

Mining tourism in abandoned and existing mines in the Swedish Far North

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Research Article

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Abstract

The Swedish North is sometimes described as a resource periphery, while others choose to label it a pleasure periphery. Regardless of the terms used, the region is characterised by problems such as out-migration and demographic issues. This study investigates why there are such different perceptions of the same area, and whether there is any contradiction between extractive resource industries and the tourism industry. This is done by collecting visitor data from mining companies and conducting interviews with a variety of respondents in three mining communities in northern Sweden. Mining tourism is a phenomenon occurring in this region and can be regarded as a context in which the two main narratives meet while being a rather overlooked form of tourism. This is partly due to the low level of knowledge regarding its impacts, but also to a somewhat established idea of mining tourism as a “bad” form of tourism. Individuals’ perceptions of mining tourism as a phenomenon seem to be highly value-related and influenced by both location and occupation. As such, various opinions can be explained by social exchange theory, which proposes that attitudes will be influenced by individuals’ evaluation of outcomes for themselves and their community. In this paper, the emergence of mining tourism is understood as knowledge creation rooted in a regional path dependency on mining and tourism. Hence, mining tourism becomes a new regional tourism product that contributes to tourism, at least in terms of standard technical visits and, at best, a well-developed tourist attraction that appeals to visitors in quantities similar to iconic regional attractions such as the Icehotel. Then again, a tourism industry selling dreams of “untouched nature” argues that this tourism product produces “bad imaging”.

Introduction

The notion of northern peripheral Sweden has evolved and transformed over time. For hundreds of years, the region was viewed as a natural resource periphery, explored and exploited by colonial central state powers (Sörlin, 1988). Since then, employment in and economic development of this area have continued to be dependent upon natural resources (Bickford, Krans, & Bickford, 2016; Knobbloch & Pettersson, 2010). Especially minerals have been of substantial significance for the industrialisation of the region and are considered to be responsible for continued regional employment (Nilsson, 2000; Tano, Pettersson, & Stjernström, 2016; Westin, 2006), suggesting a significant path dependency. Even in the present, wealth from resource extraction features prominently in narratives about the region in the media (Avango, Nilsson, & Roberts, 2013; Eriksson, 2010). At the same time, however, restructuring, rationalisation and uncertainty in natural resource markets since the 1960s have led to a new turn in the quest for “regional development” (Almstedt, Lundmark, & Pettersson, 2016; Müller & Jansson, 2007). Hence, the tourism sector, among others, has evolved into an alternative development path and a new way of utilising natural resources (Baum, 1999; Brouder & Fullerton, 2015; Hall & Jenkins, 1998; Sharpley, 2002).

This touristic development comes to be linked to an awareness of core-periphery relations, initially conceptualised by Walter Christaller (1964). Christaller (1964) also directed specific attention to the relationship of tourism and peripheries and stressed that such areas are suitable for tourism development. Such notions of spatial power dynamics were further developed in regard to tourism by Turner and Ash (1975), who proposed that the tourism industry is dedicated to pursuing pleasure, and the idea of a pleasure periphery arose. Today, the situation in Europe’s northern periphery can be regarded as relatively marginalised, caused by economic-geographical disadvantages associated with the peripheral location. This slightly negative situation is somewhat balanced by the common perception of the Scandinavian North as untouched nature (Müller, 2011). In turn, this development has opened the door for nature-based tourism products, popularly labelled “wilderness” (Saarinen, 2004; Sæþórsdóttir, Hall, & Saarinen, 2011). Governments have supported the image of a touristic wilderness by designating areas as national parks and nature reserves, which have also been designed to attract tourists (Fredman & Sandell, 2009). Even though previous studies have questioned the presumed positive relationship between nature conservation and tourism employment in northern Sweden

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(Byström & Müller, 2014), nature-based tourism companies constitute a majority of the tourism companies and entrepreneurs in the region (Lundmark, Ednarsson, & Karlsson, 2014). This dominant segment of the regional tourism industry therefore depends upon an “untouched” or “natural” landscape in its pursuit of profit maximisation, which is somewhat in contrast to the “industrial” and “artificial” landscape produced by extractive resource interests.

Hence, it is also reasonable to assume that an extractive resource/touristic interest constitutes a conflict of interest that is also mirrored in individuals’ perceptions. Indeed, a previous study by Müller (2016) suggests that tourism in this region is to some extent perceived as a land-use competitor of the traditional resource industries, rather than a labour market complement.

This seemingly conflicting situation makes the rise of mining tourism rather interesting, as it is a touristic product located at an industrial site. In turn, such an industrial locality likely becomes controversial when looking at a nature-based tourism horizon. Such a proposed controversy can be further developed by launching the hypothesis that the industrial landscape produced by mining comes to stand in opposition to the notion of a touristic wilderness. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore how and why mining tourism has developed in northern Sweden and whether or not this form of tourism is actually a threat to the region’s broader touristic development.

Landscapes as contested terrain

The notion of a touristic pleasure periphery associated with a “wilderness area” is likely to be essential for the region’s broader tourism industry, as a majority of the tourism companies offer a nature-based tourism product (Lundmark et al., 2014). In fact, Saarinen (2016) implies that the concept of wilderness conjures images of wild and untamed natural areas and argues that the idea of a touristic wilderness is crucial for tourism operators in the region (Saarinen, 2012). The notion of such a wilderness area has previously been explained through narratives and storytelling, leading to social constructions (Sæþórsdóttir et al., 2011) that are further sustained by the tourists themselves (Sæþórsdóttir & Saarinen, 2016). Therefore, the development of a touristic wilderness has most likely had an impact on the perception of the region, since the role of tourism in the making and unmaking of space is proved in both theoretical discourses and empirical studies (Chang, Khamkaew, & McAleer, 2012; Edensor, 2001). Moreover, the tourism industry is often promoted as a pathway to more diverse regional labour markets (Ladkin, 2011) as well as a transition industry that is increasing its relative share of employment in northern Sweden (Åberg, 2017).

