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# Sport Tourism and Destination Marketing.

## Case: Innsbruck and Lahti

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This thesis focuses on researching sport tourism and its role and importance in destination marketing in two cities, Innsbruck and Lahti. The aim of this study is to discover the strengths and weaknesses of these two cities as sport tourism destinations and find out how important a role sport tourism has in the marketing material produced by these cities. Additionally, this thesis provides some ideas on how to develop sport tourism further in the aforementioned cities.

This thesis aims to highlight the benefits sport tourism has and encourage cities to develop it further. Sport tourism has been identified to be an upcoming tourism market with significant economical potential that benefits from the increasing number of studies done on the topic. The theoretical section of this thesis introduces the many aspects of sport tourism as well as those of destination marketing. This theory is applied to the study of finding out what are the biggest advantages and disadvantages are which Innsbruck and Lahti have as sport tourism destinations in Europe.

The research for this study was made by using qualitative methods. Structured interviews with tourism professionals provide a base for a good part of this research while observations and benchmarking were also done in both Innsbruck and Lahti. Additionally, a number of brochures and websites were analyzed in order to gain information on the importance of sport tourism in the marketing of these cities.

The results indicate that as sport tourism cities, Innsbruck and Lahti both have many strengths, but also certain weaknesses. There are some issues that are shared by these two cities, but the research indicates that Innsbruck is ahead of Lahti when it comes to successfully developing sport tourism and making it a part of the city brand. In general the study shows that sport tourism is important for both cities and is one of the most used themes in their marketing.

Sport tourism is a niche with a lot of development potential and it can have a significant impact on economical and cultural development of cities and countries as well as their brands. The market for sport tourism is expanding while the nature of it is changing. This thesis concludes that Innsbruck and Lahti will need to take the changes within sport tourism into consideration when continuing their development of sport tourism events and facilities in the future.

Keywords: destination marketing, Innsbruck, Lahti, sport tourism, sport tourism development

Jenni Ahvenainen

Urheilumatkailu ja kohdemarkkinointi. Case: Innsbruck ja Lahti

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Tämä opinnäytetyö keskittyy urheilumatkailun ja sen kohdemarkkinoinnillisen roolin ja tärkeyden tutkimiseen kahdessa kaupungissa, Innsbruckissa ja Lahdessa. Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena on selvittää näiden kahden kaupungin heikkoudet ja vahvuudet urheilumatkailukohteina sekä tutkia kuinka tärkeä rooli urheilumatkailulla on näiden kahden kaupungin tuottamassa markkinointimateriaalissa. Lisäksi tämä opinnäytetyö tarjoaa joitakin ideoita urheilumatkailun jatkokehittämiseen edellä mainituissa kaupungeissa.

Tutkimus korostaa urheilumatkailun etuja ja koettaa kannustaa kaupunkeja tämän matkailualan kehittämiseen. Urheilumatkailun on havaittu olevan nouseva matkailumarkkina-alue jolla on paljon taloudellista potentiaalia ja joka hyöttyy aiheesta tehdyistä uusista tutkimuksista. Tämän opinnäytetyön teoreettinen osio esittelee sekä urheilumatkailun että kohdemarkkinoinnin kannalta tärkeitä näkökohdat. Teoriaa sovelletaan tutkimukseen joka pyrkii selvittämään ne urheilumatkailun hyödyt ja haitat joita Innsbruckilla ja Lahdella on eurooppalaisina urheilumatkakohteina.

Opinnäytetyö on tehty käyttäen laadullisia tutkimusmenetelmiä. Matkailualan ammattilaisten kanssa tehdyt strukturoidut haastattelut luovat pohjan suurelle osaa tätä tutkimusta, lisäksi sekä Innsbruckissa että Lahdessa suoritettiin havainnointia ja esikuvavertailua. Myös huomattava määrä esitteitä ja internet-sivuja analysoitiin jotta saatiin tietoa urheilumatkailun merkityksestä näissä kaupungeissa.

Tulokset osoittavat että sekä Innsbruckilla että Lahdella on urheilumatkailukaupunkeina useita vahvuuksia, mutta myös eräitä heikkouksia. Jotkin asiat kaupungeissa ovat hyvin samanlaisia, mutta tutkimus osoittaa, että Innsbruck on Lahtea edellä urheilumatkailun onnistuneessa kehittämisessä ja sen sisällyttämisessä kaupungin brändiin. Yleisesti voidaan todeta, että urheilumatkailulla on kummallekin kaupungille suuri merkitys.

Urheilumatkailu on sellainen matkailun ala jolla on paljon kehittämispotentiaalia ja jolla saattaa olla suuri taloudellinen ja kulttuurillinen vaikutus kaupunkien ja maiden sekä niiden brändien kehittämiseen. Urheilumatkailun markkina-alue kasvaa samalla kun sen luonne muuttuu. Tämän opinnäytetyön mukaan Innsbruckin ja Lahden tulee ottaa tapahtuvat muutokset huomioon jatkaessaan urheilumatkailuun liittyvien tapahtumien ja palveluiden kehittämistä tulevaisuudessa.

Asiasanat: Innsbruck, Lahti, kohdemarkkinointi, urheilumatkailu, urheilumatkailun kehittämisen

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## 1 Introduction

This bachelor's thesis focuses on introducing and analyzing sport tourism. Today tourism is often divided into different niche markets and while such subjects as cultural and ecological tourism have been the focus of many studies, in the recent years there has not been that many studies on sport tourism in Finland. According to Neirrotti (2003, 1), over the past few years sport tourism's potential has been understood to be increasingly significant and this niche market has become more important than before. Ritchie (2005, 157, 158) continues that governments, the tourism industry and academics have shown growing interest in the field of sport tourism and that sport tourism is gaining recognition as a viable tourism market. This thesis aims to bring a new argument to special interest tourism as well as providing insight into marketing methods in two different countries. The cities chosen to act as examples in this study are Innsbruck in Austria and Lahti in Finland.

