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THE MAGIC OF THE LINE

an analysis of the Arctic Circle as a tourist destination

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1 Introduction: Topics of the Research

Tourism is an essential economic factor for both the province of Lapland and its capital Rovaniemi. One of the region's tourist attractions is the Arctic Circle which apparently runs through the Santa Claus Village some kilometres north of the city of Rovaniemi. To mark this geographical location, a white line has been painted on the ground. My interest in that line arose when I first heard that the 'real' Arctic Circle is some kilometres further north. A look at the map confirmed this displacement and the consequent 'in-authenticity' of a seemingly natural phenomenon.

In this paper, an analysis of the Arctic Circle as a tourist destination will be presented. It will include the questions what the Arctic Circle means in local tourism and how the 'in-authenticity' of its line at the Santa Claus Village might be handled.

The circle will be analysed out of a sociological perspective, because tourism is an essential element of contemporary society and a way for people to create meaning for their life and to position themselves in the social world. The perspective will also be geographical, for according to Crouch (2005: 73), "[t]he significant component for geography here [in tourism research] is the ways in which space is activated, constructed and constituted by the tourist".

The paper will focus on how perceptions of the Arctic Circle are constructed in regional tourism, and I will deal with it both from the viewpoint of the tourism operators and the tourism consumers. The Arctic Circle in general is frequently presented as the door to the Arctic or to the North, and I will examine if tourists at the Santa Claus Village share this perception or if it is something else they think of when they come to this destination. And what kind of image of the Arctic Circle is created by tourism operators?

As one premise, this study recognizes that tourist destinations are socially constructed and their states as 'must-see-places' do not result out of some natural attractiveness of the places but of the importance society attaches to specific locations. This can be seen for instance with beaches, which nowadays appear to us as very 'natural' tourist destinations and obvious places for pleasure, well-being and joy. However, it was only in the 19th century that they received this status

and ceased to be regarded as places for health-care and medical treatment or as mere working places for fishing, so that many residents even built their houses with the backsides facing the water (Urry 2002: 29). As Ringer (1998: 7) puts it, “tourism is essentially about the creation and reconstruction of geographic landscapes as distinctive tourist destinations through manipulations of history and culture”.

The research for this case study included the conduction and analysis of qualitative interviews with local tourist guides, and in the next section I will explain the methodology that was used. After examining the Arctic Circle as an attraction for tourists visiting the Rovaniemi region in section 3, the circle will be analysed with a semiotic approach in section 4. It will be shown how the circle as a system of signs is filled with meaning through the visitors’ interpretation. Section 5 will deal with the question how the Arctic Circle can be seen as a commodity in contemporary tourism. What is it that people spend money for when they come to the Arctic Circle? Are they interested in the actual crossing of the circle? Or is it rather the collection and consumption of the sight’s marker(s) that they are looking for? Section 6 will present different images of the Arctic Circle as created by tourism operators and perceptions of the destination by tourists. The question will be, which perception of the circle tourists might get who visit the Santa Claus Village in winter. In the last section, the results of the study will be concluded and questions for further research will be proposed.

2 Methodology

In this case study, a qualitative approach to social sciences was used, which is especially appropriate when “exploratory theory building rather than theory testing is called for [...]; and when the researcher accepts that the concepts, terms and issues must be defined by the subjects and not by the researcher in advance” (Veal 1997: 71).

The research’s general intention was not to develop any form of statistics of representative statements but to provide an explorative insight into a – quantitatively spoken – rather small detail

of tourism. I dealt with the question how the Arctic Circle in Rovaniemi is communicated and perceived in tourism and wanted to show possible diversities within these perceptions.

2.1 Preparations for research conduction

The qualitative approach I followed did not include the development of an exact research plan beforehand. The logic of reasoning in qualitative research is inductive in nature, which means that a few cases are looked at deeply and then statements can be made about a much broader amount of cases. The underlying assumption is that reality is not something 'objective', something that is situated outside of humans' influence. Instead, reality only develops out of what humans think they are, and is constructed by and through their consciousness. Consequently, David/Sutton (2004: 38) suggest that "to understand humans it is best to discover what they think and how they behave, rather than to dig deeper for some hidden truth that lies beneath action and awareness".

Qualitative methods also enable the research process to be very open and broad at the beginning. According to Bogdan/Taylor (1975: 27) who stated that "[t]o enter a setting with a set of specific hypotheses is to impose preconceptions and perhaps misconceptions on the setting", there was not a set of pre-developed categories and a theory when the interviews started. Instead, elements from *Grounded Theory* were applied, where the research questions are formulated very openly at the beginning and are specified and concretised in the course of the ongoing research. The idea is that all that is relevant will arise out of the empirical data and thus, it should not be defined beforehand what is important. (Truschkat et.al. 2005: 3) In this way, a theory can be developed that is *grounded* in the – collected and interpreted – data. In the course of the ongoing research, some initial questions dropped out because they did not seem to be very relevant in the field or because they were not capable to be examined within the research approach taken. At the same time, new questions and themes came up which were added to the list of issues to be covered. This included for instance the question, whether (winter) tourists at the Santa Claus Village are at all aware of their crossing of the – supposed – Arctic Circle, since the line is not visible on the ground. I also found it important to include the question about the importance of the Arctic Circle for overall tourism into my research.

For the data collection, some initial interviews were conducted with visitors at the Santa Claus Village. After this, I decided to conduct the main interviews with tourist guides instead of tourists themselves. These guides are employed by local safari companies and guide tourists to various activities and places, among others to the Santa Claus Village. The first consideration thereby was that the guides have met much more tourists than I could ever be able to. The advantage of this did not only lie in the mere *number* of tourists but also in a greater diversity, since visitors from different nations tend to come to Rovaniemi at different times of the year. They might also have taken tourists to the Santa Claus Village when it was still free of snow and could thus tell me whether they have noticed any seasonal differences in their behaviour or experience. Furthermore, a huge constraint when interviewing tourists (at the Santa Claus Village as well as people on holiday in general) would have been their very limited amount of time at the site, which they probably would not want to spend with a researcher. The guides, on the other hand, spend much more time with the tourists, including some time in busses and at lunch/dinner, where there would be more occasions for deeper and longer conversations about the tourists' experiences. These advantages of interviewing tourist guides clearly outweighed the disadvantage that they can only give second hand information about tourists, a circumstance which has been taken into account during the analysis.

In addition to the interviews and a literature research with the main authors being MacCannell (1999) and Urry (1995; 2002), I looked at how the Arctic Circle is presented on the internet by various actors involved in tourism. I also participated in a university course on experience industries which increased my insight into how local tourism is managed, marketed and structured. Furthermore, I had access to different sources that are not distributed to the general public, such as a short description of the Santa Claus Village's history which I received from the Rovaniemi tourist information.