Therefore, today’s tourism industry can be regarded as one of the supporting pillars in the regional economy, together with regional extractive resource industries such as mining, forestry, and energy production. Hence, the rise of tourism and its impact on the imaging of the region challenges alternative landscape perceptions produced by the more traditional extractive resource industries. Also, the significant share of nature-based tourism operators and their obvious economic ties to the notion of a “wilderness area” theoretically lead to an opposition to the “industrial” landscape left by mining, for example. As such, the nature-based segment of the tourism sector finds itself in a position in which it makes sense to be critical, or at least not positive, towards the mining industry – because it is hard to see what these nature-based tourism companies, which sell dreams of “untouched

nature”, would gain from the “industrial” and “artificial” landscape left by mining. In addition, mining tourism in operating mines is normally driven by the grace of the mining companies. This means that it is reasonable to believe that such touristic experiences involve pro-mining narratives and thus something that conservative land-use interests, including nature-based tourism and reindeer herding, could have reason to reject. In turn, such differences in attitudes are a matter of land-use disagreement in this case.

According to Ward and Berno (2011), differences in attitude have often been explained with social exchange theory, an approach rooted in economic theory and modified by Thibaut and Kelley (1959) for the study of groups, focusing on perceptions of the costs and benefits of relationships. Given the topic of this study, social exchange theory proposes that individuals’ attitudes towards mining tourism and their subsequent level of support for its development will be influenced by their evaluation of the outcomes for themselves and their community.

Touring mines and mining tourism: A definition

Mining tourism as a phenomenon can be framed and conceptualised in various ways (Frew, 2008); this is more thoroughly discussed further on in this section. This study defines mining tourism as “traditional” tourists visiting a mining site for touristic/recreational purposes. This definition thereby overlooks whether the actual tourist attraction is an abandoned or operational mine. Moreover, such a definition clearly makes a distinction between “ordinary” tourists, which is the segment included in this study, and so-called technical visits, which are not included due to the essentially different motives and drivers behind these two segments.

Mines and mining museums as tourist attractions are a well-documented occurrence in various parts of the world (Kruczek & Kruczek, 2016; Rybár & Štrba, 2016; Xie, 2015), and mining tourism is a form of tourism that is argued to attract visitors due to the mystique of the wealth and treasure produced (Conlin & Jolliffe, 2010; Pretes, 2002). In the Swedish North, the development of mining tourism is at various levels and can be found in several locations. Even though all operational mines in northern Sweden generate visitors, at least in terms of standardised technical visits, it is likely that most of these sites do not perceive their visitors as tourists, or their mine as a tourist attraction. This self-perception is understandable, as it can be challenging to distinguish the tourist attraction intertwined in the mineral extraction process (Frew, 2010). Still, mines generate tourism flows to northern Sweden, and in doing so contribute to the touristic supply of the region. Touristic supply normally refers to the recreational resources that provide opportunities for tourism (Page & Hall, 2014), i.e., attractions. According to renowned tourist attraction research, attractions are the basic element on which tourism is developed (Lundberg, 1980; Pearce, 1981). In essence, tourist attractions consist of the elements of a place that attract individuals away from their homes (Lew, 1987). Gunn (1994), as cited in Benckendorff and Pearce (2003), argues that attractions serve two key functions at destination: to act as a demand generator for visitation, and/or to cause tourists to extend their stay. Still, it is rather unlikely that operational mines in Sweden are the element that attracts traditional tourists to a place. Instead, it is more likely that they account for extended stays as a complementary attraction. According to Edwards and Llurdés i Coit (1996), mines have a

good chance of attracting visitors if they are part of a wider range of tourism attractions in a locality.

Still, mining communities in northern Sweden (in the two present northernmost cities in Sweden, Västerbotten and Norrbotten counties) are often remotely located, a situation that seldom coincides with any larger tourism attraction clusters. As a consequence, there is no ease of access for the broader public, which is another key factor for attracting mining tourists (Wanhill, 2000). Hence, the peripheral location, insufficient accessibility and lack of surrounding tourism attractions theoretically constitute obstacles to mining tourism in northern Sweden. Therefore, it could be suggested that tourism based on pristine nature and a “touristic wilderness” is the major attraction of the region that lures people to the North. Therefore, the notion of such a “wilderness” also comes to be a precondition even for mining tourism development, which becomes a tourism activity that is complementary to nature-based tourism. However, this could be seen as a contradiction and the two tourism forms as repugnant. Then again, one could argue that the wilderness, which is claimed to be the foundation for nature-based tourism, has only been made accessible to tourists due to the infrastructure financed by natural resource projects. An extension of this reasoning would be that the mining and tourism industries form a symbiosis, which some might perceive as an unholy alliance. Although mines are obviously visited by tourists and mining tourism is accepted as a form of tourism in the scientific literature, everyone does not accept mines as tourist attractions. Hence, they are also largely absent from tourism promotion and place-image campaigns.