The research is done in both of these cities by collecting and analyzing data and by interviewing professionals within the sport tourism and marketing field. Sport tourism relies heavily on consumers' perceptions and experiences and understanding how consumers see a destination is a key element. However, it is equally important to know about the way marketing professionals see the destination and knowing where these two visions correspond and where they differ from each other.

Sport tourism is not only about visiting a place for doing a specific sport but it is a mix of culture, politics and economics (Weed & Bull 2004). The aim of this thesis is to find out the strengths and weaknesses of Innsbruck and Lahti as sport tourism destinations and what these cities could learn from each other. Furthermore, this research aims to find out what kind of role sport tourism plays in the marketing material these cities produce to the general public. This thesis combines the author's interest in sport and tourism in a way that is most familiar to her, namely in being a spectator. It also allows the author to take a look at marketing measures from that same point of view. The writer of this paper decided to forego the traditional surveys of people's motivations for sport tourism related trips and instead take a look at how sport tourism shapes a city as a tourism destination.

The two cities chosen to act as examples in this thesis were chosen due to the fact that the author spent a semester studying in Innsbruck and was fascinated by the city's history of organizing successful sporting events and offering numerous places for sport tourism today. The city of Lahti was chosen because it was reasonable to find a city in Finland to compare Innsbruck with. The researcher was already familiar with Lahti and the region and the fact that it has a prominent status as a sporting city sealed the choice. It was also taken into notice that

when it comes to population both cities are around the same size and that neither of them is the city that attracts most of the tourists in their respective country.

The main focus in this research is in understanding sport tourism, introducing its theory and the process of becoming a sport tourism destination. The examples that are presented in this study will help the future development of sport tourism destinations and enhance comparisons between cities. This paper will explore the following questions:

What is the importance of sport tourism in the cities of Innsbruck and Lahti?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of these particular destinations?

How is sport tourism represented in the marketing material of the destinations?

How to further develop sport tourism and marketing in Innsbruck and Lahti?

The aim of these questions is to discover and explain the challenges in tourism planning and give information on the marketing measures implemented. These questions also help to find out how and why these two cities have become to be known as sport tourism destinations and what kind of future they have ahead of them.

## 2 Sport Tourism

### 2.1 Defining sport tourism

Generalized definitions of the word sport and what it means lead people to think of some sort of physical activity that can be done either alone or in a group. This is a right line of thought, but there are other characteristics that should be noted too. Many definitions of sport include that in addition to a physical activity there should also be structure and rules (Hinch & Higham 2011, 18). Taking the definition of sport further are McPherson et al. (1989, 15) who state that sport is often something competitive and based on contests and that there are goals people want to reach. Most of the time the notions of contests and goals bring into mind professional sports done by elite athletes, but these same characteristics apply to sports done for recreational purposes too. Weed (2008, 6) lists similar characteristics for sport as the others, but he also states that sport can be done either actively, passively or vicariously. This means that sport is something spectators are doing although they are not actively taking part in a competition.

Tourism is about "the movement of people to countries and places outside their usual environment" (UNWTO 2008). Hinch and Higham (2011, 19) expand that in order for someone to be called a tourist this person must return to their home at some point. They also write that sport is an important part of tourism, just like tourism is often associated with varying types of sport (Hinch & Higham 2011, 20).

This brings up a question: if sport is a part of tourism and vice versa, what then is sport tourism? The easiest way to answer this question would be to say that sport tourism is a form of tourism where people travel to do sports outside of their normal environment. This is not wrong, but the definition of sport tourism is not so one-sided. Like Hall (1992a, 194) and Weed & Bull (1997b, 5) say, sport tourism is travel where a sporting activity is part of the purpose of the trip but they also continue that the tourist can be either a participant or a spectator. These definitions make it clear that both a person travelling to a place to play football as well as a person who travels to watch a football match is a sport tourist. Hinch and Higham (2011, 33) however want to make a differentiation between tourists and athletes and spectators travelling for sports as they see these two groups do not have similar motives for their travels. According to them, tourists "participate in sports while travelling" (Hinch & Higham 2011, 33). What motivates athletes and spectators to travel is that they are looking for a competition or want to pursue their passions.

Deery et al. (2004) have a differing definition of what sport tourism is as they say that the definition of sport only includes competitive sports and all other forms of sport should be either recreational or leisure pursuits. Based on this, they argue that sport tourism is basically sport event tourism and that it is only focused on sports that are competitive. Weed offers us a definition of sport tourism that is slightly different from all the others while encompassing the same attributes others have given for sport tourism. He writes that sport tourism is "a social, economic and cultural phenomenon arising from the unique interaction of activity, people and place" (2008, 7).

Weed has also divided sport tourism into five different types, which are tourism with sports content, sports participation tourism, sports training, sports event and luxury sport tourism. According to him, tourism with sports content is the kind of tourism where sport is not the primary reason for the trip (2008, 12). This is for example the kind of tourism where the tourist finds out about a sporting event in the destination while being there and decides to go see it. Another example could be that the tourist knows of a famous sporting area or stadium in the place they are visiting and chooses to visit it because it feels like something that ought to be done.

In the case of sport participation tourism sport is the number one reason for doing the trip (Weed 2008, 15). This includes all sorts of travel from going to a destination for skiing or for playing golf, but here sport can also be a transport method. This means that when a tourist decides they will be riding their bike or kayaking from one place to another they are actively engaging in sport participation tourism.



Sports training, as the name suggests, happens when a holiday is planned to be first and foremost about some sort of sport instruction or training (Weed 2008, 17). Weed goes on to divide this type of sport tourism into three subcategories where the first one is about travelling somewhere to learn how to do a sport. This can be a trip to Australia to learn how to dive or going to the Alps to learn the basics of downhill skiing. The next subcategory is meant for those tourists who already have an idea how to do some sport but who want to receive more instructions. A good example would be someone who knows how to play tennis and who takes part in a course to learn how to become a better player. Weed's final category is about elite training and there we can find national squads comprising of athletes who do a sport for a living.

