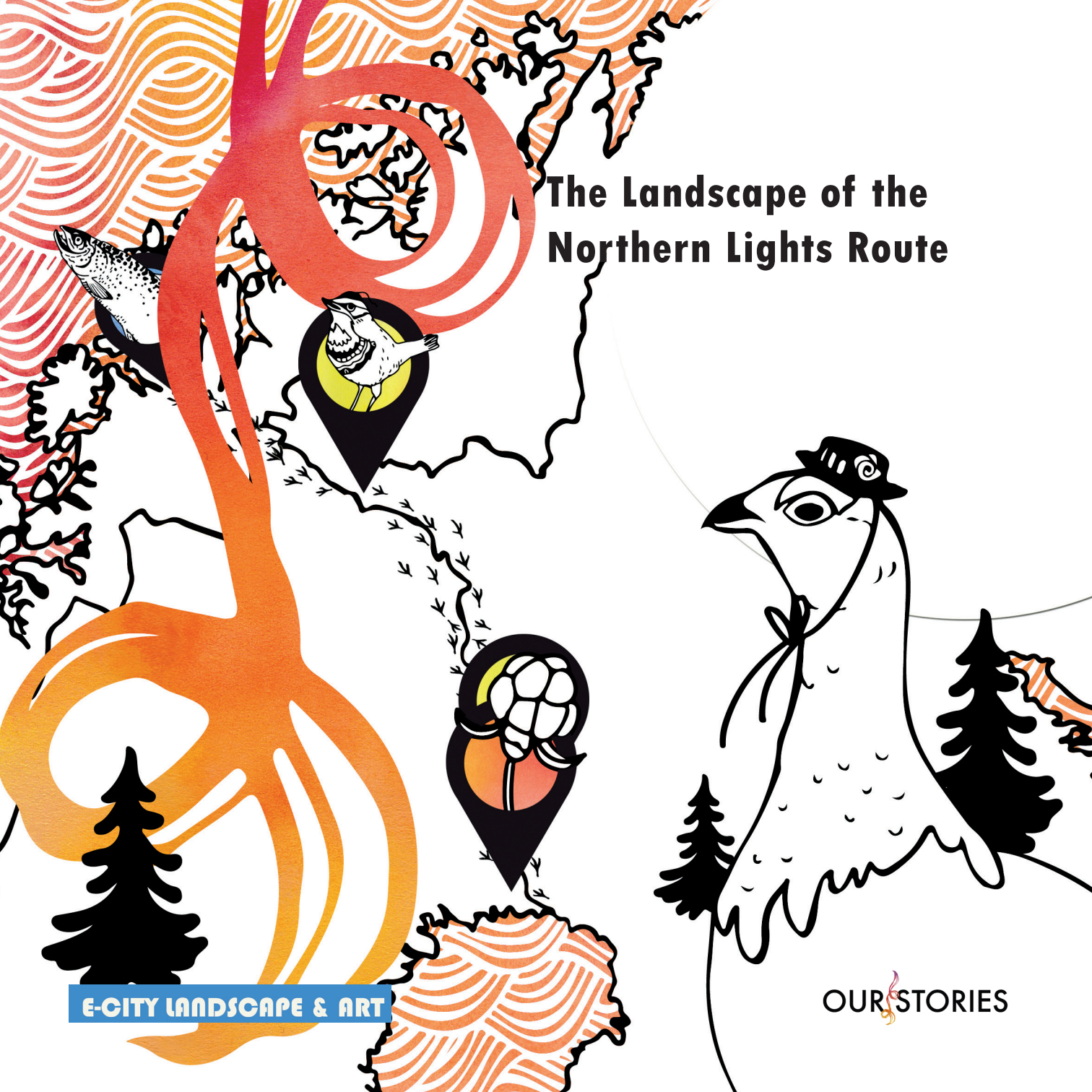


The Landscape of the Northern Lights Route



E-CITY LANDSCAPE & ART

OUR  STORIES



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The Landscape of the Northern Lights Route

1. Introduction

The Northern Lights Route extends from the Gulf of Bothnia to the Arctic Ocean. This area is thousands of years old, an ancient cultural environment, full of stories and the landscape is very beautiful. For many, the Northern Lights Route is still quite unknown, even though it was named as an official tourist road in Finland in 2002. This analysis of the landscape of the Northern Lights Route contributes to making this unique cultural area better known to general public.