The evolution of mining tourism

The term “evolution” is here applied rather than the parallel concept of development. Evolution is used as a concept in analyzing the change in an economic sector. The economy evolves but society develops. According to renowned studies on economic geography, knowledge (as in professional skills) runs regional economies (Asheim, Boschma, & Cooke, 2011; Boschma, 2005; Eriksson, 2011). Such notions derive from the Schumpeterian standpoint that knowledge and innovation drive the economic system and that the distribution of such skills is uneven at the spatial level. By extension, this means that various places hold different or unique forms of knowledge that in turn influence these places to develop towards a certain “track” or “path”.

Such paths have previously been explained through a number of different but related theories, including path dependency theory (Bebchuk & Roe, 1999; Hassink, 2005), evolutionary economic geography (Boschma & Frenken, 2006; Martin & Sunley, 2007) and notions of related variety (Boschma & Iammarino, 2009), as well as the concepts of knowledge transfer/creation (Bathelt, Malmberg & Maskell, 2004; Cooke & Leydesdorff, 2006). In essence, these theories and concepts all recognise the importance of previous decisions (i.e. history) as well as the relationship between various activities in proximity.

As such, these development theories seem to agree that previous decisions and the relationship between various actors serve as a sort of lock-in effect that impacts development processes in a certain direction. Furthermore, this basically means that new products or specialisations in any given region rarely arise from thin air, but are instead based upon established regional resources that over time invent new productive expressions.

Derived from this reasoning is the assumption that mining tourism is the result of knowledge creation based upon a historical

dependency on mining and tourism. From this angle, the development of mining tourism becomes a logical extension of the knowledge base found in mining communities with an established tourism sector. From this perspective, the emergence of mining tourism in Kiruna (one of the cases in this study) seems rather logical, as Kiruna indeed is a mining community with an established tourism sector. Hence, mining tourism can perhaps be comprehended as a destined path for places like Kiruna, as their regional resources largely entail mining and tourism. When located in close proximity, such skills can be assumed to merge sooner or later. However, this merging has not been without its problems, as land use is contested terrain that is linked to various notions of “good” and “bad” development processes.

Landscape perception

While landscape studies in their methodologies are primarily centered on perceptions (i.e. through the reading of landscapes in the field; the study of maps and documents; or interviews), the identification of such perceptions of landscape should not be the ultimate goal of landscape research. Instead, the aim should be to better understand the totality of human existence. Swedish geographers such as Hägerstrand and Sporrang (1993), Jansson (2003) and Ihse and Skånes (2008) have emphasised the totality of landscape, which is comprehended through the notion of nature and culture as inseparable entities. This line of thinking has also been expressed by Sporrang (1990), who defined landscape as “*The spatial product of physical geographical processes dependent upon climatological, hydrological, tectonic and other variables that are more or less unaffected by humans, but also upon societal changes grounded in the changing knowledge, values, habits and needs of the population regarding production, recreation and residence.*”

Inspired by this “totality narrative” (or the totality of the landscape as expressed above) on landscape perceptions, this study argues that mining tourism becomes a sort of knowledge creation that helps us understand how the evolution of labour markets influences the meaning, value and esthetics of landscapes. By analyzing attitudes in regard to this form of knowledge creation (which comes to be interlinked with the production of landscapes), this paper hopes to improve the understanding of the totality of the northern landscape.

According to previous research, mixed feelings regarding landscapes have to be scrutinised while acknowledging divergent human–environment relationships, which are highly value-related (Sandell & Öhman, 2015). Moreover, differences in value and worldview in relation to land use can lead to conflicts driven by opposing discourses (De Groot, 2006; Hilson, 2002; Sandell & Öhman, 2010). Such value-based conflicts are highly interesting in the peripheral North, with thought to the suggestion that extractive resource industries constitute a threat to nature-based tourism (Müller, 2016). Therefore, planners are now expected to include protections for “regional sustainable growth”, which involves an economic growth dimension that is somewhat in conflict with the conservation agenda (Müller, 2013). This rather contradictory element within planning is likely to find its explanation in the opposing perceptions of what the region is and should be.

Tensions arise as the touristic space to some extent overlaps with the industrial layer. Therefore, the transition through which tourism is taking employment shares from mining, forestry and energy production has not been without its problems. As previously stated, tourism in this region is to some extent perceived as a land-use competitor of the traditional resource industries,

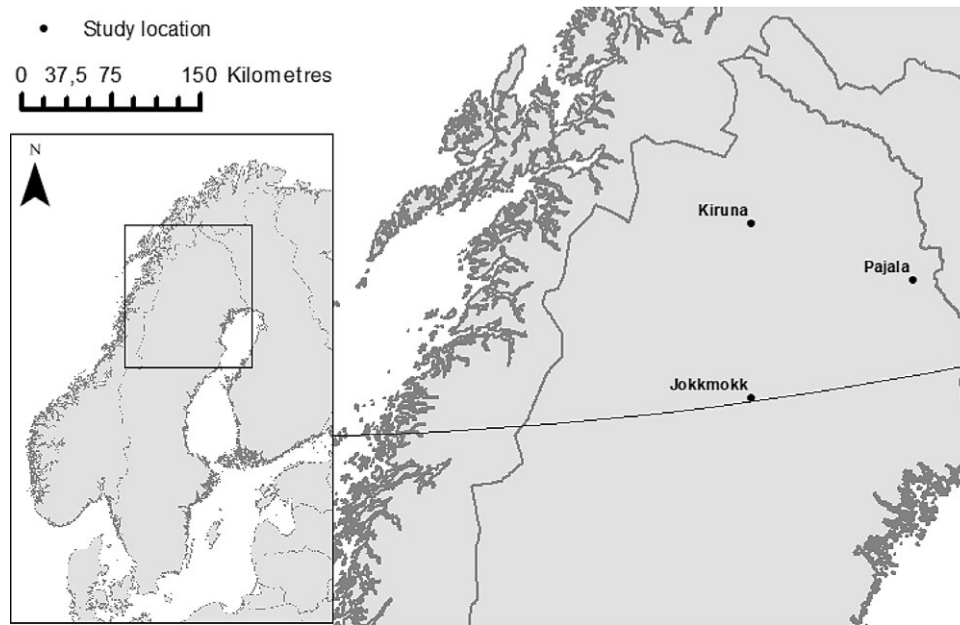


Fig. 1. Kiruna, Pajala and Jokkmokk, all located north of the Arctic Circle in Norrbotten County of North Sweden, are the three study locations in this paper.