When it comes to sports events, the main reason why people travel is to take part in an event, either as a participant or as a spectator (Weed 2008, 19). The final type of sport tourism according to Weed is luxury sport tourism, which is slightly different from the other types. Here, the defining element is not who does the sport or how it is done, but the quality of the facilities where sport is done. (Weed 2008, 21) Luxury sports tourism has characteristics such as high quality facilities, luxurious accommodation and top-level service.

Another way of dividing sport tourism into different categories comes from Gammon and Robinson (1997, 10-11) who talk about either sport tourism or tourism sport, both of which can be either hard or soft. Their definition of tourism is similar to Weed's sport participation tourism. They say that hard sport tourism is about actively or passively taking part in a competitive sport event whereas soft sport tourism is what is done for recreational purposes. In tourism sport sport does not play the most significant role in choosing a destination. In the hard definition tourism sport is something secondary that enriches the experience. Soft tourism sport is talked about when sport is not at all a planned part of a holiday and simply happens because it can be done in the destination, like going bowling or playing a round of mini golf. (Gammon & Robinson 1997, 10-11)

To conclude, it can be said that sport is a structured, competitive physical activity that has rules and that can be done either alone or in groups. Sport tourism then is a form of tourism where sport usually has an active part when it comes to planning and implementing a trip. A sport tourist is a person who takes part in sport by being either a participant or a spectator. Furthermore, sport tourism can be divided into different types according to its importance for the reasons of travelling. In this research sport tourism is understood to include competitive sport and events as well as leisure and recreational sport.

## 2.2 Sport tourism markets

Sport tourism in itself is a niche market within the wider field of tourism. Niche market is understood to be a "more narrowly defined group whereby the individuals in the group are identifiable by the same needs or interests" (Robinson & Novelli 2005, 5). As a result, sport tourism can be divided into more niche markets such as winter sport tourism, adventure sport tourism or water sport tourism. This helps to understand that people have very different motivations when it comes to participating in sport tourism. Maier and Weber (1993, 38) have divided sport tourism participants into three different demand groups. The first group includes top-performance athletes who prioritize training facilities and competitions over other factors. This group is followed by those tourists who take part in mass sports in order to stay healthy or to reach set targets. Maier and Weber continue by adding people who are looking for sports that are not overly demanding into the occasional sports (wo)men group. Their final demand group comprises of attendants of sports events as well as coaches and media and is called passive sports tourists. This grouping already gives us an idea of the many markets sport tourism and destinations are targeting. Like Nogawa et al. state, destination marketers must "understand the motivational and behavioral profiles of sport tourism market segments." (1996) It is risky to assume all sport tourists are the same and are looking for the same things in the destination, as that is hardly the case.

Sport tourism markets can be divided roughly into two categories, to those who participate in actively and to those who are passive participants. Active sport tourists travel to take part in physical activities and might even choose a specific location because of the sport resources it offers. (Hinch & Higham 2011, 42) Passive sport tourists on the other hand can be equaled with the event sport tourists who visit places to witness a sporting event. It is also possible that sport events may attract visitors for whom the event itself is not a primary factor for travelling. These people may go see tennis or a football match because they have been played for decades in a certain city and thus have become something that is very traditional. They might also attend a sporting event because it is exclusive of nature and is something that only some people have the possibility to experience. (Hinch & Higham 2011, 52)

What are the reasons that motivate sport tourism travel, in addition to some of the reasons that have been mentioned earlier? Among the push factors, that is, those factors that encourage visitors to travel are for example the want to achieve sporting goals and the possibility to do things that the tourist cannot do in their home environment. Pull factors, those that attract tourists to a destination, are the image of the destination, the price level it has and the people in the destination. (Stewart 2011)

It can be said that sport tourism markets can be divided in many ways, but separating them into active and passive sport tourists is the easiest way. It is essential for destination marketers to keep in mind that different markets are looking for different things and that there are times when sport tourism can be something that is done to add value to the holiday but not the primary reason for the trip.

### 2.3 Sport tourism places

Places are something that are constructed by social processes and that can change over time. They comprise of things such as material objects, companies, workers, societies as well as practices and values. (Shaw & Williams 2004, 186-187) Generally sport tourism places can be divided into two categories, which according Hinch and Higham (2011) are peripheral and central locations. When talking about places many will equal them with destinations even though there are differences. Here the focus will be on places that can be seen as the areas where destinations are set and destinations will be discussed more later on in this research.

Peripheral sport tourism locations are usually places that have natural resources such as mountains or rivers that make them attractive for sport tourism. These natural resources can be complimented with built facilities, for example by having a restaurant at the skiing slope at the mountains. (Hinch & Higham 2011, 84) Central locations on the other hand are places that the visitors can reach with little travel. A good example of these would be sports centers or stadia in inner cities.

As mentioned earlier, peripheral locations are marked by the landscape they have and as such they rely heavily on active sport tourists. The advantage of peripheral locations is that they often have natural resources unique to the place and active sport tourists are likely to appreciate that over the number of sports that can be done in the location or the facilities that there are. (Hinch & Higham 2011, 97) However, according to Hinch and Higham (2011, 98) peripheral sport tourism locations also face issues that might be of disadvantage. Sometimes the location might be so remote and hard to reach that only a small number of tourists visit it. Weather conditions in mountainous area or near large bodies of water might change fast and the issue of climate change might turn some locations usable only during some times of the year. In the most extreme cases the changes in weather can make it completely impossible for a location to be used in sport tourism.

Central sport tourism locations have a clear advantage over peripheral ones when it comes to attracting visitors. A sports center or a track located close to other major sights in the destination is likely to have tourists visit it even if they were not originally planning it. As Hinch and Higham (2011, 91) state, "central sport locations that are situated adjacent to city ser-

vice and entertainment areas have become an important aspect of the planning for sports centers". This means that in the future it is possible to see areas where shopping centers and leisure complexes are built in the vicinity of sports centers so that sport tourists can get everything they need from one location.