2.2 Data gathering: Interviews

The four interviews with tourist guides lasted between 25 and 50 minutes each, and the interviewees (2 women, 2 men)¹ were all about in their 20s, with non-Finnish citizenships. Three of them worked for local safari companies, one was an employee of a local husky farm who takes visitors to husky sledge rides. All of them were seasonally employed during the winter. Two of the interviewees were in their first working season; the two others had already been employed as a guide for three respectively nine years. All interviews were recorded on tape and transcribed afterwards for the purpose of analysis. In the following, numbers in boxes [] will refer to the interview the quote is taken from.

Qualitative interviews are guided by “an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidmann 1991: 3, cited in Jennings 2005: 102). The interview aims at inquiring, how the people make sense of their world. Qualitative interviews generally consist of open questions where the interviewees have the possibility to express themselves in their own words. However, the degree of openness varies, especially regarding the intervention of the interviewers. My interviews can be characterized as semi-structured, meaning that a “flexible agenda or list of themes to focus the interview [was used], although between interviews with different participants the order of discussion will vary” (Jennings 2005: 104). There was a set of questions to ask but because of the interviews’ almost conversation-like character with probing and clarifying questions, they were not always asked in the same order.

2.3 Interview Analysis

To analyse the interviews, content analysis was used, with some elements borrowed from Grounded Theory. In content analysis, the *coding process* is crucial, which has been explained by David/Sutton (2004: 195) as follows:

“Coding is perhaps the single most significant act in the process of qualitative analysis.

Coding involves the identification of common themes (words, phrases, meanings)

¹ To ensure anonymity despite the small number of interviewees I will refer to them in a gender-neutral way, even though of course I know whether they are male or female.

within the data being analysed. Every time the same theme is mentioned it is tagged (electronically or otherwise). Then all instances where the tag (code) has been made can be compared. [...] These codes allow links to be made and are a form of data reduction, the highlighting of key points within the vast mass of the overall data. [...] Some coding is predefined; a set of codes is developed and applied to the data. Another form of coding is called **open coding**. Glaser and Strauss' *grounded theory* is associated with the open coding approach."

If content analysis is used within a qualitative/grounded theory approach, the inductive reasoning again is important. This means that codes are not always thought of *prior* to collecting and reading data, but that relevant codes develop and are 'discovered' out of the data.

The procedure of open coding mentioned by David/Sutton is how I started my analysis with. I read all the interview texts minutely and tried to find general themes that occurred frequently. Afterwards, I went through the texts again and transferred paragraphs, sentences or single words to the theme they fit to. I added my initial research questions to those themes so that the text was also searched for passages that answered to these questions. After this procedure, I had a pile of information to each theme, which I re-arranged according to similar statements made in the texts, to create categories.

My analysis therefore was comprised of an "interplay of experience, induction, and deduction" (Berg 2004: 273). The themes I developed out of my research questions can be referred to as deductive themes and included for instance the theory of post-tourists and the semiotic approach which sees tourist destinations as signs. Inductive themes emerged by reading the interview texts and highlighting themes that were mentioned frequently and include for instance the different understandings one might have of the Arctic Circle.

2.4 Limits of the study

Interviews can never catch facts or truths, but they gather people's opinions, memories and perception. They show how the interviewees make sense of their world, and the results always have to be seen within this context. Furthermore, qualitative methodology acknowledges that the circumstances of an interview always have an impact of the outcome. For instance, the time and place of the interview, the appearance of the interviewer, the recording of the interview on a tape

all influence what the interviewee (as well as the interviewer) says and also, what she/he does *not* say.

Among the constraints of this study are its scope (limited amount of interviewee) and possible language limitations since the interview language in three interviews (English) was not the participants' mother tongues. Furthermore, there were ethical concerns which led to decision that tourists should not be informed about the 'in-authenticity' of the sight by the researcher.

Another limitation was the time frame of a few months within winter time. What I am presenting here is an analysis of the circle at times when its marker is covered by snow. Findings would probably differ if the same study was done during summer, and a future analysis during this season might provide additional insights into the topic by examining how natural conditions can influence the dynamics between tourist sights.

3 The tourism attraction

One of the first tasks of the research was to establish the importance of the Arctic Circle as a sight for the tourists who visit Rovaniemi. Before addressing this question, some general features of the tourism attraction will be presented first.

3.1 General Facts

The Arctic Circle is located at 66° 33' North and represents the border above which the sun does not set for at least one night in summer and does not rise for at least one day in winter. It is often referred to as the southernmost latitude where the midnight sun can be observed. Even though this is theoretically right, in practice the midnight sun can be seen up to 90 km south of the line due to various reasons like refraction and the landscape's topography. Moreover, the Arctic Circle is not a fixed line but is constantly moving due to the tilt of the earth's rotation axis which in itself is not fixed but waves constantly. Therefore the Arctic Circle moves in a wave-like pattern which is determined by different cycles, the most important one being an interval of 41,000 years. Because of the latter cycle, the Arctic Circle is presently moving north for about 14-15 m per

year. Due to the other cycles, it can move several metres on a single day. Therefore, the Arctic Circle is not located at a fixed latitude. In the course of centuries, the location of the circle can shift within about 250 km which equals more than 2 degrees of latitude. Thus, any marking of the Arctic Circle can only be correct for a specific date and time.² To elaborate this even further, one arc second of latitude refers to an area slightly broader than 30 m. It is thus not a thin line that can be crossed with a single step, but rather a whole area that surrounds the globe at a permanently moving location.

3.2 The circle at the Santa Claus Village

Ever since the famous radio reporter Markus Rautio told a story in Finnish radio in the 1920s, Finns believe that Santa Claus lives on a fell called Korvatunturi, which is situated in north-west Finland just above the 68th parallel, right on the border to Russia (Wikipedia 2006). For the sake of better accessibility for visitors and in the course of making Finnish Lapland the tourist destination *Santa Claus Land*, the Santa Claus Village was created as Santa's 'working place' in 1985 (Pretes 2006: 24). Visitors can meet him at this location every day of the year, and can send letters from Santa's Main Post Office which has its own stamps and whose establishment also led to the Arctic Circle getting its own postal code.

The Village also contains other attractions besides Santa, one of which is a white line painted on the ground with the inscription *Arctic Circle* (in several languages) and $66^{\circ} 32' 35''$. Extra attention is added by a world globe and a monument that stand on it, explaining the line's meaning. The Arctic Circle has been marked at this location since 1955, when Eleanor Roosevelt came to visit Rovaniemi. The city was looking for possible sights to present to her, and a small hut was erected that can still be visited today. Even though the location of the circle has been more in the South than it is today, it was not as south as the Santa Claus Village throughout the 20th century. So even at the time of the marking, the marker did not indicate the 'real' location of the circle. As stated in the *Handbook for Experience Tourism Agents*, "[a]t the same time Santa's Village was being built, it was further decided that the Arctic Circle would be 'moved' a few kilometres in

² When looking at the movement from a human life-time perspective, the circle's location at $66^{\circ} 33'$ can still be considered correct because the movement does not extend more than some arcseconds within the length of a human life.

line with the tourist attraction, to facilitate the illusion of crossing the line, a transition with one step from the south to the magical north” (Tarssanen 2006: 45).