rather than a labour market complement (Müller, 2016). The existence of overlapping extractive resource and touristic spaces means that spatial planning becomes important in facilitating various sorts of development processes, rather than just the traditional/dominant one. Indeed, a current study from Iceland highlights this issue, arguing that tourism operators perceive energy production as a negative land-use competitor and therefore suggesting improved spatial planning to better handle the situation of overlapping extractive resource/touristic spaces.

The notion of North Sweden as a pleasure periphery for touristic purposes, as opposed to a resource periphery for the extraction of raw materials, can be further placed in a geographical context by linking it to the concepts of “global” and “local”. Scholars argue that tourism represents the local, with entrepreneurs focusing on heritage theming and place identity functions (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2004; Chang & Huang, 2008; Paradis, 2004). The global, on the other hand, which in the present case represents the mining industry, signifies multinational companies and symbolises enterprise as well as profit-making (Chang & Huang, 2011; Paradis, 2004). This notion makes the setting of this study interesting, since there is a presumed contradiction between the local and the global. Such an assumption leads to conflicting/dualistic attitudes and perceptions regarding various industries represented in the region. Thus, mining in North Sweden becomes a controversial industry that is argued to threaten other regional industries such as tourism (Müller, 2016), but also reindeer herding (Leu, 2018). The clash with reindeer herding is partly a financial land-use conflict due to overlapping spaces for reindeer pasture and mineral prospecting. In addition, it involves a conflict with colonial trademarks, since the Swedish reindeer-herding businesses is exclusive to selected parts of the native Sami population, which has suffered well-documented oppression due to government directives throughout history (Sörlin, 1988).

As such, critical positions regarding landscapes produced by mining involve economic characteristics that also include an inherent colonial axis. As such, the colonial traits of the conflict become part of the totality of the landscape, as the mining landscapes bring

to mind an industrial landscape while nature-based tourism and reindeer herding rely on the idea of a natural or conservative landscape, one might say. By extension, this means that the mining industry (re)produces the idea of a resource periphery, while the tourism industry generates the image of a pleasure periphery. Negative attitudes towards mining tourism might therefore develop out of a fear of legitimising the mining industry. Then again, mining tourism could just as well be shaped to highlight environmental concerns or post-colonial structures. Therefore, whatever ethics, logic and/or principals that are driving the development of mining tourism come to be of scientific interest.

Methodology

In order to understand the phenomenon, development and attitudes towards mining tourism in North Sweden, the approach has been to apply a methodology consisting of both descriptive statistics and semi-structured interviews (Winchester, 1999).

The interviewees are representatives of key respondents with an interest in land-use and regional development issues. The focus of the interviews is on perceptions of mining, tourism and “regional development”. The interview portion focuses on complex socially constructed concepts, including notions of “regional development”. To identify spatial differences, three different study locations are included: Kiruna, Pajala and Jokkmokk, three communities located in the peripheral Norrbotten County (see Fig. 1). These communities have a history of mining and/or an ongoing mining discourse. Kiruna is a community with a strong path dependence on mining, with roughly 13% of its population directly employed in the mining sector (Statistics Sweden, 2016). In addition, the Kiirunavaara mine, around which the city of Kiruna has grown, has a well-developed visitor mine.

Pajala is a mining community that experienced a short-term faith in future development during its limited mining period (2009–2013), before the 2013 bankruptcy of the local mining company. During 2018, however, the mine reopened under new owners. Still, the fieldwork for this study was conducted before the

reopening of the mine, which could possibly have had a negative effect on attitudes towards mining.

Jokkmokk, a municipality that has marketed itself as “Europe’s last wilderness”, is a community with strong ties to the regional Sami culture. Jokkmokk is also considered a gateway community for accessing some of Europe’s oldest and largest national parks, and mineral prospecting and plans for future exploitation here are heavily debated (Abram, 2016).

This means that the study comprise three rather different mining municipalities. Kiruna with a more than a one-hundred year long mining history and an entire society heavily depending on the mining industry. Kiruna represents both a historical heritage in the mining industry and the development of the industrial ton of Kiruna as well as a highly advanced present mining industry. Both the historical heritage and the ongoing mining extraction attracts attention from visitors. Pajala is a case of a remote place with a reasonable big deposit was explored and financially collapsed a few years later. The reopening of the mine and the related activities to the Pajala mine attracts interest from the surrounding world. Jokkmokk, finally is one of the core areas for the Sami population in Scandinavia. Jokkmokk is also one of the largest nature protected areas in Europe. A potential mine in Jokkmokk municipality might interfere with other strong interests.

In total, there were 15 respondents divided into four sets representing key groups: (i) *Official representatives*, consisting of three official municipal representatives at top level as well as three managers of local/regional tourism organisations that are organised in a private–public partnership; (ii) *Hotels*, including three hotel and guest-house managers; (iii) *Tourism entrepreneurs*, consisting of three owners of nature-based tourism companies operating in the region and (iv) *Sami representatives*, including three spokespersons for regional Sami reindeer-herding cooperatives. The Sami are the indigenous population of Northern Europe, and Sami reindeer-herding cooperatives are the organisations of reindeer herders operating within certain areas. The interviews were conducted during the spring of 2015.

