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Challenging, spectacular and less appealing versus flat, boring and highly attractive? A comparative analysis of the images of the two winter sport events Birkebeinerrennet and Vasaloppet

Utfordrende, spektakulært og mindre tiltalende, kontra flatt, kjedelig og attraktivt? En komparativ analyse av imagene til vintersportsarrangementene Birkebeinerrennet og Vasaloppet

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Nature-based Tourism

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Preface

This master thesis was written for the Faculty of Environmental Sciences and Natural Resource Management (MINA) at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU), during spring 2018 and symbolizes the end of my master degree in nature-based tourism.

First, I would like to thank my supervisor Øystein Aas. I am very grateful for his involvement and constructive advices. He gave me the opportunity to have my own office at Norsk institutt for naturforskning (NINA), which also gave me the possibility to get to know other people in the industry. Thanks to everyone at NINA Lillehammer for being welcoming and including. Hope to see you all again.

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I would also thank my cousin Hannah and my uncle Anthony for helping me out with the translation of the citations, and Clayton for proofreading in the final stage. I am very grateful.

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This thesis was written in article format, with a goal of future publication in a scientific journal.

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.....
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Abstract

The number of participants in Birkebeinerrennet has decreased during the last years. An understanding of how sport tourists perceives an event's image can help destinations make a image that attracts more desirable visitors and participants. Research on sport event image is limited, and more research is needed. This was also asked for by Birken AS, the organiser of the event. Vasaloppet in Sweden is a similar race to Birkebeinerrennet. Both races are endurance oriented, engaging rather broad segments of the general public, and having long-lasting traditions. Further, they gather huge numbers of spectators and participants from different countries. The races differ from previous researched events in terms of season (winter), latitude (north) and the level of skills and equipment needed (cross country skiing compared to running/jogging). The aim of this article is to gain a wider understanding of how participants perceive Birkebeinerrennet's and Vasaloppet's image and to advise on how Birken AS can actively use this insight to modify their product and marketing strategies to improve a favourable and more widely attractive image, and to increase the number of participants. Five research questions were deducted: to what extent do previously identified image domains of sport events fit the events Birkebeinerrennet and Vasaloppet?; what dimensions characterize Birkebeinerrennet's image?; what dimensions characterize Vasaloppet's image?; can any other relevant dimensions be identified based on these events, compared to other long distance endurance sport events?; and what are the similarities and differences between the image of Birkebeinerrennet and Vasaloppet?

The research is based on 52 qualitative interviews with participants in mainly Birkebeinerrennet and Vasaloppet, conducted through semi-structured interviews. How the participants perceived the event's images were investigated, and ten dimensions of the images were revealed and described further: 'historical,' 'emotional,' 'environmental,' 'social,' 'physical,' 'organizational,' 'competitive,' 'equipment,' 'cultural' and 'destination.' 'Equipment' and 'destination' were new dimensions; the other eight fit well to previously identified dimensions in relation to, among others, different marathon race events. Several similarities and differences were found. The main differences were found in relation to the three dimensions 'environmental,' 'equipment' and 'destination,' in addition to nuances between the races on the remaining dimensions.

KEY WORDS: Sport event image, winter sport tourism, dimensions, equipment, destination, Birkebeinerrennet, Vasaloppet

Sammendrag

Antall deltakere på Birkebeinerrennet har sunket i løpet av de siste årene. En forståelse for hvordan idrettsturister forstår et arrangements image, kan bidra å skape et image som tiltrekker seg flere besøkende og deltakere. Det er forsket lite på ”idrettsarrangementsimage”, og mer forskning er derfor nødvendig. Dette var også ønsket av Birken AS. Vasaloppet i Sverige er et lignende renn som Birkebeinerrennet. Begge rennene krever utholdenhet, engasjerer et bredt segment og har en lang tradisjon. De samler mye publikum og deltakere fra ulike land. Begge renn skiller seg fra tidligere undersøkte idrettsarrangementer da de arrangeres vinterstid nord i Europa og at utstyr er nødvendig (langrenn sammenlignet med løping/jogging). Formålet med denne artikkelen er å få en bredere forståelse for hvordan deltakere opplever Birkebeinerrennets og Vasaloppets image og gi råd til Birken AS om hvordan de kan bruke denne informasjonen til å tilpasse sine produkter og markedsføringsstrategier med mål om å endre sitt image og på den måten øke antall deltakere. Det ble utviklet fem forskningsspørsmål: 1) Til hvilken grad passer tidligere identifiserte dimensjoner av et idrettsarrangementsimage til Birkebeinerrennet og Vasaloppet? 2) Hvilke dimensjoner karakteriserer Birkebeinerrennets image? 3) Hvilke dimensjoner karakteriserer Vasaloppets image? 4) Kan det identifiseres andre relevante dimensjoner ved disse arrangementene sammenlignet med de som er identifisert i tidligere, lignende sportsarrangement? 5) Hva er likhetene og forskjellene mellom imaget til Birkebeinerrennet og Vasaloppet?

Studien er basert på 52 kvalitative intervjuer med deltakere på Birkebeinerrennet og Vasaloppet, innsamlet via semistrukturerte intervjuer. Hvordan deltakerne oppfatter arrangementenes image er undersøkt, og ti dimensjoner som beskriver imaget ble funnet: historisk, emosjonell, miljømessig, sosial, fysisk, organisatorisk, konkurranse, utstyr, kultur og destinasjon. ”Utstyr” og ”destinasjon” var nye funn i denne sammenhengen, mens de øvrige åtte tidligere har blitt identifisert i studier av blant annet flere maratonløp. Flere likheter og forskjeller ble funnet, der hovedforskjellene dreide seg om dimensjonene ”miljømessig”, ”utstyr” og ”destinasjon”, i tillegg til flere nyanser mellom rennene på de andre dimensjonene.

NØKKELOD: Idrettsarrangementsimage, vintersportsturisme, dimensjoner, utstyr, destinasjon, Birkebeinerrennet, Vasaloppet

1.0 Introduction

People have been travelling to engage in or watch sports since the ancient Olympic Games, but it has only been during the last decades travel destinations have recognized the potential of sport tourism (Hudson & Hudson, 2015). Sport tourism is considered one of the fastest growing sectors in the tourism industry, and research specifically addressing sport tourism is growing (Hinch & Higham, 2011). As a result, several authors have defined sport tourism. In this article the following definition of *winter* sport tourism will be used: “sport tourism is to travel away from home to participate in, or observe winter sports on the snow, or to visit attractions associated with snow-based winter sports” (Hudson & Hudson, 2015, pg. 6). Further, winter sport tourists are commonly divided into three categories: tourists going on holiday principally to participate in winter sports; tourists going on holiday and participating in winter sports as a secondary activity; or tourists visiting winter sports attractions or attending winter sports events as spectators (Hudson & Hudson, 2015).

Tourists participating in winter sports events were not taken in consideration by Hudson and Hudson (2015). Worldwide, such sports events have become an important factor to promote and develop sport tourism (Ritchie & Adair, 2004). Events are keystones for attracting tourism because they can improve a places’ image and create positive media coverage. ‘Event’ has, in relation to sport, often been used to describe a certain competition. The main assumption for something to be an event is that it is temporary, and ‘sport events’ are “fixed in time and space by its rules and venue” (Getz, 2005, pg. 15). Different approaches have been used to look at different formats of sport events. One of these are focusing on if the event is indoor or outdoor; land, water or air-based; regular scheduled, periodic or one-time only; public with spectators or private; professional, amateur or combined; and fixed or alternating locations (Getz, 2005).

The approach presented above describes a number of possible events. Norway host several winter sport events that create the basis for tourism and related business activities. The spectre stretches widely, both in terms of kinds of sports (e.g. cross-country, alpine skiing, free skiing), the size of the event (e.g. world championship, Olympic Games or smaller local ski races) and what kinds of athletes participate (e.g. elite, non-elite or a combination). Several cities and communities in Norway are working with the aim to attract and develop sport and cultural events. Such events have potential to stimulate local and regional development and are considered to; positively affect the host destination’s image and

reputation; provide tourists' with opportunities to get to know the local culture and experience a place and local community; and engage locals working as voluntaries (Meld.St.19, 2016-2017).

Event sport tourism includes elite events, non-elite events and combinations of these. Some international elite events are known for gathering huge amounts of spectators (e.g. the Olympic Games, World championship in football, track and field), while non-elite events normally have fewer spectators, besides family and friends (Hudson & Hudson, 2015). The last category, the combination, often gathers a wide range of professional athletes, non-elite competitors and spectators at the same event. Internationally, typical examples of such combined events are city marathons such as the London and New York Marathons (Hinch & Higham, 2011). Birkebeinerrennet and Vasaloppet are well-established Scandinavian examples of long-distance cross-country ski races that gather both large numbers of spectators and different kinds of participants, where elite and non-elite athletes participate in parallel. Both races are a part of Visma Ski Classics, the long distance ski championship (Visma Ski Classics, s.a.). According to the previous definition of 'sport events' (Getz, 2005), Birkebeinerrennet and Vasaloppet are outdoor, land (snow) based, annual, regular, scheduled events, combined for amateurs and elite, and occur at fixed locations.

While Birkebeinerrennet had its 'golden years' during 2010 – 2013, the number of participants has decreased during the last years (appendix 4). The race has not been fully attended since 2015 (Mangelrød, 2017), a stark contrast to 2012, when the sign-up was filled in only 97 seconds (Halvorsen, 2011). Interestingly, Vasaloppet, a similar event in Sweden, continues to be sold out only seconds after tickets become available (Folvik, 2017). Athletes, spectators, organizers and media have launched several hypotheses for the reduced interest in Birkebeinerrennet. Less snow, changed trends, bad weather and expensive tickets are some hypothesis for understanding the decreasing participation. Birken AS has completed several formal market surveys during the last years aiming to earn better insight into the decrease (Birken AS, 2017b). These officially available surveys make no mention of event image. In addition, I gained exclusive access to another survey, which pointed out the need for a changed, adjusted or improved reputation as one main finding (Id.mngmnt, 2014).

In a world with dynamic trends, is it crucial for event and experience providers to understand how their own image is seen from the customer perspective (Kvåle & Wæraas, 2016). Customer's opinion about the event's images varies both between customers as well as over time. Thus, some researchers argue that organizations on regular basis should conduct studies of customer perceptions of the organizations' image dimensions (Barich & Kotler,

1991). Such collections may help organizations discover attributes hurting the image, identify dimensions both where the organization should improve compared to its competitors and where they already are better than the competitors are. In addition, it may be instructive and useful to understand whether any corrective actions, such as increased marketing or publicity spending, are effective or not.

The aim of this article is to gain a wider understanding of how participants perceive Birkebeinerrennet's and Vasaloppet's image, to what extent the images are similar and different, and to advise on how Birken AS can actively use this insight to modify their product and marketing strategies to improve a favourable and more widely attractive image, and to increase the number of participants.

2.0 Theoretical framework, objective and research questions

2.1 Sport tourism and image

According to the definition of 'sport tourism' sports are considered a tourist attraction. An understanding of how sport tourists perceives an event's image can help destinations make a image that attracts more desirable visitors and participants (Chalip, 2001, cited in Hallmann et al., 2010). There are several definitions of 'image' and the definitions varies depending on what perspective they are studied in. A widely used definition of image in marketing literature is:

An image is the set of meanings that an object is associated with, and as people use to describe, remember and refer to it. It is thus the sum of the interaction between a person's ideas, feelings and impressions associated with an object (Brønn & Ihlen, 2009, pg. 67).

According to this definition, an image can change from person to person. Also, 'image' is something stakeholders have of an organization, not something the organization makes by itself, even if they want to or try through marketing.