About 100-200 metres away from the line in the Santa Claus Village, in a rather unobtrusive position, a map can be found that shows the region around Rovaniemi. On this map, the Arctic Circle does not run through the Village but is marked a few kilometres north of it, at the location where it was really situated in 1997. So whoever takes the effort to look at the map will discover the ‘in-authenticity’ of the white line that was mentioned in the introduction.

Tourists who visit the Santa Claus Village with a safari company receive so-called *crossing certificates*. Additionally, the certificates can be bought individually in different shops in the Village. Sometimes tourists receive them during a *crossing ceremony* which takes place at another location, for instance at a reindeer farm or at Santa Park, an amusement park located a few kilometres west of the Santa Claus Village.

3.3 Visitors at the site

According to the head of marketing at the Rovaniemi tourist information (interview 27.04.06), the city receives about half a million visitors per year and registers around 400,000 overnight stays. About 60% of the visitors come from foreign countries, the majority of them being German, French, British, Russian and Italian. The main months for tourism are July and December, but there are great seasonal differences between the characteristics of tourism. Winter tourists mainly purchase their holidays as pre-arranged packages from safari companies; the majority of them only visit the region of Rovaniemi and stay in average 4-6 days. Most of their activities take place within safari tours; also the visit to the Santa Claus Village is usually part of such a tour so that the tourists go there by bus and are accompanied by tourist guides. Especially in the weeks before Christmas, there are many day trippers, most of them from Great Britain, who arrive in the morning and just stay for a few hours without spending a night. Summer visitors, on the contrary, are usually travelling on their own and are just passing through the town on their way North. They often travel to the North Cape, and only spend about one or two days in Rovaniemi.

As described by the tourist guides, the majority of tourists are families with small children. The day trippers are frequently grandparents with their grandchildren. One guide [1] stated that “small children are the biggest part of the British tourists”. Minor tourist groups comprise couples

without children, groups of friends and – especially in spring time – incentive groups from companies. The guides stated that most of the visitors cross the Arctic Circle for the first time in their lives (excluding visitors who come from the North themselves), and Rovaniemi usually is a once-in-a-lifetime destination; very few visit the region regularly.

3.4 Importance of the circle in local tourism

According to the head of marketing at the Rovaniemi tourist information (interview 27.4.06), the circle is “very important” for tourism and it is the city’s “main attraction”. However, it must be stressed, that not only the characteristics of tourism in general differ between the seasons, but so does the visual appearance of the white line. Located in the centre of the Santa Claus Village’s main promenade, it is one of the site’s visually most striking features in non-snow conditions. In winter, on the contrary, it is invisible due to a thick snow cover. Huge snow sculptures combined with a display of lights to brighten up the darkness of the winter appear to draw all the attention. Instead of the line on the ground, there are lights above in the air to indicate a line, but the guides confirmed me that they were not switched on during this season so that the line remained invisible. Consequently, one can argue that the seasonal differences in the sight’s visual appearance reflect a difference in its importance so that the Arctic Circle plays a minor part in the winter tourism to Santa Claus Village.

The first short interviews, conducted with visitors at the Santa Claus Village, confirmed this hypothesis. All the persons I talked to stated that the circle was not the reason for their visit. One of the interviewees was the guide of a tourist group himself and had been at the Village already a couple of times. In his opinion, most people come because of Santa Claus and the snowy winter.

The interviewed tourist guides then also agreed on the huge importance of winter and Christmas and all of them see Santa Claus as the Village’s most important attraction. Other important attractions include the “proper winter” [3] in terms of the huge amount of snow as well as the nature in Lapland in general. Furthermore, the interviewees mentioned the Northern Lights as attractions as well as outdoor activities provided by the safari companies such as snowmobiling, reindeers and husky sledging. At the Santa Claus Village, sending postcards from the Main Post Office as well as buying souvenirs was mentioned by the guides as the most important

things after the meeting with Santa himself. The tourists also like to play in the snow, especially if they have children with them (which is usually the case).

However, even though Santa's huge importance might be true for many tourists, one guide suggested that there are "people who are not actually coming to Santa, some are coming to Arctic Circle, some are coming to the post office, just to see the place" [2]. The circle's importance was rated by the guides between the second most important attraction (after Santa Claus) and the fifth important attraction. There are cases where the main goal of the holiday trip seemed to be the crossing of the Arctic Circle, but the guides refer to these tourists as exceptions.

One guide suggested that Santa Claus is probably not so important for Catholics³ or atheists (who do not celebrate Christmas at all) so that for them, the Arctic Circle might be more important. Another guide pointed out that visitors from Northern Russia who come from areas north of the Arctic Circle do not become as excited about the Arctic Circle as visitors from Great Britain or even from Southern European countries who have never been that far North before. The crossing certificates one can buy at the Santa Claus Village are available in ten different languages, most of which are equally popular among visitors. "Only [the] Finnish certificate is not that popular" (e-mail 2.5.06), as stated by the company which sells them. The relevance the Arctic Circle plays for tourists is therefore linked to their cultural, social and geographical background. Especially people from different geographical regions might be unequally susceptible to the presentation of the Arctic Circle as an attraction.

4 Semiotics of the Arctic Circle

Semiotics is the study of signs. In the beginning of modern semiotics in the mid 19th century it was primarily meant to analyse language as a sign. For instance, the word 'snake' can be called the *signifier* for the animal 'snake', which is referred to as *signified* (David/Sutton 2004: 216). There is no natural connection between the two, which can be seen for instance when looking at very different

³ In the South of Germany and in Austria at least, it is the 'Christkind' – the infant Jesus – who brings the presents on Christmas rather than Santa Claus.

words from different languages that refer to the same thing. Soon, however, semiotics was also applied to “nonverbal systems of signification” (Echtner 1999: 48), and some authors added a third object: the *interpretant* (a person in most cases), which makes meaning out of the other two elements. Those two respectively three objects – signifier, signified and interpretant – are the elements that together create a sign, and semiotics aim at studying and analysing the relationship between them. (Echtner 1999: 48-49)

Semiotics has already frequently been applied to tourism (cf. MacCannell 1989⁴; Echtner 1999 for the use within tourism marketing), and one of the first authors to apply semiotics to tourism was MacCannell: in *The Tourist – A New Theory of the Leisure Class* which was first published in 1976, he dedicated a whole chapter to the “Semiotic of Attraction”. MacCannell understands tourist destinations as signs. They consist of a *sight* (‘signified’ in the terminology mentioned above) and its *marker* (‘signifier’). Markers can be *off-sight* as information in tourism advertising, magazines, posters etc. or *on-sight* as for instance signs in a zoo describing the animals in the cage. (MacCannell 1999: 109-133)

The Arctic Circle as a tourist destination thus is a sign. Its first element, the *sight*, is the geographical Arctic Circle, a line surrounding the North Pole at a constantly moving latitude. The second element, the *markers*, is the white line on the ground together with the globe, the monument and all the other information about it. The speciality of these markers in the Santa Claus Village is that they appear as *on-sight* markers, making the visitors believe they really stand on and step over the geographical Arctic Circle, whereas in reality, they are *off-sight* markers, due to the circle’s movement and its location north of the Village.