This analysis is made by one of the project partners: Elina Söderström, a Landscape Architect, musician and tourism entrepreneur from Studio E-City.

1.1 Project “Our Stories – the business of using storytelling to draw people in”

Common culture and history are strongly represented along the Northern Lights Route, combining the Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian nations. The bordering countries share a growing consciousness of common roots and identity, which is the basis for the cross-border project to make the North Calotte region more active, vivid and attractive with increasing business opportunities through stories and storytelling. Region-specific languages and cultures, as the Meänkieli and Kven languages, are an essential part of the stories, particularly in the Sami culture. The stories will be made visible in varied ways, such as a

Storybook, music productions, short film production and oral storytelling.

Financier: Interreg North

Priority: Culture & environment

Partners: Lapin ammattikorkeakoulu Oy, Studio E-City ky from Finland; Ihana! AS from Norway; JORD & SveFi -Sverigefinskafolkhögskolan from Sweden.

1.2 The goal and methods

The goal of this analysis is to describe the landscape of the Northern Lights Route from the TornioHaparanda-area by the Gulf of Bothnia Sea, along the Tornio River Valley, all the way to Storslett in Norway . Because the area is so large, the analysis will be kept at a fairly general level. The view has a key part in the analysis.

The analysis began with the Round Trip, with the whole project team travelling along the Northern Lights Route to collect stories and explore the area. Since then, the work has continued with searching on the web and in literature, by exploring maps, taking pictures, and doing field visits.

1.3 What is a landscape?

The landscape is the environment around us. It constitutes of different factors; living and inanimate. The living elements are, for example, fauna and vegetation, and the non-living elements are eg climate, land and bedrock.

The landscape is alive and evolving, with various natural phenomena, weather variations, water, wind, sun, and different seasons constantly changing the landscape. The man also modifies the



landscape. A landscape created by the interaction of man and nature is a cultural landscape.

The landscape can be experienced in many ways, using different senses. Our personal experiences and values affect how we experience and observe the landscape.

1.4 What is Northern Lights Route?

The Northern Lights Route begins at the Gulf of Bothnia in Tornio/Haparanda and follows the highway E8 on the Finnish side and the highway 99 on the Swedish side of the River Tornio to Kilpisjärvi and then continues to the Norway through Storfjord to Tromsø. The Northern Lights Route was formerly known as the “Four Winds Road”. The Northern Lights Route was named an official tourist route in 2002. The development of the E8 road for tourism began in 2001 as a project between Finland, Sweden and Norway. The goal has been to improve regional co-operation and add value to tourism marketing and development in the region.

Before the roads or railways were built in the area, The River Tornio served as the main route for travel and trade until the 1830s, when a road was built on the Swedish side. Today, the road follows the river on both sides and there’s also a railway on the Finnish side.

There are seven places for crossing the border along the route; Tornio/Haparanda, Aavasaksa/Matarengi, Pello, Kolari/Pajala, Muonio, Karesuvanto and Kilpisjärvi.



*TornioHaparanda is a vilkas rajanylityspaikka.
photo: Stefan Haapaniemi.*

Northern Lights Route - sign.source:kearesuando.se



The landscape of the Northern Lights Route



The Bothnian Sea and rivers such as Tornio River were the main routes in the area still in the 19th century.

There are seven places for crossing the border along the route.



Aerial view: Vallas Oy/
www.tornio.fi

The Northern Lights Route begins in TornioHaparanda. The route runs towards the North on the both sides of the Tornio River.



