tourists and consisting of actors engaged in activities and controlling resources in connection with other actors”. In this definition there are three words that had to be taken into a consideration; tourism, business and network. This definition, in comparison with Anklam (2007), has more features that can be related to business and to tourism.

Networks can be divided into two; business and private networks. O'Donnell etc. (2001) have examined the differences between these two. One way of defining business networks are dividing them to vertical and horizontal networks (Arhio, 2004, p. 25). Also, territorial networks are formed in a specific area where companies are located. It is typical for tourism networks to be inter-organizational or at least have companies or distributors from other industries part of the value chain e.g. primary production, farming or health and sports promotion. Perhaps, it can be said that tourism is related to everything and therefore, there are no specific type of network or a way of forming one.

Networks have always existed but only after the rapid development of information technology networking and cooperation beyond boundaries expanded expansively. Internet enables continuous interaction with partners, suppliers and others involved. This was also

acknowledged among the entrepreneurs in Meltosjärvi. Internet, emails and social media have changed the nature of networking. Today, you can hear terms such as electronic business or eBusiness which refers to business happening online (Anklam, 2007, p. 10)

This development has been particularly important for tourism entrepreneurs and SME's in rural areas being far from big cities and tourism destinations. Ebusiness has enabled networking outside their vicinity. Social media for example has opened a whole new viewpoint in doing business and network. There is a true possibility for the entrepreneurs not only for marketing but also in networking and to reach tourism destinations and big city centers. This development seems to continue and bring new possibilities also in the future.

2.3 From cooperation to networks and clusters

By now it is obvious that cooperation and networks or networking are tightly connected. Also, these two concepts are used in day-to-day speech synonymously. Through cooperation, networks are formed between three or more companies. These tourism networks can form more extensive consortiums called clusters. (Klepers, 2010, see also Michael, 2007.)

According to Porter (1990) clusters are “groups of companies, suppliers, service providers and institutions that are interrelated industries related by links of various kinds, are in geographic proximity and engage both in mutual competition and cooperation”. Clusters usually emerge and grow naturally. Even though Porter (1990, p. 73, 131) examines nation's competitive advantage, the ideas of clustering can be applied to a wider discussion. Clusters of industries connected through horizontal and vertical cooperation that Porter stressed can be applied to today's discussion on cooperation, networking and clusters.

The entrepreneurs use the words networking and cooperation almost as synonyms. When talking about network in the text, it refers to the GCL -project network that includes the four companies that are introduced in the case study. Tourism clusters cannot be discussed in this context yet, but it is the next step from networks that follow multilateral cooperation (Klepers, 2010, pp. 51-61). Purpose for taking clusters into the discussion is not to go any deeper into defining clusters rather just to clarify the relationship between cooperation and networks with the help of the idea of business clusters.

3. EMPIRICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Meltosjärvi village in Finnish Lapland

Empirical framework is formed by the Ylitornio municipality, and more closely the Meltosjärvi village as a context for the phenomenon that has the focus in this study. Even though, the main focus is on the four entrepreneurs that operate in Meltosjärvi or its close surroundings, understanding the nature of the area is as important. To understand the context helps us to get a fundamental idea of the context that frames the later analysis and the final results.

Through the empirical case study which was carried out in Ylitornio, a municipality located in Finnish Lapland, the key aspects of cooperation and networking will be illustrated. The four entrepreneurs chosen are living and working in the area of Meltosjärvi village or in close proximity. In this case study, a region refers to the Meltosjärvi village area if not mentioned otherwise.

The data entails four interviews conducted with four tourism entrepreneurs who participated in Green Care Lapland -project during August 2012 – January 2013. The project is introduced in chapter 3.2. The four entrepreneurs were part of a regional development group for six months. Later, they formed a local, unofficial network without any outside parties or authorities. This study explores the nature of this network and the on-going cooperation throughout the theoretical and empirical frameworks.

Meltosjärvi is a small agricultural village in Ylitornio municipality in Finnish Lapland. Ylitornio municipality is geographically a wide area approximately 2 212,7 km². Ylitornio is located in the Arctic Circle, and on the border of Finland and Sweden. Meltosjärvi is one of the 18 villages in Ylitornio. In a way the village is located in a central position when Meltosjärvi is approximately 75 km from Ylitornio center, 60 km from Rovaniemi and 45 km from Pello. Therefore, distance to Rovaniemi is less than to Ylitornio center.

“We have this nicely defined area, and what makes it funny (...) is that from here the distance to Ylitornio center and to Rovaniemi is almost the same. So you can say that we have a little identity crisis about where we belong (...)” E4

The area of Meltosjärvi inhabits around 150 people around the year. There is not a prominent change in population between summer and winter according to one entrepreneur. Mostly the

area is inhabited by locals or people who have moved to live there all year around. There is a small village center where there are primary services such as a school, a bank and a health center. According to one entrepreneur, there are 10 companies from different branches of the business, and at least four or five of them provide tourism services in the Meltosjärvi area. Raanujärvi is the neighboring village and some of the companies are partly over the official border line, so the amount of companies depends on the source.