As a result, a special phenomenon occurs in the Santa Claus Village, which MacCannell (1999: 121) calls *sight-marker-sight replacement*. The *sight* ‘Arctic Circle’ is replaced by the marker ‘white line’. In this case this is obviously necessary because the Arctic Circle can not be seen itself. However, through this replacement the marker (white line) becomes the actual *sight* and replaces the real Arctic Circle. To illustrate this phenomenon of marker-sight replacement, one can look at the area where the gangster couple Bonnie and Clyde was shot in the early 20th century. There are

⁴ MacCannell edited the 1989(1) issue of *Annals of Tourism Research*, a special issue presenting a collection of articles all dealing with the “Semiotics of tourism”.

neither visible sights nor any specialities in landscape and the area is a tourist destination only because of its history. It only exists as its marker, which becomes the real sight tourists want to visit. (MacCannell 1999: 114)

MacCannell (1999: 121) sees this interest of tourists in the marker rather than the sight as one central characteristic of modern tourism and stresses that “[s]ight → marker → sight transformations are not merely something that may *occur* in the act of sightseeing. They are an *essential element* of the act. Tourists have been criticized for failing, somehow, to see the sights they visit, exchanging perception for mere recognition” (emphasis added). Following this notion, tourists might just visit the geographical location of the Arctic Circle to recognize the circle’s marker and to take a picture of it. Arguably, they are not so interested in really exploring the site by looking around. If they did this, they would come across the map that shows that the Arctic Circle is somewhere else and that the markers thus are off-sight markers. Therefore it can be argued that the tourists are primarily interested in confirming the image they already have in their mind by just recognizing the marker and consequently, “seeing a marker is more important than the sight itself” (Grenier 2004: 91).

This tourist interest in the marker rather than in the sight is called *marker involvement* by MacCannell (1999: 127). He states that the marker involvement is “an original form of a sight → marker obliteration [and it] is especially evident when a sight is dominated by some action that occurred in the past”, meaning the Bonnie and Clyde shootout area mentioned above. However, I suggest that this is not only true for action that occurred in the past but for any place that has as its central meaning a story, whether it is artificially created or based on actual history. Therefore, similarities to the Santa Claus Village can be pointed out. Both the shootout area and the Santa Claus Village are only made attractions out of a specific story. Both stories are grounded in the past; at the Bonnie and Clyde area the story obviously refers to the death of the two persons, in Rovaniemi it refers to the much older stories of Santa Claus living in the North of Lapland. The belief in this story is crucial and so is the ability of tourism actors to keep this story alive. Depending on how important the Arctic Circle is in this fairytale-atmosphere, the danger of revealing its ‘in-authenticity’ is that it might damage the story and with it, the whole attractiveness which only develops out of the story.

In addition to the analysis of markers as signifiers for concrete objects, semiotics aim at identifying “several layers of meaning within a sign system” (Echtner 1999: 50). The Arctic Circle as a sign system can not only be understood as the relationship between the geographical location and the white line in the Santa Claus Village, but can also be examined in a metaphorical way. Due to the marker-sight replacement, the marker ‘white line’ becomes the sight. On a higher layer of meaning, however, even this sight might only be a marker for the *image* the Arctic Circle represents. This becomes clear when the third element is included into the sign system, the interpretant, whose role it is to interpret the marker and the sight in order to create a meaning to them.

For the visitor at the Santa Claus Village, the Arctic Circle might not only be a sight in itself but might also become a marker for a much broader symbolism, which includes the Village’s Christmas-theme as well as the idea of Lapland as a symbol for remoteness and wilderness and the idea of ‘the North’ in general. Barthes (1984, in Echtner 1999: 49) has described this situation, where a whole sign functions as a new (symbolic) marker. He calls it a “*second-order semiological system*”, and the second-order sight he calls “*myth*”.

The following chart illustrates the different layers of meaning for the Arctic Circle:

2nd order	marker		sight
1st order	markers	sight	'the North'
	white line, monument, globe, information (in tourism brochures etc.)	geographical Arctic Circle	

The first order system comprises the markers of the Arctic Circle and the circle’s geographic location, which together create the whole sign of the Arctic Circle. This sign – together with a visitor to interpret it – functions as a second-order marker for the sight of ‘the North’. This North can also be called a myth.

5 The Arctic Circle as a tourist commodity

Despite the minor role the Arctic Circle may play for many winter visitors, the certificates that confirm the crossing are very popular; the guides stated that tourists usually show happy and contempt reactions when they receive them. According to one interviewee [1], some of the visitors might even frame their certificate and put it on the wall after returning home.

This appears to be a contradiction at first, because tourists do not care much about the Arctic Circle but then the receipt of a crossing certificate does seem to be important to them.

One guide [1] addressed this problem and tried to explain it by saying that “not the less they know that they are coming to the Arctic Circle so it is important for them”. However, a geographical location does not automatically become important because of the mere knowledge about it but there are various factors that have to contribute in order to create an attractive destination out of it.

One explanation could be that the marking of the Arctic Circle plays a crucial role: the tourists do not have any expectation regarding the Arctic Circle prior to their visit, but once it is presented as an attraction, tourists accept it as such and also perceive it worth visiting. This presentation may happen visually through the sign, the monument, the lights on top or (in summer times) the painted line on the ground as well as verbally by the safari guides. This can also be seen as a commodification of the Arctic Circle, where the circle is transformed into a commodity within the region’s whole tourism business and is consumed by the tourists. Two basic theories about contemporary consumption patterns might be suitable for an examination of the Arctic Circle as a tourist commodity.