2.2 Sport event image

'Sport event image' lacks a good definition, and there is limited research on participant's sport event images, even though participants most likely have intensive and comprehensive experiences from before, during and after an event (Gwinner, 1997; Hallmann et al., 2010; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Kaplanidou, 2010; Papadimitriou et al., 2016). Based on this, several approaches have tried to give 'sport event image' a meaningful definition. Researchers suggest that the definition of 'destination image' can define 'sport event image' (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Hallmann et al., 2010; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Kaplanidou, 2010). Several authors (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Hallmann et al., 2010; Kaplanidou, 2010) define 'destination image' using a combination of functional and physiological aspects that can be considered both common and unique. They developed the definition by identifying four common components between functional and physiological: cognitive (beliefs), affective (feelings), conative (behavioural) and more general or global/holistic components. According to these aspects and components, 'destination image'

can be composed of, for instance, common functional characteristics such as prize levels, types of accommodation and infrastructure, but also of psychological characteristics such as unique features, events or atmospheres.

An similar approach to understanding and dissecting ‘destination image’ is to divide the image into three levels; ‘organic,’ ‘induced’ and ‘complex’ (Fakaye & Crompton, 1991; Lopes, 2011). ‘Organic’ is the image a person has of a destination without actively searching for information about it. Images on this level occur through media, word-of-mouth and other informal sources. As the person becomes influenced by more planned and direct communication, the ‘organic’ image changes to an ‘induced’ one (Lopes, 2011). This appears, for instance, while actively searching information about a specific ski race on the Internet or in special magazines. ‘Complex’ images develop if the person actually chooses to visit the destination or event, and is based on her or his own experiences (Fakaye & Crompton, 1991).

Gwinner (1997) was one of the first to define and study ‘event image.’ According to his definition, ‘event image’ is a function of three factors that affect people’s perceptions of an event: event type (e.g. sport, music or art), event characteristics (e.g. event size, history or venue) and individual factors (number of meanings, strength of meanings and past history with the event). This definition has been criticized because it was not customized to sport events that includes competition, socialization and certain knowledge and skills (Hallmann et al., 2010). The event’s size, type of tourists visiting the event (e.g. active or passive) and kind of destination (e.g. urban or rural) are important in order to assess how participants perceive the image: if the tourist actively participates in the event, or if he or she is watching the race influences how he or she perceives the event. In addition, image can vary depending on whether the consumer participated, was a spectator or experienced it through electronic media (Hallmann et al., 2010).

Recent research has tried to address some of the critique mentioned above (Hallmann et al., 2010; Kaplanidou, 2010; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2010; Papadimitriou et al., 2016). Kaplanidou and Vogt (2010) examined the meaning attached to a small-scale bicycle race in the United States with approximately 300 participants. The study showed that participants’ associated image attributes to ‘organizational,’ ‘environmental,’ ‘physical,’ ‘social’ and ‘emotional’ dimensions of sport events. The relevance and validity of these dimensions were later tested on a larger event. Athletes participating in the Athens Classic Marathon were asked to indicate the three first words that came in mind when they thought of the race. The results showed that the five same overarching themes emerged there, in addition to a new dimension: ‘historical’ (Kaplanidou, 2010). Further, Hallmann et al. (2010) studied four

German marathons which also supported previous identified dimensions. These marathons had from 100 to 20 000 participants. Active sport tourists (participants) were concluded for associate ‘emotional,’ ‘physical’ and ‘organizational’ dimensions to the sport event image, while passive sport tourists (spectators) associate ‘social’ and ‘historical’ dimensions. Papadimitriou et al. (2016) did a similar study on a much greater event, the Universiade – the world’s second greatest multi-sport event after the Olympic Games, and found that ‘sport event image’ has five core dimensions: ‘competitive,’ ‘emotional,’ ‘social,’ ‘cultural’ and ‘organizational.’

Words people use to define sport events can form image dimensions, and these dimensions can have an influence on the participants intention to revisit the event (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007). Kaplanidou (2010) categorized the words into six dimensions, where the theme ‘historical’ includes words associated with the history of the event; the ‘emotional’ theme consists of words as excitement, fulfilment and joy; the ‘organizational’ theme with words about organizational and management aspects; the ‘physical’ theme includes words associated with health, exercise and training. The ‘environmental’ theme encompasses words connected to the scenery, sights and the topography, and finally; the ‘social’ theme includes words associated with interaction with people, for instance other athletes, local residents or fans. ‘Competitive’ includes words as sport, performance, winner and medals, and ‘cultural’ represents words as diversity, culture and multi-nationality (Papadimitriou et al., 2016).

Kaplanidou (2010, pg. 383) used the identified dimensions to define ‘sport event image.’ She emphasized ‘historical’ as an own dimension, but she omitted it in the definition without explaining why. The definition of ‘sport event image’ was: “Sport event image involves cognitive and affective perceptions related to emotional, organizational, environmental, physical, and social aspects that are permeated by common and unique attributes”.

In summary, literature on ‘sport event image’ is limited (Gwinner, 1997; Hallmann et al., 2010; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Kaplanidou, 2010; Papadimitriou et al., 2016), and ‘sport event image’ can be distinguished in several dimensions describing certain aspects. Previous identified dimensions are ‘organizational,’ ‘environmental,’ ‘physical,’ ‘social’ and ‘emotional’ (Hallmann et al., 2010; Kaplanidou, 2010; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2010), ‘historical’ (Kaplanidou, 2010), ‘competitive’ and ‘cultural’ (Papadimitriou et al., 2016). All of these eight dimensions will be considered to obtain this research’s aim, which will be presented below.

2.3 Objective and research questions

The aim of this article is to gain a wider understanding of how participants perceive Birkebeinerrennet's and Vasaloppet's images, and to what extent the images are similar and different. Taking a point of departure in the earlier identified dimensions of sport event images, the research questions were as follows:

- To what extent does previously identified image domains of sport events fit the events Birkebeinerrennet and Vasaloppet?
- What dimensions characterize Birkebeinerrennet's image?
- What dimensions characterize Vasaloppet's image?
- Can any other relevant dimensions be identified based on these events, compared to those identified in other long distance endurance sport events?
- What are the similarities and differences between the image of Birkebeinerrennet and Vasaloppet?

Based on the findings, I end with discussing how Birken AS can customize their product and marketing to obtain more participants, based on the insight gained from the image study.

3.0 Cases

3.1 Birkebeinerrennet

The Norwegian case, the ski race event Birkebeinerrennet (“Birken”) symbolizes a historic occurrence in year 1205. The prince of Norway, Haakon Haakonsøn, was two years old and needed to be brought to the safety of King Inge in Nidaros (Trondheim). An expedition went from Lillehammer and over the mountains to Rena. Unfortunately, bad weather conditions caused problems during their expedition. Despite this, and also because of the stamina and skiing skills of the soldiers, the prince was brought to safety and later became the king of Norway (Birken AS, 2017a).

The race was arranged for the first time in 1932 (Birken AS, 2018a) and is the main race in Birken Skifestival. The track stretches over 54 kilometres from Rena to Lillehammer, has a significant difference in altitude and passes two mountains (appendix 3). Classic technique is required. Several celebrities and elite cross-country skiers attend the race every year, in addition to top athletes competing in Visma Ski Classics race circuit. After being sold out in both 2013 and 2014 (17 000 participants), Birken AS has experienced decreasing interest over the last years with only 8650 participants in 2017, with foreigners participants constituting approximately 20 % (Birken AS, 2018b).

All must carry a backpack with a predetermined content weighing at least 3.5 kilograms when passing the finishing line. While directly symbolizing Håkon Haakonsøn, the backpack also contributes to safety during the race. Because of the demanding and challenging track and because of risk of bad weather conditions, warm and windproof clothes and provisions are the obligatory content (Birken AS, 2016a). The participants are divided into different groups with different starting times, based on their expected time for completing the race, but it is possible to improve the starting position by using seeding (Birken AS, 2018d). You earn the Birkebeiner Medal if you finishing the race within the time limit (based on the average time of the five fastest in the current class, plus 25 %). The prize for signing up was 1335 NOK in 2018 (Birken AS, 2018c).

3.2 Vasaloppet

The Swedish case event, Vasaloppet (“Vasan”), symbolizes Gustav Eriksson’s escape from the Danish king’s soldiers in year 1521. Sweden was in union with Denmark, and Gustav Eriksson from Sweden was prisoned in Denmark. He managed to escape, and during his escape, he stopped in Mora. The inhabitants in Mora were known for being tough, but they

did not want to agitate against the Danish king. Therefore, Gustav continued his fleeing on skis towards Norway. Meanwhile, inhabitants in Mora changed their mind. Gustav Eriksson received the message from two skiers in Sälen: The inhabitants in Mora wanted Gustav Eriksson to lead the insurrection against the Danish king. Gustav Eriksson later became king of Sweden under the name 'Gustav Vasa.' As such, Sälen is also the starting point for Sweden's modern national history (Vasaloppet, s.a.-d).

The race is the worlds' oldest, biggest and longest ski race (Vasaloppet, s.a.-b). It was arranged for the first time in 1922 and is the main race in Vasaloppet's Vinterveckan. It stretches over 90 kilometres from Sälen to Mora (appendix 3) and has classic technique. Celebrities and athletes from national ski teams, in addition to athletes from Visma Ski Classics, participate together with thousands of amateur skiers. A maximum of 15 800 people representing approximately 49 different nations participate every year in Vasaloppet, with foreigners participants constituting 23 % (Vasaloppet, 2018). The tickets are always sold out only seconds after they becoming available, and the prize for signing up was 1740 SEK (1615 NOK) in 2018 (Vasaloppet, s.a.-a).

The race has a mass start (all start at the same time), but it is possible to improve the starting position by using seeding (Vasaloppet, s.a.-e). There are no equipment requirements such as backpack or clothing. If you complete the race at the winning time plus 50 % in your class, you will receive a medal as a symbol on your achievement (Vasaloppet, s.a.-c).

4.0 Research design

4.1 Data collection and sample selection

Because of lack of former image studies of these or similar events, a qualitative, semi-structured methodology was chosen to obtain the aim of the research. Qualitative methods using in-depth interviews are supposed to be suitable to measure holistic components of image. Interviews allows informants to describe key aspects without being affected by predefined attributes, and such methodologies have potential to capture unique characteristics and atmospheres as well (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Tjora, 2011).

Data were gathered by personal interviews in the trade fair area in Håkons Hall, Lillehammer, on March 18th and 19th, and Vasaloppsmässan (Vasaloppet Trade Fair) in Mora, on March 3rd and 4th. I was given allowance from both organisers to conduct interviews at the trade fairs. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in full. During the transcription, Swedish and Danish interviews were translated to Norwegian.

The interview guide (Appendix 1) consisted of open-ended and semi-structured questions. The first questions were about demographic characteristics and informants' former experiences with ski races, before more personal questions were asked. This created a relaxed atmosphere, which hopefully contributed to a more free and informal talk (Tjora, 2011). Questions about both races were asked in all interviews.

The goal of the sampling plan was not to gain a representative sample, but rather get an in-depth understanding of how a diverse group of participants perceived the races' images. To ensure variation, informants were as far as possible randomly selected, limited by these criteria: participants who visited the fairs and participants understanding Norwegian. The information on the posters was written in Norwegian and the interviews were also mainly conducted in Norwegian. With these limitations taken into consideration, an effort was made to obtain a balance in gender, age, nationality and what race the informants were participating in. This resulted in a total sample on 52 informants. All informants were rewarded with a pair of sunglasses from Birken AS, and ten informants won a gift voucher from Birken AS. Forty-five asked persons actively rejected participating in the survey, mainly because they were in a hurry.