It is also possible that certain places become identified through sports (Hinch & Higham 2011, 113). This happens when specific regions are associated with specific sports, such as Scotland with golf or Brazil with football. If a place has many successful sport teams it can lead to being identified through sports too. An example of this would be the city of Manchester, which is home to two successful football clubs. Personification of a place through sporting heroes and heroines is another way a place can be identified through sports. Taking the case of Argentinian footballer Lionel Messi it is evident that his successful career has made not only Barcelona but also Argentina places that are identified through football.

Peripheral sport tourism locations often rank among those that are lower in the location order while central locations tend to be higher in such order. It needs to be kept in mind that locations can be developed and they can attract more visitors. (Hinch & Higham 2011, 102) However, it is imperative that marketing processes do not damage the meanings and image a location has because that might make the places seem undesirable to tourists. If a peripheral location is developed too much it might lose the allure it had to active sport tourists and the visitor numbers could go down. Similarly, if central locations suddenly come to include every sport one could imagine tourists might think it is simply too much.

#### 2.4 Sport tourism trends

Many of the trends in sport tourism follow the bigger trends affecting tourism in general, trends such as population ageing, climate change and the increasing role of social media. The fact that the population in western countries is growing older is leading to a shift in the form of sport tourism. Elder participants are looking for sports that are physically less demanding than many past and present hard sport activities. For example, they could be changing from mountain climbing to hiking or from downhill skiing to cross country skiing because for the elder sport tourists preserving their health tends to mean more than getting an adrenaline rush. (Hinch & Higham 2011, 208)

Climate change has been one of the most talked trends and issues in tourism for years and it is something that affects especially those destinations that are based on either summer or winter sports (Hinch & Higham 2011, 205). For example, when the climate shifts from clear winters and summers into seasons that see very little snow in the winters and a lot of rain during the summer, many destinations need to find new ways to attract visitors. For skiing

destinations winters with little to no snow mean bad times for business and these destinations will need to invest in snow making equipment if they want to continue their operation. For destinations that are based on summer sport tourism extremely hot or very rainy summers can mean that visitors start looking into places where the weather conditions are better and do not hinder the sport activities.

The ever-increasing role of social media and sports experiences that cannot be obtained online create their own challenges for destinations and especially for sport tourism events. There are many services, legal and illegal, offering live video and updates from sporting events. Earlier it was feared that sports being broadcasted on television would discourage fans from attending the actual competitions and watching them at home instead (Hinch & Higham 2011, 203-204, 209). This is understandable from the point of view of organizers because they want to fill the stadia and create an atmosphere for the event.

However, it can also be argued that giving spectators the chance to watch events on their television or on their computers makes it possible to attract new visitors to destinations. Furthermore, it allows those sport fans that cannot obtain tickets or travel to the competition sites to follow the events and thus keep up their interest in sports. During the recent London Olympic Games the European Broadcasting Union offered numerous live streams of events for free so that people could follow the Games even though they could not do it on the spot (European Broadcasting Union 2012). It can be said that this way they managed to promote various sport disciplines as well as give the London Games an image of openness.

Social media also has a role in how people choose the place they visit. Many people may post questions about the pros and cons of certain destination or ask general advice on where to travel and when if they would like to do certain sports. Opinions and suggestions from other social media users are valuable and it is an easy way to find information. Additionally, social media gives spectators the possibility to be part of the event by commenting what is going on and prompt discussion on issues that might be current in a sport.

High profile sporting events such as the Olympic Games attract thousands and thousands of visitors and they are also visited by a large number of heads of states. While there have been no severe attacks on sporting events after 1972 in Munich, the events will need to pay more and more attention to their security arrangements in this day and age. This in turn means that when the security costs rise, some cities may not be able to host events in the future. It also means that people might prefer staying at home watching the events than make the way to the competition site. (Hinch & Higham 2011, 207)

In the trends that are shaping sport tourism and the activities, it can be said that indoor simulation of outdoor facilities has been and continues to be popular. Some examples of this could be skating rinks and skiing slopes in shopping malls and cruise ships. (Kurtzman & Zauhar 2004, 284) Many sports activities also get adapted so that they can be done in the cities too and do not require travel. This offers access to sports for people who do not have the time or resources for travelling. Good examples of this would be indoor climbing walls for those who are interested in rock climbing or skiing tubes for those who want to do cross country skiing but do not have access to traditional tracks.

In conclusion, there are numerous trends that are shaping sport tourism in many ways. It is important that marketers keep in mind the power of social media while destinations must look into how they are going to keep up with the ageing population and their demands while battling the issue of climate change. These are by no means the only trends in the world of sport tourism, but these are among the most important ones.

### 3 Destinations

#### 3.1 Defining a destination

According to the World Tourism Organization "tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes." (UNWTO 2008) Playing a major part in tourism is the destination, which the World Tourism Organization defines as "the place visited central to the decision to take the trip" (UNWTO 2008). However, destination is not an easy or straightforward concept to define and may vary considerably in different contexts. Therefore it is important to understand the different kinds of definitions of the same term.

One way of defining a destination is to say that it is a place where tourists temporarily base themselves in order to participate in interaction and activities related to tourism (Pike 2008, 26). Pike continues that from the demand-perspective destinations are places attracting tourists for a temporary stay and can range from continents to countries and from cities to purpose-built resorts. (2008, 24-25) In Medlik's definition destinations have the attribute that tourists visit them but he also notes that destinations have amenities serving permanent residents and that those amenities have temporary users too, namely tourists. Furthermore, according to Medlik the importance of a geographic unit as a tourism destination is determined by the attractions it has, its amenities and what kind of accessibility the place has. (1993, 148)

Similar to all definitions is the fact that visitors from outside the location are needed in order for a place to be a destination. As Cooper and Hall state, a destination “comes to exist by virtue of the people who visit it” (2008, 112). However, it is interesting to note that in some definitions it is highlighted that tourism should be a predominant activity both from demand side and from the supply side thus encompassing tourists as well as infrastructure and employment. (Papatheodorou 2006, xv)

In addition to having people outside the destination visit it, many definitions emphasize that a place ought to have attractions or activities to be called a destination. Cooper and Hall define an attraction as something that tourists are prepared to visit and experience for a purpose that is not directly supporting their travel. (2008, 118) Although attractions often have a key role in motivations for travel they often enjoy the least of the tourists’ expenditure (Goeldner & Ritchie 2003, 207). Attractions can be divided into many different segments, but those related to this study are segments such as events and recreation. The event segment includes but is not limited to megaevents, festivals and sport events while recreation is often about doing sports like tennis, golf, hiking or snow sports. (Goeldner & Ritchie 2003, 205)

Why, then, do locations want to become destinations? The simplest answer to this is that they want to gain the economic benefits tourism brings (Cooper & Hall 2008, 112). In addition to this, many places wish to promote a destination to secure investments and acquire migration (Cooper & Hall 2008, 129). These definitions help understand what a manifold term destination is and how the definition differs within the tourism field.