5.1 Consumption of experiences

Already MacCannell (1999: 23, first published 1976) emphasised *experiences* as an important element of tourism. According to him, the value of sights and locations “is a function of the quality and quantity of experience they promise”. In the past years, several authors (cf. Schulze 1992; Pine/Gilmore 1999) have claimed our present society to be an *Experience Society* and our economy to be an *Experience Economy* and there is an ongoing debate about tourism’s role in the embodied *experience industries*. It can be stated that what is sold here are not mere tourist services, but tourist experiences, which are of a higher value in economic terms (Pine/Gilmore 1999: 2).

In this context, the Arctic Circle can be seen in the following way: it is part of the experience industry that creates the safari tourism in the Rovaniemi region (one guide [4] in fact addressed this experience commodity character of local tourism, by saying that the tourists' aim was to "consume as many adventures as possible").

The Arctic Circle also offers the possibility to be commodified as an experience itself, the experience of crossing the line. The question arises, how advanced this commodification is at present. Do tourists perceive it as an 'adventure' to physically move over the 'magic line'? According to Urry (2002: 90), one feature of contemporary (post-modern) tourism is the constant availability of the gaze through the media (TV, travel magazines, internet etc.). Because of this constant availability of the visible, it is not the mere *seeing* of a sight that makes modern tourists leave their homes. Urry (2002: 13) has further written about the general nature of contemporary consumption:

"[C]overt day-dreaming and anticipation are processes central to modern consumerism. [...] satisfaction stems from anticipation, from imaginative pleasure-seeking. People's basic motivation for consumption is not therefore simply materialistic. It is rather that they seek to experience 'in reality' the pleasurable dramas they have already experienced in their imagination."

One possibility what tourists are looking for then, is that within experience economy, the physical experience becomes the reason for people to leave their homes and to be willing to spend money. Recently, the importance of body and of corporeal movement has been discussed in tourism research (cf. Urry 2002: 152-156). In case of the Arctic Circle, the reason that could make the trip worth it is the experience of physically crossing an 'important' line.

This assumption was supported by one guide [1] who told about the possibility to emphasise the crossing by making the whole safari group step over the line at the same time. This emphasis, however, seems to occur only rarely. The guide pointed out that it is not done very often, mostly because of the practical reason that the groups are too large.

In the crossing ceremonies, the physical crossing of the line plays a minor role or no role at all; the Arctic Circle is just a setting for an event that tells people about life in the holiday region.⁵

Therefore, one can argue that the actual experience of stepping over a line is not very much developed in organised safari tourism to the Santa Claus Village, which is also represented by the fact that the line was not even visible during this winter so that the crossing was made virtually invisible. I therefore suggest that winter tourists do not primarily visit the Arctic Circle for the experience of crossing. But what could then be their mode of consuming the Arctic Circle as a tourism commodity?

5.2 Consumption of images

Shortly after MacCannell stated the importance of experience for tourist destinations, Baudrillard (1983 in Urry 2002: 77) argued that “what we increasingly consume are signs or representations”. I suggest that both the consumption of experience and the consumption of images take place when tourists visit the Arctic Circle, but that the former would be ‘useless’ without the latter.

Urry (2002: 74) has continued his examination of consumerism as involving daydreaming as a key element, stating that “daydreaming is not a purely individual activity; it is socially organised, particularly through television, advertising, literature, cinema, photography and so on”. One can assume that the image of crossing the Arctic Circle is already in the tourists’ minds before they go there, and it is mediated among others by the media, the TV and by pictures of friends who have been there before. For instance the Santa Claus Office’s website shows a photograph of Santa and a woman dressed like a Sámi who both are stepping over the big white line which says *Arctic Circle* (Santa Claus Office 2006^a), and travel stories published in the internet by people who crossed the Arctic Circle during their travel usually include a photograph of this crossing.

What was striking about the information given by the guides about the tourists’ behaviour was the big importance of taking pictures with the circle’s markers. While tourists do not make a great

⁵ The ceremony can be seen as an experience itself, but there is no distinct experience of the Arctic Circle by highlighting its crossing.

deal out of crossing the line, they do take pictures with the globe. One interviewee [1], when asked about the tourists' main activity at the line and the monument, answered: "I believe it is taking pictures mostly". A similar statement was made by another guide [2] who told that "crossing the line is not so important but the important thing for tourists is to be photographed under the sign". This suggests that while tourists seem to engage in some kind of collection and consumption of sights, it is important that those sights are persistent so that they can be shown at home or also looked at later. It is not the experience (of crossing) per se that is important, but the ability to capture it in a picture.

This would also explain that visitors are willing to buy the photographs of their meeting with Santa even though they may seem rather expensive for a good part of the tourists: The mere personal, singular experience of meeting Santa as well as the experience of crossing is not sufficient for the success of the visit. There must be some visible, collectable 'evidence' like photographs, souvenirs, crossing certificates, postcards, stamps etc. The Santa Claus Office's official website (Santa Claus Office 2006^b) gives a quote that can be related to this suggestion:

"Santa's friends often wonder how on earth they are going to convince their friends and relatives that they really have met Santa in person. The camera elves have a good solution to this problem – in a flash they provide you with a quality photo as a souvenir and proof of your visit."

The same idea is addressed in *Economies of Signs and Space* where Lash/Urry (1994) claim that in today's economy, what is most important are signs and images. As part of the culture industries, they play a crucial role in how people distinguish themselves from others and how they define their own place in the social world. For MacCannell (1999: 121), one feature that characterizes modern tourism is the mere consumption of the attraction as a means of expressing a certain lifestyle and of positioning oneself within a system of social differentiation. This has been already addressed in the section on semiotics, where I quoted his accusation against tourists, that they fail "to see the sights they visit, exchanging perception for mere recognition". Thus, MacCannell's theory of the semiotics of tourism can be observed quite clearly in the case of the Arctic Circle: due to the movement of the line and the impossibility to really capture it, what is left to be seen can only be a marker. So even at the sight, the tourists just obtain more markers, which are the white line, the globe, and the pictures of them over the line and with Santa.

Urry (2002: 128) has pointed out that “much tourism becomes in effect a search for the photogenic; travel is a strategy for the accumulation of photographs and hence for the commodification and privatisation of personal and especially of family memories”. There are certain must-see sights – or rather ‘must-photograph’ sights – and the Arctic Circle is one of them for tourists visiting Rovaniemi.

When asked about the importance of the actual crossing of the line for tourists, one guide [2] stated that the crossing is less important because “it’s more like that they enjoy that they are in the place where the Arctic Circle lies about, so I think they maybe don’t feel like it’s important to cross some border but more important is that they are somewhere around that place”. This statement is rather different from what the other guides said, and it leads to another set of questions: What does ‘Arctic Circle’ actually mean in local tourism and how do tourists understand that term? Is it connected to one specific line and if so, how may the fact that this line is not on the ‘right’ location be dealt with? What kind of image of the circle is created in tourism marketing and business?