Participants in other races in Birken Skifestival (Stafettbirken and Fredagsbirken) and Vasaloppets Vintervecka (Nattvasan, Stafettvasan and Öppet Spår) were included to get a

wider perspective on the images, in addition to complement the research while it was hard to find enough participants from the main races who were willing to do the interviews.

The interviews lasted from two to twenty-two minutes, averaging eleven minutes. Longer in-depth interviews were originally planned, but it turned out to be difficult because informants were unwilling to spend more time providing a sufficiently long in-depth interview. The interviews also varied in their level of detail, but all main topics and themes from the interview guide were covered. Some customizations were needed because of differences in knowledge and experiences from the two ski races. Thus, the empirical data consists of a mix of shorter and longer interviews. The data material from both kinds of interviews turned out to be important and meaningful for the analysis. Obviously, the longest interviews contained the most detailed information, but the shorter ones also provide interesting findings, mostly because they provided important supporting details for the findings in the longer interviews and reflected on the images that most easily came to mind.

4.2 Data analysis

The transcriptions were read several times. First, they were read in full to gain full overview of the material. The transcriptions were printed out and sorted according to which race they were conducted on and what race(s) the informant had participated in. Further, colours were used to create codes and categories (Tjora, 2011). Especially interesting quotes were marked, and similarities to previous research on sport event image were identified. The analysis were further based on the dimensions according to the definition of ‘sport event image’ (Kaplanidou, 2010), supplemented of three additional dimensions describing ‘sport event image’ (Hallmann et al., 2010; Kaplanidou, 2010; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2010; Papadimitriou et al., 2016). Beyond earlier identified dimensions, new dimensions were also looked for.

It was challenging to make a distinction between opinions about the races images, and opinions about the races in general. The earlier presented framework discussing ‘organic’, ‘induced’ and ‘complex’ images (Fakaye & Crompton, 1991; Lopes, 2011) made it easier to accept that opinions about the races in general influence the images as ‘complex’ images and are thus included in the analysis.

For this thesis’s aim, some citations were translated carefully into English (appendix 2), with the goal of keeping the content and meaning unchanged. The citations are coded with the use of an individual code, for example ‘B1’. The letter represents what race the informant participated in, B for Birkebeinerrennet (or other races in Birken Skifestival) and V for

Vasaloppet (or other races in Vasaloppets Vintervecka). The number indicates in what order the informant was interviewed.

4.3 Reliability and validity

Differences in the interview situation occurred. Some informants were standing and someone was sitting, which may allowed the informants to be more talkative (Tjora, 2011) when the atmosphere was more relaxed. How questions were asked and which questions asked varied depending on the informant's experiences from the appropriate race. These circumstances might weaken the reliability.

The informants were informed before the interviews about the possibility to win gift cards, which might influence them to participate. Seen from an ethical standpoint, it can be assumed that I tried to 'buy' informants, which actually weaken the reliability.

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in full, which made it possible to ask follow-up questions, to focus on the informant's body language and to get literal citations. Literal citations strengthens the reliability (Tjora, 2011) when it makes it feasible to correctly report what informants said, simultaneous as it makes it possible for the reader to get closer to the evidence.

The interview guide was tested on previous participants in Birkebeinerrennet, which helped to determine which questions were most appropriate to ask. This, in addition to the obtained variation in age, gender and nationality strengthen the validity.

These circumstances taken in consideration, the reliability and validity are assessed as satisfactory.

5.0 Analysis

5.1 Sample characteristics

The average informants from both events were a man in his mid 40's living in Norway (Birkebeinerrennet) or Sweden (Vasaloppet). This correlates with previous studies (Id.mngmnt, 2014; Vasaloppet, 2018). The informants' general demographic profiles are summarized below in table 1.

Table 1

Overview of demographic variables of the informants in this study, participating in Birkebeinerrennet or Vasaloppet.

Participates in...		Gender		Nationality				Age						
		Female	Male	Norway	Sweden	Denmark	Germany	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89
Birken Skifestival	21	6	15	14	1	6	0	3	5	4	4	3	1	1
Vasaloppets Vintervecka	31	8	23	2	27	1	1	4	9	7	6	4	1	0
Total	52	52		52				52						

From the sample of 52 informants, 34 informants participated in Birkebeinerrennet or Vasaloppet, while 15 took part in other races in Birken Skifestival or Vasaloppets Vintervecka. A total of 13 informants participated in both events in 2017. What races the informants participated in are described in appendix 5.

The informants participated in the ski events because it was fun; a good workout goal; because it is challenging; or they appreciate skiing. Everyone had heard of Vasaloppet, but two informants in Mora had never heard of Birkebeinerrennet. The participants in Vasaloppet had different concerns that had to be addressed before signing up for Birkebeinerrennet: they just had to make a decision; they had to team up with friends; they needed more information; or they needed more or better training. Similarly, participants in Birkebeinerrennet were asked what would make them participate in Vasaloppet; Vasaloppet was judged to be too long; too boring; not technically challenging enough; or that they just had to gather some friends and do the sign up together. It was important for 52 % of the informants to get a good finishing time. Nearly 9 of 10 (84 %) had previously participated in the race where the interview took place.

5.2 Analysis of The Image Dimensions

Applying the definition of ‘sport event image’ (Kaplanidou, 2010), and the additional dimensions (Hallmann et al., 2010; Kaplanidou, 2010; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2010; Papadimitriou et al., 2016) presented above seemed immediately meaningful. Several of the existing dimensions and associated aspects were described during the interviews. In addition, new dimensions were also looked for. Here, the identified dimensions are presented according to an enumeration of how often and/or immediate they were mentioned. The order supports the findings both from the longer and shorter interviews. Some of the dimensions were presented and discussed in ways that made it obvious that dimensions are related or partly overlap. Typical to this was the discussion around the important image related to ‘challenge.’ Often, this related both to the ‘physical’ and ‘emotional’ dimensions. Most often it was laid out more as a feeling and is therefore placed under the dimension ‘emotional.’

5.2.1 Historical dimension

The informants knew a lot about the events’ historical basis, which was exemplified in different ways: reflections related to the backpack representing Håkon Håkonsson were mentioned several times in association to Birkebeinerrennet: “backpack!” (V8) and “The baby who was carried in it. That old story comes to mind” (V18). Such statements reveal how the obligatory backpack connects the current race regulations to the history. Equivalent themes were also described in relation to Vasaloppet: ”Gustav Vasa” (V11) and “I think of kings from Sweden and such things” (V12).

The informants had, for the most part, a correct idea about the historic background for the events, and both races were described as meaningful because the histories contributed to giving the races a character of being special: “The story about those fighting through the snow storm and the son of the King [Birkebeinerrennet]... The same with Vasaloppet, it also has the historical background, which makes them more special races than others” (B38).

Also, both races are historical also because they have been arranged for many years, which exemplify the other historical aspect: the modern, long-lasting history of the race itself. An example was: “It [Vasaloppet] is an old organization, it started in 1922, it has been a tradition for a hundred years, it is founded in folklore, it's become a brand name, as has Birken in Norway” (V28).

The historical dimension was described by Kaplanidou (2010) with words associated to the history of the events. In this study’s cases, the historical dimension of both cases had two distinct aspects: the historical images were based on certain historical events (see chapter

3), but also historical images related to the fact that the races themselves (in modern times) had been arranged for many years.

5.2.2 Emotional dimension

On questions about what emotional aspects that related to participating in Birkebeinerrennet, answers centred on meaningful personal outcomes such as improved self-confidence, lasting adventure, deep motivation and excitement. Consequently, Birkebeinerrennet contributes with several important psychological (emotional) benefits in addition to the physical ones that are more obvious when training for, and completing a sport endurance event. On questions about what personal meaning it gave to participate in Vasaloppet, the answers related to the same kind of outcomes: a feeling of mastery, happiness, strong self-esteem, having faith in oneself and deep satisfaction. Such emotional outcomes influence the participants' 'induced' or 'complex' images of the races. Consequently, such images can affect how former participants tell about the races to family and friends, which again might affect if they participate or not.

A socio-cultural attachment to, and responsibility for Vasaloppet, as something utterly Swedish was revealed: "It is a huge Swedish thing to participate in Vasaloppet" (V17). As such, Vasaloppet seemed to have a stronger Swedish identity compared to Birkebeinerrennet's lesser Norwegian identity mark.

On question about what the participants think of when they hear the event names, the answers were, for instance: "positive thoughts" (B42) and "tough guys" (B49) about Birkebeinerrennet, and "something positive and fun" (V21) and "exciting" (V9) about Vasaloppet. Such answers exemplified both 'organic,' 'induced' and 'complex' images (Fakaye & Crompton, 1991; Lopes, 2011). 'Complex' images originating when they actually have participated in the race were expressed like this by a woman: "A lasting endurance... Finding it within one's self to go the distance" (B49).

Some informants exemplified how the emotional images could be also highly mixed, for instance bringing in fearsome aspects. As one said she feared the downhill towards the end of Birkebeinerrennet: "I dread the steep hills. Not the uphill, they can be hard, but the downhill can be very scary" (V18). Also, changes in weather conditions contribute to make the races, especially Birkebeinerrennet, mentally challenging: "It is tough to ski from Rena to the finish line... And it is really tough if the weather is bad!" (B47).

Both races were perceived as hard and challenging, triggering what was expected to be strong emotional efforts and reactions. Birkebeinerrennet was described as the most challenging, hardest and toughest race among those who made direct comparisons. One of the

main reasons was the difference in altitude (appendix 3), which provides a basis for emotional reactions. ‘Challenging’ occurred in the intersection between ‘emotional’ and ‘physical’ dimensions and are thus related to both. When ‘challenge’ is a personal feeling, it is added as an aspect to the ‘emotional’ dimension. Such feelings exist in relation to several sport events with physical achievements. It is thus quite surprising that ‘challenge’ is excluded as an aspect in previous research. ‘Excitement,’ ‘fulfilment’ and ‘joy’ have previously been used to define the ‘emotional’ dimension (Kaplanidou, 2010), which means that the dimension primarily has related to emotions around the events images, not what emotional outcomes participants get from completing one or both races. These aspects are most likely closely connected, especially among earlier participants and thus reflect what Fakaye and Crompton (1991) and Lopes (2011) describes as ‘induced’ or ‘complex’ images. In addition to several similarities to Kaplanidou’s (2010) research, some new aspects were revealed in connection with the ‘emotional’ dimension: ‘connection’ and ‘challenge.’

5.2.3 Environmental dimension

For this thesis, the environmental dimension was divided into two aspects: aesthetical and topographical.

Aesthetical aspects

The spectacular scenery in Birkebeinerrennet was readily mentioned and the event was emphasized as a unique nature experience: “To ski in the mountain is something completely different than in Vasan... It is... More in the forest. You get more of a nature experience in Birken” (B38). A man described the scenery in Birkebeinerrennet as so nice, and the atmosphere as so relaxed, that he appreciated to stop and take pictures during the race. He also described the scenery in Vasaloppet with a more negative undertone when it stretches over several marshes, through forests, and lacks views. The following citation summarizes the different descriptions of the aesthetical image dimensions in both races well:

You have the environment, it’s totally different from Birkebeinerrennet where you are up in the mountains surrounded by beautiful scenery. I had a very nice day and the sun was shining, I stopped, took pictures, took videos; things I couldn't imagine doing in Vasaloppet, because there you are always watching the clock. It was not like that at Birkebeinerrennet. Birkebeinerrennet has beautiful views. You ski down a valley; you don’t get those same sceneries in Vasaloppet. I think that was a big difference (V29).