Limitations

There are several methodological limitations to this study. First, a greater amount of visitor data for several mines would have been fruitful for understanding the diverse development of mining tourism at the spatial level. However, collecting data from mining companies turned out to be problematic, as some of them were not interested in taking part in the study while others did not have reliable data, or had data sets that combined technical visitors with traditional tourists. Also, it would have been beneficial to include mining company representatives among the respondents. This turned out to be challenging as well, with only one of the mining companies agreeing to participate in the study. As a result, the voice of this group is not included in this paper. Additionally, several respondents declined to answer questions related to mining companies’ influence over regional development issues, which could suggest that this is perceived as a sensitive topic.

Ethical consideration

The Swedish Science Council argues that research ethics largely concern finding a reasonable balance between different legitimate interests (Hermerén, 2011). One of these is the knowledge interest, while interests in privacy and protection against various forms of injury are other examples. The empirical data upon which this paper is built consists mainly of interviews with so-called key

respondents. As such, these interviewees are comprehended as functions rather than people. Still, behind these respondents are real individuals whose identity is therefore kept anonymous, which in turn minimises the risk of connecting data to specific individuals.

Findings

Tourism mobility in general sets the frame of this study. The triggers of tourism mobility could be various factors such as in this case different attractors in the destination such as nature and pleasure periphery. It could also be a tourism flow related to industrial extraction sites such as a large mine. The fact that a mine most often includes investments in infrastructure and services which enable more visitors (tourists) to come to the area is rather well-known (Lundmark & Stjernström, 2009).

The findings in this study are more tentative suggestions for understanding the system of localities and different kinds of tourism flows rather than statistical correlations and conclusions. Therefore, the results in this study should be understood in a tentative way.

A majority of the mines in northern Sweden do not offer tours to traditional tourists. In fact, only one of them, Kiirunavaara in the town of Kiruna, offers standardised tours on a daily basis for a wide range of tourists. This mine offers a well-developed tourism experience in collaboration with the local tourism office and has exhibited visitor quantities at ca. 26,000 visits/year for the last decade, not including technical visits. Such visitor numbers suggest that the mine attracts quantities similar to those of the Icehotel and Abisko National Park, iconic attractions in the region that, in contrast to the mine, are heavily promoted on a national scale.

The relative success of the Kiirunavaara mine in terms of visitor quantities has several explanations. One of the obvious reasons is its accessibility, which can be historically explained by the infrastructure that has been developed over time due to mining operations. As such, not only roads and a railroad but also flights connect Kiruna with the rest of Sweden; communications that can otherwise be considered rare in such a peripheral setting. Moreover, the well-developed mining tourism product, with daily tours in both Swedish and English, enables both national and international visits. The state-owned mining company, LKAB, does not directly charge tourists for the experience; instead, the local tourism destination company – Kiruna Lapland, a private–public partnership – sells tickets at 345 SEK (€38) each. Accordingly, it is likely that the local tourism organisation makes approximately 9,000,000 SEK (€ 960,000) annually on mining tickets alone.

The mining company’s collaboration with the local tourism company is of course beneficial, since the local tourism office is skilled in tourism management. In addition to this, it is likely that the income provided by the mining tours assures mutual influence on planning, decision-making and marketing within the tourism organisation. Moreover, one could easily assume that mining visitors are largely tourists who are drawn to the area by well-known attractions, such as the Icehotel or Aurora Borealis chasing, and simply choose to visit the mine as a complementary attraction. However, data from LKAB suggest quite the opposite. According to visitor data, mining tourism in Kiruna peaks during the summer months of June–August, with about four to eight daily tours. This can be compared to January–March, the main season for the Icehotel, with only one to three tours a day on offer. As such, mining tourism in Kiruna cannot be easily linked to the Icehotel, Aurora Borealis tourism or any other established winter activity.

Growth-oriented	Preservation-oriented
Economic growth	Employment
Employment	Culture
Entrepreneurship	Sustainability
In-migration	
Infrastructure	

Fig. 2. Respondents' perception of the regional development concept. Identified key word with those occurring most often at the top.

Interview findings

As mentioned, the interviewees in this study consist of official representatives (6), tourism entrepreneurs (3), hotel managers (3) and Sami representatives (3) located in Kiruna, Jokkmokk and Pajala. Initially, the respondents were asked to subjectively describe the meaning of "regional development". Key words that arose multiple times within the various collections of respondents suggest the identification of two main groups with a similar understanding of the concept. As a result, the groups' official representatives and hotel managers are labelled *growth-oriented* while the respondents representing tourism and the Sami representatives are termed *preservation-oriented*. Figure 2 illustrates the key words, with those occurring most often at the top.

The respondents' idea of this concept creates an image of a division between the *growth-oriented* and *preservation-oriented* groups', even though the idea of employment was reoccurring in both groups. The noted key words "economic growth", "infrastructure", "in-migration" and "entrepreneurship" were identified only among the growth-oriented respondents. The preservation-oriented group, on the other hand, was the only one in which "sustainability" and "culture" reoccurred.

Moreover, the respondents were asked to subjectively describe the meaning of "cultural heritage". Here, the answers did not always fit within the framework above associated with growth/preservation-oriented respondents. Instead, perceptions of "cultural heritage" seem to correlate with location. As such, the respondents in Kiruna were the only ones who commonly mentioned mining as a cultural heritage, regardless of their personal relation to this activity. One of Kiruna's officials concluded that *Our history is pretty young and interconnected with the mine*". Another Sami respondent in Kiruna, who also recognised mining as a cultural heritage, said "The history of mining is what built this place, which makes it a sort of cultural heritage even though I personally see a lot of problems with it".