6 Creation and perception of the destination

In tourism research, it is essential to examine how destinations are perceived by the visitors. As mentioned above, the way how the destination Arctic Circle is presented by tourism operators might have a great influence on the tourists’ perceptions. Therefore the study aimed at exploring which image of the Arctic Circle is communicated to tourists who visit Rovaniemi.

6.1 Knowledge and information

The tourist guides I interviewed are not independent in their work but are part-time employees of safari companies, so the company influences to a great degree their knowledge as well as the knowledge transfer to tourists. The guides’ training usually includes some information about the Arctic Circle, frequently also in written form. One guide [1] stated that the information includes “mostly the geographical facts of it, where it is and that it goes through Rovaniemi”.

The most common questions the interviewed guides are asked by their customers regarding the Arctic Circle are “What is it?” and “Where is it?” – two very basic questions that led to the assumption that tourists in general have only very little knowledge about the Arctic Circle before their arrival. This assumption was confirmed by a guide [1] who pointed out that most of the visitors do not have any knowledge beyond that they will cross it. Other guides said that many of them at least know the “geographical facts”. This term was used frequently by two guides, without explaining what they actually mean by it. It could include anything from the very basic knowledge that at the Arctic Circle, the midnight sun can be observed, to the understanding of its complex movements depending on the tilt of the earth axis. Since the guides did not fully know this complex background themselves and since they rarely experienced the situation of being unable to answer the tourists’ questions, it can be expected, however, that these “geographical facts” at least exclude the circle’s movement and the off-sight character of the markers in the Santa Claus Village. Another guide [4] mentioned that for tourists, the circle was not much more than a “mythical line into the North”.

In general, it can thus be assumed that the majority of (winter) visitors at the Santa Claus Village know little or even nothing about the Arctic Circle prior to their visit.

6.2 Perceptions of the circle

Regarding the creation of a certain image of the Arctic Circle in tourism, a contradiction between interviewees was discovered. Usually the training for safari guides seems to include proper information about the Arctic Circle’s location; some guides even receive printed booklets during their training where also the movement of the Arctic Circle is explained. All of them knew something about the movement of the circle and the consequent in-authenticity of the marker, even though not with the complete geographical/astrological background. However, their views about how to deal with that knowledge in interaction with tourists differed widely and as a consequence, different images of the circle are created for the visitors: one guide [2] informs tourists about the circle’s movement and about the fact that it is not really located at the place where it is marked, and so do his colleagues. This guide mentioned that her/his safari company encourages its employees to tell tourists about that. Regarding the tourists’ reaction, the guide has observed interest like in any other information, but tourists do not seem to be shocked, amazed or

disappointed. This observation is interesting since it contradicts with statements made by other guides.

Even though no company seems to explicitly order them not to tell to tourists about the circle's movement and the 'in-authenticity' of the markers, some feel that it is better to hide that fact because it would cause disappointment. Among this type of guides an unexpressed agreement seems to exist. As one interviewee [1] put it, "I believe that it is common sense, you know, that we, the guides, know that it is not wise to tell people that it's not actually there". Another one [3] stated that "maybe it's just a principle of service industry you don't say it, like, I mean you say things in a positive way".

The study showed three different images of the Arctic Circle that are created in local tourism and thus, three different ways for visitors to perceive the destination. Each of them might lead to a different way how the marker's 'in-authenticity' is dealt with. It is hard to determine the exact role the authenticity of the circle's marker plays and to answer the question if the tourists still perceived the sight worth a visit if they knew about the marker's off-sight character. Nevertheless, some general suggestions will be presented along with the description of the destination's different perceptions.

a) Arctic Circle as one specific sight in Santa Claus Village

One way to create a certain image of the Arctic Circle is its representation as the concrete line that is painted on the ground in Santa Claus Village. As explained earlier, most of the winter tourists who visit the Santa Claus Village with a safari tour go there by bus, and the time in the bus is usually used by the guides to tell some things about the village. Sometimes this introduction also includes the Arctic Circle, in which case it is presented as one (out of several) attractions offered at the Santa Claus Village. The guides point out, what tourists can do in the Village and how to best orient themselves, and these explanations are meant to assist the visitors in their organisation of the visit ("when we arrive there with the bus we usually drive around the village and explain to them where is the Santa Claus and where is his Main Post Office ... we give them small maps" [1]). The guides take care that tourists are aware of all the possibilities that are offered in Santa Claus Village and that they do not miss an attraction; they do not encourage visitors to discover the site themselves and find out what is interesting to them.

In this way, an image of the whole village is created in the tourists' heads prior to their visit, and the actual visit is limited to collecting the particular sights, and to capture them on a picture as elaborated in section 5.2. The guides' role thereby is to make sure that visitors manage to collect all the sights that seem relevant without missing any.

Additionally, the tourists usually have seen images of the Arctic Circle in advertisements, travel brochures, web pages (cf. Santa Claus Office 2006^a) or also photographs taken by friends who have been at the Arctic Circle. One interview-quote [1] shows particularly well the guides' role as making the visit easy on a practical level rather than or inspiring people to their own exploration: "I try not to make it so scientific so I just tell them that the Arctic Circle is this imaginary line that goes through the Santa Claus Village and I don't usually tell so much geographical stuff, I just explain what is in the village and what they can do".

This perception of the circle as a concrete sight, contributing to the Santa Claus Village's status as a must-see-place, can be visualized by thinking of visitors taking pictures of the line or the globe. At that particular moment, the markers enable the visitors to imagine themselves as being on the Arctic Circle as a concrete location, which is visible and capable of being caught into a picture.

b) Arctic Circle as an area

In its second possible perception, the aim is to present the Arctic Circle as a broad and rather abstract concept. This image is expressed for instance by talking about the whole area around Rovaniemi as 'on the Arctic Circle' instead of putting the focus on the one line running through the Santa Claus Village. This image can be communicated to tourists by telling about the circle's movement. One guide [3] sometimes uses two arches that are installed above the road between Santa Claus Village and the airport and tells that they are "marking the Arctic Circle area". By doing so, she/he illustrates its broad expanse. Two of the guides explicitly stated that in their opinion, tourists get the impression that the Arctic Circle is not just one line but a "wide thing" [3] and that for them, it is not so "important to cross some border but more important is that they are somewhere **around** that place" [2].

One part of this perception is the circle's own postal code. Due to Santa's Main Post Office at the Santa Claus Village, the whole area is referred to as 'Arctic Circle' in the Finnish postal system.