Topographical aspects

The topography in Birkebeinerrennet was described as very hilly, hard and challenging, especially because of the differences in altitude. Vasaloppet was described as flat, less technically challenging and as one, long slight downhill, even though the track in Vasaloppet has a greater difference in altitude (appendix 3): “It's an easier track [compared to Birkebeinerrennet]... It's almost flat!” (B43). Flatter tracks make it possible for more people to participate; several participants can master a cross-country-ski-race with smoother track. Nevertheless, a Swedish man had a more nuanced opinion about Vasaloppet: “It is a considerable distance. Everyone thinks it's nice and flat, but it's not. It's quite hilly. Not to Birken's degree, of course. I think Birken is even tougher” (V5). Similarly, a Norwegian man said his friends were considering doing Vasaloppet, but they perceived the track as so long (in distance) that they never had signed up. Thus, the length can be a barrier for participation since it becomes physically challenging in a different manner.

Previous research have described the ‘environmental’ dimension by ‘sceneries,’ ‘sights’ and ‘topography’ (Kaplanidou, 2010). It was naturally to divide the dimension into two subcategories since Kaplanidou's (2010) description was quite wide including both personal aspects as ‘sceneries,’ but also measureable aspects as ‘topography.’ ‘Aesthetic’ aspects include ‘sceneries’ and ‘sights.’ These aspects are dynamic and personal since it varies how persons perceive such aspects and also between years. ‘Topography’ and ‘terrain’ describes topographical aspects related to the setting and track.

5.2.4 Social dimension

The responses touched on several very different aspects of the ‘social’ dimension. Foremost, both races were known for having a unique atmosphere, which affects the participant's performance because it makes them extra motivated: ”challenging, but the atmosphere makes it perhaps easier” (B36). A Swedish man described the wonderful cheering during Birkebeinerrennet, and said someone had transported a stereo up to the mountain and established their very own discotheque, which contributed to the atmosphere. He claimed Birken AS has the potential to capitalize more on the positive atmosphere, and that the race is more of an adventure than a competition.

Loads of participants and spectators characterize Vasaloppet and contribute to make the event such a great social happening with a certain relation between participants and spectators: “It's a great experience, the spirit and the atmosphere, so many people. So cool!” (V5).

Nevertheless, many participants in Vasaloppet created crowding, which was mentioned as something negative in relation to the image because it creates chaos and destroys the tracks: “Its greatest strength is that it's so well organized. It is also starting to attract more people, it's become quite crowded in the tracks” (V30). The sequence-start in Birkebeinerrennet spreads the participants and helps avoid chaos, which several interviewees appreciated.

Another example of interaction was that several celebrities and athletes from the national teams participate in both races. The significance of their participation varied from having great significance to no significance at all: the fact that non-elite athletes completed was more meaningful. Others described celebrities and athletes from the national team as most important for the audience. However, one person claimed that celebrities make it more attractive to participate: “We think it's cool that the crown prince [of Denmark] is participating, and we have asked his trainer to ask him to clap when we cross the finish line. And in that way to make a more of a show of it, in addition to encouraging us. There are many things you can say about the event. When talking about the race it's easy to say "he [the crown prince] is also doing it" for example” (B40).

Vasaloppet was given credit for its contribution to engage Swedes in cross-country skiing: “It is a strength that it is gaining recognition... It has motivated people in Sweden to put on skis who otherwise wouldn't have” (V8). Vasaloppet's track was described as fitting everyone, who may contribute its more prominent Swedish image.

Several described participants in Birkebeinerrennet, repeating the media stereotype image (Sæle 2011), as sport freak men in midlife crisis with high income and top jobs. Nevertheless, this image was also challenged: “It has a reputation as a posh race, undeservedly in my opinion. I can understand why people think that, but I don't agree now that I have participated a couple of times” (B34).

An informant was surprised over the friendly relations between the participants on the bus to Rena. The participants were talking together instead of treating each other as competitors, which was described as a contrast to what he experienced in Vasaloppet. Such findings are quite interesting according to often-mentioned perceived hard competition in Birkebeinerrennet:

When I competed in Vasaloppet (...) even if we were doing it slowly, people were elbowing me... It wasn't like that in Birken. It was more like... People were talking to each other. I don't know, on the bus, in the morning. In Vasaloppet everyone was sitting

down quietly, on the bus to Rena people were more friendly. I was like “what’s going on!” I think it is... I don’t know... I had rather... I tried to gather some friends to join me in Birkebeinerrennet this year, but no one wanted to... (V29).

Kaplanidou (2010, pg. 383) explained the ‘social’ dimension as “interaction among other athletes, fans and local residents.” Such interactions were readily present among the images of Birkebeinerrennet and Vasaloppet. In sum, the ‘social’ dimension reflected varied and sometimes contrasting aspects covering positive as well as negative aspects. The findings were well-fitting with the ‘social’ dimension from Kaplanidou (2010): different aspects related to interaction with other athletes, locals and fans were revealed. More prominent than in Kaplanidou’s (2010) research, aspects related to ‘crowding’ and ‘atmosphere’ were found.

5.2.5 Physical dimension

Being well trained was perceived as important before participating in both events. Even though Vasaloppet is 26 kilometres longer than Birkebeinerrennet, it was perceived as necessary to be better trained in Birkebeinerrennet. An informant participating in both races experienced Birkebeinerrennet as most exhausting: “The first time I did Birken I thought it was really exhausting. I thought “54 kilometres, that's easy, I just did Vasaloppet two weeks ago, this is gonna be easy”, but it wasn't! (...) there were lots of hills, so it was quite a different race” (V9). The topography was a central component when the participants perceived Birkebeinerrennet as the most challenging race, both seen from the ‘emotional’ and ‘physical’ dimensions in terms of how fit and well trained you needed to be.

Previous research have mainly focused on marathons events (Hallmann et al., 2010; Kaplanidou, 2010), and issues regarding technique have not surfaced. Here, informants described clear requirements to the technique: “You have to be technically good to do Birken. That’s the biggest problem. There are too many hills; you have to do the diagonal stride. In Vasaloppet you can get by with double-poling, you can’t do that here” (B47).

The findings in Kaplanidou’s (2010) research described the ‘physical’ dimension with words associated with ‘health,’ ‘exercise’ and ‘training.’ Similar findings were also revealed here. In addition to the previous revealed aspects, ‘technique’ was a distinct aspect describing the ‘physical’ dimension of the image of both Birkebeinerrennet and Vasaloppet.

5.2.6 Organizational dimension

In general, both races were described as well structured and organized. Easy access to information before and during the races made it easy to participate and find your way around.

Anyhow, the organization in Vasaloppet was described as outstanding: “I have participated in several races in Europe, and Vasaloppet is on a very own level” (V15). Especially the logistics and how participants were treated after completing the race was described as unique in Vasaloppet. The staff took care of their equipment while the participants were competing but also their skis after the race, which made the whole participation less complicated. Several emphasized this, and the following citation summarizes it well:

When you pass the finish line a volunteer takes care of your skis, you are guided to a bus and when you get off the bus, a friendly volunteer gives you your bag and guides you to the showers and shows you the food area. From the moment you finish the race you are looked after (B47).

It is necessary to visit the trade fair in both races, either for picking up the bib number, to receive the medal or to eat. Distribution of bib numbers was described as taking too much space in Håkons Hall, which could be used as an improved social area offering good atmosphere, snack bars and entertainment. Benches were preferred rather than chairs since it contributes to socialization and presence. In Sweden, this was rated better than in Norway. The trade fair area in Vasaloppet was perceived as very well, also the food and drinks after the race. It was possible to sit down to eat and drink, which was perceived as a success factor: “In Norway it's all about the sporting event, which is good, but in Sweden there is more focus on the total package, like this area [the trade fair]” (V20). The trade fair area in Marcialonga, Italy, seemed even better:

Marcialonga, exactly the same. You sit inside a trade fair area like this one, but much smaller. Space for 6-7000 people, and there's free pasta and you can buy beer. Fantastic, you sit with lots of Italians and other people. You meet new people, it's exciting. So... I feel sorry for those who have done the Fredagsbirken and are sitting here now, I imagine it must be boring (B47).

Such areas contribute to socialisation and to make the experience even greater: “I think that it [the trade fair area] is better here than in Håkons Hall. In Håkons Hall there's not so much... I think there's more happenings here compared to Håkons Hall” (V29).

Similar areas are supposed to exist in previous researched events such as Athens Classic Marathon (Kaplanidou, 2010), and it was somehow surprising that such fair areas not have been discussed earlier.

The entry fee in Birkebeinerrennet was perceived as quite expensive (see chapter 3): “I think it is quite expensive. Compared to other races, it is quite expensive. Nothing is actually included. I think it is dear” (B34). The willingness to pay changed according to the feeling of what the participants got back. In addition, some informants had sympathy for the level on the fee; the money used on ski track grooming has to be earned somewhere:

It will be interesting to see what we get out of it, how the service-stations are, the food and drinks, how well it's arranged. When you are paying as much as this, these things are important, so I can't answer before it's over. Such things are decisive if you are paying much, so it's not possible to answer that before I have completed the race. But I think it's a reasonable price, but it is also... If I compare it to a marathon or to a longer race. It requires a lot to prepare the track and so forth, so I think the price is ok (B40).

A Swedish man alleged Vasaloppet makes itself look nicer on videos posted on social media than it is: "If you are watching the inspiration movie from Vasaloppet... It looks nicer than it really is" (V29). Such information influences the ‘organic’ image (Fakaye & Crompton, 1991; Lopes, 2011) while it is possible to perceive the race without actively searching information about the race, and can thus contribute to communicate an even ‘better’ image of Vasaloppet than it actually deserves.

As the ‘organizational’ dimension have been described by ‘organizational and management’ aspects (Kaplanidou, 2010), similar aspects were revealed also in the research of these races images, but it was also natural to add several aspects: ‘trade fairs,’ ‘logistic,’ ‘entry fee’ and ‘social media.’

5.2.7 Competitive dimension

A certain level of competition occurred in both races. Vasaloppet was described for having a lower grade of competition, which also affected the threshold for signing up: “Vasaloppet is maybe not so focused on the competition... There is not that much competition, and thus it's a lower threshold for signing up. I guess... Birken has become more... competitive...” (V2).

The medal was not mentioned in conjunction to Vasaloppet, while it was perceived as impressive to only finish Vasaloppet: “When I return to work, after doing Birken, all my colleagues want to know is if I got the time-badge. But if you return from Sweden and have done Vasaloppet, it's a good achievement just to have participated. There are big differences...” (B35).

In Birkebeinerrennet, the medal gained a lot attention: “Birkebeinerrennet has the time-badge and people are very focused on that. But in Vasaloppet the focus is just on finishing, that's at least what I felt” (B32).

Though, another informant, who actually had participated in both races, had the opposite assessment: “Birken is not as competitive as Vasaloppet” (29).

Birkebeinerrennet was described as having the potential to develop to be more family-friendly and focus less on the contest, and the medal was something someone illustrated as something negative:

“It has to be more family friendly. Stop talking about your times. The most important thing is participation, not the times and the time-badge. The threshold for getting the time-badge should be lower” (B46).

The words ‘sport,’ ‘performance,’ ‘winner’ and ‘medals’ have previous been used to describe ‘competitive’ as an own dimension to ‘sport event image’ of Papadimitriou et al. (2016). The ‘competitive’-dimension was displayed also in Birkebeinerrennet and Vasaloppet. The images of both races reflect a certain level of competition, but the informants had different perspectives about which race had a greater level of competition.