“The area is very small and there is not very many companies so (...) I think almost all the companies are in this project.” E1



Figure 1 Map of Finland and Ylitornio municipality in Finnish Lapland

In Ylitornio, the cross-border cooperation is part of the regional development agenda but it did not come up in the interviews conducted. Therefore, it is not discussed in this paper. Instead, the interaction and cooperation, or better, the lack of it between Ylitornio municipality actors and the tourism entrepreneurs in Meltosjärvi came up in every interview. In this case study, the geographical location plays an essential role in the analysis of cooperation and networking. Rovaniemi being closer to Meltosjärvi was considered a more important area for networking in this case.

In Meltosjärvi, there are lakes and Nordic fells that shape the area. Surrounding nature and forested landscapes bring a unique attractiveness to the region. Features of Lappish nature are

distinguishable in the surrounding areas. Lakes, Iso-Meltosjärvi, Vähä-Meltosjärvi and Iso-Vietonen surround the village. Meltosjärvi and surrounding villages are well-known from their unique nature and the countryside atmosphere. The villages in Ylitornio municipality, including Meltosjärvi, are attractive nature tourism destinations that have much possibility to development in nature tourism such as Green Care tourism.

In Meltosjärvi, the cooperation between the companies can be described as horizontal hence the companies have similar tourism products and services. In some sense, vertical hence some of the companies provide services and products to other sectors as well such as education, sales or primary farming. Cooperation is territorial hence all the companies are located in the same geographical area. The nature of the cooperation in Meltosjärvi is diverse. This integration describes the nature of the cooperation and gives this study important background information for understanding better the empirical case study.

All of the companies who were part of this study offer one or more of the primary tourism services such as accommodation, activities and/or food services. The chosen companies have some common features such as family-oriented business model, nature based services and focus on green values. They all share the same values and principles in business and in their everyday lives. The entrepreneurs, who were interviewed, were approximately from 30 to 70 years old. To ensure the anonymity for the entrepreneurs and for the objective of this study, there was no reason for more specific descriptions of the participant companies.

3.2 Green Care Lapland -project

Green Care Lapland -project is a 2-year project that supports companies, entrepreneurs, municipalities and associations to develop totally new or already existing products and make them more nature friendly in the frames of Green Care principles (see Green Care Lapland). Project was launched on the 1. January 2012 and it will end the 30. June 2014. The GCL -project is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, Centre for Economic Development and Transport and the Environment in Lapland.

The project is operated by a project group in Rovaniemi University of Applied Science (RAMK). Green Care Lapland had four development groups in different municipalities in Finnish Lapland during the year 2012 (Enontekiö-Utsjoki, Muonio, Sodankylä and Ylitornio).

The fifth development group was launched in January 2013 in Rovaniemi. (Green Care Lapland; Jankkila, 2012, p. 4.)

According to the pre-report of the GCL -project there are a lot of possibilities for Green Care activities in different sectors in Finnish Lapland. Especially Green Care tourism has much capacity in rural areas and therefore, positive future prospects. All the entrepreneurs and the companies, who are involved with the project, already produce products and services that are based on nature tourism, promotion of wellbeing and at least partly based on the Green Care values. (Jääskeläinen, 2012, pp. 51-64.)

Green Care is a new concept that has been slowly coming to Finland from the health and social sector. Green Care Finland (GCF) is an association that has taken the initiative to promote the Green Care ideas and principles in Finland. Simply Green Care is wellbeing from the nature. Mostly Green Care is used to special groups for example people with disabilities. (Green Care Finland.)

Originally Green Care concept comes from farming and agriculture where farm activities, horticultural- and animal therapies are used for therapy purposes (Relf, 2006, p. 1). For example, Norway, Netherlands and Italy Green Care farms have a longer history and are more widespread than in Finland (Hassink & Dijk, 2006, p. 347). Green Care concept in tourism is still undefined so there are implications for further research in Green Care tourism. Perhaps, there are weak signals already visible and Green Care tourism will develop into a trend in the near future in Finnish Lapland.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Semi-structured interviews and collected data

By using interviews as a method, the aim was to find out the entrepreneurs interpretations, thoughts and given meanings about the specific phenomenon. The aim is not to generalize or to make assumptions but rather use content analysis as a tool to make sense of cooperation in the empirical case study. The research data is analyzed according to the theoretical framework and the main concepts. The results are based on researcher's interpretations from collected data, hermeneutics. (Heikkinen etc., 2005 according to Metsämuuronen, 2008, p. 12.)

In this paper, the semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. Four entrepreneurs were interviewed. These interviews aimed to systematically collect the information needed (Metsämuuronen, 2008, p. 38). Interviews are one of the most used ways to collect data in qualitative research especially in social sciences. The interviews can be structured in different ways. For the research question in this paper the most suitable way was to categorize them by the readiness of the questions; structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Jennings, 2005, p. 100; Ruusuvuori & Tiittula, 2005, p. 11).