Furthermore, the 'Arctic Circle Hiking Area' about 20 km north of Rovaniemi was established in 2001 (Metsähallitus 2006).

c) Arctic Circle as a symbol for 'the North'

Visitors at the website of the Santa Claus Village (Santa Claus Village) are informed about "[t]he mysterious Arctic Circle" by providing "a little info-package about this *magical line*" (emphasis added). In this image of the destination, the circle is presented as a symbol for a much greater idea of myths like 'Lapland', 'the North' or also – in the special case of Rovaniemi – 'Christmas'. Part of the functions the Arctic Circle fulfils within tourism is that it symbolizes a broader concept of 'the North' that is thought to be found right here in Rovaniemi. This perception has been theoretically explained within the semiotic analysis in section 4, and it was frequently mentioned by two of the interviewed tourist guides.

According to one guide [4], tourists already have an image of 'the North' in their mind, and visitors who do not come for Santa Claus as the main reason might mainly come for the crossing of the Arctic Circle, which "means to them coldness, snow, dogs, reindeers, snowmobiles [...] The special thing for them is that they could do all this everywhere but when they go home and have done it at the Arctic Circle it is something special, like North Cape [...] so there is something symbolic".

The creation of the Arctic Circle as a symbol for 'the North' can be illustrated by looking at the crossing ceremony. Even though the circle gives the name and the reason for this ceremony, it plays a minor role in the ceremony – if it is mentioned at all. Instead, the goal is to tell about the history, tradition, culture and life of the region's inhabitants.

But what exactly is this 'North' people are linking to the Arctic Circle?

The connection to Santa Claus is unique to the destination of Rovaniemi, but there is more to the myth of the North in general. The official homepage of Santa Claus Office (Santa Claus Office 2006^a) explains that the Arctic Circle is the best place for Santa Claus to live because of its peaceful and quiet atmosphere. It further states that "[y]ou cannot see the Arctic Circle. Its location at 66° 32' 35'' is also recognised as *the border between the hectic and non-hectic world*. Anyone crossing it is filled with a sense of calm and forgets the busy world he or she has come from" (emphasis added). Therefore silence and calmness is a second element included in the idea of 'the North'.

How this theme of calmness is communicated during the crossing ceremony has been described by one guide [3]: “there is no stress, people are really calm and there are lots of animals, life is peaceful and they don’t know what stress is, but people who are coming from somewhere else they have this weird thing and they behave strangely and this is called stress”. Moreover, the ceremony frequently includes a ritual to take stress away from the tourists.⁶ Also included in the image of the North is the link to the traditional regional culture, in the case of Rovaniemi, the Sámi culture.⁷ One way how the Sámi culture is used to transport the image of the North within the crossing ceremony is a tale about a shaman who managed to get the previously unorganised winds to blow in one direction; as a result, Lapland became a “very friendly and nice place” [3].

Another image of ‘the North’ that is related both to Santa Claus/Christmas and to the Sámi tradition, are the reindeers. Reindeer meat is served during most safaris, all kinds of reindeer-souvenirs can be bought, and reindeer sledges are used in special reindeer safaris. Also the special Arctic nature and the remoteness and wilderness of the area are important images of the North, despite the fact that Scandinavia is the least Arctic regions of all, regarding the climate, natural conditions and spatial remoteness. The description of a 19-day holiday tour (Vacations to Go 2006) including a visit to Rovaniemi points at the wilderness that is connected with the region as follows: “As you cross the Arctic Circle (66°31’N), you are in *incomparable, unspoiled Lapland*” (emphasis added). Furthermore, tourists might connect the crossing of the circle with the perception of the Arctic in earlier centuries when it was not well known yet. The image of the North as a magical land, with severe and frightening characteristics, but also with a special ‘aura’ and full of adventures has not become redundant even in times when tourism reaches up to the North Pole.

From an organisational perspective, this perception of the Arctic Circle is created for instance on the website of the city of Rovaniemi (Rovaniemi Tourism) where the region’s ‘must-see-sights’

⁶ This image is not without a certain irony: guides have a rather stressful work, since everything has to be perfectly planned and organised (one guide [1] mentioned the perfect service in Finland as a reason for Russians to come here despite the more or less same environment than they could experience at home). As soon as they face the tourists, however, they have to act “as if they were beyond all time, they are never allowed to show stress” [4].

⁷ In the safari tours, the traditional culture seems to equal the Sámi culture. This representation ignores the facts that most Sámis do not live the traditional lifestyle anymore and that within the Sámi region, where people’s lifestyles probably come closest to the traditional ways, Sámis only constitute one third of the population. With the exception of the municipality of Utsjoki, Non-Sámi are in the majority everywhere. (<http://virtual.finland.fi/netcomm/news/showarticle.asp?intNWSAID=25786>)

are presented: “The Arctic Circle is where you’ll find Santa and his elves when they want to come out of their secret places and meet people”.

All these images add up to the region’s special magic and its fairy-tale character. As one interviewee [4] expressed it, “the whole tourism is connected to a fantasy-world and there is not much space for realities”. For instance, day trippers usually do not even visit the city of Rovaniemi but are just taken to the Santa Claus Village and/or the Santa Park, and according to one interviewee [1], many of them do not even know that they are in Finland. The guide’s statement that “some of the British tourists they do not even realize that they are in Finland so they are told that they are in Lapland” illustrates one of the features of regional tourism: the creation of an artificial, fairy-tale-like atmosphere. It is built out of several different attractions, and the Arctic Circle is one of those attractions that contribute among others to the magical image of the destination ‘North’.

6.3 Contradictions within the presentation of the circle

These different presentations of the Arctic Circle as a tourist destination are not necessarily exclusive categories. The same guide might act differently in different situation; one guide [3] explicitly stated that it depends on the impression she/he has of the tourists whether she/he tells them about the movement or not.

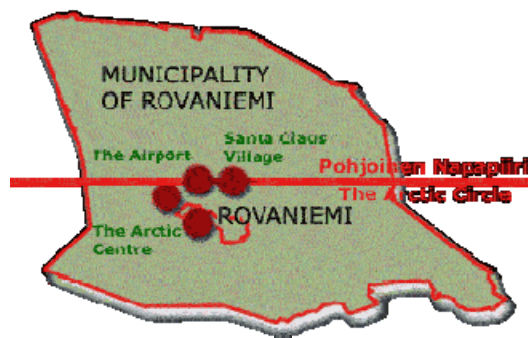
The question arises, if the different ways to perceive the circle at least partly contradict each other. As for the third category, I assume no contradiction, since the Arctic Circle as a symbol or myth does not say anything about its geographic location. A geographic location can act as a symbol, as seen for instance at the prominent example of the North Cape (cf. for instance Birkeland 2001).⁸ But can the Arctic Circle be perceived as both a concrete sight to visit in the form of a fixed line and a rather broad area?