5.2.8 Equipment dimension

Compared to marathon races (Hallmann et al., 2010; Kaplanidou, 2010), ski races require a lot equipment. Equipment was described as important for completing both races, but differences occurred. Participants in Vasaloppet were perceived as sometimes having equipment of lower quality, which maybe reflects that Vasaloppet has a more diverse group of participants:

There are... there are so many people using old Alfa-shoes and old skis, and even jeans, I don't understand how they manage to ski 100 kilometres in jeans, so many people do it. So... with ponytails and... so... they look like bikers, right... Many of them actually look like that, but some just want the image. But in Birken... Now here it's... People doing Birken have great equipment, they have thought through their

clothing, they carry a backpack, there are some challenging aspects to it [Birken] which makes it a tougher race. (B47).

The focus on equipment was described as overstated in Birkebeinerrennet, which may be a result of the requirements to carry the backpack and its content. Some participants talked about having more focus on the equipment rather than being well trained:

People participating now are... Extremely preoccupied with having the right poles, and if they have the right equipment and all that, they're hung up on it. The most important thing is if you've actually trained. A lot people are buying everything you can imagine... Honestly, it's totally ridiculous (...) There are people who are going to ski 100 kilometres, that buy new gloves, new poles, things they've never used whilst training, new clothes and... If you haven't used it whilst training, don't use it here. But on the other hand, it is a way to finance the event (B47).

'Equipment' as an own dimension describing a sport event image has not been revealed before. Previous research are mainly based on marathon races (Hallmann et al., 2010; Kaplanidou, 2010) but also on a bicycle race (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007) and The Universiade (Papadimitriou et al., 2016) – two events actually requiring equipment. Where Birkebeinerrennet and Vasaloppet are different from previous researched events it terms of season, latitude and level of skills and equipment needed, they also require other types of equipment and more equipment. Thus, a new dimension was discovered – one that is also needed to completely describe sport event image – and the revelation is truly useful for future research on sport event image.

5.2.9 Cultural dimension

Both races have foreigners participants constituting approximately 20 % (Birken AS, 2018b; Vasaloppet, 2018), but the perceived level of international character varied. Vasaloppet was often perceived as having greater international character than Birkebeinerrennet: “Vasaloppet has a more international feel to it than Birken” (B31) and “In Vasaloppet, we can see people from all over the world, at least I have experienced that” (B31). A Danish woman was also aware the international character of Vasaloppet: “A lot of people from Copenhagen participate in Vasaloppet” (B50). A man from Sweden claimed Vasaloppet for being more known in Norway than Birkebeinerrennet is in Sweden. He knew several elite athletes from

Sweden, and very few have participated in Birkebeinerrennet: "Quite little, actually. It's more like... Several have travelled to participate in other long-distance races, but it's been more like Marcialonga maybe, relatively few participate in Birkebeinerrennet. I don't know why, actually" (V3).

A Danish man asserted Birkebeinerrennet was quite unknown in Denmark. He was asked if he participated in Vasaloppet when he said to friends that he travelled to participate in a race in Norway. Similar, some Swedes did not know where Lillehammer and Rena actually are, and how short it is to travel from Sweden: "I think that people don't know... For me, living in Malmö, it's the same distance driving to Lillehammer or Mora. Many people do not understand how easy it is and how great the road to Lillehammer is" (V29).

Of an opposite view was a Norwegian-American man who described Birkebeinerrennet as well known also in Alaska: "Most of my friends are Alaskan... They also go cross-country skiing. Birkebeinerrennet is prestigious for them as well" (B51).

Papadimitriou et al. (2016, pg. 10) described the 'cultural' dimension as "captur[ing] references to culture and cultural diversity", focusing on cultural enrichment rather than number of countries represented. In this research, the focus has been on what perceived level the participants have of the events' international character, for instance in terms of number of countries represented. Several meanings and perceptions about this were revealed. Participants' nationality was central when it contributes to create the races images more or less international. According to the findings, the 'cultural'-dimension could rather been called for instance 'multi-nationality,' which also was described as one of the aspects to the dimension (Papadimitriou et al., 2016).

5.2.10 Destination dimension

Previous research on sport event image has not described events as reflecting views on a tourism destination. Instead, what impacts events have had for local communities have been investigated (Hudson & Hudson, 2015; Meld.St.19, 2016-2017). This study reveals certain aspects related to 'tourist destination' as a distinct dimension of a sport events' image.

Lillehammer has several hotels, is a somewhat larger town and has more to offer the tourists than Mora has. Mora was described as a small town with few hotels, having traffic-chaos during the race and a boring urban life. Birkebeinerrennet and Lillehammer were given credit for its possibilities for the whole family, several hotels and for the surroundings. Consequently, Birkebeinerrennet has the potential to differentiate its image as its very own destination, or at least strengthen the relation to Lillehammer as a tourist destination.

Informants underlined that in addition to Birken Skifestival, Lillehammer offers several opportunities besides the specific event: “You live in the city centre, so you can have a completely different type of holiday, there's more to do than here in Mora” (V29).

The party in the centre of Lillehammer after the race was also praised: ”I also like the party in Lillehammer afterwards. It is not here... Everyone goes home afterwards. It is because not so many people live in Mora. I think most of the people lived around or in Lillehammer. It was such a party...” (V29).

The hotel capacity in Lillehammer makes it possible to spend the night on hotels instead of dormitories which are needed for Vasaloppet’s numerous participants, combined with lower hotel bed capacity in Mora (and Sälen). This was highly appreciated by a Swedish man, participating in both races: “Here [in Mora] you usually sleep in a large hall. In Lillehammer I slept in a hotel. There are a lot of good, cheap hotels. This [Birkebeinerrennet] should be understood as more than just a race; it's an experience” (V29).

Similarities have earlier been drawn between ‘destination image’ and ‘sport event image,’ and it has been suggested that the definition of ‘destination image’ can be used to define ‘sport event image’ (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Hallmann et al., 2010; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Kaplanidou, 2010). The identification of ‘destination’ as an image domain of an event is therefore not surprising but interesting. It underlines how important a sport event can be for a destination, or even be perceived as a major part of what constitutes a destination. Birkebeinerrennet had an image for having great potential for contributing to a vital destination, and thus ‘destination’ was revealed as a very own dimension in relation to Birkebeinerrennet. Such findings were not revealed in relation to Vasaloppet’s image.

5.2.11 Summary of image dimensions

Overall, ten dimensions describing the images of Birkebeinerrennet and Vasaloppet have been identified during this analysis. Confirmations of earlier identified dimensions as well as the suggested two novel ones are presented below in table 2 (Hallmann et al., 2010; Kaplanidou, 2010; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2010; Papadimitriou et al., 2016). Further, words and themes describing each dimension that adds to previous research are also listed.

Table 2

Discovered dimensions and words and themes associated with each dimension. Words written in italics are words, themes and dimensions novel for this study.

Dimension	Includes words and themes associated with...
Historical	The history of the event, <i>events arranged for many years</i>
Emotional	Excitement, fulfilment, joy, <i>challenge, connection</i>
Environmental	<i>Aesthetic aspects: scenery, sights</i> <i>Physical aspects: topography, terrain</i>
Social	Interaction with other people (athletes, locals, fans), <i>crowding, atmosphere</i>
Physical	Health, exercise, training, <i>technique</i>
Organizational	Organizational and management aspects, <i>trade fairs, logistic, entry fee, social media</i>
Competitive	Sport, performance, winner and medals
Equipment	<i>Equipment, skis, poles, shoes, backpack</i>
Cultural	Diversity, culture, multi-nationality, <i>countries represented</i>
Destination	<i>Vacation, hotel, accommodation</i>

5.3 Similarities and differences between the cases

The analysis described some obvious similarities and differences between Birkebeinerrennet and Vasaloppet. Several similarities were found: the informants were aware that both races are historical and that they have been arranged for many years (historical dimension). Both races were also perceived as being challenging (emotional dimension), well organized (organizational dimension) and as having a unique atmosphere (social dimension), and it was considered necessary to be well trained beforehand (physical dimension). Both races had images of having an international character (cultural dimension) and a certain level of competition (competitive dimension). Nevertheless, nuances and even differences were also identified in relation to these dimensions; the organization and logistics in Vasaloppet were described as outstanding compared to other races in Europe (organizational dimension); and crowding was used to describe the interaction between the participants in Vasaloppet more often than in Birkebeinerrennet (social dimension).

The clearest differences occurred mainly in relation to the dimensions ‘environmental,’ ‘equipment’ and ‘destination.’ While the track in Birkebeinerrennet was perceived as challenging and hilly, offering spectacular views, the informants had an opinion about Vasaloppet’s track as flat and less challenging (environmental and emotional dimensions). Vasaloppet’s track does also have some inclines and the finish is lower than the start (appendix 3), but this was not overly emphasized. The image of required equipment was also one of the main differences; the focus on equipment was described as major and

exaggerated in Birkebeinerrennet, compared to Vasaloppet were some participants even wear jeans. The third main difference was Birkebeinerrennet's potential for more directly contributing to Lillehammer as a vital destination. Aspects related to 'destination' were not described in connection to Vasaloppet, except the descriptions of Mora as small and boring compared to Lillehammer. The most prominent similarities and differences between the two cross-country ski races are summarized below in table 3.

Table 3
Similarities and differences between Birkebeinerrennet and Vasaloppet.

Dimension	Common	Mainly...	
		Birkebeinerrennet	Vasaloppet
Historical	The history, arranged for many years		
Emotional	Challenging, strongly connected	Most challenging	Extensively linked to Swedish identity
Environmental a) Aesthetical b) Physical		a) Mountain scenery, rich nature experience. b) Hilly, scary down hills	a) Marsh and forest b) Flat
Social	Unique atmosphere	Friendly relations, middle-aged men with high income	Crowding
Physical	Required to be well-trained	Require good technique, more training is required	Double poling, long and tiring but less technically demanding
Organizational	Well organized, being taken care of	Trade fair area has potential for improvement, expensive entry fee	Outstanding logistic, service stations with waxing, great trade fair area
Competitive	Disagreements about the level of competition	Focuses on the medal	Little focus on the medal, focuses on completing
Equipment	Some basic equipment are required	Good and new equipment	Equipment of more varied quality
Cultural	International character	Known all over the world, but less known than Vasaloppet, have unreached potential in Scandinavia	Greater character of internationality
Destination		Holiday for families, activities in Lillehammer, hotels, several tourist attractions and opportunities, great party in the centre of Lillehammer	Dormitories, few hotels, chaos in traffic, boring town-life

6.0 Conclusion

Participants' experiences from sport events and their interpretation of events' images have previously been under researched, but several researchers have called for more research about sport event images (Gwinner, 1997; Hallmann et al., 2010; Kaplanidou, 2010; Papadimitriou et al., 2016). Especially in a world with dynamic trends, it is crucial for event providers to understand their own images and how these are seen from the customer perspective (Kvåle & Wæraas, 2016). This qualitative study has identified how participants in Birkebeinerrennet and Vasaloppet, two winter sport endurance events, perceive the races' images, including differences and similarities between these. The informants identified and elaborated on several dimensions of the images of these events.

The definition of 'sport event image' (Kaplanidou, 2010) was used to investigate the images, which included five dimensions related to the image: 'organizational,' 'physical,' 'social,' 'environmental' and 'emotional'. Three additional dimensions labelled 'historical' (Kaplanidou, 2010), 'cultural' and 'competitive' (Papadimitriou et al., 2016) were also used. The relevance of these eight dimensions were confirmed when informants described the images of both Birkebeinerrennet and Vasaloppet. In addition, two new dimensions were identified: 'equipment' and 'destination'. Overall, these ten dimensions captured the images of Birkebeinerrennet and Vasaloppet (figure 1), however to somewhat different degrees; 'destination' was only used to describe Birkebeinerrennet's image. Several similarities and differences between the races' images occurred during the analysis (see table 3). The clearest differences were found in relation to the three dimensions: 'environmental,' 'equipment' and 'destination'.