Interview questions were divided to themes such as company's background information, cooperation and networking, commitment and trust in cooperation, experiences of cooperation and future outlooks. The structure of the interview questions was applied from Komppula (1996, pp. 163-166) based on the similarities of the research interests. This paper used qualitative data and analysis on finding out the prerequisites of cooperation among tourism entrepreneurs.

Before, all entrepreneurs agreed to participate on the research process and were asked a permission to use all the collected data only for this research purposes. All entrepreneurs agreed to be part of the research. The data was collected during a 6-day trip to the municipality of Ylitornio. The data was collected in collaboration with an international group of students, educators and researchers. TURID 2013 is a group of educators, researchers and students from Nordic and Baltic countries, who participated in Nordplus funded project and an intensive course in Ylitornio, Finland 13.-18.1.2013.

There were 4-6 students and the entrepreneur present in the room when each interview was conducted. One of the interviews was done in English and to get the thorough explanations and answers, three of the interviews were done in Finnish. These three interviews were later translated to English. Another reason to use Finnish as an interview language was the interviewee's ability to answer the questions better in their native language. The four interviews were from 37 minutes to 65 minutes long.

During the interviews the same questions were asked from all the entrepreneurs and if needed, the interviewer asked for more detail or provided explanations. The interview situations were interactional which meant that in an addition to the questions asked more details or clarification were asked if needed. This again gave more accurate data for the analysis and the final results.

Interviews were chosen for the data collection for several reasons. First, it was the best way to get information directly from the entrepreneurs. If, for example, newsletters or online sources were used, they would have not answered the research question from the perspective wanted. And secondly, in qualitative research in social sciences, interviews are often used because the aim is to explain social phenomenon that are constructed socially and interactively. This study is based on social constructivism which means the social reality is constructed through interaction and communication. In this research the meanings and the social actions are emphasized. Social constructivism includes three ways of looking at the reality and the research process. First the reality is subjective (ontology), second the individual's possess the knowledge (epistemology) and third the researcher is interacting with the subjects or interviewees in this case. (Metsämuuronen, 2008, p. 12.)

In this case, the focus is on the cooperation among tourism entrepreneurs in Meltosjärvi village, hence the chosen view point is from them. When carried out, well-planned interviews can give a deep inside about the social phenomenon from the chosen perspective. This paper was inspired by the Green Care Lapland project. The intensive course in Ylitornio had specific guidelines and timetables. The data was collected in cooperation with the participants of the TURID 2013. Students were participating in the interviews and also the timetable of the data collection was pre-organized. Therefore, these factors could have influenced the nature of collected data compared to an interview situation where only the entrepreneur and the interviewee were present.

All interviews were recorded for later analysis. Interviews were transcribed which helped the analyzing process so that the information was available throughout the whole research process (Ruusuvuori & Tiittula, 2005, p. 14). Only the spoken language was transcribed because all the other gestures or for example pauses were not highly significant when analyzing the results. After transcription interviews were from 9 to 11 pages. If the research was to put more stress on the attitudes or emotions, these small gestures and features would have been important in the final analysis phase (Ruusuvuori & Tiittula, 2005, p. 16).

There are quotations from the interviews throughout the paper and instead of names of the entrepreneurs or of the companies symbols are used to ensure the anonymity. In the paper, entrepreneurs are marked as E1, E2, E3 and E4. If the entrepreneurs referred to another company, it is marked as C1, C2, C3 and C4. These given symbols are not in any specific order and do not match with one another. The results are based on the interview questions on

cooperation and networks, and followed by the researcher's analysis from the chosen topics in chapter 5.

4.2 Content analysis

The theoretical framework and the empirical case study led to the chosen method in this qualitative research analysis. Content analysis was used to analyze the interviews to answer the research questions. Neuendorf (2002, p. 1) defines content analysis as follows: “(...) the systematic and objective analysis of message characteristics. It includes the careful examination of human interactions (...)”. For the purposes of this study it was important to find out what kind of meanings the entrepreneurs produce in their speech about cooperation and networking.

Content analysis was chosen hence it supports the research questions and the objectives of the study. In the analysis, the emphasis is in the words and meanings from the interviewee's answers. Even though, there is an interest towards the meanings behind the words and the comments from the entrepreneurs, more value lies in the words itself.

Content analysis can be seen as a basic analysis method in qualitative research and it is also a sort of a loose theoretical framework. In a way, all the qualitative research methods are based in the content analysis. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 91; Hall, 2005, pp. 191-206.) Other methods such as discourse analysis, narrative method or semiotics would have not been a coherent part of the entity considering the collected data and the objective of this case study. Later in the analysis it was obvious that despite of few differences or contradictions between the entrepreneur's interviews, there were mostly similarities and unified answers given.