Besides mining, reoccurring key words in relation to cultural heritage among Kiruna respondents were *Sami culture* (reindeer herding, handcraft, traditions), *hunting, fishing and snowmobiling*. In both Jokkmokk and Pajala, hunting, fishing and the native Sami culture also reoccurred as examples of cultural heritage. In addition, the Pajala respondents also included *Meänkieli* (regional language) as well as the regional *sauna tradition*.

Attitudes towards mining

The respondents were asked to what degree they were positive/negative towards mining in their vicinity, and why. The so-called growth-oriented respondents, consisting of official respondents and hotel managers, all agreed that mining was of a positive nature. This position clearly involved an economic dimension, with key words such as *economic growth, income, in-migration, spillover effects, employment* and *infrastructure*. One hotel manager in

Pajala said: "When the mine closed, our turnover dropped. Obviously, I am hoping for a reopening". In a similar manner, another hotel manager in Jokkmokk exhibited parallel reasoning, concluding that "A mine in Kallak (a local prospecting site) would involve a whole new segment of visitors".

This sort of growth-oriented reasoning, which tends to recognise socio-economic benefits in mining, was relatively absent among the other respondents in the segment labelled preservation-oriented. This group, consisting of tourism entrepreneurs and Sami representatives, was therefore generally more skeptical, or less positive, towards mining. Here, the respondents tended to see problems associated with mining by underlining their own detachment from the mining industry. One tourism entrepreneur in Pajala said, "I offer nature-based experiences and therefore have a hard time seeing why the mining industry, whose business idea is essentially different from mine, could be in my interest". Such reasoning suggests that a lack of personal prosperity in relation to mining could possibly result in negative attitudes.

The spatial controversy of mining

In Kiruna, the established mining community in this study, mining seems relatively uncontroversial. This is partly evident in the fact that all respondents here recognise it as a cultural heritage. Then again, two official respondents in Kiruna declined to answer certain questions concerning the local mining company's influence over decision-making, and/or asked not to be recorded. In addition, several Kiruna respondents labelled as preservation-oriented (tourism entrepreneurs and Sami representatives) underlined personal skepticism towards mining while at the same time recognising the historical significance of the local mine for the municipality as a whole.

In Jokkmokk and Pajala, however, mines and the mining industry are sensitive topics for other reasons. According to respondents in Jokkmokk, disagreements related to mining plans have led to open conflict between coworkers and neighbours. In 2013, the conflict escalated to the point of individuals being threatened. "Some received verbal threats; others had their car tires slit," said one official municipal respondent. Meanwhile, in Pajala, the sensitivity seems to be related to the relatively short production time followed by the abrupt bankruptcy and the idea of failure.

Mining tourism

When asked about mining tourism specifically, all but one respondent in Kiruna agreed that mining tourism was positive, while only one respondent in Jokkmokk and two in Pajala showed positive attitudes towards mining tourism. The one critical respondent in Kiruna, representing the group of Sami representatives, answered rhetorically, "Who the hell wants to see a gravel pit?". The other Kiruna respondents were generally positive, however, with noted key words such as *employment, innovation* and *public interest*.

In Pajala, negative attitudes towards mining tourism seem to be associated with the rather short production time of the local Kaunisvaara mine. One public official in Pajala said, "The mine and the bankruptcy are a fiasco, and are nothing that should be on display". Such ideas, or at least similar thoughts, were recurrent among Pajala respondents regardless of their professional background. This line of thinking implies that a precondition for promoting a tourism attraction is related to some form of success, or at least not failure. Still, one official representative and a hotel

manager in Pajala were positive. The official said, “*If the mine can be utilised in other ways, I guess that’s a good thing*”.

In Jokkmokk, only one of the growth-oriented respondents (hotel manager) recognised a potential in mining tourism, while the rest of the respondents were less optimistic. “*Jokkmokk’s touristic profile is built around the Sami culture and the natural landscape. I don’t see how a mine would fit*”, said one official representative, before underlining that a future mine in Jokkmokk would include several positive aspects, but not touristic ones. Another interviewee, representing tourism entrepreneurs, concluded, “*Mining tourism is not tourism*”.

Such notions, questioning the touristic identity of mining tourism, became further prominent when the respondents were asked whether or not they perceived mining visitors as tourists. Here, the division between the so-called growth-oriented and preservation-oriented respondents once again became evident. The growth-oriented group commonly recognised mining visitors as tourists, while only two respondents in the preservation-oriented group did.

Finally, the respondents were asked to mention what potential positive as well as negative aspects could be linked to mining tourism. In terms of positive aspects, noted key words included *employment, new tourism products, education and transparency*. Noted negative aspects included a fear of pro-mining narratives and thus the justification of continuous mining. This fear was expressed somewhat differently, partly by linking mining tourism to notions of “*bad imaging*”. Such ideas were mentioned mainly by respondents working in tourism and reindeer herding (e.g. preservation-oriented respondents). One of them said, “*A mine is a scar on the landscape and should therefore be restored rather than promoted*”.