### 3.2 Destination marketing organizations

Organizations responsible for helping destinations promote themselves are called destination marketing organizations. Traditionally destination marketing organizations or DMOs were departments or agencies that received government funding for marketing a destination. These days they have grown to involve the private sector too. (Cooper & Hall 2008, 236) Marketing is outlined to be a social and managerial process. The aim of this process is to create and exchange products and value that either individuals or groups can acquire. (Koller et al. 1999, 12) The tasks of destination marketing organizations vary, but mostly revolve around creating and developing a positive image of a certain destination through various means of promotion. What is more, these organizations will also have to manage the networks and stakeholders a destination possibly has. (Cooper & Hall 2008, 225, 217)

Pike (2004) has divided the work of destination marketing organizations into four goals, which include enhancing destination image, increasing industry profitability, reducing seasonality and ensuring long-term funding. The answer to the question why it is important that destina-

tion marketing organizations promote a destination in positive light can be summarized into Cooper and Hall's (2008, 223) statement: "the image of destination is critical to marketing as it affects both an individual's perception of a destination and their choice of destination". In other words, in order to a destination to thrive, it needs to gain favorable publicity and this is what the destination marketing organizations work towards. It should also be noted that many organizations are shying away from doing what their name suggests, that is focusing on marketing and moving towards managing destinations. (Cooper & Hall 2008, 237)

If destination marketing organizations' most important task is to assist a destination in creating and publicizing a positive image, what are the biggest challenges these organizations face? According to Pike (2008, 44) the greatest challenge destination marketing organizations must deal with is how to differentiate their offering in the most effective way when the consumer is making their decision. As he continues, "one of the greatest obstacles to achieving destination competitiveness is the challenge of marketing multi-attributed destinations in dynamic and heterogeneous markets" (Pike 2008, 43). It is crucial to keep these tasks and challenges destinations and destination marketing organizations have in mind when taking a closer look at the places in the core of this research.

### 3.3 Innsbruck

#### 3.3.1 Sport tourism in Innsbruck

Innsbruck is the capital of federal province of Tyrol in Austria, located in a valley that is surrounded by the Alpine mountains of Nordkette, Patscherkofel and Serles. The city has a population of 121,329 inhabitants (Statistik Austria 2012). The area of the city is 104,91 square kilometers and Innsbruck can be easily reached by motorway, by both domestic and international trains and by plane via one of the many scheduled flights from a number of European cities (Innsbruck Tourism 2010). Innsbruck is known for its long sporting history; in 1964 the city hosted the Olympic Winter Games for the first time. It was granted the honor of hosting the Games again in 1976 and in 2012 it hosted the first ever Youth Winter Olympic Games. During the summer of 2008 Innsbruck acted as one of the Austrian hosts of the Euro2008 European Championships in football. (Innsbruck Tourism online 2012)

The sport tourism options in Innsbruck range from downhill skiing to extreme sports and hiking. Being surrounded by the Alps offers Innsbruck and its holiday villages unique places for sports that do not exist anywhere else in the world. Mountain-related sports are popular in the region and for example, the Olympia Skiworld Innsbruck has nine different ski areas with 300 kilometers of slopes and runs. The Skiworld includes ski areas of Axamer Lizum, Patscherkofel, Muttereralm, Nordkette, Glungezer, Rangger Köpfl, Kühtai, Schlick 2000 and Stubai



Glacier. This ensures skiing possibilities until spring in the glaciers and quick ski trips in the near vicinity of Innsbruck city center. (Innsbruck Tourism 2012b, 3-4) In addition to traditional downhill skiing these areas offer the possibility for ski touring and snowboarding. Moreover, for those who prefer cross-country skiing, there are approximately 120 kilometers of tracks both in the mountains and on the valleys (Innsbruck Tourism 2012b, 10).

Winter sports in Innsbruck are not only limited to skiing and snowboarding, the tourists can also do winter hiking on paths with a length ranging from 250 meters to almost 14 kilometers. There are also more than 90 kilometers of toboggan runs for those who want to try something different. (Innsbruck Tourism 2012b, 12-13) Furthermore, there are several rinks for curling and almost all the holiday villages in addition to Innsbruck have at least one ice skating rink.

For those who are more interested in participating in summer sport activities in Innsbruck the Alps act as a scene for numerous different activities. Hiking appears to be the most popular summer sport activity and Innsbruck Tourism in cooperation with the Alpin Schule Innsbruck organizes dozens of hiking tours for tourists. Most of the tours are free of charge and with the duration of few hours they are suitable for most age groups from toddlers to elderly people. (Innsbruck Tourism 2012c, 6) There are around 1,220 kilometers of hiking routes in the mountains and they are clearly marked so that those hikers who wish to go on their own can easily find a suitable path for themselves. In the recent years mountain biking has become a popular activity and as a result the mountains have 115 kilometers of sign-posted routes. In the Inn valley, bikers can enjoy up to 350 kilometers of biking routes. (Innsbruck Tourism 2012c, 36)

Sport enthusiasts who would like to try something more extreme than hiking or mountain biking can choose from activities such as rock climbing, paragliding, skydiving or white water rafting. Innsbruck and the surrounding areas have the possibility to offer almost all sports one can think of.