When using content analysis, the researcher has to make a decision and border the subject of interest precisely otherwise the analysis might end up being complicated and unclear for the reader. Research questions, the main concepts and the theory delineate the research. This paper aims to study one phenomenon, cooperation and networking among four tourism entrepreneurs, in one specific geographic location, Meltojärvi village.

First, to gain an extensive understanding of the collected data, it was reviewed several times during the research process. When using content analysis, it is essential to make observations from the data and analyze them systematically. In content analysis, data is categorized by

looking for similarities and differences, and summarizing them under the chosen categorizes. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, p.105.) Hence in the analysis the data were shattered into smaller pieces, conceptualized and then organized into new, themed entities. Also, quantifying was partly used in the analysis process. While examining the determinants of cooperation through the framework of Oliver (1990) some loose quantifying, counting how many time some theme or word is mentioned in the data, was used (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2002, s.117).

The analysis can be conducted based on the collected data or the theory, or both. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 109-116.) In this case both the data and the theoretical framework guided the analysis process. Some frequently mentioned themes were then named again under the same title for example “trust” or “the relationship between Ylitornio municipality and the entrepreneurs” (public and private sector).

Therefore, the themed results introduced in the following chapter (5) are constructed according to the topics that the entrepreneurs emphasized or the topics the researcher found interesting or relevant to the study. Also, the chosen themes follow the research question and supporting questions introduced earlier in the paper. The frequently mentioned themes will be examined from the following perspectives 1) what are the determinants of the cooperation, 2) the operative actions in the GCL -network, 3) the role of commitment and trust in the network, and 4) the benefits that drive to cooperation and networking. These themes also answers the research questions.

During the research there were some preconceptions about cooperation beforehand, after spending one week getting to know the entrepreneurs in January 2013. Some of the preconceptions came up in the interviews and are part of the analysis through the interviews. Researcher made choices that have an influence on the results such as choosing my empirical case study, deciding to use interviews as method and choosing the quotations to use in the paper.

5. COOPERATION IN MELTOSJÄRVI

5.1 The determinants of cooperation

In this chapter, determinants of cooperation will be examined through a modified framework the determinants of cooperation in a multilateral network (Oliver, 1990; Komppula; 1996). In

this case study the focus is on the multilateral network and cooperation. Determinant is understood as a reason for starting cooperation with one or more companies. There are some expectations on cooperation and those are named as determinants such as *necessity*, *asymmetry*, *reciprocity*, *efficiency*, *stability* and *reliability*. (Oliver, 1990; Komppula, 1996, p. 56.) These determinants are determinants of relationship formation as well as cooperation therefore they are suitable for this study where relationships between the entrepreneurs define the network operations intensively.

In Table 1 it is demonstrated how or if the entrepreneurs in this case study mentioned the determinants by using the same word or synonymous meanings. This part of the analysis is partly based on the researcher's interpretations of synonymous meanings. There was some variation among entrepreneurs but not much. Some determinants were mentioned several times while others were not mentioned at all.

Table 1 Oliver's determinants, and the one's mentioned by the entrepreneurs.
Reference: Oliver, 1990 pp. 243–246; Komppula, 1996, p. 56.

	E1	E2	E3	E4
necessity				
asymmetry	x		x	x
reciprocity	x	x	x	x
efficiency	x	x	x	x
stability				
reliability				

In the interviews *necessity* was not mentioned once as itself. Necessity refers to companies being dependent on each other to answer competition or to obey some laws or regulations (Komppula, 1996, pp. 39-40). Cooperation in general was perceived especially important. On the contrary the GCL -network was not considered vitally important for business for an individual company at the moment. However, all the entrepreneurs were optimistic about the future of the network. They all estimated that the importance of their cooperation and network activities would grow in time if all went as planned.

“Not a very big part of it, because what we have now done together is a start but maybe in the future it can be.” E4

“Maybe in the future it will be important. We hope so.” E2

Still, necessity is part of the fact that the network was originally formed. The competition between small and large tourism companies can be harsh. SME's normally join resources to get a competitive advantage compared to the large, dominant companies while still being able to provide specialized and tailored services. Also, in this case, the competition in the tourism field in Finnish Lapland is intense and perhaps SME's need each other. Therefore, they are dependent on each other and necessity is one of the determinants in this case.

“And they are competing with the small companies, and it is difficult for small companies to go forward. But I don't speak about the accommodation companies but I don't talk about the activities companies. And all these big companies are organizing all by themselves (...)” E4

Asymmetry means that small or medium-sized companies join resources to answer the competition set by large companies (Komppula, 1996, p. 40). This was a determinant three entrepreneurs recognized and mentioned in the interviews. However, two entrepreneurs whose tourism services concentrate on winter time were aware of the mass tourism that takes over their businesses as well during the busy Christmas and winter. Still, the entrepreneurs want to offer special products and services and distinguish their companies from mass production of tourism services. There is a possibility to specialize in Green Care Tourism that is still a rather unknown and new branch of tourism in Finland.

