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**CO-CREATING THE PLACE BRAND  
OF FINNISH LAPLAND**  
Mental associations and visual representations

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# ABSTRACT

Johanna Dietrich: Co-creating the place brand of Finnish Lapland. Mental associations and visual representations  
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Brands are living in an era of customer-centric life where all their potential, present and former customers are regarded as co-creators. The center of attention is in customers' daily lives and they have an enormous amount of power to influence on brands. Social media has accelerated the pace of communication and this has connected also cities and counties into the new brand co-creation paradigm. Places have adopted branding practices from the business world to persuade people to move, do business or travel in their area. In Finland, Lapland has been one of the first counties to execute place branding activities considering the tourism planning which started already in the 1980's. The aim of this study is to analyze the place brand associations that Finnish Lapland generates as well as contribute to the understanding of place brand co-creation process in Lapland.

The theoretical framework of this study consists of place branding, brand co-creation and stakeholder theories which form the base for empirical observations. The empirical data includes visual and verbal elements: photographs from House of Laplands' Instagram accounts as well as interview materials. The research method is qualitative combining semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis and visual methods to create an image of mental associations that the place brand of Finnish Lapland evokes. Through the analysis of interview data, the brand co-creation process and understanding of Laplands' place brand is examined.

The results show that Finnish Lapland has a strong place brand which is remarkable in Finnish scale as majority of other counties are launching their branding activities. Laplands' place brand was associated with nature, internationality, location-specific characteristics and tourism from which the nature was considered as the prime characteristic of the brand. The brand development work has been mainly project-based until establishment of the Official Marketing and Communication House of Lapland in 2015. This was reflected in the results as an unclear image of the brand creation process in Lapland. Despite this, results indicated that stakeholders working in relation to Laplands' branding have a shared vision of the future development points of the brand. Functional infrastructure and accessibility were regarded as the competitive advantages of Finnish Lapland when compared to nearby competitors Sweden and Norway.

This research supports the findings of earlier studies considering the importance of authentic visual materials in place branding activities. Furthermore, this case study demonstrated that stakeholders who can relate to the marketing pictures used by place branders in Lapland have clearer image of the brand since they can relate to the already existing place brand as the way it is marketed. Based on the results, branding activities in Lapland will face challenges common to the public sector as Lapland has a public co-created brand which encompasses authentic features of a vast region including different people, different natural conditions and different cultures.

Keywords: Place branding, brand co-creation, stakeholder approach, brand identity, brand image, Lapland

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Finnish Lapland has a well-known brand which has been developed systematically from the 1980's on (Lapin aluekehitysohjelma 1998–2001). As a place Lapland tries to achieve a reputation as a lively, modern place to live, visit and do business. Geographically Lapland covers the Northern Finland starting from the Sea Lapland area around Kemi and Tornio reaching all the way north to the Fell Lapland area and to Nuorgam, the most northern village of Finland. Lapland has been growing the number of visitors significantly during the last years. In December 2018 Lapland accommodated 399 000 foreign tourists which is 7,8 percent more compared to December 2017 (Tilastokeskus, a, 2019). In Nordic scale, Finnish Lapland is a significant actor. During years 2013 and 2014 the aggregate demand of tourism in Lapland was 1 billion euros (House of Lapland, b, n.d.) which makes Lapland a vitally important region for Finland.

All places enforcing place branding and marketing activities have the same aims: identify market opportunities and implement strategies that will foster social and economic development within particular geographic area. This holds true in Laplands' case as well: Lapland has its own marketing house which aims to attract tourists, businesses and potential residents to the area. A motive to focus on the brand of Finnish Lapland is the exceptionally good reputation and positive mental associations it stimulates (Aro, Suomi & Saraniemi, 2018, 75). Furthermore, place branding is a growing research area and it has attracted attention within scholars during the last century (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008, 151). Vuignier (2016) states that places nowadays advertise themselves as “branded places” even though the real “branding” happens within the target groups, more specifically when the marketing messages are perceived by people.

## 1.1 Research aim

This study aims to observe the place brand of Lapland through two approaches. Firstly, this research explores the brand image of Finnish Lapland aiming to form a picture of brand associations that Lapland evokes. By exploring the image and brand associations, the real meanings of Laplands' brand can be discovered. An intriguing characteristic of place brands is the variety it has; place brands are constructed individually (Klijn, Eshuis & Braun, 2012, 503: Anholt, 2010, 10) but still tried to construct and communicate in cooperation with multiple

actors (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008, 151). The collaborative brand construction highlights the brand co-creation discussion which is prevailing way to view branding nowadays. Referred as *the new branding paradigm*, this approach sees brands as co-created and constantly transforming mental images. Therefore, the second objective of this research is to examine the branding process and key stakeholders working with the brand creation of Lapland.

The place branding research framework will bring to this research keywords like place brand co-creation, place brand image and stakeholders. The stakeholder approach viewpoint will be included to acknowledge different stakeholder groups that a place brand might have. A brand is comprehended in this study following Anholt's (2010, 4) definition of branding as a holistic process which, for the most parts, is crystallized in the mind of a person. Applying the brand co-creation theory, this study approaches brands as something what are created in interaction within different stakeholders that a brand and a branding organization have. The characteristics of brand as abstract and non-measurable concept led to choose the qualitative method with phenomenological viewpoint. The core of the empirical data consists of interviews with people whose work is to some extent related to branding of Lapland. Complementary data consists of visual forms of communication, hence also pictures are included in the empirical data of this study. The perspective of this research is descriptive and explorative as the aim of the research is to explain a phenomenon of place brand co-creation and describe the meanings and associations of Laplands' brand.

This study focuses on giving an answer for the following research questions:

1. How the image of Finnish Laplands' place brand is understood and envisioned and what kind of mental associations it evokes?
2. How the place brand of Lapland is co-created in collaboration with House of Lapland and its stakeholders?

The empirical data for this study is collected through semi-structured interviews with people whose work is in some level related to the brand of Lapland. One person from House of Lapland, which is the Official Marketing and Communication House of Lapland, was interviewed for this study. Other interviewees are stakeholders who are working in connection to the brand, for example people representing local associations and companies. Through the research questions this thesis contributes to the understanding of Lapland's co-created place brand.

## **1.2 Structure of the study**

The content of the study is organized as follows. First, the theoretical background of place branding, brand co-creation and stakeholder approach are presented and related to the field of public administration. In addition to that, challenges and limitations of place brand formation and management are discussed alongside the history place branding. Secondly, the study familiarizes reader with Finnish Lapland and describes shortly the branding process.

Following that, the methodology section in chapter four presents the chosen methods, research questions and objectives of the study. Qualitative research approach, semi-structured interviews and visual methods are explained as ways to understand a brand and associations behind it. After methodology, the results chapter compares and assesses the empirical findings, both verbal and visual ones. The theoretical perspectives are combined to support, analyze and explain the findings more thoroughly. Finally, the conclusion chapter summarizes the most notable results and reflections as well as combines empirical results to the theory.

## 2 PLACE BRANDING AND PLACE BRANDS

This chapter represents the base of place branding, brand co-creation and brand image and identity theories. The general branding research and public administration traditions are referenced to link the study in the field of public administration and place management. To start with, the history of place branding will be briefly explained. Following the history, the environment where place branders work is presented. After that the general place branding literature as well as the phenomenon of place brand formation and management will be discussed.

### 2.1 History of place branding

Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2008) prove the claims of place marketing to be a fresh or new phenomenon wrong: “*The conscious attempt of governments to shape a specifically designed place identity and promote it to identified markets, whether external or internal, is almost as old as government itself*” (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008, 151). They do, however, point out that place marketing has evolved a lot during 21st century and become more and more researched and identified in today’s world. (ibid.) Similarly, Klijn, Eshuis and Braun (2012) highlight the importance of branding in today’s governance world. They also recognize how widely used different branding strategies, especially in the place branding discussion, are but they do also notify how public agencies are lagging in basic branding knowledge and skills. (Klijn, Eshuis & Braun, 2012, 500.) As in any field, the used instruments, active participants and the goals of place branding have been altering depending on three variables: changes in the competitive conditions of the place management bureaus, shifts in government planning and shifts in the theory and practice of marketing science (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2015).

Place branding has developed through the socio-economic conditions that nations have faced. The development of branding practices linking to places is based on the country-of-origin idea. National governments got interested in this shift during the 1970s because of the significance of national industries on the economic development of countries during that time. (Campelo, 2017, 4.) The period from the seventeenth century to the 1980’s and New Public Management (NPM) trend can be described as *the stage of place promotion*. From the 1990’s onward place marketing was seen more as a *planning instrument* and from 2000 onward the *corporate brand* became the



prevailing way of develop place branding. (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2015.) A revolutionary change in ways to approach place branding has been caused by industrialization which emphasized the need to persuade factories and growing industry businesses into the rural areas since those places could promise low-cost land and, in some cases, even subsidies (Ward, 1998). After the industrial booming, places had to sell themselves in order to survive and replace the lost sources of wealth. This is still nowadays the battle of residents and professional potential that cities and regions are fighting for. (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2015.)

In his literature review Vuignier (2016) highlighted the multidisciplinary nature of current place branding literature and articles published. The literature review revealed a wide variety of different disciplinary approaches appearing in the field of this discipline: from 1172 articles analyzed the most presented disciplines were public management (59%), geography (18%), classic marketing (11%) and political science (10%). Vuignier also found that the scientific approach of certain articles defined the references used, in other words, the articles analyzed didn't have an interdisciplinary perspective or discussion between the different fields. (Vuignier, 2016, 25–26). This study incorporates classic marketing and public management literature while the latter being emphasized.

## **2.2 Places, branding and competitive market logic**

In an ideal situation a brand can act as a profitable factor creating incomes long in the future. If a brand is well managed it can even be referred as an everlasting property. An apt example of this is Frankfurt ("Bankfurt) which is often viewed as one of the most compelling banking cities in Europe. (Rainisto, 2008, 32.) Place branding in general is a financially remarkable field since it is estimated that from all major newspaper advertising occurring in the United States, place marketing takes about 10% (Kotler, Haider & Rein, 1993). Places operate in global, competitive market environment just like companies. Decades earlier branding was especially important for big companies as they managed a significant part of the markets. Nowadays SMEs, business-to-business markets as well as public agencies have increasingly adopted the idea of reputation and brand management (Alapeteri, 2018, 16-17) which utilizes marketing approach to attract diverse target groups (Vuignier, 2016, 11). An early factor influencing into this development is industrialization and the changes happened in the Western societies from nineteenth century

onwards. After a strong reign of industrial boom rural places had to find ways to persuade people to stay in the area. (Ward, 1998.)

Another major shift in the public administration field influencing into the ways how places are managed today is New Public Management, NPM, which highlighted the need to get cities more productive and profitable while they are using the taxpayers' money. NPM orientation strove for public organizations and municipalities to operate as firms, simply put gaining more with the same resources or gaining the same result with less resources. At the same time NPM emphasized the role of customers, better known as the citizens in the world of public administration. (De Vries & Nemec, 2013, 6.) In general, 1980's was a century when marketing philosophy was introduced to public sector and place managers, particularly in Western cities (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2008, 156). These trends, in accordance with the increasingly networking and globalizing world due the development of mobile phones, internet and social media, has led in the situation where places are approachable from almost any part of the world. All different online communication technologies have made the reciprocal communication between place marketers and locals possible which enhances the role of locals as an essential part of place branding practices (Braun et al., 2013, 24). Municipalities and regions communicate with citizens more actively than before the 1980's and the NPM movement. In many ways, public organizations see themselves more as service-oriented organizations than as public authorities filling their legal responsibilities. (De Vries & Nemec, 2013.)

Place brands are susceptible to negative connotations and place's image can alternate very fast due to media and word of mouth (Gertner & Kotler, 2004, 51). One variable increasingly influencing into the world of competition between places is social media. Social media stresses the temporal and transient qualities of places by bringing up events, highlights and polyphony of places. (Andéhn et al., 2014.) In their study of user-generated place brand equity on Twitter, Andéhn et al. (2014) bring up an interesting observation of the manifold relationship between events and place branding on Twitters' platform. If we think events, they enrich the reputation and publicity of places as well as ascribe meaning to places whereas places offer emplacement of, and easy association of geographical location to events. (ibid., 2014, 141.) Aaker (1996, 30) reminded already in 1996 how fragmented the media landscape is and how challenging it can be to maintain a precious brand image when the channels and possibilities of marketing are so different, including for example direct marketing, television and advertisements in local

newspaper. He also stressed how coordination of brand image and branding activities turn more difficult as more branding activities are outsourced and not done in-house anymore. (idib., 30.)

