

Julkaisussa: Lovén, L. (ed.). 2000. Responsible Nature Tourism.
Finnish Forests Research Institute, Research Papers 792: 145-152.

Koli National Park **– site of solitude and heritage**

Lasse Lovén
Finnish Forest Research Institute, Joensuu Research Station
Koli National Park
email: lasse.loven@metla.fi

ABSTRACT

In Finnish national parks a nature tourist meets sometimes both the ultimate ecological forest wilderness and diversity, but also the frontier of local subcultures. Among nature tourism destinations there are several sites, like Koli National Park, which local people have used as ancient sacred places with myths, tales and spiritual values. These complex heritage sites are very sensitive to severe conflicts between different groups of users. There is an urgent need to increase multidisciplinary scientific approaches to collect and refine all that information, which we now can reach when using our protected areas for nature tourism. This is an investment for knowledge supporting the sustainable development in the future. The national parks have the widest profile of stakeholders, which gives them a special status as “heritage laboratories”. Finnish Forest Research Institute is developing scientific programs for some of the national parks in order to produce know-how and tools for park managers to maintain the heritage and also welcome the nature tourists.

Keywords: Nature tourism, national park, opinions and preferences, customers, Koli.

1. KOLI NATIONAL PARK – A TYPICAL SITE OF FINNISH NATURE TOURISM

The main attractions in the district of Koli rise from unique nature; the geological structure of the quartzite stone hill, giving information of basic global processes occurring 2 billion years ago, the high diversity of the living nature rising up from the environment under slash-and-burn cultivation during last 1000 years and landscape so unique that it is difficult to compare it with any other formation in this country. Koli was one of the main destinations for the early Finnish natural tourism already a 100 hundred years ago.

The numbers of visitors was not too high in the beginning, on the last years of 1900th century. About 500 hundred visitors per year was a good number then (Hirn & Markkanen 1987). But something else occurred and then Koli was involved in the high policy. In the process of developing independence for the Finnish nation, Koli was introduced as a symbol of Finnish nationalism, as an icon of forests-lake landscapes, a site of Finnish solitude and heritage – as the national landscape.

The core group of first pioneers, who found and developed the Koli-image, included three Finnish artists on the period of national romanticism; Juhani Aho, Eero Järnefelt and Jean Sibelius (Muhonen 1997). They wrote, painted and composed Koli landscape on the map of main Finnish tourism sites. In the beginning Koli had almost no services for visitors. Only some 2-3 farms rented rooms for visitors. During first period of 25 years, Koli could provide as accommodation for visitors only one log hut with 12-25 beds.

2. KOLI – A STRONG SPIRIT IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

The spirit of Koli rises up from the image of remoteness. The image of the region (Kotler et al. 1996, 1998) is depending on the point of view; for the Finns the Koli area is lying in the middle of vast forest wilderness area, behind of lakes and everything, where people easily lose their sense of space and time. For the people coming more far like from the South or West Europe, Koli lies behind the seas and forest wilderness. The Koli-spirit has over and above a special supernatural character capable to produce extraordinary mental experiences.

The analogous image has been used many times in literature. Already Homer (Chapman 1857, Homeros 1990) told 2500 years ago a story about Odysseys, when this famous hero travelled to extreme far north over the large ocean to the low shore of Pluto's kingdom, the land of the dead ones, where grows consecrated wood of tall firs and sallows that their fruits soon loose; to the lake where waters were running into two directions, under a white rock mountain, where there was a sacred hole for sacred rituals; to give the offer for the underground people. According to this story the brave Ulysses finds the site and meets here the underground people, especially the honoured Tiresias, the reverend Theban wise, who gives him advice how to get back home to the isles of Ithaca.

The same image of extreme far north and arctic ice was given by Kurt Vonnegut (1993), who visited Koli Hills in 1977. Afterwards he told a story about the special place, meaning Koli Hills, where he had been happy and felt that there must be somebody out there who is interested of his happiness.

The area, which we today call as Koli National Park has in reality strong connections to the ancient stories. Koli lies in the far north-east on the boarder of boreal and semi-boreal forest zones. The tops of the dominantly fir-covered hills already represent the boreal taiga-forest qualities. The consistent taiga-forest can be seen in the north east horizon from the scenic points on top of the hill. Koli has the historical heritage of sacred offers for the underground people; the sacred holes in the rock lies on top of the hill and also on the lakeside. The Lake Pielinen beneath the Koli hills has flown in last 11 000 years to 2-3 directions because of the terrestrial uplift after the glacier period (Hyvärinen 1966), and the quartzite bedrock of Koli hills is snow white like the white marble of Carrara or the Cliffs of Dover.