“Also because cooperating together I think you get more than being competitors all the time and if you think I want everything to come to my company and I don't want anything for the others. But now days in Lapland too there are more and more very big companies that is a pity. They come really huge.” E4

Reciprocity, the interactive change of goods or knowledge towards set goals was mentioned by all the entrepreneurs (Komppula, 1996, p. 40). In the operative actions the clearest function was to borrow equipment or reindeer for example. The know-how was passed from older entrepreneurs to the younger and not only inside the network but also from parents to children in one case.

Efficiency is one determinant that stresses the financial benefits but also for example in marketing. (Komppula, 1996, pp. 40-41). Efficiency was considered as an important determinant for cooperation in this case study. Efficiency was mentioned several times on

discussion about reasons to start cooperation. Especially, financial efficiency in marketing or resource sharing was emphasized by two of the entrepreneurs.

“Also marketing (...) you can get much more with same amount of money rather than using it just by yourselves.” E3

“Also you cannot do all by yourself that’s for sure and I think it’s not even – how can I say (...) economically efficient (...) E4

Stability refers to uncertainty in the business field such as paucity of resources or unstable economics, or factors coming from outside that can destabilize the company’s existence (Komppula, 1996, p. 41). This did not come up as a factor in the interviews. The state of tourism is rather stable in Finnish Lapland and in Meltosjärvi. In fact, the GCL -network was established more as an opportunity to develop a new branch of tourism based on the Green Care values and nature tourism.

Through *reliability* companies normally aim to better their reputation or build an imago via cooperation with two or more companies or organizations (Komppula, 1996, p. 41).

Reliability was not mentioned by the entrepreneurs. Hence the networking in this GCL -project is just began either branding or joint marketing has not yet discussed or decided on. There are signs towards that sort of development through the joint week-program and the Green Care Tourism brand.

To summarize, the most significant determinants in this case study were asymmetry, reciprocity and efficiency. None of the determinants were asked in the interviews therefore they had to be mentioned by the entrepreneurs in another context. Oliver’s (1990) determinants worked well as a theoretical framework establishing the determinants of this specific GCL -network.

5.2 Operative actions in the network

Some operative actions, which concretize the cooperation, were discussed in the interviews and they are also part of the analysis. The most frequently mentioned in this network were *sharing resources, joint product development, promoting other companies in the area, subcontracting, social interaction and marketing*. One of the entrepreneurs stressed the

importance of the operative actions in successful cooperation. The most frequently mentioned operative actions were chosen for further analysis.

“It was really important that we started doing something concrete right from the beginning. We haven’t thought too much about common principles but rather just decided to do something. It’s a lot easier that way.” E3

Sharing resources is not a new form of cooperation for the entrepreneurs. All the entrepreneurs and their families have been living in the area for a long time, expect for one who has other connections to the area from before. They have known each other a long time as well and therefore, they have been sharing resources when someone has needed snowshoes or reindeer. Perhaps, sharing resources is one of the most common ways of cooperation in both official and unofficial networks.

“To use the resources efficiently in every level, like we talked about the equipment swapping earlier.” E3

“And these things which we agreed on, like snowshoes, we swap equipments (...)” E2

Joint product development is the most visible act in GCL -network. The group of entrepreneurs has been developing a new weekly program that involves services and products from all the companies. Two of the companies focus their services for winter and two for the summer. The main goal is to increase tourism activities for spring, summer and fall instead of the already busy winter season.

“We have worked together since the beginning (1994). On our first reindeer safari we had [E4] reindeer with us.” E1

It was important for the entrepreneurs to *promote other companies in the area*. It is based in the social relationships and friendships between the entrepreneurs. All the entrepreneurs explained how they feel that they share the same values and are happy to recommend other company for tourist in case they are fully booked or too busy. This was evidently based on the tight social structure of the GCL -network.

“So we are making the full program package where we are using their products or we are just selling them for individual guests.” E4

“ (...) not like that we are competitors. We are good friends and if we are full I can surely call them if they have place and so on (...)” E4

Also, *subcontracting* occurs between some of the companies. Services and products vary between the companies and subcontracting enables more versatile supply. Before GCL - network was established subcontracting was mostly unofficial and dyadic. In Lapland, it is common for tourism activity companies especially to provide services for hotels and travel agencies. This is mostly because tourism activity companies seldom have the possibility to provide accommodation or transportation. Special characteristics between tourism service providers shape the nature of cooperation.

“Well, mainly it goes so that I order their services, I sell it and take persons there in their place or they are coming here (...)” E4

Between the entrepreneurs there was regular *social interaction* that had a fundamental impact on the beginning and development phases of the network. In every interview the relationship between the entrepreneurs came up as the most important reason for successful cooperation. Also, the reasons for starting the cooperation and establishing the network came from the company's needs. One of the entrepreneurs talked about the bottom-up approach where the cooperation starts from internal need.