The events analysed had several similarities to previously researched events (Hallmann et al., 2010; Kaplanidou, 2010; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2010; Papadimitriou et al., 2016), such as being long distance, endurance oriented, engaging rather broad segments of the general public and having long-lasting traditions. Further, they gather huge numbers of spectators and participants from different countries. The races differed from previous researched events in terms of season (winter), latitude (north) and the level of skills and equipment needed (cross country skiing compared to running).

Functional and psychological image aspects as well as elements in the continuum between these were also revealed (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Hallmann et al., 2010; Kaplanidou, 2010). Images can be composed of functional aspects as

trade fair areas, equipment or of being a destination for visiting, but also of untangling components (psychological aspects) such as atmosphere or emotions related to the event. Further, ‘emotional’ and ‘social’ dimensions exemplify affective judgements, while ‘environmental,’ ‘historical,’ ‘organizational’ and ‘physical’ reveal cognitive evaluations. Thus, it is clear that the definitions of ‘destination image’ and ‘sport event image’ have several common aspects.

The findings add to the existing research on sport event image by describing the images of two winter sport events. The image to such events has not been investigated before. This framework, including the two novel dimensions, can be used to gain a greater understanding about event image, and how the images are composed, which is important for providers to understand from a customer perspective. In addition, the findings can be used to understand how Birken AS and Vasaloppet can evolve, improve and develop their products even further.

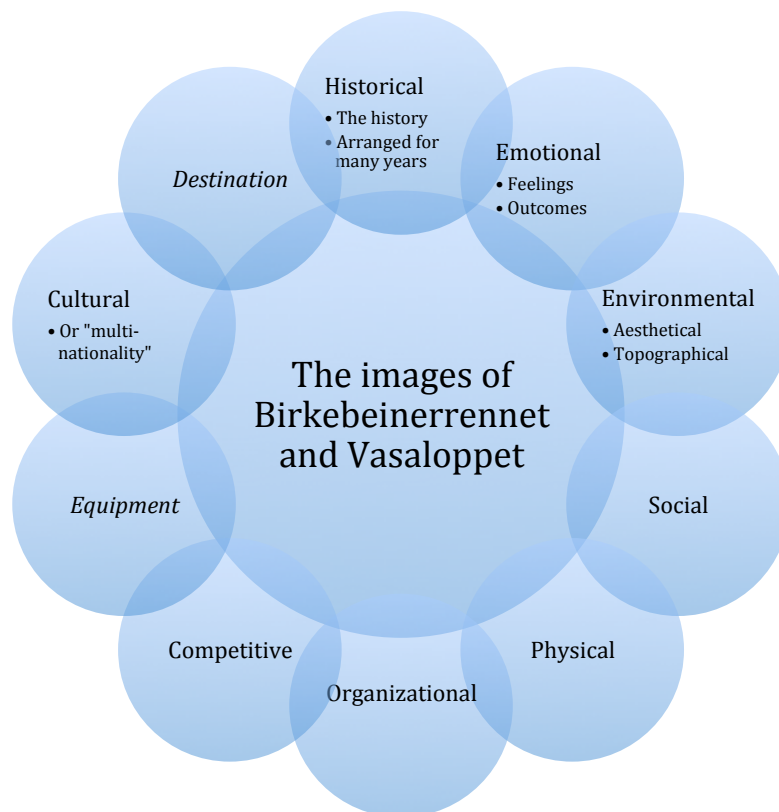


Figure 1
A visual representation of the identified dimensions of Birkebeinerrennet’s and Vasaloppet’s images.

6.1 Future research needs

Future research should seek to confirm the identified image dimensions. Quantitative approaches using Likert scales or discrete choice approaches will add more knowledge of the relative importance of each dimension among representative samples of existing and potential participants. In what dimensions does Birken AS and Vasaloppet have most potential for improvement, and which dimensions are not necessary to improve. The research revealed ‘destination’ as a new dimension, and there is a specific need to assess the existence and nature of this dimension in other sport events.

6.2 Business implications for Birken AS

Birken AS can actively use this insight in modifying their product and marketing strategies to create an even more favourable and attractive image, and to increase the number of participants. The key implications from this study are:

- **The trade fair area can be improved.** Distribution of bib numbers takes too much space. An updated meeting place after the race, where athletes can meet for having dinner, beer and entertainment, and a great after-party in the evening. Benches were preferred instead of chairs as it makes the atmosphere more intimate and eases contact with other participants.
- Birkebeinerrennet is unknown to many potential participants in Scandinavia. Participants described Birken AS for having a potential to capitalize by focusing on these countries. Swedes and Danes represent a large part of the participants in Vasaloppet. **Concentrated marketing in Scandinavia** would probably be valuable to gain and increase number of participants in Birkebeinerrennet.
- The spectacular views and the adventure were emphasized. A **photo contest** during the race (between the participants) might be successful. “Photo-frames” could be placed along the track. Such elements could contribute to reduce the level of competition and make the great scenery visible for more potential participants. Simultaneously Birken AS would receive free marketing when these pictures would be posted in social media, which is most likely what participants would do with these images.
- Birkebeinerrennet is known for being challenging, for having a high level of competition, and for needing top equipment. Such images make the threshold for signing up higher. **Less focus on the competition** and more communication about that

the race is possible to a wider audience is required, and as such much can be learned from Vasaloppet.

- It is possible to finish Birkebeinerrennet without having the newest and most expensive equipment. A **second-hand-store** where athletes can sell their equipment to other athletes may be valuable. Such a shop would give Birkebeinerrennet a reduced image of being only for equipment-nerds, but also give Birken AS an image of being more sustainable and environmentally friendly, in addition to making it possible more people to participate. The shop could be in cooperative with Fretex or a similar organization.
- **Develop Birken Skifestival and the better link to the tourist destination Lillehammer.** Focus on the possibilities for vacation and experiences beyond the occasion of the event, not only during the ski race weekend. Lillehammer and the surrounding region offer an endless spectrum of products to tourists with or without kids. By making packages with adventures during a long weekend or even a week, the participants could stay in Lillehammer for a longer time, which has great spin off to the community. Moving the race to the weeks when schools in Norway have winter holiday would make it possible for more people to participate, even though that is a controversial idea. By using marketing strategies to communicate where Birkebeinerrennet is, and what possibilities that exist for the whole family in Lillehammer, more people would probably sign up.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview-guide

A) Innledning (1 – 2 minutter)

- Starte båndopptaker
- Informasjon om meg og prosjektet, presentere formålet med studien
- Forklare hva intervjuet skal brukes til
- Informere om anonymitet
- Båndopptaker, lydopptaker, muntlig samtykke til opptak

B) Om deltakeren (1 – 2 minutter)

- Kjønn
- Alder
- Nasjonalitet
- Bosted
- Yrke
- Deltar på...

- 1) Hvorfor går du skirenn? (hovedmotivasjon)
- 2) Hvor mange treningstimer har du hatt i uka de siste månedene?
- 3) Er det viktig for deg med en god sluttid når du går skirenn?

C) Erfaringer (2 minutter)

- 4) Skal du delta på Birkebeinerrennet/deltok du på Vasaloppet (i år eller tidligere)?
- 5) Hvorfor går du Birkebeinerrennet/Vasaloppet? Har du gått dette rennet før? Hvor mange ganger?

D) Nøkkelspørsmål (10 minutter)

- 6) Hvilke styrker/svakheter har Vasaloppet?
- 7) Hvilke styrker/svakheter har Birkebeinerrennet?
- 8) Hva skal til for at du skal delta på Vasaloppet/Birkebeinerrennet?
- 9) Hva er det første du tenker når du hører ”Vasaloppet” ?
- 10) Hva er det første du tenker når du hører ”Birkebeinerrennet”?

- 11) Hvilke utviklingsmuligheter ser du for Vasaloppet og Birkebeinerrennet?
- 12) Hvordan opplever du konkurranseaspektet i Birken vs. Vasaloppet?
- 13) Hvordan oppfatter du at Birkebeinerrennet omtales i ditt skimiljø/blant dine (ski)venner?
- 14) Hva betyr det å gå Birkebeinerrennet/Vasaloppet for deg helt personlig?
- 15) En rekke kjente idrettsutøvere går hvert år Birkebeinerrennet. For eksempel vant Therese Johaug i 2015, mens Martin Johnsrud Sundby kom på andreplass samme år. Deres deltagelse får ofte fokus i media og på Birkens egne hjemmesider. Hvilken betydning tror du deres deltagelse og mediens fokus på dette har på rennets image og omdømme?
- 16) Birken er ofte omtalt i mediene, spesielt av medier som E24 og Dagens Næringsliv. Dagens Næringsliv er også en av Birkens samarbeidspartnere. Hvilken effekt tror du dette har på rennets omdømme? *(Stilles fortrinnsvis til norske deltakere)*

De neste spørsmålene krever at informanten kjenner godt til Birkebeinerrennet

- 17) Har du noen eksempler på tapte muligheter eller ubenyttet potensiale for Birkebeinerrennet?
- 18) Hvordan kan Birkebeinerrennet styrke sitt omdømme (for å tiltrekke seg flere deltagere)?
- 19) Hvilken betydning har avlysningen i 2014 hatt for din deltagelse i Birkebeinerrennet?

E) Avslutning (1 – 2 minutter)

- Spørre om det er noe informanten ønsker å legge til
- Takke for intervjuet
- Minne om anonymisering og om at lydopptaket vil bli slettet etter transkribering
- Stoppe lydopptaket

Appendix 2: Citations in Norwegian and English

Table 4
Citations translated into English

Informant	V8
Norwegian	”Ryggsekk!”
English	“Backpack!”
Informant	V18
Norwegian	Babyen som ble transportert. Det historiske, det er det man tenker på”
English	The baby who was carried in it. That old story comes to mind”
Informant	V11
Norwegian	”Gustav Vasa”
English	”Gustav Vasa”
Informant	V12
Norwegian	”Jeg tenker på svenske konger og den biten”
English	“I think of kings from Sweden and such things”
Informant	B38
Norwegian	”Den historien med de der som kjempet seg gjennom snøstormen og kongssønnen [Birkebeinerrennet]... Det samme med Vasaloppet, det har jo også den historiske funderingen kan man si, det er jo noe som gjør de til mer spesielle renn enn de andre”
English	“The story about those fighting through the snow storm and the son of the King [Birkebeinerrennet]... The same with Vasaloppet, it also has the historical background, which makes them more special races than others”
Informant	V28
Norwegian	“Det [Vasaloppet] er en gammel organisasjon, starten starta i 1922, den har liksom hundre års tradisjon, en bygger jo på mye av folks tradisjoner, det er jo et gammelt varemerke, litt som Birken er i Norge”
English	“It [Vasaloppet] is an old organization, it started in 1922, it has been a tradition for a hundred years, it is founded in folklore, it's become a brand name, as has Birken in Norway.”
Informant	V17
Norwegian	“Det er en stor svensk sak å gå Vasaloppet”