3. WHAT ARE THE MOTIVES OF NATURE TOURISTS TO COME TO KOLI?

Koli resort has been an important source for recreation and tourism research already for a long period (Sievänen 1993, 1998). What are the main attractions for nature tourists to come to Koli? According to the preliminary results of ongoing visitor study the tourists are absolutely not coming to Koli for finding active night life or to find high standard program services. Also not due to the other visitors or the social activities. They come because they want to see the beautiful landscapes and the wilderness is understood to be so near (Table 1). One of four is coming only for the silence and peace.

Nature tourists are seeking for positive and refreshing mental experiences on Koli (Table 1). These experiences are gathered mostly visually through admiring the beautiful scenes of the site. They want to eat well and see the interesting places around the Koli area. Downhill-skiing and also cross country –skiing is also important motive for Koli visits. Visitors do not so much today see Koli as a destination for hiking trips or long-distance skiing-wanderings although a small group of visitors are devoted back-packers.

Table 1. The motives of visitors to come to Koli on summer season 1997?

	% (n=852)
Beautiful landscape	64 %
Wilderness is there very near	48 %
Earlier experiences	30 %
By the road	28 %
Silence and peace	27 %
Near enough	25 %
Never been here before	23 %
New National Park	15 %
Local history and cultural heritage	9 %
Option for romance on holidaytime	9%
Diversity of services	8 %
Activities for night and evening entertainment	3 %
Good program services	3 %
A lot of other tourists	2 %

The first mental model or image about Koli is most often the scenic beauty of the Koli landscape (Table 2). Some visitors think also such phenomenon like conflicts or peace in connection of Koli. Conflicts have been reality and public problem in the early period on Koli National Park, especially and actively distributed by the mass media. Peace is a private mental experience which some visitors seek on Koli and maybe some also find it there.

Table 2. The first image of visitors, when they here the word Koli (on winter season 1997-98).

	% (n=327)
Koli-landscape	49
Hills	17
Downhill-skiing	10
Nature	8
National Park	5
Snow	3
Ukko-Koli summit	3
Rough and wild	5
Conflicts	2
Peace	1

Nature tourists are seeking for positive and refreshing mental experiences at Koli. When visiting the site these experiences are gathered mostly visually through admiring the beautiful scenes of the site (Table 3). The visitors want also to eat well and see the interesting places around the Koli area. Exercise activities like downhill-skiing and cross country –skiing are also important motives for

Koli visits. Visitors do not so much consider Koli as a destination for hiking trips or long-distance skiing-wanderings although a small group of visitors are devoted back-backers.

Table 3. What do the visitors do on Koli on summer season 1997 and winter season 1997-98?

	Summer % (n=852)	Winter % (n=346)
Admiring the landscape	92	80
Eating and dancing in the restaurant	37	51
Sightseeing around Koli district	34	12
Skiing and hiking near by the resort	23	57
Downhill-skiing	-	54
Swimming in the pool of hotel	19	39
Wandering and backpacking in the forest	15	4

The most favourite place for the visitors in Koli National Park is the summit of Ukko-Koli Hill, which is the main pole of all landscape admiration activities in the area (Table 4). This scenic point is the highest summit in the South-Finland, rising 347 meters above the sea and 253 meters above the lake Pielinen. The Paha-Koli Summit is a dramatic steep slope point, which has heritage values because of the stories about ancient law-cases, where the suspected criminals were punished by throwing them down from the top to the stony slope. If they survived they were innocent and free, but if not, they were guilty and deserved the verdict.

Table 4. What is the Most-Favourite-Place in Koli National Park on summer season 1997?

	% (n=852)
Ukko-Koli summit	64
Paha-Koli summit	5
Forest Trails	4

4. THE HERITAGE OF KOLI – IS IT A SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE FOR TOURISM?

The cultural heritage of Koli includes the mythical background of the region; Koli community is one of the last relics of ancient slash-and-burn agriculture with living talent to use fire for ecological renewing on scientific basis. The modern Koli includes also the high-cultural profile of arts and symbols of Finnish nationalism like Finnish flag waving on top of the pole in the yard of Heritage Centre Ukko in National Landscape. The natural heritage of Koli includes the rare type of quartzite stone bedrock, which is a platform for special ecotypes including to the Natura 2000 program. Vulnerable natural forest species are living in about 150 hectares area inside the park. Also National Park is a site for conserving the rare heritage-landscape meadows, which produce relatively high biodiversity after manmade management.