Via *joint product* development also marketing was raised into a discussion among the entrepreneurs. Currently, every company has their own marketing channels and websites. Because the network is unofficial, there is no joint marketing yet. There is a potential for development in *marketing* and destination branding for these Green Care Tourism companies and this was also acknowledged by the practitioners.

“And then came this Green Care to our area (Ylitornio) so now we that together with kind of wellness and health week together with other companies in the area..” E4

None of the entrepreneurs think there is competition between the four companies. Still, they recognize having identical tourism services and products. They are actually competing in some levels. Having individual marketing channels, websites and networking elsewhere, the companies do not compete for the same tourist segments at the moment. However, if cooperation is to be continued and developed extensive competitor analysis would enable the network strategy to be drawn (see Porter, 2008).

“ (...) not like that we are competitors. We are good friends and if we are full I can surely call them if they have place and so on (...)” E4

“We really don’t have the same products (...) but [C1] and [C4] have some.” E3

“I don’t see there is (competition) between these companies, no.. Not so that we could talk about competition.” E4

5.3 The meaning of commitment and trust

Personal support and relationships in a network and between the cooperative partners has not been discussed as much as for example the economical perspective but deserves as much attention (see e.g. Pesämaa & Hall, 2007; 2008). During the research it became obvious that personal relations before, during and after the GCL –project were important to the entrepreneurs. Especially in entrepreneurship commitment and trust are an important determinant of cooperative actions.

One of the entrepreneurs explained how they borrowed other entrepreneur’s reindeer for the very first reindeer safari they had. There were different social relations between the families already before the GCL -project was launched. Some had worked together, some were good friends and they all knew each other as members of the village community. In the interviews this was seen as a key factor for the successful start for the cooperation.

“(...) but we have this restricted area here, where the entrepreneurs and the companies know each other and so that forms the base (...)” E3

Networks can be divided to official, contract-based and unofficial, relationship-based networks (Axelsson, 1991, pp. 242-243). The GCL -project group functioned as an authority and an executor that named a project leader among the four entrepreneurs. The project leader, one of the entrepreneurs, organized the monthly meetings and was named the chairman. According to the entrepreneurs the meetings were held in someone’s home or companies facilities to keep them as casual as possible. The six-month project was more as an initiator for cooperation and the network was operated based on the relationships instead of contracts or agreements.

“Of course we have known each other and been friends for a long time with these people who are involved in this network. When we talk about the companies here that are run by entrepreneurs and have very little hired staff, it’s all about the people.”

E3

“Well, let’s say that we have known each other and E3 has been working for C4 last winter so (...) I am sure it has helped a lot in this and we have known each other so there has not been a need to use time for the acquaint phase.” E3

“We have had nice meetings (...) And you could feel that easiness and so on (...)” E2

There is a consensus between the four companies therefore all entrepreneurs seem to have shared values, similar business principles and compatible tourism services and products. All the entrepreneurs share the cohesion which they saw as an important factor for committing to the network. One of the entrepreneurs mentioned that because they were friends before the project and had shared values they could start developing a concrete product (the week-program) right away. Normally, this could take years.

“They came here and told me about this Green Care project and I was very interested and they said to me that they first thought about us because we kind do already Green Care but do not use in the marketing..” E4

“Our business idea was suitable for this Green Care format already before this GCL -project. We have always been pretty green (...)” E3

Trust is mentioned as a key factor in cooperation between two or more companies or organizations (Komppula, 1996, pp. 46, 117.) Trust is usually based on long-term relationships and cannot be established between strangers. In this case it was beneficial for the entrepreneurs that they all knew each other former to GCL -network and current multilateral cooperation. They have had dyadic cooperation before that has been mostly just “helping a friend” or referring tourists to other company for example in case of an overbooking. According to the entrepreneurs trust was already there and starting the cooperation was easy.

“The trust is already there” E3

“Yes, Yes, I think so because now they have trust me so much that I have put all the program together and given the price for that and now I go marketing it. So I have trust (...)” E4

One of the reasons why GCL -network would be considered informal rather than formal is because none of the entrepreneurs have not invested anything else but their time. However, time is often money for entrepreneurs. Also the entrepreneurs bring their own know-how and local knowledge to the development and that is perhaps more valuable than invested money in this case. The entrepreneurs felt that the project was important hence as an entrepreneur you do not have much time to organize meetings or start forming a network. Although, as mentioned earlier all entrepreneurs have their own networking outside the GCL -network.

“They are very small companies together in this so it would impossible to invest (...)” E4

“Yeah, perhaps it needs a project but not necessarily but in practice it’s good like that because all the entrepreneurs are very busy with their own work so they really don’t have so much time for thinking like so what should we do together.” E4

“If you look at the email traffic you could tell there is constant communication without any authority. The technology makes it possible (...)” E3

Cooperation between public and private sector stakeholders can be complicated. The motives and objectives can differ between these two. From the interviews it was obvious that the public sector is not participating to the cooperative activities. Some of the entrepreneurs feel that the public sector is operating there and they are operating here. There was a clear division to “us” and “them”. The location of Meltosjärvi village and the tourism companies is closer to Rovaniemi than Ylitornio city center. Perhaps, this is the reason for current situation.