English	"It is a huge Swedish thing to participate in Vasaloppet"
Informant	B42
Norwegian	"Positive tanker"
English	"Positive thoughts"
Informant	B49
Norwegian	"Tøffinger"
English	"Though guys!"
Informant	V21
Norwegian	"Noe positivt, morsomt"
English	"Something positive and fun"
Informant	V9
Norwegian	"Spennende"
English	"Exciteing"
Informant	B49
Norwegian	"En sånn seig utholdenhet... Gå inn i seg selv og være en maskin hele rennet"
English	"A lasting endurance... Finding it within one's self to go the distance."
Informant	V18
Norwegian	"Jeg er redd de bratte bakkene. Ikke oppoverbakkene, de kan være harde, men nedoverbakkene kan være veldig skremmende"
English	"I dread the steep hills. Not the uphill, they can be hard, but the downhill can be very scary"
Informant	B47
Norwegian	"Og det er tøft å gå fra Rena og komme i mål. Og er det [været] virkelig ille så er det skikkelig tøft!"
English	"And it is tough to ski from Rena to the finish line... And it is really tough if the weather is bad!"
Informant	B38
Norwegian	"Å gå på høyfjellet er noe helt annet enn å gå i Vasan, det er jo... Mer i skog. Man får litt mer naturopplevelse av å gå Birken"
English	"To ski in the mountain is something completely different than in Vasan... It is... More in the forest. You get more of a nature experience"

	in Birken”
Informant	V29
Norwegian	“Du har miljøet, det er et helt annet når du går Birken, du er oppe på fjellet, kjempevakkert, altså jeg hadde en kjempefin dag, det var solskinn, jeg stoppa og tok bilder, filma, som jeg aldri kommer til å gjøre på Vasaloppet for da er det sånn ”shit, nå må jeg gå” liksom, for tiden-tiden-tiden. Sånn var det ikke synes jeg, jeg synes.. det som er med Birken er at det er et veldig vakkert miljø. Du går ofte mye nedover i en dal, du får ikke samme utsikt når du går Vasaloppet. Det synes jeg var en stor forskjell”
English	“You have the environment, it’s totally different from Birkebeinerrennet where you are up in the mountains surrounded by beautiful scenery. I had a very nice day and the sun was shining, I stopped, took pictures, took videos; things I couldn't imagine doing in Vasaloppet, because there you're always watching the clock. It was not like that at Birkebeinerrennet. Birkebeinerrennet has beautiful views. You ski down a valley; you don't get those same sceneries in Vasaloppet. I think that was a big difference”
Informant	B43
Norwegian	“Lettere løype [compared to Birkebeinerrennet] da. Det er jo nesten flatt”
English	“It's an easier track [compared to Birkebeinerrennet]... It's almost flat!”
Informant	V5
Norwegian	”Strekningen er jo ganske heftig. Alle tror den er flat og fin, men det er den ikke. Den er ganske kupert. Ikke som Birken så klart, Birken tror jeg er tøffere”
English	“It is a considerable distance. Everyone thinks it's nice and flat, but it's not. It's quite hilly. Not to Birken's degree, of course. I think Birken is even tougher”
Informant	B36
Norwegian	“Krevende, men at på en måte, på grunn av stemninga så gjør det litt lettere kanskje”
English	”Challenging, but the atmosphere makes it perhaps easier”.
Informant	V5

Norwegian	”det er en spesiell opplevelse. Det er stemningen og atmosfæren. Så mye folk. Det er kult”
English	“It's a great experience, the spirit and the atmosphere, so many people. So cool!”
Informant	V30
Norwegian	“Største styrken er nok at alt rundt det, veldig bra arrangert. Så begynner det å bli mye folk, det er ganske trangt i sporene”
English	[“Its greatest strength is that it's so well organized. It is also starting to attract more people, it's become quite crowded in the tracks’
Informant	B40
Norwegian	“Vi synes det er kult at kronprinsen skal gå, og vi har spurt om treneren kan få Kronprinsen [av Danmark] til å klappe når vi kommer i mål. Så det har en betydning at man lager litt show ut av det. Også kommer det til å ha en ubevisst betydning tror jeg. Det er jo flere ting man kan referere til i forhold til løpet. Det er lett å si til andre at ”han går også”
English	“We think it's cool that the crown prince [of Denmark] is participating, and we have asked his trainer to ask him to clap when we cross the finish line. And in that way to make a more of a show of it, in addition to encouraging us. There are many things you can say about the event. When talking about the race it's easy to say "he [the crown prince] is also doing it" for example”
Informant	V8
Norwegian	Men det er jo styrker at det har et gjennomslag... Det har fått folk i Sverige til å gå på ski, som ellers ikke hadde gått på ski
English	“It is a strength that it is gaining recognition... It has motivated people in Sweden to put on skis who otherwise wouldn't have”
Informant	B34
Norwegian	“Det blir nok omtalt som litt sånn kakse-renn i Norge, et ufortjent dårlig rykte egentlig. Jeg kan se at folk tenker sånn, men ja, er ikke helt enig etter å ha gått et par ganger før”
English	“It has a reputation as a posh race, undeservedly in my opinion. I can understand why people think that, but I don't agree now that I have participated a couple of times”

Informant	V29
Norwegian	"Da jeg gikk Vasaloppet (...) var det liksom selv om vi går sakte, så kan folk liksom ha spisse albuer, og bli sure, slik var det ikke i det hele tatt på Birken. For det var mer liksom.. Folk kunne prate mer... Jeg vet ikke, på bussen, på morgenen, på Vasaloppet sitter alle stille, på bussen til Rena satt alle og snakka. Jeg bare ”hva er det med dere!”, jeg synes det er.. Jeg vet ikke, jeg hadde heller... Jeg har forsøkt å få med meg folk til å gå Birken i år, men det var ingen som ville
English	“When I competed in Vasaloppet (...) even if we were doing it slowly, people were elbowing me... It wasn't like that in Birken. It was more like... People were talking to each other. I don't know, on the bus, in the morning. In Vasaloppet everyone was sitting down quietly, on the bus to Rena people were more friendly. I was like “what's going on!” I think it is... I don't know... I had rather... I tried to gather some friends to join me in Birkebeinerrennet this year, but no one wanted to...”
Informant	V9
Norwegian	“Første gangen jeg gikk Birken så var det så jævlig slitsomt, jeg tenkte 5 og en halv mil, det er lett, jeg har jo gått Vasaloppet to uker før, det er jo enkelt det her, men det var det jo ikke! (...) Også var det veldig mye oppover, så det var et helt annet løp”
English	“The first time I did Birken I thought it was really exhausting. I thought “54 kilometres, that's easy, I just did Vasaloppet two weeks ago, this is gonna be easy”, but it wasn't! (...) There were lots of hills, so it was quite a different race”
Informant	B47
Norwegian	“Skal du gå Birken så må du være teknisk god. Det er det som er det største problemet. Det er alt for mange bakker, du må kunne diagonal. I Vasaloppet kan du stake, det kan du ikke her”
English	“You have to be technically good to do Birken. That's the biggest problem. There are too many hills, you have to do the diagonal stride. In Vasaloppet you can get by with double-poling, you can't do that here”
Informant	V15
Norwegian	”Jeg har gått mye løp i Europa og da er Vasaloppet en helt egen divisjon”

English	“I have participated in several races in Europe, and Vasaloppet is on a very own level”
Informant	B47
Norwegian	“I det du kommer i mål er det noen frivillige som tar skiene dine, stripser de og du blir dytta inn på en buss og du sitter der og når du går ut av bussen kommer det noen frivillige mot deg og sier ”her er baggen din” og ser deg i øynene, du blir dytta inn i dusjen, dusja, inn og få mat og etterpå er så er du... du har en opplevelse fra du kommer i mål, hele tiden blir fulgt opp”
English	“When you pass the finish line a volunteer takes care of your skis, you are guided to a bus and when you get off the bus, a friendly volunteer gives you your bag and guides you to the showers and shows you the food area. From the moment you finish the race you are looked after”
Informant	V20
Norwegian	“I Norge er det veldig fokus på det sportslige, og det er veldig bra, men i Sverige er det mer på det rundt omkring, for eksempel dette området [messeområdet”
English	“In Norway it's all about the sporting event, which is good, but in Sweden there is more focus on the total package, like this area [the trade fair]”
Informant	B47
Norwegian	”Marcialonga, akkurat det samme. Der sitter du inne i en hall som dette her, men mye mye mindre. Plass til 6-7000, og det er gratis pasta og du kjøper øl i tillegg. Fantastisk, da sitter du ved siden av italienerne og masse folk. Du treffer nye folk. Spennende. Så... Jeg tenker på de som har gått Fredagsbirken og sitter her nå, det synes jeg må være kjedelig”
English	“Marcialonga, exactly the same. You sit inside a trade fair area like this one, but much smaller. Space for 6-7000 people, and there's free pasta and you can buy beer. Fantastic, you sit with lots of Italians and other people. You meet new people, it's exciting. So... I feel sorry for those who have done the Fredagsbirken and are sitting here now, I imagine it must be boring”
Informant	V29

Norwegian	"Jeg synes at det [trade fair area] er bedre her enn i Håkons Hall. I Håkons Hall blir det ikke like mye... Jeg synes det er mer event her enn i Håkons Hall"
English	"I think that it [the trade fair area] is better here than in Håkons Hall. In Håkons Hall there's not so much... I think there's more happenings here compared to Håkons Hall"
Informant	B34
Norwegian	"Jeg synes det er litt dyrt. Sammenligna med andre turrenn så er det en ganske stiv pris. Det er ingenting som er inkludert egentlig. Jeg synes det er litt dyrt"
English	"I think it is quite expensive. Compared to other races, it is quite expensive. Nothing is actually included. I think it is dear"
Informant	B40
Norwegian	"Nå skal vi se hva vi får ut av det, hvordan servicestasjonene er, mat og drikke og hvor godt det er arrangert, det synes jeg er avgjørende om man betaler en høy pris, så det synes jeg man først kan svare på når man har gått løpet. Men jeg synes det er en ok pris, men det er også... Jeg sammenligner med maraton eller litt andre lenger løp. Det skal mye til for å preparere og sånn, og da synes jeg det er en ok pris"
English	"It will be interesting to see what we get out of it, how the service-stations are, the food and drinks, how well it's arranged. When you are paying as much as this, these things are important, so I can't answer before it's over. Such things are decisive if you are paying much, so it's not possible to answer that before I have completed the race. But I think it's a reasonable price, but it is also... If I compare it to a marathon or to a longer race. It requires a lot to prepare the track and so forth, so I think the price is ok"
Informant	V29
Norwegian	"Jeg tror det at hvis man titter på den inspirasjonsfilmen fra Vasaloppet så har man sett... Det ser i blant triveligere ut enn i virkeligheten"
English	"If you are watching the inspiration movie from Vasaloppet... It looks nicer than it really is"

Informant	V2
Norwegian	“Vasan er kanskje ikke så konkurransepreget, at det ikke blir så mye konkurranse, lavere terskel da, for å melde seg på. Vil jeg tro. Birken har blitt litt mer sånn... konkurranse...”
English	“Vasaloppet is maybe not so focused on the competition... There is not that much competition, and thus it's a lower threshold for signing up. I guess... Birken has become more... competitive...”
Informant	B35
Norwegian	“Hvis jeg kommer tilbake på jobben, og har gått Birken, det første de spør om er om jeg klarte merket, men hvis du er i Sverige og har gått Vasaloppet, så er det stort bare å ha deltatt, veldig, veldig stor forskjell på massene”
English	“When I return to work, after doing Birken, all my colleagues want to know is if I got the time-badge. But if you return from Sweden and have done Vasaloppet, it's a good achievement just to have participated. There are big differences...”
Informant	B32
Norwegian	”Birkebeinerrennet har det her merket og folk er jo veldig fokusert mot det. Men på Vasaloppet så er det mer om å gjennomføre, følte jeg i hvert fall”
English	[“Birkebeinerrennet has the time-badge and people are very focused on that. But in Vasaloppet the focus is just on finishing, that’s at least what I felt”
Informant	V29
Norwegian	“Birken er ikke like mye konkurranse som Vasaloppet”
English	“Birken is not as competitive as Vasaloppet”]
Informant	B46
Norwegian	“Det må bli mer familievennlig. Få med alle og slutte med detta maset om gode tider og viktigere at en deltar enn at det skal være best mulig tider og merke. Det kan være merke, men da må det være tider som gjør at flere har muligheter til å ta det...”
English	[“It has to be more family friendly. Stop talking about your times. The most important thing is participation, not the times and the time-badge.