The political field is somewhere between the private and public modes of action: mostly funded with private money but working with the public organizations. Klijn et al. (2012) bring up how branding is something that politicians have been working with always and perhaps nowadays even more extensively than few decades ago. Therefore, it could be said that branding as a phenomenon has been having a role in the public sector organizations but despite of its' "prevalence" in public organizations, branding as a practice has not reached the same level of know-how and experience than in the private sector. (Klijn et al., 2012.) Place branders work with the same structural setting than the current city administration system. It has been even argued that place branding is a governance process since it works as one part of the network that creates and recreates the brand (Klijn et al., 2012, 515). The prevailing approach to governance processes nowadays is network approach which means that multiple actors take part in the governance, as well as, in the place branding processes. This brings instability and different viewpoints about branding and brand communications on the table. (Klijn et al., 2012.)

Besides wide networks, places compete with other places which makes benchmarking a possible way to enhance the branding process. Concentrating too much on the workings of competitors can risk the authentic brand. Neumeier (2016) calls that "the lure of competition" and advices brands to watch out for the continuous scramble to be the first to execute the newest trends. Another point that Neumeier (2016) brings up is the "expediency of extension" which refers to the tendency of people to invent and add new features or modifications to the existing brand. These variations might be useful in the short-term but the risk with extensions is that they can defocus the brand. (ibid., 102.) Gertner and Kotler (2004) refer to the same risk of overdoing by stating that place brands should be designed to be simple and distinctive at the same time. The brand extensions and various images of one brand ultimately lead in confusion even though the designed brand image would be distinctive and something that no other city has. (Gertner & Kotler, 2004, 55.)

## 2.3 Place branding and place marketing

As it appears to me, the mainstream standpoint is that place branding is a tool in place marketers' toolbox (see Vuignier, 2016; Kotler, Haider & Rein, 1993) as seen in classical marketing literature, too (Kotler, 1999). Some scholars put it another way around like Anholt (2010) who states that: "...places... 'umbrella brands' providing reassurance, glamour or status to the products and services that are marketed under their aegis" (Anholt, 2010, 4). Place branding and place marketing are also defined as separate fields of study in some articles (Vuignier, 2016, 9). Even so, I'll include both terms in my research to get as wide perspective as possible about the research field of place branding. Therefore, the term "branding" used in this thesis represents both place marketing and place branding because the research of this field is relatively young (see Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2008; Vuignier, 2016; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013) and researches use terms place branding and place marketing interchangeably.

Brand positioning is an important part of strategic work behind the actual brand creation. If it is executed well, the brand strengths compared to competitors will be identified and highlighted to create a distinctive image of the brand. The actual brand image is anyhow perceived by the target groups and therefore brand positioning aims to modify the image to a positive direction. (Rainisto, 2008, 28.) The definition by Anholt (2010) reflects my approach to branding: "...a process that goes on largely in the mind of the consumer...and cannot be seen as a single technique or set of techniques that directly builds respect or liking" (Anholt, 2010, 10). That underlines the versatility of actions that branding encompasses as well as brings up the notion of consumers, or residents in this case. Similarly, Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015) see that current understanding of place brand development bases on the view that brands are sums of mental associations. This approach underlines the place branding process as communicative and collective, not forgetting the influence of subjective, individual associations. The challenging aspect of interactive place brand formation is that it's constantly evolving. (Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015.)

All places enforcing place branding and marketing activities have more or less the same aims: identify market opportunities and implement strategies that will foster social and economic development within particular geographic area. Campelo (2017) brings out two trends which have been influencing on the place branding activities and widely, to public administration activities,

too, during the last decades. Firstly, the amount of urban population will massively increase leading to formation of super cities. This trend Campelo calls as “*trend of urban conglomerations*”. Secondly, the power of new economic activities, like creative economy and economy of culture will have an effect on the development of cities and their socio-economic structure. (Campelo, 2017, 16–17.) These global trends direct the development of nations, regions and cities and at the same time remind public managers and organizations about the need to identify locals’ needs to keep up with the economic growth.

### **2.3.1 Place brand formation and management**

Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015) state that there are two gaps when it comes to place brand formation: to *what* characteristics people construct their associations on and are those associations ‘real’ or imagined, and *how* these mental constructions function together in order to create the actual picture of place brands (Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015, 1371). This leads to question how much leverage place branding professionals have about the brand meaning construction as well as how much those associations and meanings are depending on the work of place brand designers and marketers. Alapeteri (2018) recognizes the consensus that brands can be managed, at least to some extent, since otherwise managing brands would be pointless use of resources. She also underlines the dynamic factors influencing in branding activities by stating that if branding and brand communications would be fully controllable, then the final outcome of all branding attempts would be the desired one. (ibid., 35.) From the co-creation perspective, brand meanings change due to customers’ meaning construction and therefore, brands are living in a constant flux (Andéhn, Kazeminia, Lucarelli & Sevin, 2014, 141) and risk of failure regardless of the brand managers (Klijn et al., 2012, 503–504).

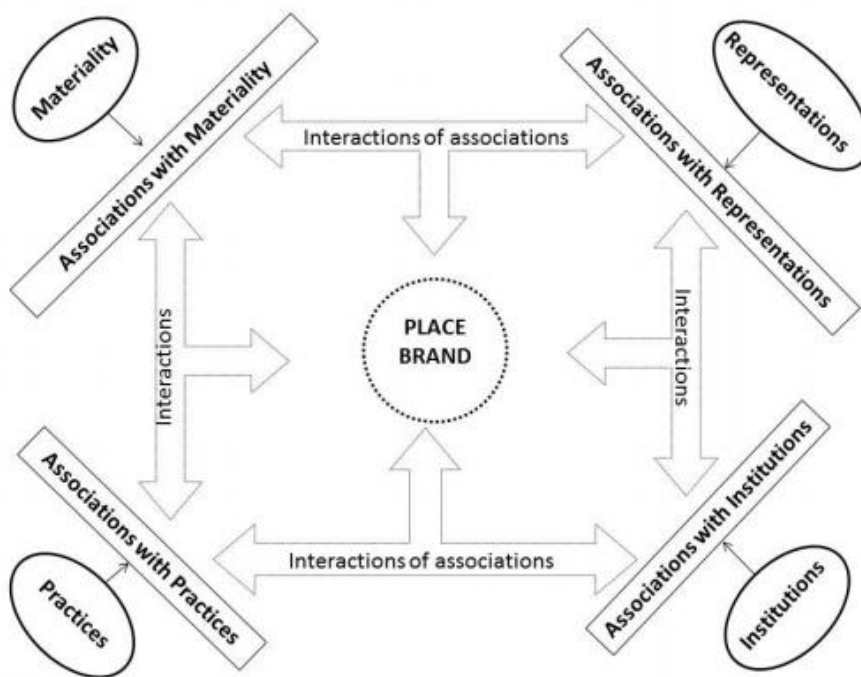
While place branders aim to attract more visitors, potential new residents and businesses with money to invest for the region, they have several different ways to approach this. Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2008) represented a typology of how places are related to products. They identified challenges when places are straightly marketed as physical products because places have innated distinctive features and therefore, they claim that place marketing professionals should acknowledge those distinctive features. (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2008, 152–153.) This leads to the very essence and mission behind the branding practices since places can be branded just for the sake of a place which aims to attract people, or they can be branded alongside a product.

Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2008) separate those different approaches to places as branded products and make an important distinction by separating branding which aims to sell a physical product and not the place itself. An example of this *place-product co-marketing* is Swiss watches which are branded by taking advantage of the characteristics, like fastidiousness, that Swiss people are thought to have. Another strongly product-driven marketing approach is *geographical nomenclature*, also known as “Champagne phenomenon” which combines the name of a geographical region to the product. The place has no deeper connection with the product other than helping to identify the product on the market. (idib.) Considering the place case of this research, Finnish Lapland, it can be certainly stated that the aim of place branding in that region is to brand and sell the actual geographical location and not a single product. It is also clearly observable that products which are sold with “Finnish Lapland” tag on it, have been produced to support the place brand. If this is reflected to the place-product typology that Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2008) represented, Finnish Lapland would fall somewhere between *locational marketing* and *place marketing as place management*. *Locational marketing* focuses on places’ marketable commodities and will carefully choose, even manipulate, how the place and the qualities of it are branded for the target groups. Another sub-category relating to Lapland is *place marketing as place management* which recognizes the competition between places and seeks to find uniqueness in the place. (ibid., 152–153.) From these two sub-categories the former is leaning more towards a commercial approach and the latter towards a more traditional governance management approach to places.

Wæraas, Bjørnå and Moldenæs (2015) have argued for more detailed investigation of place branding practices and reasons behind it. They recognized three differing strategies for place or locational branding: place, organization and democracy strategy. The differences between these three strategies lie on a fundamental vision of places. Either a place sees itself as a political entity (democracy strategy), as an organization trying to fine-tune its outer image as an employer (organization strategy) or as a place which competes with neighbouring municipalities trying to persuade tourists, potential new residents and businesses into its area (place strategy). (Wæraas, Bjørnå & Moldenæs, 2015.) Therefore, if we combine the above-mentioned question of places as products and the different strategies places use for branding, it is quite evident that place branding practices chosen by a city reflect the vision, values and aim that a city has for its’ branding. In an ideal situation a brand can act as a profitable factor creating incomes long in the future.

Place brands consist of qualities which are either dependent or independent of human perceptions. Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015) base their analysis of place associations on four elements which form a place (constructed by utilizing Läßle’s, 1991, constitutive elements of place). Firstly, physical or *material* elements consist of place-specific artefacts, or even humans. Those refer mostly to the clearly observable artefacts which might then get further meanings within discussions. The three more abstract elements are *practices* linking to social interaction and use as well as production of materiality, *institutions* referring to normative regulation, norms and power relations, and finally *representations* meaning names, symbols and other elements linking to the material element. These all four elements together form the “what” of place formation. (ibid., 1373–1375.) The four elements of place brand formation can be founded from Picture 1 below.

Picture 1. Place brand formation process by Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015, 1376)



By introducing associations into this four-element place formation model, Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015, 1376) developed a model of place brand formation process which practically consists of interactions of mental associations between all the four elements. For example, a

person might have presumption of a Santa Claus Village located in Rovaniemi. Then, this person hears some rumors about how cold is in there, how big and smelly Santa's reindeers are and how delicious gingerbread cookies are served in the Santa's house. All this information is mixed up with the pictures from internet and few movies that this person has seen earlier. Finally, after visiting the village and seeing the elves, Santa and reindeers this person has a wide-ranging picture of the place brand of Rovaniemi, and of course of the brand of Santa. And in the world of global networks and social media, this picture will evolve and get new twists quite often. An intriguing characteristic of place brands is the variety it has; place brands are constructed individually (Klijn, Eshuis & Braun, 2012, 503; Anholt, 2010, 10) but still tried to construct and communicate in cooperation with multiple actors (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008, 151).

To sum up the aforementioned brand formation and management discussion, brands are thought of as manageable "assets", but the level of control will be alternating depending on external factors (Alapeteri, 2018). These factors can be political, social, economic or they can even raise from discussions between individuals in the social media, since local people do possess a lot of power regarding the reputation management of a place (Aitken & Campelo, 2011; Anholt, 2010).

## **2.4 Brand co-creation**

In her dissertation about brand co-creation from communicative perspective Alapeteri (2018) refers to *a new branding paradigm* which diverges from the traditional approach to branding. According the traditional branding school brands can be controlled and even owned by organizations. This new branding paradigm underlines the significance of relationships and communication, and therefore the brand co-creation concept is in the center of attention in the current branding discussion. (Alapeteri, 2018, 50–51; Neumeier, 2016.) The new branding paradigm also brings new challenges to the brand management processes. Joint brand creation requires cooperation between stakeholders from the public and private sector and can be described as collaborative action. The joint management practices can easily face challenges throughout the process as one of the most important aims of collaborative brand management is to maintain long-term collaboration between stakeholders. (Vuorinen & Vos, 2013.)

Alapeteri (2018) links the brand co-creation discussion to social constructivism leading from the idea that since people co-construct their identities through their subjective decisions, the brands



are created in the same way if relation-centric network approach is applied. Similarly, Braun et al. (2013) describe brand co-creation as a brand formation process which is enabled through the communication between a multitude of people. This description underlines the co-constructive way of brand formation and sees the official brand communication only as one part of the branding process. (Braun et al., 2013, 24–25.) Following the idea of brands as co-constructed entities, Neumeier (2016) describes how complicated brands are to manage by comparing sales and branding: while a sale needs only one transaction, a brand needs thousands of transactions in the form of relationships and communication (ibid., 46). Customers in today's world want to relate to brands and feel confident to say that they have bought a product from certain brand, or that they live in an area which has a good reputation. Neumeier (2016) underlines that customers want brands to be part of their personal identity. This is demonstrated in the Brand Commitment Matrix which narrates how customers' *identity* needs to be linked to company's *purpose*, how customers' *aim* needs to be linked to company's *onlyness* and how customers' mores (habits of belonging) should be in line with company's *values*. When all these statements come across, the brand and the customer will have a start for lasting relationship. (Neumeier, 2016, 46–47).