“And especially the network in this area when talking about Ylitornio, it is a very big county and sometimes they think that they are only there in the central which matters and we here in the countryside. “ E4

“So we have our own network here and they have their own in Ylitornio. But this could be more bigger. This is very small network.” E4

5.4 Benefits from the cooperation

There are some clear benefits from cooperation that the companies see beneficial for the business and they are also the reasons why companies engage to cooperative activities. There

are some close connections to the determinants of cooperation (chapter 5.1.) and benefits of cooperation that are discussed in this chapter. Still, the different perspectives are chosen to look at these factors. In this chapter, more concrete activities are examined where as in chapter 5.1 the determinants of cooperation were examined through the loose framework of Oliver (1990).

The most frequently mentioned benefits by the entrepreneurs were chosen for the analysis. *Economic benefits, versatile programs for tourists, regional attractiveness, growth in amount of visitors, personal support and the possibility for year-around tourism* were the benefits that came up in the interviews two or more times. In addition, the importance of the GCL - network for the entrepreneurs and the state of current cooperation is discussed later in this chapter.

Cooperation is often mentioned as a key factor in business strategies, and the *economic benefits* as a result from this cooperation. Considerable amount of research has been conducted from the perspective of business economics (see e.g Porter, 1990; Arhio, 2004). However, in recent years the focus has shifted to other aspects such as cultural and social factors in cooperation. It was evident in this network as well that values, the social process of networking and the added value for the customers gained more emphasis than increased profit for the companies. While, economic benefits were still mentioned in a sense of bringing more work and more customers for the companies.

“It sounded like a good idea and maybe it will bring us more work in the future.” E3

“Hopefully it can bring us more work in the future.” E2

“(...) to get more clients (...)” E1

All the entrepreneurs agreed that it was important to provide something special and added value for the guests arriving to Meltosjärvi. Being able to offer *versatile programs for tourists* was clearly one of the objectives for cooperation but also one of the benefits that the entrepreneurs felt was important. It was clear from the way the entrepreneurs were talking about the customers, calling them guests or visitors rather than using the word tourist for example. It was obvious that the customer experience and satisfaction was on the core of the business activities and the development. For the entrepreneurs the guests are individuals and special. In no case do they want to develop to the level of mass tourism in Meltosjärvi.

“You can provide versatile programs for the guests and one company does not have to know it all but they can specialize in something” E1

“(…) and you can provide wider program right away” E3

“Because when you have a huge company that is organizing all by themselves, I think, then the traveler is not anymore so special, but it’s becoming more like mass, mass-tourism.” E4

Regional attractiveness was considered important to the entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurs want to develop and make the area attractive in a sustainable way for all visitors and maintain the respect for the surrounding nature. All the entrepreneurs mentioned the growth in amount of visitors to their companies as a benefit for themselves but also to the area. It seemed like the entrepreneurs were thinking if the area had more visitors, all the tourism companies and other stakeholders would benefit from it. One of the entrepreneurs stressed the importance of showing a good example for others which would maybe generalize the idea of cooperation in Finnish Lapland even further.

“Well, at least we can show a good example of how well things could work with good cooperation.” E4

“But let’s say that that it (cooperation) will bring benefits to the close area here and a possibility to attract more customers. It (cooperation) brings recognizability to the whole area. If one company messes up, the whole Lapland or Finland has messed up. They don’t know a company called [name of the company 4]. Every entrepreneur has to take responsibility of the area.” E1

One of the characteristics that shape the tourism sector in Finnish Lapland is seasonality. The possibilities for *all-year around tourism* were discussed among the entrepreneurs. Christmas time and winter are busy, even over the capacity of the area and companies, when spring, summer and autumn are slow and quiet. This is a generally noted problem in tourism globally, nationally and regionally. For example many ski resorts in Finland have been battling with this problem of seasonality by trying to provide new innovative summer activities, but still, seasonality is a challenge.

For the entrepreneurs in Meltojärvi this has been a challenge they have taken up as an objective for the cooperation. With a joint Green Care week-program that includes services

and products from all the four companies, they intend to develop tourism outside the busy and hectic winter season. Themed, Green Care week-program is planned for spring, summer and autumn. Network has a clear objective that benefits all four companies, the surrounding area and hopefully shows an example of well-planned cooperation that starts from the companies needs, micro to macro level (bottom-up-approach).