I think the contradiction does occur if the Arctic Circle is really understood as an area *itself*, as opposed to an area that is *around* or *close* to the Arctic Circle, or to an area around the North Pole with the Arctic Circle marking its southern border. This contradiction is also reflected in a rather

⁸ The North Cape, like the Arctic Circle, is another example for a marker-sight transformation and also includes ‘in-authenticity’ of its markers, therefore a comparison between these two destinations might provide interesting results.

unclear approach to the Arctic Circle among the different parties involved in tourism. They seem to lack a common agreement about how to present the circle as a tourist destination. This is indicated by various contradictions, one of which are the guides' different statements of what they tell tourists about the Arctic Circle. A second example is the map at the Santa Claus Village that shows the 'real' location of the circle and is situated only about 100-200 m from its 'in-authentic' markers.

Another contradiction occurs in the project "Find your Arctic Circle" by the Lapland District Survey Office, in cooperation with major tourism actors such as the municipality of Rovaniemi and the Santa Claus Village. The project was finished in 2000, when the Arctic Circle ran exactly through the crossing of the airport's landing strips, and apparently there were thought about using



GEOINFO/NapaGIS 2000

that fact for tourism marketing. In this project (Lapland District Land Survey Office), the Arctic Circle is explicitly presented as a "perpetual motion machine", and it is explained that "[t]he wavering of Earth's axis causes the motion of the circles". In a map of the Rovaniemi municipality the Arctic Circle is marked by a big red line (cf. picture). This line runs correctly through the airport but also misleadingly through the Santa

Claus Village. So my conclusion here is that the 'official' presentation of the Arctic Circle as a tourism destination is not clear but ambiguous and this is connected to an uncertainty and unsteadiness of how to handle the 'in-authenticity' of the line in the Santa Claus Village.

6.4 Authenticity vs. story of the 'magic line'

The Lapland Centre of Expertise for the Experience Industry (LCEEI) has developed a model to evaluate tourist products – for instance safari tours – in view of their ability to create experiences for the consumers. This model (Tarssanen/Kylänen 2005: 137-142) mentions both 'authenticity/credibility' and 'story' as important elements for the success of such a product. Applied to the Arctic Circle as a tourist product, this means that some geographical background information has to be given in order to ensure the destination's credibility. At the same time, the product has to include some fiction, not only facts, which can be achieved by embedding the circle

into the Santa Claus Village's Christmas myth or in the symbolism of 'the North'. Therefore, the third perception of the Arctic Circle that refers to it in a metaphorical way is indispensable for its success as a tourist product. The challenge thereby is to provide both elements – facts and fiction – to an appropriate amount so that sufficient geographical information about the circle is provided, but without destroying the product's story. The crucial question is, how important the white line and the belief in its authenticity is to the tourists. The fact that the Arctic Circle is constantly moving is certainly interesting for tourists, but is it interesting enough to compensate for the knowledge about the 'in-authenticity' of the marker and thus, for the possible destruction of the 'magic of the Line'?

This leads to the question of *post-tourists*, a term that is frequently used to describe travellers within our contemporary – often labelled *post-modern* – society. One key element of post-modernity includes reflexivity (cf. Beck et.al. 2003; Urry 1995: 145) and consequently, post-tourists can be characterised as being increasingly aware of the nature of destinations as being socially constructed. Urry (1995: 140) even goes as far as to describe them as being “almost delight in inauthenticity”. The example from a cruise ship to Antarctica illustrates how post-tourists should *not* behave like: A passenger was confirmed by the captain that she had seen Cape Horn, and insisted on this even after being told that it was another cape she had seen. Post-tourists on the contrary, should not “choose to shut themselves from reality in order to achieve satisfaction without seeing either the sight or the marker” (Grenier 2004: 94). Neither should their enjoyment of the destination be lost, once they gain information about its feasible 'in-authenticity'.

Applied to the tourists visiting the Arctic Circle at the Santa Claus Village, this idea of post-tourists includes two aspects: first, the visitors should be willing and able to take into consideration that the line painted on the ground in Santa Claus Village might not be identical with the 'real' Arctic Circle. Secondly, they should be capable of accepting the line as being a fictitious one while still regarding it as a destination that is worth being visited. There should be no need for them to regard the destination as 'authentic' in order to gain enjoyment of it.

Based on this case study, I suggest that if Arctic Circle-visitors are post-tourists there is no contradiction between the different possible perceptions of the circle. Visitors can be told about the movement of the line and still accept the painted line as its off-sight marker and a sight worth

being visited. They can enjoy taking pictures of themselves crossing the line, even if they know that it is merely a consciously created representation, since the 'real' Arctic Circle can never be captured in a single line painted on the ground or a row of lights hanging above our heads.

7 Conclusions

In this case study, a qualitative approach to social research has been applied to analyse the Arctic Circle which has been marked as a tourist sight in Rovaniemi's Santa Claus Village. It has been shown, how a geographic location that might at first appear to be a 'natural' tourist attraction can be subject to various ways of perception and how different meanings can be attached to it by tourism operators and by visitors.

The nature of the Arctic Circle as a tourist commodity has been discussed and it was suggested that an important part of the tourism to the sight consists of visually collecting and consuming the destination.

The study has further argued, that the Arctic Circle can be seen as a sign system in which the visitor takes the role to attach meaning to the sight; and that this is done by interpreting the relationship between the sight's 'real' location and its markers. However, there is no clearly defined image of the Arctic Circle in tourism, but tourists might perceive and interpret it differently. The study has described three main ways of how the circle can be perceived and it has become clear, how tourism operators try to create a certain image of the destination. It has been argued that the presentation of the circle as a tourist attraction, however, is characterised by ambiguity and that the images of the circle as created within tourism marketing partly contradict each other.

At the end of this study, two main questions remain.

The first question addresses the way how visitors at the Santa Claus Village would handle the off-sight character of the circle's markers if they were informed about it. A possible future research among tourists themselves might be capable of answering this question. It could be examined, whether tourists at the Santa Claus Village are post-tourists enough to know about the 'in-authentic' nature of the destination without losing the ability to gain enjoyment of it.

The second question deals with the factors and circumstances that determine, which image of the circle the visitors get and keep in their mind. It has been shown that the tourists' perception of a sight is influenced by their cultural, social and geographical background. Furthermore, the suggestion was made that in Rovaniemi, the way how the Arctic Circle is presented plays a very influential role in how tourists perceive the destination. Especially due to the small knowledge visitors have prior to their visit, they are very susceptible to the marking and presentation of the sight. However, their role might after all not be restricted to a passive consumption of whatever tourism operators offer them, for recent studies have demonstrated "the more active, subjective work that the consumer does in making things matter (Miller, 1998). The relative power of particular site-visits in the flow of tourist activity may be more complex than the guidebook privileging may imply." (Crouch 2005: 83) The conduction of interviews with tourists themselves might provide deeper insight also into this question for it could evaluate and assess the visitors' own role in creating meaning of this special destination.

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