As transpired from the brand co-creation discussion above, the practical process and responsibility of place branding can oftentimes be shared within many distinctive actors. While studying rural place branding practices in Finland Vuorinen and Vos (2013) identified challenges in the coordination of responsibility as well as multi-level branding practices carried out by different actors in their case areas. One reason behind this was that the municipality-level actors focus on the municipal-level branding and at the same time the regional-level thinking, and vision of place branding takes a back seat. (Vuorinen & Vos, 2013, 158.) Multi-level practices challenge the brand image management if responsibilities are shared and ambiguous. Strategic brand image management requires that place marketers are able to follow changes in the brand image and analyze constantly evolving brand associations (Gertner & Kotler, 2004, 51–52). It can be reflected then that the actual control of brand co-creation and the quality of brand image management might be dependent on each other.

Aitken and Campelo (2011) endorse the co-creation paradigm as influential way to reveal the ethos of a place which encompasses symbols, meanings and attributes that form the identity of a place. Since the brand of a place is constructed in dynamic interaction with a local community, brand meanings are in continuous change. (Aitken & Campelo, 2011, 927.) Thus, if networks,

relations and interaction are in the center of the brand development, it can be questioned how the real meaning and essence of a brand can be determined if the brand itself lives in a constant change? Perhaps the new branding paradigm after all aims to emphasize the importance of all distinct stakeholder groups from a more *individualistic* standpoint than branding has done before.

#### **2.4.1 Co-constructed, collective sense of a place**

Campelo (2017) observes the phenomenon of collective sensemaking of places through the lens of Bourdieu's concept of capital. Bourdieu (1986) presented the concept of capital to the more abstract ways to create and evaluate it: shared and communal resources. Some of these resources are by nature intangible and linked to culture and social relationships. Bourdieu (1986) introduced three different types of capital: cultural, social and symbolic capital, which are based on the logic of economic capital. He sees these different types of capital as "...*disguised forms of economic capital...*" (ibid., 54). Campelo (2017) aims to develop a concept of sensory capital based on the idea by Bourdieu (1986) and possibilities to observe and research the conversion of capital from purely economic form to more abstract, intangible form. She sees that as a way to unravel how people value and experience places, not forgetting the visual senses of places which are an essential part of the experiences and knowledge that is created by individuals and by communities. (Campelo, 2017.)

One of the most common concepts linked to brands is mental associations. Brands are very often defined to be sum of individuals' mental associations but what is missing from that conceptualization is the understanding of the formation phase of those associations. This can be reflected in the place branding world, too, and the fascinating part with mental associations is that they vary constantly depending on the brand experiences that people witness. (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015, 1370–1371.) The same idea of brands as mental associations is valid in the world of places, too. Spencer (2011) describes places to be constructed *only* within humans and interestingly separates the concepts of location and place. Individuals' identity needs to be related with a particular location in order for the anonymous location to get a sense of place. For this reason, Spencer (2011) claims places to be manifold and challenging concepts to research in the field of social sciences. (ibid., 69–70.)

Brand co-creation links to stakeholder theories since brand co-creation sees brands as meanings

which are constructed through relations and networks (Alapeteri, 2018, 52). In the following sub-chapter, the stakeholder approach is presented and discussed mirroring it to the new branding paradigm.

## **2.5 Stakeholder approach in the world of place branding**

Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) make a meaningful separation between the stakeholder *approach* and stakeholder *theory*. The approach has been defined as “*heuristic device*” whereas the theory is more specific and posing a question: “*which groups are stakeholders deserving or requiring management attention, and which are not?*”. (Mitchell et al., 1997, 855.) Complying with this separation, the chapter focuses only on the stakeholder approach as a tool to identify different stakeholders in the context of place branding.

Robert Edward Freeman is considered as the father of the term stakeholder (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997). In his book “Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach” stakeholders are determined as “*any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives*” (Freeman, 1984, 46). This definition includes one-way communication between stakeholders and the organization in question as it says *can affect* or *is affected*, but it’s not stating for example *cooperate* which would describe dialogic communication between stakeholders and the organization in question. Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) identified notable differences between broad and narrow views of stakeholders. They see researchers and organizations using more narrow definition as “*normative core*” where managers can pick few stakeholders based on the information they have been delivered with. The broad perspective on stakeholders is identified either as systematically comprehensive approach (public affairs approach) or as “*exhaustive*” approach (social responsibility approach). (ibid, 857.)

Braun, Kavartzis and Zenker (2013) bring up an interesting, many disciplines crossing, trend regarding stakeholders. Stakeholder participation processes are discussed in the fields of marketing and branding (Braun et al., 2013, 19; Aitken & Campelo, 2011), urban governance (Zenker & Seigis, 2012, 22–23) and public administration (De Vries & Nemec, 2013). This overarching trend highlighting participation processes is clearly perceivable in today’s world. Public agencies don’t want to be judged as faceless administration machineries and enterprises want to have a close connection to their customers for example via social media. It reflects the

willingness of organizations to communicate with stakeholders who can nowadays increasingly influence to the brand itself. An excellent example of that is demonstrated in the next paragraph.

Neumeier (2016) explains how brands have made a total change from corporate-led, polished appearances to consumer-centric communities which embrace co-creation. He demonstrates how new computer technology gave consumers more choices in the 1980's: people could choose from endless selection of goods with possibilities to fine-tune the color, shade and model. After all, it was too much for consumers who were in the middle of deluge of choices. That is why Neumeier (2016) encourages brands to turn back from *overchoice to simplicity*. (Neumeier, 2016, 100–103.) If we think this development from already in advance designed and limited selection of goods to the millions of possibilities given to the consumer, it highlights a change in power relations. Individuals are now in charge of the brand management which has required a total shift towards stakeholder-centric action in the mindset of companies. If this is reflected to the world of place branding, Zenker and Seigis (2013, 22) state that place marketing *is* a function with customer-oriented perspective and the significance of residents as audience is obvious. Aitken and Campelo (2011) highlight the position of local people and the community in the creation of the place brand. (Aitken & Campelo, 2011, 917). From this tendency of brands to lean towards their audience can be reflected that communication and openness describe the world where place brands operate nowadays.

## **2.6 Brand image and identity**

Like Vuignier (2016, 7) states, there are two sides that brands have: an image and an identity. These two concepts are intertwined and complement each other. There is quite a massive collection of brand image literature (see Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Hakala & Lemmetyinen, 2011; Braun, Eshuis, Klijn & Zenker, 2018), but literature on place brand identity is less developed. Brand image and brand identity are important factors influencing into the picture that people have about brands (see Alapeteri, 2018; Gertner & Kotler, 2004; Rainisto, 2008). Therefore, these concepts are useful to include in this study as it aims to explain the mental associations and image that are linked to Lapland.

The identity of a place is formed when peoples' insights are shared. These shared insights reflect the ways how and where people relate themselves. (Aitken & Campelo, 2011, 922.) Place

managers usually want to present their city or region as unique with a distinct identity. Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015, 1369) claim though that place branders lack the geographical understanding of the elements on which the place associations are formed. Vuignier (2016) goes even further by referring to places which advertise themselves as “branded places” even though the real “branding” happens within the target groups, more specifically when the marketing messages are perceived by people. Since branding is a trendy concept nowadays, a tendency of places been branded just because of the trendiness of the concept is perceivable. (Vuignier, 2016, 8.) From place image and identity perspective this kind of “fraud” branding will probably be only an unfortunate thing while locals usually sense the overtrying of image construction.

The identity of a place is, according to Rainisto (2008), defined by the place itself and therefore it is also a way to manage and show the ambition of places’ marketing communications. Place identity includes the distinctive characteristics of the place itself as well as the organization. Furthermore, the symbolic values of the brand are an essential part of the brand identity. (ibid., 37.) Hakala and Lemmetyinen (2011) use brand image and identity to crystallize the core elements of a nation brand. Elaborating a figure from Gnoth (2002) they divide the identity in three different levels: symbolic, experiential and functional. The most abstract level of these, the symbolic one, basically indicate the brand intangibles, like the national anthem, logo or slogan. According to Gnoth (2002) the symbolic level reveals what the place brand means to people and how deeply they can relate to the place brand. The symbolic and experiential levels are the power of places because they differ from place to place and can be unique. The functional level, in turn, is something that places can imitate. These points raise the importance of the symbolic, intangible aspect of place brands. (Gnoth, 2002.)

### **3 LAPLAND AS A PLACE OF EXTREMES**

In Nordic scale, Finnish Lapland is a significant actor. During years 2013 and 2014 the aggregate demand of tourism in Lapland was 1 billion euros (House of Lapland, b, n.d.). This study combines place branding and the case of Finnish Lapland which is one of the most well-known brands of Finland. That is why Laplands' brand is intriguing case to research. It awakes a lot of emotions and associations even within Finns who are not living in Lapland and it's something that Finns are known of around the world. Lapland is the engine of Finnish tourism and during 2018 it reached three million registered overnight stays. Approximately half of the tourists and registered overnight stays consist of foreigners, British being the major visitor group. Geographically Lapland covers 30% of Finland but only a little less than 3% of Finnish people live in that area. (House of Lapland, a, n.d.) Logistically Lapland has been under a lively discussion regarding the Arctic Railway which would complete the railway route from Europe to Arctic Ocean. Currently, a route from Rovaniemi to Kirkenes, Norway has been considered as the most realistic option for the railway. (Liikenne- ja viestintäministeriö, 2018; Arctic Corridor.)

Lapland is in this study defined by the geographical terms meaning that Lapland refers to the county of Lapland (Lapin liitto, a, n.d.). Lapland is an area starting from the South of the Sea Lapland area around Kemi and Tornio reaching all the way north to the Fell Lapland area and to Nuorgam, the most northern village of Finland. From administrative perspective Lapland has 21 municipalities and they are grouped to six regions which are cooperating in the field of regional development (Lapin liitto, a, n.d.). Although Lapland covers geographically wide area, its population density is the lowest in Finland: 2 residents per square kilometer (Tilastokeskus, b, 2018). At the same time, with its 179 000 inhabitants (ibid.) Lapland generates seven percent of Finland's exports (House of Lapland, e, n.d.).

#### **3.1 Approach to research the place brand of Finnish Lapland**

The place brand of Lapland is approached in this study as a unified entity even though the actual brand image is made of multiple observations and sensory perceptions (Aaker, 2016). Therefore, all the separate projects which relate to the brand, such as Lapland above Ordinary and Only in Lapland projects, are observed as part of the brand creation but not as a part of the brand itself.

To research a place brand as an entity can be challenging, especially in the case of Finnish Lapland since it is often related to the national brand of Finland. As stated above, Lapland is a wide area and there are many organizations implicitly and explicitly putting effort to create a unique brand of Lapland. Local tourism offices, municipalities and enterprises all give distinctive impression of Lapland as a place. Even though House of Lapland is the one organization responsible for the marketing and branding of Lapland, it must be clarified that other actors across organizational boundaries have a role in the branding process, too. For example, companies offering services for tourists will be partly creating the image of Lapland's brand as they work closely with visitors. Therefore, this justifies the theoretical framework of this study which emphasizes the brand co-creation theory.

From tourism perspective Lapland has lately reached positive publicity within international influencers such as Lonely Planet in 2016, National Geographic in 2016 and World Travel and Tourism Council in 2017 (Aro, Suomi & Saraniemi, 2018, 75) with descriptions like: "...*sanctuaries for silence-seekers*" as written in National Geographic's article (2016). However, this positive publicity suffered in November 2018 when British press hit the headlines with "Crapland" (Independent, 2018; CNN Travel, 2018; The Sun, 2018). Lapland had at the time very little snow and that made the British tourists and tour operators anxious about the situation. The panic within tourists and media calmed down quite fast as the snow appeared to Lapland again but the discussion about climate change and chances to have a black Christmas in Lapland continued within Finns. In January 2019 Finland was awarded as the "most trending destination" in India Travel Awards 2018. Even though it was a recognition to Finland as a country, the characteristics related to Lapland, such as northern lights and Santa Claus, were brought up by Finland's India market representative. (Business Finland, 2019.)

The empirical core of my research consists of interviews with a marketing professional from House of Lapland and stakeholders of House of Lapland who are working in connection to the brand of Lapland. House of Lapland is the Official Marketing and Communication House of Lapland and they take care of Lapland's brand and promote Lapland as a tourism destination, filming location and a place to live and do business. In their own words: "...*most importantly, we share the stories of Lapland locals who live the life above ordinary*" (House of Lapland, c, n.d.). Because House of Lapland is the one organization responsible for building the brand of Lapland (House of Lapland, d, n.d.), this perspective is regarded as a professional perspective for

Laplands' branding. The company was founded in 2015 and since then they have had four main target groups: experience seekers, skilled persons, business and filmmakers. House of Lapland is publicly owned, non-profit company employing 13 people and its ownership is divided between municipalities and higher education institutions of Lapland and The Federation of Finnish Enterprises in Lapland. House of Lapland has office in Rovaniemi and in summer 2018 they opened virtual office in Shanghai, China.