Discussion

The motives for mining companies to get involved in tourism are likely to be both economic and/or self-promotional. Economic profits can theoretically be made, since tourists require guides and other services, which fund additional employment. Self-promotion can be achieved via mining tourism through the opportunity for mining companies to communicate whatever they want to a broader public. Such topics could include a specific mining company’s goodwill, the importance of mines to local communities and/or other positive aspects of mining in general. However, since the relevant mining companies in the study area declined to participate in this study, it is difficult to draw conclusions in this matter, or as to their perceptions regarding the future potential of mining tourism. Something that can be concluded, however, is the fact that knowing the motives behind the development of mining tourism is essential for understanding attitudes towards this form of tourism. This is because various motives will produce various narratives, which in turn can be used to legitimise or question mining operations.

Even though limited visitor data make it challenging to conduct any in-depth analysis of its impact, it is clear that mining tourism in the Swedish North is part of the broader tourism industry, at least through contributing to the standardised technical visits and at best presenting a well-developed tourism product that appeals to thousands of traditional tourists. As such, mining tourism can be seen as a positive regional driver that transforms labour markets through regional branching into related activities. Then again, specialised places relying on one principal sector, like Kiruna, are at risk of following a pronounced path dependence development, as the opportunities for cross-industry learning and knowledge transfer might be limited due to the narrow labour market composition. This argument has previously been asserted

by Kemeny and Storper (2015), who hold that relative specialisation might obstruct or hinder regional development processes. Such signs have indeed been identified in a recent Swedish study suggesting that dominant actors can monopolise the development discourse in their favor, which risks blocking related diversification (Eriksson & Lengyel, 2019).

From this angle, the development of mining tourism can instead be perceived as a sign of limitation in terms of development possibilities. As such, it can also be argued that regional resources in Kiruna (consisting primarily of mining and tourism skills together with certain political and social capabilities) constitute a limiting framework that restricts alternative development paths.

Whether mining tourism in North Sweden should be comprehended as a mainly positive or negative path is likely to remain disputed. Still, the introduction or creation of mining tourism in places like Kiruna becomes quite logical from a theoretical outlook, as previous studies on labour market transformation show that new economic activities, such as mining tourism, normally arise from the merging of skills in close proximity (Asheim & Coenen, 2005; Bathelt et al., 2004). Yet, however, “*logical*” or “*deterministic*,” the growth of mining tourism might be in regard to development theory, it is still perceived as controversial among the preservation-oriented segments of the northern labour market.

Perceptions of mining tourism

Findings suggest that there is a clear relationship between the employment sector and attitudes towards both mining and mining tourism. Hence, respondents can be placed in two main groups. First, those with a relatively pro-touristic notion in combination with a skeptical attitude towards mining and mining tourism are linked to the idea of a pleasure periphery. This group, termed *preservation-oriented*, consists of tourism entrepreneurs and Sami representatives. Second, those with a pro-industrial agenda in combination with a positive attitude towards mining tourism are associated with the idea of a resource periphery. This group, called *growth-oriented*, consists of official representatives and hotel managers. The growth-oriented group was positive to mining tourism in general. This group also perceived mining tourism as something potentially positive from an economic point of view, which can be identified through reoccurring key words such as *income, employment and touristic supply*. Such key words conform to the same respondents’ notions regarding the concept of regional development, which they associated with terms like *employment, economic growth, in-migration and entrepreneurship*.

The preservation-oriented group, on the other hand, had a slightly different understanding of the concept of regional development, with key words such as *sustainability and culture*. Hence, they were also less positive to mining tourism even though, to some extent, they recognised the economic potential in the activity. In addition, several respondents within the preservation-oriented group did not accept mining tourism as part of the broader tourism industry, which exposes a conceptual problem since traditional tourists visiting a mine are registered as tourists in the statistics. The respondents who opposed the definition of mining visitors as tourists have several common features: (i) They were negative to this form of tourism, based on fears of bad imaging; (ii) they generally saw no touristic potential in the activity and (iii) they were negative to mining operations in their vicinity. Then again, difficulties accepting mining visitors as tourists might not be surprising at all, as previous studies on mining tourism argue that mining companies involved in tourism have a hard time

identifying themselves as tourism operators, due to self-imagining reasons (Frew, 2010).

Conflicting landscapes

As mentioned, some respondents in the preservation-oriented group explained their skepticism towards mining tourism by expressing a fear that it would contribute to “bad imaging”. Such perceptions suggest that these respondents’ idea of the region was in contrast to the image produced by mining tourism. This suggestion is enhanced by again considering the different groups’ ideas of the concept of regional development. The general conclusion is that the preservation-oriented group includes a focus on cultural and sustainable aspects in relation to the concept and is negative to mining operations in their vicinity. Conversely, the growth-oriented group is mainly positive to mining operations in their vicinity, while relating regional development to solely economic factors like income and employment. Also, the preservation-oriented group’s notion of mines as something destructive and/or ugly reveals a landscape perception that deviates from that of the other group. As such, notions of what the landscape *should* look like seem to influence attitudes and according to previous studies are highly value-related (Sandell, 2009). From a social exchange theory perspective, these findings make perfect sense, since the respondents likely to benefit from mining and/or mining tourism (growth-oriented group) are those who are positive, while those who are and/or could be negatively affected exhibit more negative attitudes (preservation-oriented group) (Cook, Cheshire, Rice, & Nakagawa, 2013).

Spatial variations

Considering the findings from a geographical outlook, a spatial variation becomes evident. As such, all but one respondent in Kiruna, which is the established mining community in this study, was positive towards mining in their vicinity. At the same time, such positive attitudes towards mining were exhibited by only half the respondents in Pajala, which at the time of the interviews had recently experienced a bankruptcy of the local mine. Moreover, in Jokkmokk, which is awaiting government decisions regarding a proposed mine, a majority of the respondents were negative.