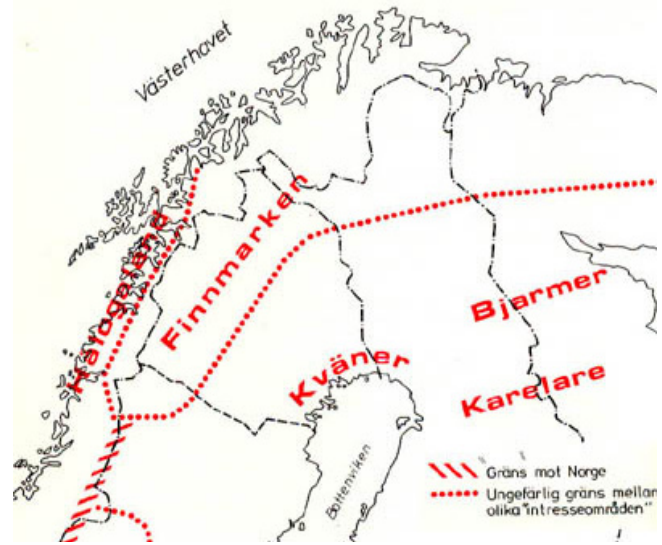
2. The Landscape of the Northern Lights Route

2.1 History

The Landscape of the Northern Lights Route has an exciting history. The beautiful and multi-faceted northern landscape is formed by nature: ice, wind, water and sun, and of course by us, the people. The seas of the region and the great northern streams, rich in fish, the good arable land in the rivervalleys and forests with lots of timber and good hunting have attracted people through the ages and created the possibility to live in the north.

Different tribes and languages have come and gone in the North Calotte for centuries. The old maps tell about these old tribes and kingdoms, such as the Kvens, the Bjarmians, the Karelians, the Laplanders, the Tavastians, the Sámi people, the Danes, the Goths, the Hälsingians and the Norsemen, etc.

The area has always been perceived as somewhat unlimited. Before any countries existed, the routes went mainly east-west. The tribes that spoke different languages lived in the area mostly in harmony, hunting, fishing, trading, animal husbandry and agriculture. Today, the livelihoods have evolved with service and industry taking room from hunting and fishing. When the states appeared, the borders have created artificial barriers in the area. But the people in the region have continued to interact with each other despite of borders.



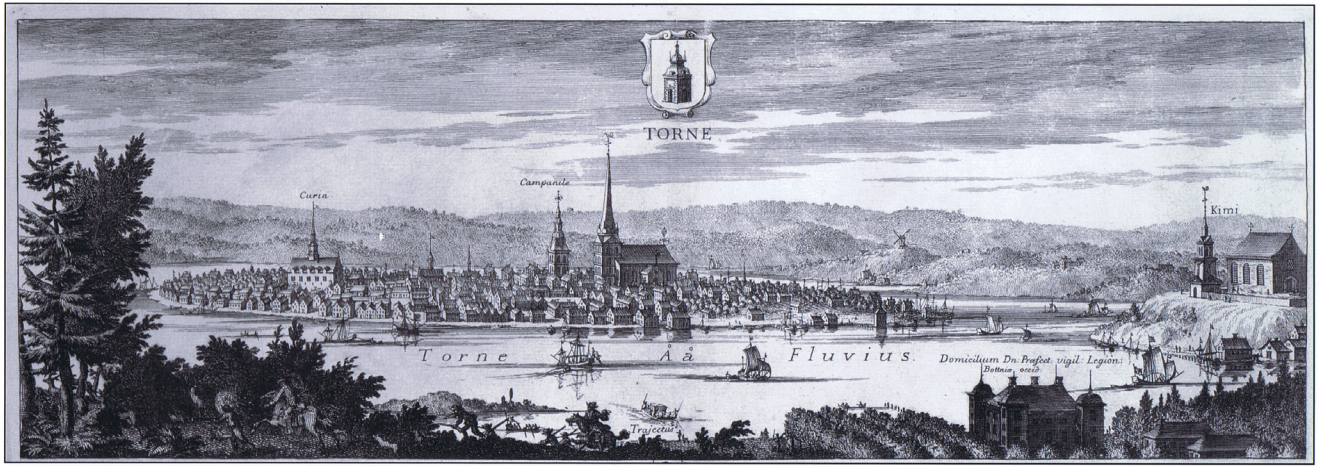
Different tribes and languages have come and gone in the North Calotte for centuries.