Interviewed stakeholders consist of people working in public sector, university, local companies and regional associations. The scope of stakeholders was defined to include only people who work in relation to the brand of Lapland since I saw for example citizens to be too far from the actual branding work to be able to answer for questions such as "What kind of challenges influence the brand creation of Lapland in the future?". Even though the brand co-creation approach does highlight participative forms of branding (see Alapeteri, 2018; Braun et al., 2013; Neumeier, 2016) which sees citizens as an important stakeholder group, I aimed to keep the observation of branding practices in a more "professional" level. The professional level in here refers to people whose *work* is in some level linked to branding of Lapland. Therefore, the empirical data analyzed in this study doesn't represent the viewpoints and impressions that local Laplanders or tourists have and is clearly defined as impressions and viewpoints of people interviewed for this study. An interesting approach for further studies would be to explore the perceptions that for example locals or tourists have about the brand of Finnish Lapland.

According to House of Lapland, the branding process of Lapland has never been researched from the perspective of their organization. Although this research won't dig deep into the process itself, it will produce novel information about the meaning of Laplands' brand from the perspective of this marketing house. Because House of Lapland is sharing the stories of locals, it was logical to look into different perspective for Laplands' brand from the stakeholders working with connection to the brand. Even though House of Lapland presumably have a much more commercial standpoint on the brand, I'll suppose that this perspective will be in some level matching with the perspective that stakeholders have.



### 3.2 Branding practices in Lapland

Laplands' branding activities have been evolving through different schemes and initiatives (see; Lapin liitto, b, n.d., Lapin liitto, c, n.d.) and there has been no one office to take responsibility of the marketing work before House of Lapland was established. Before that Regional Council of Lapland had a major role developing the branding initiatives further which was also perceivable from the discussions with the interviewees as they referred to Regional Council of Lapland many times, even more often than to House of Lapland. Before the establishment of House of Lapland, branding activities focused more on tourism marketing and they functioned through project funding which led to discontinuity within branding activities. In 2010 Regional Council of Lapland together with the tourist industry and other local actors initiated a tourism strategy for Lapland for years 2011–2014 (Lapin matkailustrategia 2011–2014). That was a first broad-based image marketing plan for Lapland as a wider region and it was recognized as advantageous for the whole Lapland area. (ibid., 42–43.)

Campelo (2017, 10) notes the two fields that city branding is usually focusing on: tourist destination branding and urban regeneration. House of Lapland identifies four main target groups which they want to reach with their marketing and branding activities: tourists, filming professionals, talents and business people. These four groups can roughly be divided into the two categories mentioned by Campelo (2017) followingly: tourist destination branding includes tourists and in some level filming professionals since they are *visitors*. Urban regeneration would then include talents and business people. The main point dividing House of Laplands target groups so specifically and with so wide range of variation is the fact that House of Lapland is promoting a region, Lapland, and not just a city. This gives possibilities to promote special features across the whole Northern Finland and enhances the variety of branding.

House of Lapland has focused strongly in digital marketing (House of Lapland, d, n.d.) and they don't exploit such classical marketing methods as fairs because nowadays their target groups are increasingly using digital channels to find information (comment from interviews). Only exception to this are the film marketing professionals who travel around the world and especially to United States to make Finland more known within the international film industry. House of Lapland aims to take advantage of media exposure and phenomena in creating the brand image effectively. In addition to that, they have partnership programmes for businesses and they strive

to do well-focused marketing communication for the partners. (ibid.) They also have a material bank (House of Lapland, f, n.d.) for different branding materials which can be used by stakeholders, partners and all who are working with the brand of Lapland in any occasion.

## 4 METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research method was chosen as branding is related strongly on feelings and associations. Anholt's definition of branding: " ...goes on largely in the mind of the consumer" (Anholt, 2010, p. 10), crystallizes the ambiguity of this concept. These characteristics of brand as abstract and non-measurable concept and the goals that branding processes usually have, led to choose the qualitative method. The perspective of this research will be descriptive and explorative as the aim of the research will be to explain a phenomenon and finally describe the meanings that the House of Lapland and its stakeholders have given to Laplands' brand.

Phenomenological methods focus on lived experiences which are formed through intersubjective, changing dialogue. The central aim when utilizing phenomenological methods is to find the deeper and richer forms of real life and social meaning construction. (Spencer, 2011, 44–45.) Because of the quality of visuals as something that can vividly bring up these deeper meanings (ibid.), visual data is used to enrich the data collection process as well as the final conclusions of this study. House of Lapland has focused strongly in digital marketing (House of Lapland, d, n.d.) and they don't exploit such classical marketing methods as fairs because nowadays their target groups are online (comment from interviews). Only exception to this are the film marketing professionals who travel around the world and especially in the United States to make Finland more known within the international film industry. In the digital marketing world, visuals have a marked impact on the whole process of marketing from planning to execution (Gillian, 2001). This, as well as the fact that House of Lapland mainly operates in digital environment, led me to utilize marketing pictures as a part of my research.

I see visual methods as a smart and brilliant possibility to research brands, their meanings and mental associations. Next, I have elaborated on qualitative research methods and more deeply on thematic analysis, semi-structured interviews and visual research methods. The chapter will be finalized with some ethical considerations regarding the chosen research methods.

### 4.1 Qualitative research as hermeneutic understanding of the research subject

Qualitative studies interpret social data which is constructed through communication processes. Therefore, qualitative studies strive to understand the world as it is *experienced*, and not how the

world actually *is*. This is an essential separation between the nature of qualitative and quantitative research as quantitative research leans on numbers and numerical proofs whereas qualitative approach aims to explain and explore phenomena through interpretations, rhetoric's and different forms of communication. (Bauer, Gaskell & Allum, 2000, 5.) Similarly, Gaskell (2000) summarizes the goal of qualitative research as follows: it should aim to explore different point of views and representations of the research subject as well as comprehend the arguments behind those approaches (Gaskell, 2000, 41).

Qualitative research approaches rest on hermeneutic understanding which concentrates on channels of communication. These channels are twofold. The first one refers to the researchers own experiences and traditions, and the second one includes dialogic communication between distinct actors such as individuals, organizations and traditions. The aim of hermeneutic approach is thus to recognize patterns of communication within oneself and within different communities and individuals. As many qualitative research settings possess a critical standpoint, flawed communication channels are very often in the focus of hermeneutic research approach. (Bauer, Gaskell & Allum, 2000, 13–14.) Hermeneutic research orientation enables a researcher to interpret social and artistic research data which includes also human factors, like patterns of communication (Anttila, 1998).

Hermeneutics includes values within the research and it highlights the interconnection between values and facts and therefore, it is seen as interpretative research method. The so-called hermeneutic circle refers to the hermeneutic way of understanding the researched phenomena as a whole: one part of a phenomenon can be understood only as a part of a whole. This means that hermeneutic research sees a phenomenon as something that is formed from many parts and the parts of a phenomenon shouldn't be observed separately, only as a part of the whole phenomenon. (Anttila, 1998.)

#### **4.1.1 Semi-structured interviews**

Verbal, visual and written forms of data are utilized in this study to define the meanings and associations of Finnish Lapland. Qualitative data has been collected through semi-structured interviews and field observations during a visit to Rovaniemi. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted to collect qualitative, explanatory data of the perspectives and

meanings of Laplands' place brand and the associations that the name "Lapland" evokes in people. According to Hirsjärvi and co. (2013) semi-structured interview method will give power to an interviewer to influence on the theme of the interview and to steer the conversation. Structurally semi-structured interview is more free than structured (form) interview but it's not going forward without before-set agenda, unlike free interview. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara, 2013, 208–209.) To gain as deep insights as possible initial themes and the question base was sent to the interviewees in advance. In addition to the interview base, six marketing pictures of Lapland were shown during the interview to invoke more thoughts within the interviewees. These pictures were not shown beforehand as it might influence on the presumptions that individuals have about the theme of the interview.

The participant selection for interviews includes few important aspects which should be taken into consideration while planning the interviews. Representativeness refers to the coverage of the research subject and focus of the research. Thus, interviewees should literally represent the group that is observed for the research, with enough variation within interviewees so that they cover the possible natural variety within the group. The representativeness goes to some extent hand in hand with quality as representative interviewee base has better possibilities to accumulate high-quality data. The quality of interviews depends on research goal, and that is why the aim of interviews should be clear for the researcher. Different approaches for interviews include for example informant interviews, respondent interviews and narrative interviews. (Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2012, 241, 247.)

House of Lapland is the one organization working to create a coherent Lapland-brand and that's why it represents branding professionals' voice in this study. Regarding the number of employees working in House of Lapland and the time limits for this research, one interview was considered as an adequate number to gather enough data to get a good idea of the perspective on Laplands' branding and brand building. Other interviews with branding stakeholders consist of five individual interviews which were conducted face-to-face and via phone. Interviewed stakeholders were selected from organizations or companies working in Lapland and the crucial criterion was that an interviewee should recognize that his or her work is somehow related to the brand construction of Finnish Lapland. That is a limitation considering the reliability of research results but as this research aims to observe the branding process as well as mental associations linked to Laplands' place brand, I considered interviewees know-how and interest towards the topic as an essential criterion.

The first round of interviews was face-to-face, and they were held 26<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2019 in Rovaniemi. The second round of interviews, which were conducted via phone, was held during March and April 2019. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and then analyzed anonymously using content analysis method. Following that, the discussed subjects were grouped and conceptualized. The number of interviews was not decided beforehand, and some additional interviews were held in the later stages of the research process. Therefore, the analysis process consisted of several re-evaluation phases. Returning to the later stages of the thematic analysis process is a common habit within qualitative research practices as the data collection and analysis can even happen simultaneously (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017, 4). A challenge for individual in-depth interviews was to get as deep into the phenomenon and concept of Laplands' place brand as possible. Especially in case of employed people working for company which mission is to build a brand, the concept itself might be quite embedded in their minds as a taken-for-granted-like idea.

#### **4.1.2 Visual methods**

In organizational life, visuals have become the most important mediator of information to their audiences and stakeholders. Internet and all different communication technologies we use have become the main channel to manage organizations' reputation and values, and visuals are increasingly affecting to those technologies and media. (see Meyer, Höllerer, Jancsary & van Leeuwen, 2013; Gillian, 2001; Loizos, 2000, 93.) According to The European Communication Monitor, the largest transnational study on strategic communication worldwide, more than 94 % of the communicators believes that visual elements will have an increasingly important role in strategic communications (European Communication Monitor, 2017). In scientific world, visual materials can be utilized in many distinct fields as well as in interdisciplinary research settings such as cultural studies and social geography (Spencer, 2011, 12). Organizational research has been enriched with visual perspective through many different research orientations: sociology, anthropology, social semiotics, art history, psychology, communication and media studies. The magnitude of visual approach in organizational studies has not been outstanding, but for example anthropologists have used photo-elicitation techniques already in the 1950s to get deeper comprehension about the studied subjects (Meyer et al., 2013, 498).

Ray and Smith (2012) have argued for the benefits of using photographs in research. They bring up that pictures are the kind of data which can be more accurate than many other kinds of qualitative data, like interviews and diaries. (Ray & Smith, 2012, 289.) Meyer et al. (2013), on the other hand, note about the fact that visuals created or chosen by a researcher advocate always the subjective perspective of the researcher. Therefore, visuals used in those studies “...*create, rather than represent, organizational reality.*” (Meyer et al., 2013, 518–519.) The same notion of photographs as interpretations of the world is raised by Gillian (2001) who describes visuals to be a way to render our reality in visual terms. Pictures can then be “the real” illustration of the organization or for example the brochures it uses, but the researcher always has the power to choose which ones to utilize, how to collect or represent them in the study and how to analyze them (interviews with stakeholders, deep analysis of the picture and content of it, analysis of the production phase). (Gillian, 2001, 6.) This reminds about the reality of the research world in general: research is always made with limitations, with special choices and aim.

According to Meyer et al. (2013), in management and organization research many different visual methods can be, and are, applied to enrich the scope and focus of the research. In addition, visuals also offer diverse ways to conduct novel research designs. Depending on the research, *visual agenda* of the research subject can be more easily communicated and reflected through visual illustration of photographs and therefore visuals can create a fruitful add-on to research analysis and conclusion. Particularly significant is the way how this visual mode extends opportunities of usual meaning construction. (Meyer et al., 2013.) An important distinction between verbal and visual world is the observational scale that is wider, explicit and more *immediate* in visual mode than in verbal mode (Spencer, 2011, 32; Meyer et al., 2013, 494–495). Furthermore, verbal language is observed as linear and sequential which means that sentences that verbal performances communicate can be understood right only if they are presented in certain order. In comparison, visual presentations are perceived as a whole instantly, and they don't necessarily need any sequence to be interpreted right. (Meyer et al., 2013, 494–495.)

Meyer et al. (2013) bring up a fascinating observation of visual artifacts being harder to brush aside than verbal text. They also mention how visual artifacts can “individualize” communication since visuals are usually interpreted by one person in his or her thoughts. Interestingly, they also state that visuals are interpreted more as information than as arguments. (Meyer et al., 2013, 496.) This leads to regard visuals more like information and nice-to-know facts, without much deeper

meaning, even though visuals can have a strong message behind them. It is undeniably evident that arguing is more challenging via visual communication. Photographs and paintings can also be used to mislead the interpreter as different electronical and digital techniques enable picture editing which leads to challenges when analyzing pictures during a research (Loizos, 2000, 95).