When it comes to sports centers in Innsbruck, it can be said that the Olympiaworld rises above others in what it offers. The world consists of the Olympic Hall, which is mainly used for ice sports events but also for ball sports such as basketball, and boxing. It also houses concerts, galas and other similar events. In the Tiroler Wasserkraft Arena one can see Innsbruck's ice hockey team play, but also go to one of the public ice-skating events or watch professional skaters. The Tivoli Stadium is home for FC Wacker Innsbruck, the city's football team with a turbulent history. The football stadium was also one of the venues during Euro2008. Furthermore, the Olympiaworld has Tyrolean Sports Center, which has a handful of rooms and sports halls for athletes who want to train in Innsbruck. (Olympiaworld 2012)

One of the most interesting sports centers within the holiday villages is the high-altitude training centre in Kühtai. They provide athletes, both professional and amateurs, with top-notch training opportunities in their facilities located 2,000 meters above the sea level. Among their facilities are football pitch that meets international standards, a reservoir lake for those who go to practice rowing and canoeing and some smaller facilities for track and field athletes. (Höhenleistungszentrum Kühtai 2012)

While the aforementioned activities and places are popular among sport tourists in Innsbruck, there is one place that is more famous and attracts thousands of visitors every year. It is, of course, the Bergisel ski jump stadium that was constructed again in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and saw the grand opening ceremony take place in September 2002. The current jump is designed by world-renowned architect Zaha Hadid, who has left her mark on the cable car stations in Innsbruck as well. Already in the year 1927 the first ski jump competition was held on the site and in 1952 it became one of the hosts of the annual Four Hills ski jumping tournament. During ski jump competitions the stadium can hold up to 28,000 spectators, but this limit was topped in 1988 when Pope John Paul II held a mass for 60,000 people in the stadium. While the stadium is best known for the ski jumping competitions, in 2008 it became the home for Air & Style, a snowboarding show and competition event. The stadium also had the honor of acting as the venue for the opening ceremony of the first Youth Olympic Winter Games in 2012. (Bergisel 2012)

As mentioned earlier, Innsbruck is one of the hosts of the Four Hills Tournament, one of the most prominent ski jumping tournaments in the world. The tournament takes place each year, usually starting on the 28<sup>th</sup> of December and ending on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January the following year. Other locations for the tournament are Oberstdorf and Garmisch-Partenkirchen in Germany and Bischofshofen in Austria. Season 2011/2012 marked the 60<sup>th</sup> time the tournament was arranged, culminating to the fourth consecutive win by an Austrian ski jumper. Only one jumper has managed to win all four competitions of the tournament, Sven Hannawald of Germany in the season of 2001/2002. One of the most memorable tournaments was that of season 2005/2006 when Finland's Janne Ahonen and Jakub Janda of Czech Republic shared the overall win of the tournament with the exact same amount of points. (Vierschanzentournee 2012)

In the beginning of June, Innsbruck acts as a stage for an international athletics meeting known as Golden Roof Challenge. This meeting has been arranged since 2005 and the happening takes place in the old town by the famous Golden Roof. In this event, men compete in long jump and pole vault and women participate in long jump. In 2012, approximately 5,000 spectators attended the free event to see some of the world's best athletes compete. (Golden Roof Challenge 2012)

To conclude, it can be said that Innsbruck offers numerous different sports activities for tourists, both during the winter as well as in the summer. The city and its surroundings also have top quality facilities for professional athletes to train in. As a city with established history in hosting sports events, Innsbruck continues to thrive by organizing several sports events a year, most notably the Four Hills Tournament in January.

### 3.3.2 Marketing and Organization

The destination marketing organization responsible for Innsbruck and its surroundings is called Tourismusverband Innsbruck und seine Feriendörfer, referred to as Innsbruck Tourism from here onwards. It is the organization providing tourists with information on the city and the surrounding holiday villages. Among the tasks the organization (figure 1) is handling are those of marketing, event organizing, communication with customers, collecting and publishing statistics and development of online services. (Innsbruck Tourism 2012d, 37) These tasks meet the usual definition of destination marketing organization's work regarding creating a positive image for a certain place.



Picture 1. Marketing material produced by Innsbruck Tourism. (Ahvenainen 2013)

Innsbruck Tourism has a total budget of approximately 16,1 million euros for the year 2013, of which around 5 million euros alone will be used on marketing measures (Innsbruck Tourism 2012d, 6, 11). The remaining funds will be used in various development projects in and around Innsbruck. Among these projects are some investments in infrastructure and setting up new offices to improve digital marketing in the further holiday villages (Innsbruck Tourism 2012d, 11). In 2012 the 5 million euros allocated for marketing were spent to participate in roughly 130 travel fairs, to produce workshops for professionals and to create new marketing

material both online and in print (picture 1) as well as producing both radio and television commercials (Innsbruck Tourism 2012d, 6). In 2011/2012 a good deal of the worldwide marketing done by Innsbruck Tourism took place in events held in nearby countries such as Germany, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands. However, it is worth noting that there were also several marketing events in Russia, East Asia and India, indicating that the marketing organization is willing to expand on these new and quickly developing markets. (Innsbruck Tourism 2012d, 16-17)

The tourism office is actively providing more and more of their material online and is constantly working on improving the digital communication with tourists. The destination marketing organization has also taken a visible role in numerous social media sites, offering up-to-date information on Facebook and Twitter in addition to posting promotional videos on Youtube on regular basis. Furthermore, the organization has created a mobile-compatible version of the main website and developed mobile applications that work on the most popular operation systems. (Innsbruck Tourism 2012d, 6)

In conclusion, it can be said that Innsbruck Tourism is a well-working destination marketing organization with clearly defined development and marketing measures. The organization's actions meet the four main goals a destination marketing organization has, those of enhancing destination image, increasing industry profitability, reducing seasonability and ensuring long-term funding.