In terms of attitudes towards mining tourism, the trend was of a similar nature, with Kiruna respondents being the most positive and Pajala respondents slightly less positive, while Jokkmokk respondents showed the most skeptical attitudes. Hence, respondents residing in Kiruna, with a long and successful tradition of mining and an established mining tourism scene, seemed to be more positive towards both mining and mining tourism. In Pajala, the respondents were a bit more negative towards both mining and mining tourism, possibly due to the experienced “failure” associated with the bankruptcy of the local mine. In Jokkmokk, negative attitudes seemed related to the current Jokkmokk profile linked to nature-based tourism and Sami culture, which according to several Jokkmokk respondents did not “match” or “fit” the industrial footprint associated with mining.

Negative knowledge creation

The different attitudes towards mining tourism between the growth-oriented and the preservation-oriented groups can also be seen as diversified attitudes towards regional knowledge creation. From this angle, the development of mining tourism in northern Sweden is understood by some as a positive force that diversifies the regional labour market, while others see it as a negative development path

that further legitimises the production of an industrial landscape. These differences can in turn be understood as the outcome of different ideas regarding what the region is and/or should be. The preservation-oriented group comes to be associated with the idea of a touristic pleasure periphery whose marketing campaigns sell visions of a wilderness area. In the opposite way, the growth-oriented group holds onto the more post-colonial narrative of a resource periphery associated with an industrial landscape.

The notion of a pleasure/resource periphery can be further analysed by placing it within the context of geographical scale. Previous research suggests that tourism represents the “local”, with entrepreneurs focusing on heritage theming and place identity functions (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2004; Chang & Huang, 2008; Paradis, 2004). At the same time, the mining industry represents the “global” through its association with multinational companies that symbolise enterprise and profit-making (Chang et al., 2012; Paradis, 2004). This notion makes the setting of this study interesting, as there is a presumed contradiction between the local (pleasure periphery) and the global (natural resource periphery).

In light of this alleged contradiction and the local versus the global perspective, mining tourism becomes a product/activity that blurs the distinction between the two concepts, thereby creating something new – because mining tourism is obviously a tourism product with a focus on heritage theming and place identity, due to the extensive mining traditions of the region, making the activity “local” and contributing to the pleasure periphery image. Still, the setting for this activity is an industrial site, often operated by large-scale mining companies symbolising profit-making and representing the “global” or the resource periphery. Hence, mining tourism in this region creates an in-between image that is definitely local, but also global – a phenomenon that contributes to the idea of a pleasure periphery on the one hand, but recreates the impression of a natural resource periphery on the other.

Conclusions

In this study, the development of mining tourism in northern Sweden is comprehended by considering the region’s history and labour market composition. From this perspective, the labour market is seen as a self-organisation through the processes of historical decisions and regional resources that shape new products that influence the transformation of labour markets. As such, mining tourism becomes part of the broader tourism industry and a form of regional knowledge creation rooted in a path dependency upon mining and tourism. Theoretically, this knowledge creation process is of a positive nature that diversifies the rather limited labour market compositions found in peripheries. Then again, mining tourism becomes a type of regional branching that in one way or another will conserve or (re)produce an industrial landscape and therefore challenge other businesses that profit from other types of land use.

Therefore, mining tourism also becomes a controversial tourism product since its location is an industrial site whose core activity is argued by some to be a threat to nature-based tourism. In turn, such an argument can be likely explained through the dominant position of nature-based tourism entrepreneurs. Intrinsically, nature-based tourism agents have “kidnapped” the concept of tourism in the Swedish North by connecting it with notions of a “natural” landscape. This becomes rather problematic, as mining tourism is included in the scientific literature on tourism as well as in visitor data. Still, the cemented position among nature-based tourism operators and the native Sami population makes perfect sense against the

background of some sort of profit-maximisation logic: namely, the idea of a conflict whose inherent antagonism is explained by livelihood and social exchange. Also, such excluding ideas of “proper tourism” imply a position that deems mining tourism an unwelcome form of regional branching. Still, this paper concludes that mining tourism is an established tourism form and thus part of the broader evolution of the regional economic structure, involving development processes that are highly path-dependent.

Accordingly, mining tourism becomes a sort of relative diversification rooted in previous place-bound labour market specialisation, whose outcome is perceived differently by different stakeholders. Different perceptions or attitudes are therefore grounded in individual cost-benefit calculations, which in turn are connected to various labour market segments. These segments, in this paper classified as growth-oriented and preservation-oriented, are in turn associated with landscape perception and various notions of what the region is, or should be. Therefore, one could argue that the preservation-oriented group represents the notion of a touristic pleasure periphery. Correspondingly, the growth-oriented group comprises agents promoting the idea of a resource periphery.

Moreover, this study also argues that attitudes towards mining tourism in North Sweden are influenced by place. As such, respondents residing in places with a relatively “industrial” profile, such as Kiruna, seem to show more positive attitudes towards mining tourism than those in less industrialised places like Jokkmokk. Hence, local mining traditions and/or a recent history of mining seem to have a positive impact on attitudes. Then again, several suggestions from Pajala respondents imply that positive/negative attitudes towards mining tourism are also influenced by whether the actual mine in question is considered a success or a failure. Hence, places with a successful mining tradition are likely to show relatively positive attitudes towards mining tourism, while less successful mining communities are likely to exhibit less positive attitudes due to notions of a local failure on display. As such, the relatively negative attitudes towards mining tourism in Jokkmokk can be explained by the current absence of a local mine. If, however, the current mining discourse in Jokkmokk lead to the opening of a local mine, attitudes towards mining tourism would likely turn towards a more positive direction over time – at least if the mine is considered a success.

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