## **4.2 Data collection and criteria for used photographs**

The selection of data for qualitative research depends on the purpose and focus of the study. If a research aims to observe a wide societal movement for example, it may approach the subject with a general-purpose corpus (collection of research material). In a case of narrowly designed research subject, a topical corpus is the most advantageous one. (Bauer & Aarts, 2000, 30.) As well as most of the studies within social sciences (*ibid.*), this research utilizes topical corpus to research the different representations of Laplands' brand. The qualitative data collected for this study has been chosen with non-probability sampling technique which means that the choices for interviewed people and pictures used are based on my own judgement. When using non-probability sampling technique, it is extremely important to evaluate will the chosen data collection meet the needs for the study. The data collection should represent the kind of characteristics that will contribute the research process to meet the research aim. Non-random sampling techniques are justified in research when the research explores phenomena in a novel way or tries to achieve rich understandings of a certain case or theory. (Saunders, 2012, 39–40.)

Saunders (2012) presents four different groups of non-probability sampling techniques: quota sampling, purposive sampling, snowball and self-selection sampling and haphazard techniques. The purposive sampling technique is based on researchers' judgement and the choosing criterion for it, in relation to the research aim, is usually that the data illustrates, reveals or illuminates key themes of the research or informs an emerging theory. (Saunders, 2012, 41.) *Purposive sampling* is the technique employed in this study, too, because of its' qualities as a technique which enables to focus on small number of participants and to go deep into the data exploration. Bauer and Aarts (2000) discuss about the importance of relevance and homogeneity regarding the qualitative data selection. They highlight the theoretical relevance of materials and one thematic focus as a base for keeping the research focused and critical about the research quality. Homogenous and coherent data will enable possible comparisons within different material



groups (for example pictures and individual interviews), and therefore the groupings within data should be kept clear. (Bauer & Aarts, 2000, 31.)

Six marketing pictures of Lapland have been used during the interviews to evoke emotional reactions and associations within interviewees. These pictures were chosen from three Instagram accounts of House of Lapland: @onlyinlapland which is used for tourism marketing purposes, @munlappi which aims to attract skilled persons and potential residents to live and work in Lapland and @filmlapland to intrigue film makers and the movie industry. House of Lapland has also an Instagram account focused on business marketing (@businessLapland) but that is not active yet and therefore it was left out from this study.

Pictures were chosen using the following criteria:

- pictures should be posted on Instagram not earlier than two years ago
- they don't include faces of people since that might cause a problem from the perspective of personal data protection or identity issues
- I tried not to choose the most typical or iconic pictures of Lapland, which undoubtedly bases on subjective associations that Lapland brings to my mind
- I wanted to highlight the point which is considered important in branding of Lapland nowadays: Lapland has eight seasons and therefore one aim of branding is to attract people throughout the whole year
- extraordinary pictures were left out, meaning pictures which represented something in such a specific way that has not been done before considering the content of an account. An example of that would be a picture which highlights water or waterways in an extraordinary way

Regarding the above presented criteria, by the most typical Lapland pictures I mean pictures of Santa Claus, snow and sleigh ride with reindeers which, from my subjective perspective, represent not only the iconic associations of Lapland but also the tourism side of Laplands' brand. I also intentionally picked three photographs of summer season and three photographs of winter season to avoid the classical wintery associations that the word Lapland evokes. The reason for these choices was to underline Laplands' place brand broadly without emphasizing the tourism side of the brand.

Photographs can evoke different, deeper meanings within people than only verbal words and they can serve as symbolic starting points for research, even when the research subject is abstract. (Loizos, 2000, 93–94). During the interviews, pictures were shown for the interviewee after the first set of questions was talked through because I wanted to first calm the interview situation, get the interviewee to feel comfortable and lead the interviewee to the theme of the interview. In case the interview was conducted via phone, a link to a website where the pictures can be viewed was sent to the interviewee. They were not able to view the pictures beforehand and thus, that rendered the subconscious associations to come up. After going through the questions related to the pictures, they were left on the table or on the screen to be freely viewable by the interviewee, but I didn't come back to those pictures in purpose. This left a chance to the interviewee to revert to the pictures if she or he wanted so.

### **4.3 Analysis of the interview data and visual interpretations**

While the first step of generating data consisted of finding suitable photographs for the research, it gave me a picture of Laplands' brand image which House of Lapland is willing to communicate. This admittedly led me to think some presumptions considering the brand image already before the interviews and I found it useful when planning the interview theme and questions. The second step of data collection, interviews, generated the main source of empirical data that utilized to analyze the place brand and associations it evokes. To protect the anonymity of interviewees, I won't represent any demographic information about them since Lapland is, quoting one of the interviewees:

*“Although this is a large area, places are small. Everybody knows each other.”*

The scientific discussion around thematic analysis and its position within qualitative research methods is twofold. Some researchers (see Boyatzis, 1998; Holloway & Todres, 2003) consider thematic analysis as a tool to help in qualitative analysis process and wouldn't claim that it is a method in itself. Nowell (2017) with her colleagues argues that thematic analysis is a qualitative research method which can be used to seek answers for various kinds of research questions. (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017, 2). In this study, the data has been approached with abductive reasoning which refers to the analysis process as both theory-driven and empirically based process. Theory-driven, deductive research process would base the analysis on theoretical

assumptions whereas empirically based, inductive research would analyze with data-driven approach. (Koskinen, 1995, 51.) Abductive approach enables dialogue between theory and data and I saw this approach as the most fruitful one in my analysis as the data collection was divided throughout the research process.

After collecting the qualitative data, the thematic analysis phase concentrates on finding patterns, connections, contradictions and typical rationalizations within the interview data. Rereading the transcripts and going through the recordings are an important part of the analysis as the aim is to relive the interview situations with different, more analytical lenses on. (Gaskell, 2000, 54.) According to Alvesson & Ashcraft (2012) researchers should be careful when strictly following methodological procedures since it might hamper the reflexive and analytical process of interview analysis. They suggest that researchers should value creative, reflexive periods during the analysis process and at the same time recognize the importance of some kind of a methodological coding system for finding similar patterns from the interview data. (Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2012, 250.) In the case of thematic analysis, rigorously following methodological procedures might even be challenging, especially for novice researchers, because there is a lack of substantial literature about it. However, as thematic analysis is a relatively flexible method which can be applied to various kinds of research approaches, and it is easy to comprehend without deep knowledge about qualitative research techniques, it is widely used by novice researchers. (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017, 2.)

The interview data was thoroughly scrutinized by following the step-by-step approach to thematic analysis represented by Nowell et al. (2017). They aimed to illustrate a way to conduct a thematic analysis as trustworthy as possible. For this research, the data was sieved through with five phases of analysis:

Phase 1. Familiarizing yourself with the data

Phase 2. Generating initial codes

Phase 3. Searching for themes

Phase 4. Reviewing the themes

Phase 5. Producing the report

(adapted from Nowell et al., 2017)

The first and second phases of analytical process included both the process of data gathering

such as interviews, scrolling through House of Laplands' Instagram accounts and writing down field notes during a visit to Rovaniemi, and continuous process of reflection based on the discussions and observations. After transcribing all the interviews, I had an overall picture of themes and possible contradictions which could be highlighted in the deeper analysis phase. Nowell et al. (2017, 4) mention the importance of keeping the data stored well so that researcher can always revert to the data. They also bring up how peer debriefing can work as an accelerator for further analysis ideas and as a practice to test the initial thematic framework for analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). The third phase of data analysis, theme searching, was a long and alternating process for me as many thematic ideas and topics were really close each other during the first weeks of analysis. This made the analysis like a continuously changing jigsaw in which the pieces could change its form depending on the stage of the analysis.

#### **4.4 Ethical considerations**

Ray and Smith (2012) talk about ethical considerations of photographic research in organizations from North American perspective. They bring up four issues which should be taken into account when planning and executing visual research: intrusiveness, informed consent, capture of logos and brands and credibility. Firstly, and most obviously, photographing may cause discomfort within the people working in the researched organization. Open information and asking consent from employees are strongly linked to the mitigation of discomfort feelings within the staff and therefore it is important that the researcher is tells openly how, where and why photos are taken and analyzed. Third issue mentioned by Ray and Smith (2012) was organization specific logos and brands which are illustrated in the photographs since they very often are protected with copyright law. (Ray & Smith, 2012, 305.) In case of this research about Laplands' brand, logos and brand pictures are an essential part of the research and involved in the research question and therefore using branding photographs is in the core of this study. For the use of those pictures and logos, consent has been obtained from the House of Lapland and the photographers.

Holt (2012) in his article about ethical research practice brings up some areas of research which might be sensitive from an ethical viewpoint. In order for deliberative conversation to come true, interview setting, and environment needs to be calm and safe for the interviewees in a way that they can talk deliberately without interruptions. The article also narrates how openness and honesty considering the research purpose are crucial parts which indicate transparency of the

research process for the interviewees. (Holt, 2012, 103–104.) All the face-to-face interviews were conducted in a cafeteria, outside the offices where the interviewed people work. This might add the relaxed feeling during the interviews since interviewees could not be overheard by their colleagues. The same cannot be stated about the phone interviews but the atmosphere during these interviews was, from my perspective, open and relaxed, too.

## **5 CO-CREATING THE PLACE BRAND OF LAPLAND**

The history of developing Finnish Laplands' place brand bases on separate projects before the establishment of House of Lapland in 2015. Branding activities focused then more on tourism marketing whereas the branding is nowadays targeted for four different groups: experience seekers, skilled persons, business and filmmakers. The history of Laplands' brand development as separate projects and the fact that the organizations responsible for branding have been changed was perceivable from the results of data analysis. Based on the interview data, the need for clear, local communication and willingness to create shared understanding of what branding really means for local actors, raised as important development points for Laplands' place brand.

The most dominant characteristics of Finnish Lapland, mentioned by the interviewees, were nature-specific features, internationality, functional infrastructure and northern location. In Finnish scale, the brand of Lapland was seen unique as it is one of the few counties in Finland that even have a brand. The marketing pictures raised different opinions about the pictures that are used in Laplands' marketing as well as about the authenticity of the marketed brand image. Stakeholders recognized by the interviewees reflected the internationality of the brand as well as the sphere of operations that place branders work with. Next, the results of this study are represented starting from the mental associations that Laplands' place brand evokes and finalizing with the place brand co-creation and stakeholder groups that were recognized by the interviewees

### **5.1 The key characteristics of Laplands' place brand**

Interviewees envisioned Lapland as a unique place with dignity and traditions. Nature and characteristics linked to it as well as functional infrastructure were mentioned as things which Lapland should be proud of. Laplands' place brand was described to be international in a way that it's known around the world from Asia to United States and Lapland was also determined as a place which has put Finland on the world map. In the following paragraphs I go through the different mental associations and key characteristics that interviewees linked to Laplands' brand and aim to answer for the first research question: How the image of Finnish Laplands' place brand is understood and envisioned and what kind of mental associations it evokes?

Laplands' location in the North and above the Arctic Circle came up repeatedly during the interviews. The northern location was mentioned from many different perspectives: combined to the functional infrastructure while still being a remote location, being for the most parts above the Arctic Circle as a fascinating factor, location as something that ultimately defines what kind of nature Lapland has and Laplands' location near three neighboring countries which had influenced on the culture, people, habits and lifestyle. Location was a remarkable overarching theme that defined the character of Lapland as an area and a brand for the interviewees and it was also highlighted among the first things when the interviewees were asked to describe Lapland as a place. Even though it is obvious that in a research focusing on place branding the location of a place will be brought up many times, the location of Lapland was mentioned as one of the key characteristics creating the brand of Lapland. It was connected to arcticness, snow and ice. Moreover, it can be questioned if some other region in Finland would be described as such emphasis on its location than Lapland was during the interviews for this study.

The actual geographical location and the associations that people have can oftentimes be very different. An excellent example of that was mentioned by one of the interviewees: Iceland is often perceived as an arctic or very northern destination and it's competing for tourists with Lapland. Interestingly, if Iceland is explored on the map, it's located few degrees *south* from the Arctic Circle, like can be seen from the Picture 2. Therefore, associations and reputation management do have a role in the ways how people perceive places and see the qualities of it. Theories of place branding and place brand formation support this finding since place brands are regarded as manageable assets, but the level of control is varying (Alapeteri, 2018) depending on external factors such as politics, economic issues and discussions in social media (Aitken & Campelo, 2011; Anholt, 2010).

Picture 2. Laplands' location compared to the Arctic Circle. From Lapin materiaalipankki



Interviewed stakeholders referred to Laplands' brand as tourism brand while they also recognized the need and marketers aim to create a brand that attracts also other focus groups than tourists, such as businesses and new residents.