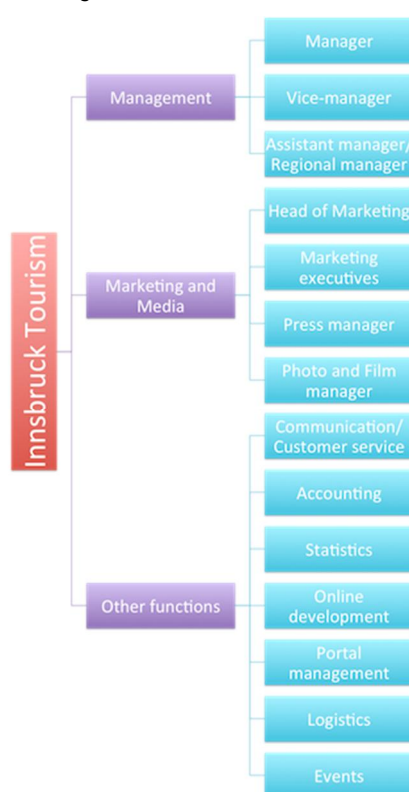


Figure 1. Organization chart of Innsbruck Tourism (Innsbruck Tourism 2012d: 37)

### 3.4 Lahti

#### 3.4.1 Sport tourism in Lahti

The city of Lahti is located in Southern Finland, about 100 kilometers north of Helsinki. It can be reached either by car or by using the regular train service to the city. Lahti has an area of 154,5 square kilometers and is a home to 101,665 people. Lahti, part of the Helsinki World Design Capital 2012 year, is the fifth biggest city of Finland. (Lahden kaupunki 2012) The landscape of the city is dominated by the ridges of Salpausselkä, which were formed during the ice age. Another big natural formation in the city is the lake Vesijärvi, which provides possibilities for water sports. Some areas of Lahti's neighboring towns such as Pajulahti in Nastola, Vierumäki in Heinola and Messilä in Hollola are included in the city's tourism area and due to their significance for sport tourism are also included into this research. (Vuoristo & Vesterinen 2009, 227)

Lahti's reputation as a sports town is evident when taking a look at the visitor numbers of attractions. Within the Lahti region, three out of five most popular attractions were sports related. For example, the Ski Museum is the fourth most popular sight in the city (Vuoristo & Vesterinen 2009, 229). The museum building dates back to 1989 but the façade was built in 2000 (Taipale 2006, 162). The museum can be found at the foot of the ski jump hills and the exhibitions it houses give the visitor an overview of the history of Finnish skiing. Among the most popular things to see is the ski jump simulator where the visitor can try out what it is like to do ski jumping. (Lahden kaupunki 2011)

The most famous sport related attraction in Lahti is the Sports Centre (picture 2) that includes a skiing stadium, a football stadium, an athletics stadium and the iconic ski jump hills (Lahden kaupunki 2012). During the summer the landing pit of the largest ski jump hill is used as an outdoor swimming pool. The largest of the ski jump hills is 133 meters and is flanked by two smaller ones, one that is 70 meters high and a 50-meter high. On top of the largest hill there is a viewing platform that can be reached by an elevator. (Taipale 2006, 162.) Altogether it is possible to do more than eleven different sports activities in the Sports Centre area.

In addition to the sports related sights mentioned, in the Lahti area there are the Messilä skiing center in Hollola and Vierumäki leisure center in Heinola. Messilä advertises itself as the most popular skiing center in southern Finland and it can back up its claims with the fact that there are approximately 150,000 visitors during the winter. In the skiing center the visitors find 10 ski slopes and 10 lifts and around 70 kilometers of cross-country skiing paths. Among

other service offered at Messilä are a skiing school, equipment rental and a restaurant and café. (Messilä 2012)

Vierumäki leisure center in Heinola offers its customers a chance to have a holiday with wellness services, fitness training and recreational activities. In Vierumäki the visitor has the chance to do sports from golf and bowling to swimming and horseback riding. They also have holiday houses that one can buy for their own use. Furthermore, Vierumäki is a popular place for meetings and conferences. However, what it is most famous for is the Sports Institute of Finland that is currently the leading sports training center in Finland. They arrange educational programmes for coaches and the center is ideal for training camps for professional athletes. Part of the Sports Institute is the International Ice Hockey Centre of Excellence that also hosts events, training camps and gathers research data. (Vierumäki 2011-2012)



Picture 2. Sports Centre Lahti guide map. (Ahvenainen 2013)

For those sports tourists that prefer to be spectators instead of active participants Lahti also offers many different options. The city has ice hockey and football teams, Pelicans and FC Lahti respectively, playing in the national leagues.

Football club FC Lahti was founded in 1996 when it became too costly to have two teams from Lahti play in the highest national level. It continues the legacy of FC Kuusysi (1934) and Reipas (1891) by representing the city in the domestic league. The two original league teams have continued their existence by doing valuable work with junior footballers and are well known for their work. FC Lahti's best season was in 2008 when they succeeded in securing their first medal by finishing third in the league. Together the football clubs of Lahti have

brought players like Jari Litmanen, Joonas Kolkka and Petri Pasanen into the knowledge of the larger public. (FC Lahti 2012)

The ice hockey team Pelicans has roots in the team that was established in 1891 as Viipurin Reipas. That team was the first ever to win the Finnish championship title, but the current team, called Pelicans since year 1996 has not been as successful. So far their best season has been in 2011-2012 when they finished second in the national league. (Pelicans 2012) Season 2012-2013 is already the 32nd for Pelicans in the highest national level (SM-liiga 2012).

The most popular and famous sport event in Lahti, however, is the Lahti Ski Games. They have been organized since the year 1923 and in 2013 the city will see the 88<sup>th</sup> Games. In the beginning Lahti was chosen as the host city especially due to its central location. The Ski Games take place in early March every year and the tens of thousands of visitors have the chance to see hundreds of competitors compete in cross country skiing, ski jumping and Nordic combined. The Ski Games have been popular among the spectators, especially on those years when Finnish and Lahti native skiing heroes have climbed to the podium. (Lahti Ski Games 2012) Furthermore, Lahti has acted as the host of the Nordic World Ski Championships many times, most recently in 2001. In 2017 the city will host the event for the 7<sup>th</sup> time and is expecting more than one million visitors in total (Lahti 2017 2012).