Particularly in the 18th century, the area was popular for scientists, and many studies have been done here, for example by Carl von Linné, Anders Celsius, Pierre De Maupertuis and Friedrich Georg Wilhelm von Struve, and of course Anders Hellant, Tornio River Valley's own scientist.

After listening to exciting travel stories from the exotic Tornio River Valley with fairies and the northernmost city of Tornio, other travelers started to come in the wake of explorers. The first destination in the north was born!



Carta Marina was the first Nordic map with names and description of places. The map was made by swedish Olaus Magnus in 1539, while he was working in Rome. It took 12 years to finish the map. Source: Wikipedia.



*A historical view of Tornio, which is almost 400 years old town, founded by the Swedish King Gustav II Adolf in 1621.
Photo: Tornionlaakson maakuntamuseo - Tornio Valley Museum.*

2.2 Landscape view

In the southern part of the area, in TornioHaparanda, the landscape is dominated by the Bothnian Sea and its beautiful archipelago, as well as the wide River Tornio descending into the sea. It runs through the landscape majestic and powerful. The Tornio and other rivers in the area create a unique and beautiful landscape. The forests, rivers and lakes, rich of fish and game, as well as the nice climate and good soil, have already for thousands of years ago attracted people to come to live in the Tornio River Valley. Variable natural landscapes of the Tornio River Valley and beautiful cultural landscapes; the villages, meadows and individual buildings, are valuable also on national scale. The settlements and living are concentrated in the Tornio River Valley along the River of Tornio. The oldest establishments are located near the river, forming ribbons of villages.



The River of Tornio creates a unique and beautiful landscape.



The terrain is flat and vegetation lush. Many former wooden housing blocks in the towns of Tornio and Haparanda have been demolished and replaced by modern buildings, but fortunately some of the valuable historic buildings have also been spared and refurbished. Outside the town center the landscape still features villages in ribbons along riversides, fields and meadows. Numerous small rivers that branch out from the Tornio River create a mosaic landscape. Beautiful river views are abundant in the south of the area.

Old, traditional yard of Åström manor in Tornio.



The landscape of the Bothnian Archipelago is unique. A view from Island of Sarvisaari, in the National Park.



The cultural landscape of Kukkola village.



The hill of Aavasaksa behind the fields.

As we move up the river valley, the terrain becomes more rolling. The strip-like, river-side track continues almost uninterrupted on both sides of the “Fairway” to Ylitornio. High hills, such as Aavasaksa and Pullinki, can be seen on the horizon behind houses and fields.



In old times it was easier to travel along the river.



A resting place with a beautiful river view right by the Kattilakoski, on the Swedish side.



A resting place in Ylitornio with a beautiful river view. Here is potential to make this place a little nicer.



In the middle of the area, by the Pajala -Kolari and Muonio, the landscape is mainly relatively flat or gently rolling, covered with forests and marshes. The road and houses in the area follow the terrain and the river valley.



There are several river views and you can get new perspectives if you sometimes travel on the other side of the river.

In the middle of the area, by the Pajala - Kolari and Muonio, the landscape is mainly relatively flat or gently rolling, covered with forests and marshes. The majority of marshes are bare. There is also a lot of woodland, but nearby the villages and surrounding fields the landscape is open and also provides views of the river. The road and houses in the area follow the terrain and the river valley.

In the north, the terrain becomes mountainous. The landscape is mostly wide, formed by the river, the edges of the large forest areas and the

outlines of the fell-chains.

In the area of Enontekiö and Kilpisjärvi, the landscape is transformed into a highland dominated by high fells such as Saana and Halti, and large lakes such as Lake Kilpisjärvi. Because of the harsh conditions, vegetation is tough. In the valleys there are mountain birches, higher areas are treeless.