*“At present Lapland has a strong tourist appeal but if we aim to attract high competence businesses, we don't have that kind of appeal. Laplands' brand image could be more diverse.”*

*“It is super important to hold on to people who live in here as well as get new people in town. We should differentiate Lapland as a tourism destination and as a place to live.”*

The need and willingness to persuade new residents and entrepreneurs seemed to be almost like a shared vision for the interviewees. Lapland was described as a vigorous place with all-year tourism and more residents as main goals. Also, marketing of all the eight seasons was seen important as the majority of tourists visits Lapland during the winter. While interviewees highlighted the tourism feature of Laplands' brand, they also claimed that Lapland, first of all, *has a brand* which is before anything an international one. Interestingly, the amount of Finnish tourism has decreased during the last years and that was mentioned as one of the development points by House of Lapland. The decreasing number of Finnish visitors was also mentioned by interviewed stakeholders and this can be observed as a strengthening factor for the international aspect of Laplands' brand. To summarize the above-mentioned points, interviewees recognized the need for more marketing targeted at potential new residents and Finnish tourists and they also had the same views about the internationality and tourism feature of the brand. A notable point here is that although it seemed that interviewees shared a vision of where the branding focus should be, they didn't share the same thoughts about the execution and realization of the brand at present. This point will be elaborated further in the chapter 5.2.

Interviewees explained how Lapland has been marketed as a tourist destination already quite some time and therefore it is logical that the brand has been evolving to international direction. The success in tourism marketing was mentioned as a fantastic story which required a lot of effort and collaboration to put it all together. Furthermore, branding activities have been evolving through different schemes and initiatives (see; Lapin liitto, b, n.d., Lapin liitto, c, n.d.) and there has been no one office to take responsibility of the marketing work before House of Lapland was established. Before that Regional Council of Lapland (Lapin liitto) had a major role developing the branding initiatives further. Because tourism have been the base idea when systematic branding activities were starting to develop, the direction and focus group have undoubtedly been foreign tourists along with Finnish people. Many interviewees saw Laplands'



brand as one of the main things that is known about Finland around the world but at the same time they recognized that there might be no difference between Swedish and Finnish Lapland in consumers mind. In Finnish scale interviewees narrated how Laplands' brand is unique as it has been, among Helsinki, the first regions to do regional branding in Finland:

*"I think that Lapland has been one of the firsts to...that we need a brand as a county and Lapland is quite big county which has created quite a challenge when thinking that from Utsjoki to Simo it is quite long distance and in between you can find all kinds of things...Helsinki has been creating its' brand, like other cities, to quite advanced level, but it is not county marketing per se."*

Looked from either international or national standpoint, interviewees respected the work that has been done for the brand creation as well as highlighted the international aspect of it.

The combination of peacefulness and functional infrastructure was recognized as a competitive advantage for Finnish Lapland when compared to Sweden and Norway since Finland has a dense road network:

*"If we think about accessibility, the Finnish Lapland is number one since we have really good roads. Norway, for example, have really long roads but better and more active air connections."*

This perspective has a linkage to the tourism brand association that interviewees referred to since the service network for both locals and for tourists was brought up as a field that Lapland has improved remarkably during the last decades, partly as a result of increased tourism. Finnish Lapland was described as a resort kind of location due to the road network and concentration of services it has whereas Norwegian and Swedish Laplands were seen more challenging places to explore by tourists. Rainisto (2008, 28) described how important it is for place brands to identify the strengths of the brand compared to competitors as it is a way to modify the image of the brand. In this case, the functional infrastructure was the only competitive advantage that was mentioned by interviewees when Finnish Lapland was compared to Norwegian and Swedish ones. This reflects the similarity of Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish Laplands as well as reveals that some brand positioning has been done in Finnish Lapland when compared to competitors. Despite recognized competitors, cooperation with those countries was seen very valuable in the field of tourism.

Nature was highlighted significantly during the interviews and this tells how Laplanders care about their home region and the unique nature that Lapland has. The uniqueness of Lapland was described followingly by one of the interviewees:

*“We aim to be unique in Finland and on a global scale. Even though we have industry, business and life here so up north, still we have the cleanest nature in the world – that’s not usual. This should be crystallized in the brand.”*

Climate change was mentioned as a challenge that needs to be considered while planning marketing activities and branding. Partly, the impacts that tourism eventually have on Laplands’ nature were mentioned as a challenge and risk for both, the brand and the nature. The balance of tourism and unspoiled nature is fragile, but interviewees saw also that Lapland has positive advantages due to a somewhat dense road network which will enable people to move around without destroying a lot of sensitive nature. From the nature specific features of Lapland, arctic light including polar nights, Northern lights and midnight sun, snow, ice, reindeers, fells, gifts of nature and clean air were mentioned by most of the interviewees. These features were used to describe Lapland as a place but also the brand of Lapland. Especially arctic light and midnight sun were appreciated as features that could be marketed more even though Northern lights already have a major role in the branding activities of Lapland.

Looking to the theory, Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2008, 152–153) mentioned how important it is for place branders to base the brand values and branding strategy to authentic, innated features of a place. It can be that places are branded just for the sake of a place or that they are branded alongside a product, like has happened in the case of Champagne area in France. (ibid.) In the case of Lapland and Northern lights, Lapland has succeeded in finding real-life features, which are valued and respected by both locals and tourists, to lead the branding strategy. Northern lights and other nature specific features of Lapland represented the essence of Lapland as a place for majority of the interviewees and interviewees highlighted the importance of Northern lights in the rise of Lapland as a tourist destination. Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2008) aimed to describe how places can be related to products. In Lapland the only straight interface between place branding and a product can be found in the relation of Santa Claus and marketing activities. That is why I would claim that Laplands’ brand is strongly based on location specific features such as nature. Wæraas, Bjørnå and Moldenæs (2015) represented three different strategies that are used by place branders: democracy, organization and place strategy, and as I found place specific features the most outstanding reasons behind the branding activities, place strategy would appear to be the prevailing method used in Lapland. In conclusion, Lapland has found key characteristics of the place to steer the place branding practices which gives a strong base for place brand development in the long term.

Table 1. The key characteristics of Laplands' brand

	Northern location
	Nature, arctic light, snow
	International
	Functional infrastructure, accessibility
	Positively crazy, bold, unique
	Tourism brand
	Cultural heritage
	Slogan "Above Ordinary"

To recapitulate, seven key characteristics identified from the interviews are presented in the table 1. Functional infrastructure and accessibility were the only clear competitive advantages that were mentioned by the interviewees. These can be reflected as a signal of brand positioning (see Rainisto, 2008, 28) work that has been done and communicated in Lapland since also stakeholders brought it up. In national level, Laplands' brand was seen advanced as Lapland has been the first counties to brand itself in Finland. In practice this came out during the interviews when I heard that other counties want to benchmark Lapland. Nature was an overarching theme in all interviews and the nature-specific features such as Northern lights and fells were mentioned as one of the most typical features of Laplands' place brand.

## 5.2 Impressions of branding and the mentality of Laplanders

An interesting observation from few interviewees was that Laplanders have a reputation as workers who have excellent service know-how and genuine service spirit as well as persons who are real, straightforward and act as they are. Few interviewees connected this to branding by saying that branding in Lapland has been executed in a bit crazy and bold way – these were also the adjectives used to describe the mentality of Laplanders. These two views, the mentality of

Laplanders and positively crazy ways to do branding, support each other, and for that reason it can be said that stakeholders saw authenticity in the branding activities since those matched with Laplanders' mentality. If we come back to the genuineness and Laplanders as authentic people who are straightforward, some contradictions were found as interviewees and especially the stakeholders brought up that brand messages need to be truthful also in a way that Lapland is more than wilderness and fells: it is also cities, international atmosphere and active people. Real people, real-life happenings and authentic pictures about the everyday life in Lapland were named as some of the things that should be highlighted more in the brand story:

*"I would love to see more real people in real situations in these pictures. Also work, industries and the eight seasons that we have could be brought up more."*

Thus, Laplanders were described as a bit crazy and bold people which was perceivable from the branding activities according to the stakeholders. Still, real-life pictures and stories were yearned. This might reflect the vision that the interviewees have about Laplands' brand and branding activities: they have an *impression* or vision of branding to be executed and planned in a crazy and bold way, but at the same time they *are missing* the positive craziness from the marketing campaigns or *ask for more* authentic pictures and brand story about Lapland. One might ask if this reflects only the personal image that stakeholders have about the brand and that the interviewees perhaps told first that they (want to) see boldness in the actual branding process, but the real-life perceptions are revealed as different because more genuineness is asked. I would still claim that the impressions interviewees had were real since interviewees have been linked or otherwise seen parts of the branding process and how the planning is executed. Furthermore, this is in line with House of Laplands' view of their branding style to be bold and more straightforward. I would argue that the bold grasp and approach to branding is a truthful notion as it reflects the mentality of Laplanders, too. To sum these observations up, the ways how branding is executed reflects the genuine boldness and craziness of Laplanders, while the outcome doesn't appear alike.

What could then cause the disconnection between perceived action and the actual outcome? The theory behind place brand formation and peoples' image of place brands explains this phenomenon. According to Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015) place brands are comprised of four mental constructions which form the image that people have about places: material elements, practices, institutions and representations. Practices, which refer to production of materiality and to social interaction (ibid., 1373–1375), could be the crucial point in this case. When

stakeholders notice a gap between the impressions and the actual perceived marketing, it could be analyzed that the overall picture of the brand gets blurred. Like Kavartzis and Kalandides (2015) underlined in their article, the interactional nature of brands facilitates ongoing changes and formulations to the place brand image that people have. They state followingly: “*Place branding then can reinforce a place’s uniqueness if it is based on the same thing that makes places unique...local blend of such elements...*” (Kavartzis & Kalandides, 2015, 1379). Based on this definition it can be questioned if this gap between stakeholders’ impressions and the perceived outcomes is “real” in a sense that the branding activities which are carried out in Lapland don’t actually represent the boldness and craziness of Laplanders, or if this contradiction just reflects the theoretical viewpoint (Kavartzis & Kalandides, 2015) of brand images as subjectively constructed and to some extent quite personal perceptions of a place? Therefore, it can be stated that the branding activities in Lapland might lack some of the elements that make Lapland a unique place, but after all it depends on who defines the unique characteristics.

Still, the question of causing factors for the disconnection of branding impressions and the actual outcome stays ambiguous. Through observing the place brand formation process presented by Kavartzis and Kalandides (2015) more, I noticed that *institutions* might be the explaining factor for the disconnection between perceived action and the actual outcome of branding. Institutions refer to the power relations and norms of place branding (ibid., 1374) and because the process of branding seemed to be unclear for interviewed stakeholders, it can be observed that from the four-part brand formation process of Kavartzis and Kalandides (2015), institutions are the explaining factor the ambiguous perceptions of the brand. The ambiguousness of the branding process most probably bases on the short history of House of Lapland as one collective actor marketing Lapland.

### **5.3 Coherent brand image**

House of Lapland has put together a material bank (House of Lapland, f, n.d.) for different branding materials which can be used by stakeholders, local entrepreneurs and all who are presenting Lapland in any occasion. The aim of this is obviously to try to communicate the brand image in coherent and solid ways, no matter who is the one describing Lapland. Coherent brand image is hard to create and even harder to handle as brand images are based on simplification of

multifaceted memories, pictures and associations (Gertner & Kotler, 2004, 50). Similarly, in one interview brand management was brought up as a field that might face challenges in the future as a brand consists of all actions and messages that are perceived by people. Furthermore, interviewee referred to the vast group of organizations, companies and individuals who shape the brand image and therefore managing the brand image can turn out to be uncontrollable. Similar point discussed with another interviewee included reputation management challenges from the regional politics perspective. For example, Arctic Railway project and so-called Lex Kittilä case (Yle, 2018) have got a somewhat negative publicity in media and all that will eventually be reflected to the actual brand image. Despite the shared material bank, fragmented media landscape hampers the ways to control the brand (Aaker, 1996, 30) even though branding activities are more concerted in Lapland nowadays due to House of Lapland.

Lapland has been pioneering in the brand creation in county level in Finland and as arise from interviews, other counties in Finland are interested in benchmarking Lapland and how they executed their marketing and county brand creation. Interviewees also recognized how unusual it is that a county has a clear brand in Finland. The following comment mirrors this perspective perfectly:

*“Well I think Lapland has a brand, and that’s not self-evident if you think about some other regions in Finland.”*

Even though Laplands’ brand is nationally well-recognized, interviewees described how it has a strong connotation as an international brand and some interviewees even perceived Laplands’ brand more known than the national brand of Finland. The international aspect brings challenges into coherent brand creation as the focus point for House of Lapland is now to concentrate on talent and new resident attraction which might risk the somewhat clear international picture that interviewees had about the brand. Like Andéhn et al. (2014, 141) brought up, brands are developing based on the associations of people which change continuously depending on outer stimulus.