	The threshold for getting the time-badge should be lower”
Informant	B47
Norwegian	“Det er så mye folk som går i gamle Alfa-sko og gamle ski, og dongeribukse til og med, jeg fatter ikke hvordan de greier å gå 10 mil i dongeribukse, men det er folk som gjør det. Altså... med hestehale og... altså... ser ut som en motorbiker, ikke sant... det kan være at noen bare ønsker å se sånn ut, men det er mange som gjør det. Men på Birken er det... Nå er det... Altså sportslig sett, så er det mye mye, mye mer, altså de som går Birken har bra utstyr, de har tenkt igjennom klær, de går med sekk, det er en del tøffere ting som gjør nok at dette er nok en tøffere greie”
English	“There are... there are so many people using old Alfa-shoes and old skis, and even jeans, I don't understand how they manage to ski 100 kilometres in jeans, so many people do it. So... with ponytails and... so... they look like bikers, right... Many of them actually look like that, but some just want the image. But in Birken... Now here it's... People doing Birken have great equipment, they have thought through their clothing, they carry a backpack, there are some challenging aspects to it [Birken] which makes it a tougher race”
Informant	B47
Norwegian	“Folk som går her nå er... ekstremt opptatt av at de har riktige staver, om de har skikkelige ditt og datt, de er opptatt av masse ting. Det aller viktigste er om du har trent faktisk. Så det er veldig mange som kjøper seg både utstyr og ditt og det er helt... Helt ærlig, det er helt latterlig (...) Det er folk som skal gå 10 mil, som kjøper nye hansker, skal ha nye staver, ting som de ikke har trent med, nye klær og.. altså hvis du ikke har trent med det før, så ikke gå med det her. Men på en annen måte, det er jo en måte å finansiere dette på”
English	“People participating now are... Extremely preoccupied with having the right poles, and if they have the right equipment and all that, they're hung up on it. The most important thing is if you've actually trained. A lot people are buying everything you can imagine... Honestly, it's totally

	ridiculous” (...) There are people who are going to ski 100 kilometres, that buy new gloves, new poles, things they've never used whilst training, new clothes and... If you haven't used it whilst training, don't use it here. But on the other hand, it is a way to finance the event"
Informant	B31
Norwegian	“Vasaloppet har jo kanskje et større internasjonalt preg over seg, enn Birken”
English	"Vasaloppet has a more international feel to it than Birken”
Informant	B31
Norwegian	“I Vasaloppet ser vi jo folk fra alle verdens kanter, hvert fall har jeg opplevd det sånn”
English	“In Vasaloppet, we can see people from all over the world, at least I have experienced that”
Informant	B50
Norwegian	“Det er virkelig mange fra København som deltar på Vasaloppet”
English	“A lot of people from Copenhagen participate in Vasaloppet”
Informant	V3
Norwegian	“Ganske lite faktisk. Det er mer typ... Det er flere som har dratt til andre langløp, men da har det vært mer Marcialonga kanskje, det er ingen som har gått Birkebeinerrennet. Jeg vet ikke hvorfor faktisk”
English	“Quite little, actually. It's more like... Several have travelled to participate in other long-distance races, but it's been more like Marcialonga maybe, relatively few participate in Birkebeinerrennet. I don't know why, actually”
Informant	V29
Norwegian	“Jeg tror at om folk ikke vet hva det... For meg, som bor i Malmø, så går det like raskt å kjøre til Lillehammer som å kjøre til Mora. Så mange forstår ikke at det er så lett og bra veg å ta seg dit”
English	”I think that people don't know... For me, living in Malmø, it's the same distance driving to Lillehammer or Mora. Many people do not understand how easy it is and how great the road to Lillehammer is”
Informant	B51
Norwegian	“Vennene mine er jo mest fra Alaska (...). De går på langrenn de også.

	Det er jo prestisje å gå Birkebeinerrennet for dem også”
English	"Most of my friends are Alaskan... They also go cross-country skiing. Birkebeinerrennet is prestigious for them as well”
Informant	V29
Norwegian	“Du bor inne i sentrum så du kan ha en helt annen ferie. Det er mer å gjøre enn her, denne byen [Mora] er ganske kjedelig (ler), det er stor forskjell”
English	“You live in the city centre, so you can have a completely different type of holiday, there's more to do than here in Mora”
Informant	V29
Norwegian	"Også liker jeg veldig godt at det er fest i Lillehammer etterpå. Det er det ikke her. Her drar alle hjem etterpå. Men det er fordi ikke like mange bor i Mora. Jeg tror de fleste bodde omkring eller var i Lillehammer. Det var jo hvilken fest...”
English	”I also like the party in Lillehammer afterwards. It is not here... Everyone goes home afterwards. It is because not so many people live in Mora. I think most of the people lived around or in Lillehammer. It was such a party...”
Informant	V29
Norwegian	“Her [Mora] får du oftest bo på... typ... sovesal eller noe, på Lillehammer bodde jeg på hotell. Det finnes mange bra hoteller som ikke koster så mye. Så at man liksom skal sette det [Birkebeinerrennet] mer som en opplevelse, et event mer og forstå det”
English	“Here [Mora] you usually sleep in a large hall. In Lillehammer I slept in a hotel. There are a lot of good, cheap hotels. This [Birkebeinerrennet] should be understood as more than just a race; it's an experience”

Appendix 3: Descriptions of the tracks in Birkebeinerrennet and Vasaloppet

Figure 2 illustrates the length and the differences in altitude on the races track. This is also described in table 1.

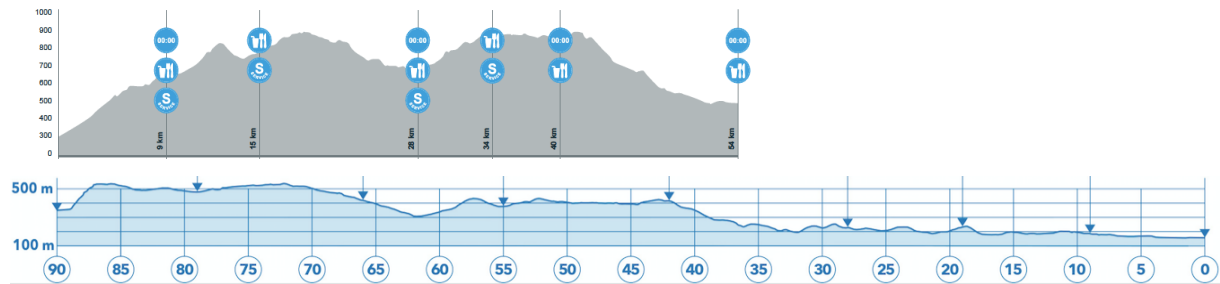


Figure 2
Track profiles. From above: Birkebeinerrennet (Birken AS, 2016b) and Vasaloppet (Vasaloppet, s.a.-a)

Table 5
Information about Birkebeinerrennet's and Vasaloppet's track (Birken AS, 2016b; Funbeat, s.a.; Skirenn, s.a.)

	Birkebeinerrennet	Vasaloppet
Length (km)	54	90
Elevation gain (m)	1147	1380
Descent (m)	871	1563
Max elevation (m.a.s.l.)	899	527
Lowest point (m.a.s.l.)	299	263

Appendix 4: Evolvement in numbers of participants during the years

The evolvement in number of participants during the years from 2000 to 2017 is illustrated below in figure 2 (Birken AS, 2017c; Frengstad, 2007; Vasaloppet, s.a.-f).

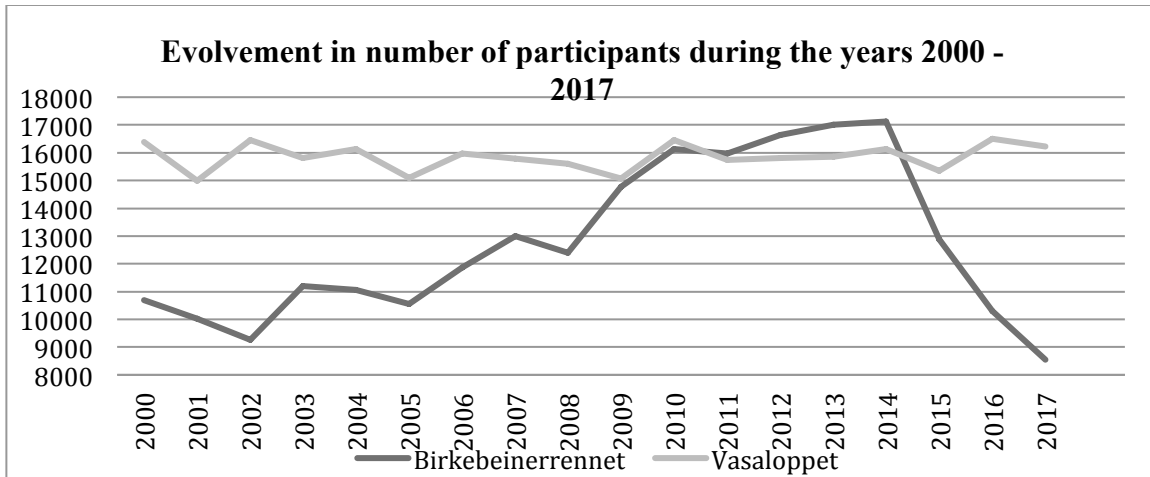


Figure 3

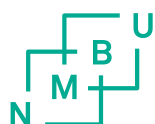
Number of participants from year 2000 to 2018 (Birken AS, 2017c; Frengstad, 2007; Mangelrød, 2017; Vasaloppet, s.a.-f)

Appendix 5: Overview over which race the informants participated in

Table 6

Information about which race the informants had participated in:

Birken Skifestival	
Participated in Birkebeinerrennet, have participated in Vasaloppet	5
Participated in other races in Birken Skifestival, have earlier participated in Vasaloppet	0
Participated in Birkebeinerrennet, have considered to participate in Vasaloppet	5
Participated in other races in Birken Skifestival, have considered to participate in Vasaloppet	2
Participated in Birkebeinerrennet, no plans about participating in Vasaloppet	6
Participated in other races in Birken Skifestival, have no plans about participating in Vasaloppet	3
Participated in Birkebeinerrennet, have never heard about Vasaloppet	0
Vasaloppet Vintervecka	
Participated in Vasaloppet, have participated in Birkebeinerrennet	2
Participated in other races in Vasaloppets Vintervecka, have earlier participated in Birkebeinerrennet	0
Participated in Vasaloppet, have considered to participate in Birkebeinerrennet	11
Participated in other races in Vasaloppets Vintervecka, have considered to participate in Birkebeinerrennet	6
Participated in Vasaloppet, no plans about participating in Birkebeinerrennet	3
Participated in other races in Vasaloppet Vintervecka, no plans about participating in Birkebeinerrennet	4
Participated in Vasaloppet, have never heard about Birkebeinerrennet	2
Former participants in both Birkebeinerrennet and Vasaloppet, but are not participating in 2017	3
Sample	52



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