The landscape is very mountainous when we move to the Norwegian side of the border, towards Skibotn or Yykeänperä, as its Finnish name is. On the way from Lake Kilpisjärvi to the Norwegian Sea, terrain shapes are steep, and elevation differences between valleys, fjords and mountains are growing rapidly, although already in Kilpisjärvi the terrain was clearly more mountainous compared to other parts of Finland. The road winds up like a serpentine in the mountains until we arrive at the Lyngenfjorden / Yykeänvuono, where the landscape opens.



Highland landscape in Kilpisjärvi with the Saana Mountain.



On the Norwegian side, the terrain gets steeper.



A fjord view in Storslett.

The road goes forward towards Storslett following the fjord. The views are spectacular. Storslett, where our trip ends, is the center of the municipality of Nordreisa, located in Reisa Valley, at the southern end of Reisa fjord. Landscape is dominated by the high mountains on both sides of Reisa Valley and the River Reisa, flowing at the bottom of the valley. While standing there by the fjord, you can sense the proximity of the Arctic Ocean. People from Tornio River Valley have been travelling, hunting and fishing here for centuries. Many also stayed here permanently. The people from Tornio River Valley brought horses, cattle and sheep with them and started farming. As a matter of fact, the kveens are considered as developers of North Norwegian agriculture. The kveens also founded a number of current Norwegian villages and cities. For example, the city of Alta in northern Norway is the old Kveen colony, Alattio.



Reisadalen



Finnish- / kveen settlers brought domestic animals to northern Norway. The Norwegian Nordland - Lyngen horse (in the picture) is partly the same as traditional Finnish horse.



3. Impressions of the Northern Lights Route

How you experience the road as a driver

strenghts:

- + beautiful and pure nature
- + heritage / old time environments, living heritage
- + cultural environments, exciting and long history
- + living villages
- + nice urban environments
- + beautiful views
- + waters; rivers, seas, lakes, fjords

How you experience the road as a driver

weaknesses:

- unfamiliarity
- everyday, lack of high lights
- in some places the landscape is monotonous/ lack of views
- the number of resting places by the road and their facilities
- poor awareness of the parallell road in the neighboring country
- the road information could be better

- the potential, stories, history etc. of the area are not utilized enough



4. Proposals

- Increasing the number of Northern Lights Route signposts. Developing a new symbol?
- Wider use of the symbols of the Northern Lights Route, for example, in marketing and by the businesses along the route.
- Develop alternative routes and travel along the Northern Lights Route eg by horse, boat or reindeer. Experiencing hiking along historic routes.
- Northern Lights Route = eventful route. Explore the sights and visit the events along the road.
- Improve the connection between Finland and Sweden by developing the Northern Lights Route as a whole, even though the road runs along both sides of the river.
- Increase the number of resting places along the Northern Lights Route, and develop resting places to inform tourists about the stories, history, events, nature, phenomena, etc. in the area.
- Bringing up/opening up beautiful views along the route.
- Making the stories and the landscape along the route more visible for the travellers/visitors.



Develop alternative routes, along the Northern Lights Route, and travel, eg by horse? Photo: Saagan Issikat.



4.1 How to bring the stories to life?



The Kukkolankoski Road sign is positively different.



The Kukkolaforseen Road sign is easy to notice.



The Särkilahti Chapel, which was destroyed in a extreme spring flood in 1671, north of Ylitornio, has been rebuilt next to the Northern Lights Route.



Renovated, old houses tells about living in old times. This is a old kveen house in Nordreisa, Norway.



This old car in Muonio tells the story about the early winterholiday tourism in Lapland.



The story of the Lovika knitted glove has been made visible like this in the village of Lovika.



Take a break under the old “Noggin Pine”. Resting place with a story, in Vittangi.

4.2 Finally

At present, the Northern Lights Route is mainly considered just as a way to get from point A to point B. However, it has the potential to become a travel destination in itself. There are lots of stories, events, culture, history and beautiful nature in the landscape surrounding the Northern Lights Route. Relatively small measures would be enough to bring all this into the consciousness of the travelers. When the interest of a traveler has been aroused, he or she can start to find out more of the “source of the story.” By careful and inventive developing and designing, we can create an exiting travel destination of the Northern Lights Route and its surrounding landscape, which is more than just a transit route.



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