An interesting observation from the interviews is that only few of the interviewees mentioned Santa Claus as something that they personally associated Lapland with. Santa Claus was mentioned when the discussion turned to one thing to represent Lapland but even though interviewees mentioned Santa, they didn’t choose him to represent Lapland. In these discussions every interviewee named an object, or a thing related to nature. Santa Claus was seen more as a complementary, but still significant character, as part of the brand. The fact that Santa was

mentioned in later stages and seldom as one of the first things related to the brand was surprising. This might have something to do with the interview groups and the profession of the interviewees since they are either a) working with the overall brand of Lapland, including the summer season marketing, or b) working with subjects related to Lapland but not straight linked to Santa Claus. One of the interviewees would have chosen Santa though, and finally didn't, because that was more of an association related to her job.

Based on the interviews, the brand image of Lapland is strongly linked to nature and locals feel that they are proud of the brand and the internationality of it. In wider scale interviewees had a critical perspective on the brand management and possibilities to control the brand image. The most critical perspectives questioned if the brand image can even be controllable at all as we live in very hectic, social media centric era. This same question has been lively discussed in the research world, too, and Alapeteri (2018) has simply stated that brand management must be controllable action as it would otherwise be pointless use of resources. In Laplands' case at least the interviewees had a faith in their branding, but they highlighted the ambiguousness of branding as they couldn't explain the responsibilities and the phenomenon in itself explicitly. Therefore, the coherent brand image is still something that Lapland has to work with so that the brand itself as well as the process of brand creation would be comprehensible for all local actors.

#### **5.4 Visual representations of the brand and a wish for authenticity**

This chapter goes through the associations that interviewees got from six marketing pictures showed to them during interviews. Interviewees were asked to describe if any of the picture represents Lapland to them or if some of the pictures feels especially meaningful for the interviewee. They were also asked to pick one of the pictures which crystallizes the meaning or characteristics of Lapland for them personally.



PICTURE 1. Photographer Markus Kiili @markuskiili



PICTURE 2. Photographer Juho Kuva @juhokuva

Few interviewees brought up how they are missing people from the pictures. As mentioned in the methodology section about the criterion for the utilized pictures, I intentionally left pictures with peoples' faces out of the collection for personal data protection related reasons. Few interviewees anyhow highlighted the role of local people in the marketing pictures in general because for the viewer it creates a possibility to relate to the picture and story behind it. Another thing that bothered interviewees was that without people pictures seem like they are fake. Addition to that, interviewees missed pictures of built infrastructure as Lapland was described to be a wilderness with services. Using people in marketing pictures have been a conscious decision by House of Lapland and they have emphasized that in their Instagram accounts. Therefore, these observations of pictures being unauthentic without people is false because the shown pictures don't represent the whole spectrum of used branding pictures. However, the observation of missing people from the marketing pictures tells about the contradiction of branding impressions and outcomes which was discussed earlier in chapter 5.2. Since local people and a place brand are inextricably linked as locals' identities relate with a location (Spencer, 2011), having people in the pictures brings more authenticity to the marketing pictures and to the brand story.





PICTURE 3. Photographer Emilia Mannerheim @emiliaevelin



PICTURE 4. Photographer Harri Tarvainen @kaffegram

During one of the interviews came up that pictures used in Laplands' branding by House of Lapland (not the pictures used in this research) haven't always been exactly from Finnish Lapland. Interviewee found this strange because those pictures don't represent the core of Lapland. Few interviewees brought up how stylized and photoshopped marketing pictures can sometimes be and for some of the interviewees that was a clear statement to ask for more authentic pictures. One descriptive example of that was a comment regarding the picture of cloudberries: "*Who picks cloudberries to an enamel mug? And a leaf on a rim of a cup...nobody!*" (translated from Finnish). Others recognized that too, but it didn't bother them as they saw the elegant pictures more as something that marketing just does and they could still find meaningfulness from the pictures. Neumeier (2016) discusses about "the lure of competition" which drives marketers to execute branding better and in more clever ways than competitors. The constant scramble to be the most compelling destination to travel requires hard work from branding professionals but the risk of overdoing, like Gertner and Kotler (2004) put it, is constantly present in today's world. In the case of Laplands' marketing pictures, the majority of interviewees could still relate to the pictures and that is why I would state that overdoing and the lure of competition have been avoided so far.



PICTURE 5. Photographer Lauri K. @lateek



PICTURE 6. Photographer Terhi Tuovinen @terhituovinen

The abovementioned difference between stakeholders' *impressions* and the way how they describe the *reality* is noteworthy as, like Gertner and Kotler (2004) write, the image that a place has, will mould how people experience the place even before they have personal connections with the place. Addition to that, a place image is more like a simplification of many different associations as information flow is so constant in our society nowadays (Gertner & Kotler, 2004, 50). Therefore, it is no wonder that impressions and reality don't always match when it comes to place brands and this contradiction can easily lead to unclear and vague brand image. Referring to the interviewees' differing perspectives about stylized marketing pictures, it could be assumed that *the ones who could more easily relate to the shown pictures have also clearer image of the brand* since they can relate to the already existing brand as the way it is marketed. The new branding paradigm supports this assumption as current understanding about brands underlines the significance of brand co-creation (Alapeteri, 2018) and the power of consumers and local people in place branding processes (Aitken and Campelo, 2011; Neumeier, 2016). In addition to that, it is proved by research that all the associations that people have about a brand will eventually have an effect on the brand image (Aaker, 2016). The next paragraphs will dig deeper into the brand co-creation process and the empirical findings regarding the collaborative brand creation in Lapland.

## 5.5 Place brand co-creation in Lapland

This chapter gives answers for the second research question: how the place brand of Lapland is co-created in collaboration with House of Lapland and its stakeholders? The brand co-creation is observed through the understanding that interviewees had about the place brand creation process. Overall, the brand co-creation process was ambiguous and unclear for most of the interviewees even though they could name the most important organizations related to the place brand management and branding responsibilities in Lapland.

The branding process was described as a continuous cooperation with municipalities, local companies and local organizations from House of Laplands' perspective. Municipalities were comprehended as enabling actors since they finance and own House of Lapland and reciprocally the vigorousness of municipalities was important for House of Lapland. Financially European Union was also mentioned in many interviews as one big enabler for Laplands' development branding-wise and in other areas, too. The cooperation between House of Lapland, municipalities and Regional Council of Lapland (Lapin liitto) was brought up by many interviewees but the impression of the level of cooperation, quality and the overall picture of branding was very different for every interviewee. Also, Regional Council of Lapland as an organization was still mentioned as an important actor in the branding process, most likely because they have a history in that field and they have been initiating the brand creation process decades ago. More critical perspectives highlighted how fragmented the brand creation is from customers' perspective as well as the number of actors involved in the branding process and some even questioned if a brand image can be managed in any way. More optimistic perspectives brought up Laplands' success story as a tourist destination. Few interviewees saw public agencies and municipalities challenging from branding perspective because public organizations don't always have the same knowledge as organizations which work with the customers on their daily basis.

Some interviewees stated that municipalities as public authorities should not do branding and their role should not be highlighted in branding activities. The next quotations reflect this perspective:

*“Authorities should not take care branding, as you mentioned that municipalities are actively involved in branding work, it is true, but I think that their job is not to do branding. Local authorities are their own unit, I would not emphasize their role in the branding work.”*

*“Brand development should be done in close collaboration with the operational actors...that is the challenge when public authorities work (do branding) with their own outlook so it is hard to resonate that to the field.”*

It is also theoretically recognized that public agencies are lacking the basic knowledge and skills when it comes to branding (Klijn, Eshuis & Braun, 2012, 500). Researchers have also brought up that the environment where place branders work is administration-like and place branding have been referred as a governance process because it is often executed by cities itself (idib., 515). The issue is twofold as place branders usually work within the city administration system and if they do, the system itself can limit their activities or direct the branding work to a particular direction. Then, like brought up by Klijn, Eshuis and Braun (2012, 500), the hindrance will be lack of branding and marketing skills. In Lapland this city administration challenge has been to some extent avoided as House of Lapland is an independent publicly owned limited company. Its' owners are municipalities, higher education institutions and the Federation of Finnish Enterprises in Lapland and therefore it is led by public authorities who also have vision about the regional level management and changes which are necessary to consider while planning branding activities. Interviewees didn't explicitly refer to the functionality of House of Lapland and it was observable that they didn't have a clear picture of its' work and the brand image of Lapland that House of Lapland aims to communicate.

During the interviews came up that locals have been co-creating the vision of Laplands' brand in the early days of the brand creation but currently House of Lapland don't do any special cooperation with locals or send them any surveys. However, the Instagram channel @munlappi functions as a place where local stories are shared, and people can tell about their life and jobs in Lapland. This channel was mentioned as a valuable way to get new insights and approaches to branding by House of Lapland. Indigenous people and Sami community was mentioned as one important stakeholder group considering the branding activities, too. One way to observe the collaboration between different actors is to look for branding projects which have been successful or are somehow known within stakeholders. As mentioned earlier, Lapland Above Ordinary was referred as a successful and functional slogan for Lapland. I noticed that Above Ordinary stickers were all over cafeterias and restaurants around Rovaniemi and that tells about the awareness within local entrepreneurs, too. An example of those stickers can be found in Picture 3.

Picture 3. Lapland Above Ordinary -icon. Lapin materiaalipankki



Some organizations and companies work with customers and visitors daily and it was observable during the interviews that these organizations don't always feel like they've been heard when it comes to Lapland level branding. Simple and already proved branding features, such as reindeers, Santa Claus and the Northern Lights, were mentioned as features which should not be forgotten in branding from their perspective. Also, fancy, green and sustainable marketing visions made by marketing offices were not seen as the most functional ones in branding and those kinds of complicated and general marketing visions perceived some criticism from few interviewees. The main argument was that when it comes to sales and marketing, too fancy and special slogans and visions don't work as well as simple ones. In the worst-case scenario, too specialized and stylized visions will be used as simplified versions when the original vision as such loses its' value and the result will be unclear brand message. The critique itself didn't point to any fancy visions to be too fancy or specialized as such but the challenge seemed to arise when the practical marketing tasks came to the picture. This perspective might refer to challenges when it comes to brand co-creation and collaboration between different stakeholders.

A material bank maintained by House of Lapland (House of Lapland, f, n.d.), which aims to share the brand look for all stakeholders and therefore helps to form a coherent brand image, is actively used by embassies around the world but for one interviewee this material bank came as a surprise even though it could be helpful for their organization. I didn't bring the material bank up during any interviews and in this case the interviewee had done some background research before the interview. This tells, again, about the international focus of Laplands' branding since local actors are missing the information of the existence of this material bank. It also reflects the importance of communication, like theoretically highlighted according the new branding paradigm thinking (Alapeteri, 2018; Neumeier, 2016). Still, at the same time Laplands' branding was described as an integrated process which functions well with different local actors. This is

contradictory in a sense that some interviewees gave opposite insights and felt that more collaboration would be useful.

Furthermore, more information about what a brand actually means and how it is formed was asked as this would help locals and local entrepreneurs to create a picture of what kind of parts Laplands' brand actually consist of and how a brand is formed:

*"How to take into consideration that it (branding) happens through so many channels so the meaning of it (branding) could be highlighted, like to build a shared set of values and shared meaning through it. So, the process of how a brand is formed should be brought into prominence. Through that anyone can take advantage of the brand."*

It might be that interviewees who brought this up didn't know about the material bank either, but however the brand of Lapland seemed to be quite vague concept for all stakeholders, despite the existence of the material bank. The challenge of creating a coherent brand for such a vast region was mentioned, too, and a strong brand image was described to be a sensitive issue for some communities as Lapland covers so different areas from Sea Lapland to the northern Fell Lapland area. All in all, the meaning and image of Laplands' brand seemed to be unclear for stakeholders while they still had strong vision about the future focus points.

### **5.5.1 Stakeholder groups reflect the sphere of operations**

Stakeholders are an essential part of brand creation process since, as described by Freeman (1984, 46) they represent *"any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives"*. Therefore, stakeholders represent all the actors and organizations that are at least in some level influenced by the brand or have a chance to influence on it. Nowadays organizations embrace brand co-creation together with their customers which can even turn into brand communities that consist of loyal customers (Neumeier, 2016). In Laplands' case the region that the brand represents is already vast which makes the *"normative core"* (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997, 857) of stakeholders wide in itself. The following tables 2, 3 and 4 represent stakeholders that were mentioned by the interviewees and were considered important from the formation and management perspective of Laplands' brand. Stakeholders are divided into three groups (local, national and international) depending on their scale of action.

Table 2. Local stakeholders

<b>Local stakeholders</b>	Local people, Sami people
	Regional Council of Lapland
	House of Lapland
	-Municipalities
	-Local companies and entrepreneurs
	Local organizations

Depending on the profession of the interviewee, different groups and actors were emphasized. However, all interviewees mentioned Regional Council of Lapland, locals and local entrepreneurs as important stakeholders considering the reputation management and branding of Lapland. Considering branding and local stakeholders, Regional Council of Lapland was highlighted to be one of the most important actors besides House of Lapland. Regional Council of Lapland was without exception mentioned before House of Lapland, and not even all interviewees mentioned House of Lapland even though it is the one organization responsible for Laplands' branding nowadays. This probably refers the long history of Regional Council of Lapland as a key actor in the promotion work. It is contradictory though, that some interviewees didn't want to see public authorities executing branding, but they still recognized the value of Regional Council of Lapland in branding work.