In the development process of nature tourism services in Koli the managers have to make choices. Tourism industry is eager to introduce to Koli all kinds of technical equipment and entertainment, which are popular in many larger tourism resorts in urban areas or in so-called downhill-skiing centres, but which easily violate the mental experiences of nature tourists. The sustainable local social development meets the issue of conserving the local cultural heritage. When people get better salaries in tourism business, they leave their traditional works and tasks. In a small scale resort like Koli, this means a rapid change in economical and social culture, which has reflections to the physical environment as rapid change in landscape and structures. Fields get desolated and start to grow bushes. Old wooden houses get ruined and new modern houses are build. Old fences and other structures of the agrarian culture get ruined and cattle and sheep disappear from the pastoral landscape.

The macro-scale scenic view remains almost constant, as seen on top of the Ukko-Koli hill, when we are looking to the east over the lakescape. The image of the east-side of the hills has always been more or less like the wilderness of Koli. The micro- and meso-scale landscape on rural surroundings on the west side of the hills however is losing little by little the basic heritage values. If we want to maintain the basic structure of slash-and-burn oriented forest landscape, our challenge in the future is to find methods to emulate the landscape dynamics through forestry or activate the forest owners to a new revival of slash-and-burn treatment. This could be approached by developing tourism products on this process and finding proper EU-funds to support the possible economic losses in forestry and agriculture because of the conservation of the heritage.

5. KOLI NATIONAL PARK – A MULTIDISCIPLINE LABORATORY FOR NATURE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

In Finland we today have a highly developed network of natural areas, a part of them clearly designated to nature oriented tourism. Official organisation for conservation management uses public resources more than 17 mil Ecu per year and gives work annually for more than 350 persons. The investments into the basic infrastructure are important first steps, when developing especially national parks for sustainable recreational use. Koli National Park has received almost 17 milj. Ecu during last 10 years for the special projects like a new water purification system, new Heritage Centre, restoration of hotel, new arrangements for car parking, rebuilding of the harbour, restoration of heritage landscapes and buildings, development of trails and information system, development of co-operation with the local community etc.

Sustainable nature tourism development needs in the case of Koli a wide range of different skills. The development includes the rising of awareness, among public and planners, about economical, ecological and socio-cultural impact of the planned measures. Therefore there is an urgent need to increase multidisciplinary scientific approaches to collect and refine all that information, which is possible to reach by using our protected areas and especially National Parks as sensitive laboratories.

Koli National Park is one of the laboratories for developing sustainable natural and cultural tourism. Finnish Forest Research Institute and Finnish Forest and Park Service have their own scientific management development programs by means of which these organisations try to support the local park management. These organisations are also open for partners and visiting specialists and also for international co-operation in these scientific projects.

References

- Chapman, G. trans. 1857. The Odysseys of Homer, vol. 1 (X). J.R. Smith, London.
- Homeros. 1990. Odysseia - X laulu. Suomentanut Otto Manninen. WSOY Juva. 5 painos. 417 s.
- Vonnegut, K. 1993. Kuolemaa tylympiä kohtaloita. Tammi, Hämeenlinna. 231 s.
- Hirn, S. & Markkanen, E. 1987. Tuhansien järvien maa: Suomen matkailun historia. Matkailun edistämiskeskus ja Suomen matkailuliitto, Helsinki. 376 s.
- Hyvärinen, H. 1966. Studies on the late-Quaternary history of Pielis-Karelia, eastern Finland. *Societas Scientiarum Fennica. Commentationes Biologicae* 29(4): 1-72.
- Kotler, P., Armstrong, G., Saunders, J.A. and Wong, V., 1996. Principles of Marketing: A European Edition, Prentice-Hall, Hemel Hempstead. 956 p.
- Bowen and Makens. 1998. Marketing for Hospitality and Tourism. Prentice Hall, UK.
- Muhonen, T. 1997. From Karelianism to national Park – 100 years of tourism and nature conservation at Koli. In: Sohlberg, B. & Miina, S. 1997. Conflict management and public participation in land management. European Forest Institute, Joensuu. *EFI Proceedings* 14: 249-256.
- Salo, K. 1997. Nature of Koli National Park. In: Sohlberg, B. & Miina, S. 1997. Conflict management and public participation in land management. European Forest Institute, Joensuu. *EFI Proceedings* 14: 257-263.
- Sievänen, T. 1993. Visitors in Koli National Park. The Finnish Forest Research Institute. *Research Papers* 465. 56 p. Summary in English.
- 1998. Kansallispuisto virkistystyksen lähteenä. Julkaisussa: Muhonen, T. & Sulonen, S. 1998. Kansallispuistojen juhluvuoden seminaari Kolilla 28.-29.10.1996. *Metsäntutkimuslaitoksen tiedonantoja* 718: 12-21.