“Not very big part of it [our business at the moment], because this is what we have now done together, is a start but maybe in the future it can be. If they [the travel agencies] like this program, and we will have here very many groups, while summer and autumn, then it is a big part of our business. E4

For the future the entrepreneurs are hopeful. The importance of the network is not considered great yet, but all the entrepreneurs acknowledge its possibilities in the future. Even though the 6-month project is over, the entrepreneurs realize the work is not finished. They intend to have regular meetings, continue developing the joint tourism products and common marketing in the future. It is hard to estimate the outcomes of the cooperation. There are implication for further studies on the development of cooperative actions and networking in Finnish Lapland. Also, the development in other GCL -networks in Enontekiö-Utsjoki, Muonio, Sodankylä and Rovaniemi would give more fundamental answers on the current state of development related to the GCL -project in Finnish Lapland. Cooperation is important for all stakeholders.

“Cooperation is important. It is very important.” E1

6. DISCUSSION

This paper emphasized the importance of cooperation between different stakeholders operating in rural areas. Cooperation has become more evident and it is not a new phenomenon but still challenging especially in rural areas. There is a division made between cooperation and networks though they are strongly linked. Companies cooperate horizontally (substitutive products), vertically (complementary products) or territorially (location as determinant). All these integrations define the nature of the cooperation in this case study and give important background information on the phenomenon.

In this study, the main focus was on the determinants of cooperation, the operative actions that concrete the cooperation, trust and commitment in networking and benefits from

cooperation to individual companies. Through these themes the objective was to explore how small tourism companies engage to cooperation in rural areas. The case study in Meltosjärvi gives a vivid, but still to a certain extent a typical, example of cooperation among tourism entrepreneurs in rural areas in the context of Finnish Lapland. There are clear implications that cooperation, in general, has some similarities but also characteristics that are unique for specific area, region or nation.

Cooperation is based on relationships and interaction between different stakeholders. Maintaining the network and the relationship between the cooperative entrepreneurs or people behind companies and organizations requires constant interaction and mutual agreements about the course of the development. One of the entrepreneurs said it well when comparing network to a marriage.

“It needs managing like a marriage. You have to care of it.” E1

Based on the analysis there are main characteristics that shape the cooperation in Meltosjärvi among the four tourism entrepreneurs. First, the location has been one of the main reasons for the formation of this specific GCL -network. Second, for the entrepreneurs it was crucial that there was a project and an outside authority to launch the cooperation since normally entrepreneurs have little time to organize meetings or establish formal or informal networks. Third, all participants in the network were friends or at least acquaintances before the GCL – network and the trust was already there. Therefore, the operative actions and cooperation started smoothly right from the start. Fourth, the entrepreneurs in the GCL -network share the same values and principles, have similar services and products that follow the Green Care principles and also, they have parallel future outlooks. These attributes have influenced on the cooperation in Meltosjärvi.

The objective of this study was not to produce new information about cooperation or networks rather focus on one small geographic area and examine the meanings and determinants of cooperation given by the entrepreneurs. Aim was to give an example on how small tourism companies can benefit from cooperation in Finnish Lapland and in general, in rural areas. As the study was conducted using qualitative research methods, the interpretations made were suitable for the research paper objective but may as well be different in another context.

In many ways this study was conducted with researcher's interminable enthusiasm towards the topic and with the continuous participation of the entrepreneurs from Meltosjärvi. For further research there are clear implications to examine more closely the cooperative relationship between public and private sectors in Finnish Lapland or to extend the research on other tourism networks for example in the GCL -project. The tourism sector provides many unique examples of different kinds of networks that deserve further examination.

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Attachment 1: The interview questions

BACKGROUND

Company name and your name

Can you tell about your products and services?

Can you tell me shortly the start and development phase in your company?

Which networks are you involved with? (regional or/and national)

Why did you join the Green Care Lapland project?

How long have you been part of this network?

What is *Green Care* to you?

GCL –NETWORK AND COOPERATION

Who do you cooperate with? Which companies? And are they your competitors, so that you have some same products?

What does networking mean to your company in practice? What kind of cooperation do you have with the other companies?

How long have you been involved with this Green Care Lapland network (GCL)?

In general, why should tourism companies work together?

How do you benefit from the cooperation?

What kind of reasons would make you leave this network/stop cooperation?

How can the area or region and business's benefit from this kind of cooperation?

COMMITMENT

How important this cooperation is to your company?

How much have you invested in this cooperation? – financial, time, know-how or something else?

TRUST

Cooperation demands trust. What are the things that have an impact on trust between different actors or increase trust? How does trust develop?

EXPERIENCE

How do you maintain this GCL network?

Have you experienced success in the GCL network? Can you think of any situations?

At the moment, are you happy how the cooperation is going in Meltosjärvi and Ylitornio?
What about in Lapland?

Have you experienced any disappointments in this GCL network? Can you think of any situations?

Can you think of any situations that could lead to ending the cooperation?

FUTURE

Do you feel that this kinds of networks are important to the local tourism development in Ylitornio or in Finnish Lapland?

Would it be beneficial to have a network list of tourism companies in Lapland?

How can other tourism entrepreneurs be involved with this kind of cooperation?