Table 3. National stakeholders

<b>National stakeholders</b>	Forest, metal and mining industries
	Finnair, VR
	-Business Finland
	Chamber of Commerce
	Uusimaa region
	Government, Members of Parliament

In national level companies representing different industries were mentioned as important factor creating financial stability and development possibilities to the region. Logistics companies, Finnair and VR, are extremely important for Finnish and international tourists since the distance from southern cities, such as Helsinki and Turku, is quite long. Furthermore, national-level

lobbying was recognized as an important way to ensure that Laplands' voice will be heard in governmental-level, too.

Table 4 represents international stakeholder groups mentioned by the interviewees. Interestingly, this list is the longest from all the three stakeholder group listings. It reflects the internationality of Laplands' brand as well as the direction of the last decades' branding strategies targeted for tourists. European Commission was brought up as another significant financier of the regional development work in Lapland along with municipalities. One of the interviewees highlighted the role of European Commission followingly: *"EU Commission is very important stakeholder. Lapland gets more support from there than from the national level authorities."* International stakeholders were mentioned as competitors since Norway and Sweden compete for tourists with Finnish Lapland but also as collaborators because *"Finnish Lapland does a lot of cooperation with Norway and Sweden, especially in the field of tourism."*

Table 4. International stakeholders

<b>International stakeholders</b>	Tourism operators
	EU and European Commission
	-Barents Region
	Arctic cooperation forums
	Norway, Sweden, Russia
	China / Asia
	USA, Canada
	Media
	Investors

The above represented stakeholder groups reflect the sphere of operations that Laplands' branding is connected to. All the interviewees recognized different levels in stakeholder groups and the internationality was underlined in these discussions. *"...in international level stakeholders are a cross-section of many fields: tourism, media, investors, commerce..."* Zenker and Seigis (2013, 22) stated that place marketing is customer-focused function, and this is well reflected in the above-mentioned tables. The list of international stakeholders could also represent list of customers for Lapland excluding EU and European Commission. All in all, interviewees were able to name many important stakeholders easily, but the brand image and the brand creation process were more difficult to describe for them.



## 6 CONCLUSION

This study aimed to answer for two research questions: how the image of Finnish Laplands' place brand is understood and envisioned and what kind of mental associations it evokes, and how the place brand of Lapland is co-created in collaboration with House of Lapland and its stakeholders. The first question aims to crystallize what kind of mental associations are connected to Laplands' place brand whereas the second one focuses on the place brand co-creation process in Lapland. Based on the analysis, Laplands' place brand is strongly associated with nature, internationality, tourism and location-specific characteristics such as Northern Lights. Empirical analysis revealed that interviewees had almost like a shared vision of how the future place brand image should look like and how the place brand should be developed to attract new residents and businesses to Lapland. This is a challenging step to reach for place branders as, like Anholt (2010, 10) have stated, the brand image is created by consumers in their minds. Regarding the second research question, the brand co-creation process was considered unclear from stakeholders' perspective. Results indicate that stakeholders would value a coherent and shared understanding of Laplands' place brand as well as knowledge about how the place brand can benefit local organizations.

House of Lapland identifies four main target groups which they want to reach with their marketing and branding activities: tourists, filming professionals, talents and business people. These four groups can roughly be divided into two categories that are usually utilized by place branders (Campelo, 2017): *tourist destination branding* including tourists and filming professionals since they are visitors, and *urban regeneration* category which includes talents and business people. The main point dividing House of Laplands target groups so specifically and with so wide range of variation is the fact that House of Lapland is promoting a region, Lapland, and not just a city. This gives possibilities to promote special features of whole Northern Finland and enhances the variety of branding. As dividing target groups enables to personalize marketing activities, it makes the brand management more challenging when the brand image is divided into various categories. A great example of branding which encompasses all four groups in Lapland is Lapland Above Ordinary -slogan which interviewees brought up as a slogan which works in the marketing activities for all the target groups. The empirical analysis pointed to challenges when branding such a diverse place as Lapland with different local cultures and nature-specific characteristics. Place branding theories support this result (Aitken & Campelo,

2011, Gertner & Kotler, 2004) and highlight the importance of authenticity in branding activities (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2008).

## 6.1 Main results and theoretical contribution

The history of Laplands' brand development as separate projects and the fact that the organization responsible for branding have been changing was perceivable from the results of data analysis. The need for clear local communication and willingness to create shared understanding of what branding really means for local actors raised as important development points for Laplands' place brand. To some extent contrary finding indicated that interviewees had a shared vision of how the future place brand image should look like and which target groups should be attracted more (new residents and talents). Thus, the vision of future was clear for the interviewees whereas the current branding activities and the benefits of branding weren't clear for all the interviewees. At the same time interviewees respected the work that has been done for Laplands' place brand development during the last decades and they were especially proud of the raise of tourism. Laplands' brand was regarded to be unique as it is one of the few counties in Finland that have a brand which is well-known around the world.

Authenticity (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2008) have a key role in creating a place brand which will be respected by the audience. Authenticity in place branding refers to the unique location-specific characteristics of a place and to the characteristics of local people. In the interviews Laplanders were described as a bit crazy and bold people which was perceivable from the branding activities according to the stakeholders. Still, interviewees were missing real-life pictures and stories from Laplands' branding activities. This might reflect the vision that interviewees have about Laplands' brand and branding activities: they have an *impression* of branding to be executed and planned in a crazy and bold way, but at the same time they *are missing* the positive craziness from the marketing campaigns and *ask for more* authentic pictures and brand story. The theory behind place brand formation and peoples' image of place brands (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015) explains this disconnection. When stakeholders notice a gap between their impressions and the actual marketing, the overall picture of the brand gets blurred. The analysis of the place brand formation process presented by Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015) indicates that *institutions* might be the explaining factor for the disconnection between perceived action and the actual outcome of branding in Lapland. Since the process of branding

seemed to be unclear for interviewed stakeholders, it can be observed that institutions as power relations are the explaining factor the ambiguous perceptions of Laplands' brand. The ambiguousness of the branding process most probably bases on the short history of House of Lapland as one collective actor marketing Lapland.

Generally, the brand evoked similar associations: arctic light, snow, eight seasons, internationality and tourism were considered as the key characteristics of the brand. The need for more appealing branding towards the talent and new resident attraction was recognized whereas the tourism brand was viewed as the strong part of Laplands' brand. Increased tourism made the development of cities in Lapland become reality but the impacts that tourism eventually have on Laplands' nature were mentioned as a challenge and risk for both, the brand and the nature. The balance of tourism and unspoiled nature is fragile, but interviewees saw also that Lapland has positive advantages due to a somewhat dense road network which will enable people to move around without destroying a lot of sensitive nature. Functional infrastructure and accessibility were clear competitive advantages of Finnish Lapland that were brought up during the interviews. These can be reflected as a signal of brand positioning (Rainisto, 2008) work that has been done in Lapland. The competitive advantages of Laplands' place brand were compared to Norwegian and Swedish Laplands and even though Sweden and Norway were considered as competitors, cooperation with these countries was highlighted as an important way to keep up with the newest trends in Northern place marketing. Since concentrating too much on the workings of competitors can risk the authentic brand image (Neumeier, 2016), Lapland should be careful while planning its' own branding activities.

Online communication technologies have enabled reciprocal communication between place marketers and target groups (Braun et al., 2013) which has created new ways to develop branding as feedback and ideas from target groups can be read straight from the internet. As social media has gained a strong foothold in the marketing world (ibid.) and the new branding paradigm highlights the role of consumers (Alapeteri, 2018), peoples' perceptions have become increasingly important for place branders. The results of this study indicate that *stakeholders who can relate to the marketing pictures* used by place branders in Lapland *have clearer image of the brand* since they can relate to the already existing place brand as the way it is marketed. Interviewees who criticized the shown marketing pictures wanted to see more authenticity not only in the pictures but also in the branding activities more generally. Earlier research findings

show that all the associations that people have about a brand will eventually influence the brand image (Aaker, 2016). For that reason, it is vitally important that place branders in Lapland base their activities to authentic and innate features of Lapland as it gives an image of thoroughly designed place branding.

The analysis shows that the possibilities to manage the brand image and reputation in Lapland are questioned as there are numerous actors who take part into the discussions considering the brand of Lapland. The most notable finding regarding the brand co-creation process indicated that stakeholders would value a coherent and shared understanding of Laplands' place brand as well as knowledge about how the place brand can benefit local organizations. Managing a place brand is challenging as the level of control alters depending on external factors (Alapeteri, 2018). This is a rather challenging set-up for House of Lapland as numerous actors will have an influence on the brand image. This kind of situation is nowadays common within public authorities as they have shifted to work more as businesses due to the NPM movement. Therefore, it can be observed that branding activities in Lapland will face challenges common to the public sector as it is a public co-created brand which encompasses authentic features of a vast region including different people, different natural conditions and different cultures.

## **6.2 Limitations and suggestions for future research**

It is noteworthy that people with different occupation and life situations have different expectations from the brand of their home region (Braun et al., 2013, 25). This added to the fact that the scope of interviewed people is limited, may influence the reliability of the study. On the other hand, brands represent the deeper values and thoughts of people in the postmodern society we are living in (Aitken & Campelo, 2011, 917) and therefore, it is hard to draw the line between reliable and un-reliable research setting since values are abstract concepts and differ from individual to individual.

Meyer et al. (2013) note about the fact that visuals created or chosen by a researcher advocate always the subjective perspective of the researcher. Visuals used in those studies “...*create, rather than represent, organizational reality.*” (Meyer et al., 2013, 518–519.) The same notion of photographs as interpretations of the world is raised by Gillian (2001) who describes visuals to be a way to render our reality in visual terms. Pictures can then be “the real” illustration of the

organization or for example the brochures it uses, but the researcher always has the power to choose which ones to utilize, how to collect or represent them in the study and how to analyze them (Gillian, 2001, 6.) Therefore, this study doesn't represent an objective observation of the visuals that are used in Laplands' marketing activities. Rather, this study aimed to combine peoples' associations of the marketing pictures and the theoretical perspectives of place branding.

To complement the findings of this study, it would be interesting to conduct a new research with the same aims but to observe the place brand associations and brand co-creation process from the perspective of local small and medium -sized enterprises or from the perspective of tourists. Especially the place brand associations would be an intriguing subject to study from tourism point of view as they could be compared to international place branding cases. Furthermore, utilizing visual methods in place branding research in an international research setting would give fruitful insights of the visuals that are used in place marketing internationally.

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# **APPENDICES**

## **Appendix 1. Base of semi-structured interviews**

### **Lapland as a place**

How is your relationship with Lapland? Are you from there, moved there later, or?  
Do you currently live in Lapland? How long have you been living in Lapland?

How would you describe Lapland as a place?  
What is the meaning of Lapland for you? Does it have a special meaning for you?

At this point, marketing pictures of Lapland were shown to the interviewee. They were left freely viewable for the interviewee during the rest of the interview and they could bring the pictures up in later phases of the discussion if they wanted to.

### **Questions about the pictures**

Does any of these pictures represent Lapland to you? If yes, how and why?  
Do any of these pictures evoke emotions in you or bring back any memories related to Lapland?  
If yes, what kind of emotions or memories and why you think that happened?

### **Laplands' brand & brand image**

What is your image of Lapland?  
How you experience the brand of Lapland from your own personal point of view?

### **Vision & core brand**

To what characteristics the Finnish Lapland builds its' brand?  
How would you describe the brand of Finnish Lapland? What characteristics you relate to the brand?  
What do you see as the core brand characteristics or components of Finnish Lapland?  
What are the things that Finnish Lapland should be proud of?  
What do you see as the distinctive characteristics of Finnish Lapland?  
If you had to choose something to represent Lapland as a place, what would it be? Why?

### **Stakeholders & local perspective**

Who you see as the main stakeholders for Finnish Lapland?

Who or what do you see as the main competitors of Lapland in national and in international level?

To what Finnish Lapland is compared (as a destination, place to live and to do business in)?

From who or what Finnish Lapland should differentiate itself? How?

Do you feel that there's sense of community within people living in Lapland, including yourself?

Either yes or no, how does that appear to you?

Would you say that being Laplander is part of your identity? How you sense that?

Where do you think that it is welling up from and what kind of things have an influence on that?

### **Branding process & brand co-creation**

How familiar you are with the branding process (brand planning, creation, communication) of Finnish Lapland?

How would you describe the branding process of Finnish Lapland? (if the interviewee is somehow familiar with it) What kind of actors are involved in the branding process?

Who do you see as the most important actors and initiators in the branding process?

What kind of challenges the branding process has faced, or what kind of challenges you see that the Finnish Lapland can face in the future?

Do you think the branding process could have been approached from different angle? Is there something that you would like to enhance in the branding process?