In summary, Lahti is a notable sports city with facilities in the city and on the surrounding areas catering to the needs of both amateurs and professionals. As the hometown of successful sports teams Lahti manages to attract visitors interested in different kinds of sports. Hosting the annual Ski Games and organizing the Nordic World Ski Championships numerous times has cemented Lahti's place in the pantheon of important winter sports cities.

#### 3.4.2 Marketing and Organization

Before the year 2004 there was no real destination marketing organization in Lahti, only tourist information and basic information services were available for the consumers. In addition to that there were some marketing services, but only after 2004 has there been a proper destination marketing organization. That year Lahti Travel Oy, a regional sales company, was founded. The main thing Lahti Travel did was to continue providing regional marketing and tourist information, but an added task was to sell the products the company was promoting. In the beginning of 2013 Lahti Travel was merged with other development companies and Lahden seutu - Lahti region development company was born. Lahti region is doing the same work as Lahti Travel did in the past, but additionally the development company is also promoting living in the region. (Kallio 2013) The Lahti region development company is owned by the city of Lahti and seven other municipalities in the region (figure 2).

Main tasks of the organization include the marketing of living and tourism in Lahti region and the sales of tourism services. The sales have been divided into three categories; into meetings and business sales, event sales including leisure and sport events, the final category consisting of all the rest, which in this case mostly means day trips in the area. For Lahti region, businesses and meetings play the most important role and the organization has created a separate catalogue for companies to use when considering where to hold their meetings. (Kallio 2013) For the so-called regular customers the organization has a handful of brochures, maps and tourist information services to offer. However, they are moving more and more of the information they provide online and are reducing the amount of brochures produced in the future. As for events, the organization has chosen to focus on marketing instead of selling event products. (Kallio 2013)

Lahti region is strongly working on profiling the whole region clearer and better than before and that could be named as the most important task they have in hand. Lahti region development company has an estimated turnover of 2,3 million euros in 2013 and currently has a staff of 10+3 people, with the three working working with various projects. (Lahti region 2012) All in all, with the new development company working as a destination marketing organization for the region it can be expected that not only the city of Lahti but the whole region will have an improved tourism image and further developed tourism services.

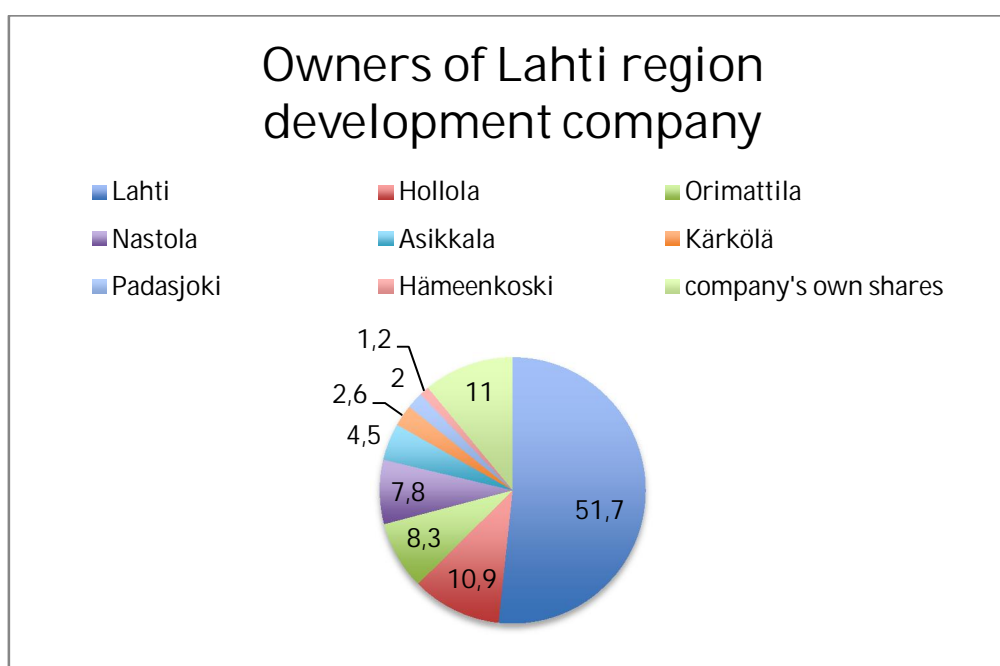


Figure 2. Ownership chart of Lahti region development company. Shares of the cities marked in percentages. (Lahti region 2012)



## 4 Research Methods

This thesis is a research done by using qualitative methods, which means the researcher is mainly an observer and an analyzer of the gathered data. The aim of qualitative research is to portray real life and its many sides as a whole. Some of the characteristics of qualitative research include choosing the target group of the study purposefully as opposed to using random samples like in quantitative research. In qualitative research the person doing the research has an important role as many of the results are based on the observations and interviews they do. As a result of this, the use of qualitative methods such as themed and group interviews and being an active observer is popular. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 161, 164)

This research is mainly a content analysis that is based on interviews and data. As sport tourism as a research topic is manifold it is important to take a look at it both from the side of those who work in creating sport tourism destinations as well as from the point of view of the consumer. The aim is to help the reader understand sport tourism in Innsbruck and Lahti in relation to the theory of the subject and compare and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the destinations.

### 4.1 Research strategy

Research strategy for this thesis has been divided into several parts. First, as has been established, the author has introduced the topic and the main research questions. This was done so that the reader would be quickly familiarized with the subject and knows what to expect. After this the reader has been presented with literature review that focused on the basic concepts relating to sport tourism. This part also gave insight in destinations and marketing and presents the two case cities of this research. After the literature review the reader is finding an explanation of the research methods. The following fourth part of this work includes findings about sport tourism strengths and weaknesses in the two case cities and in-depth analysis on them. Finally, this thesis concludes with comparison of Innsbruck and Lahti as sport tourism destinations and offers development suggestions on what could be done differently in the cities. The final part also includes an analysis of the research done for this text.

### 4.2 Interviews and data collection

The data collected for this research was mainly obtained through interviews and benchmarking. The interviews were structured interviews where the author had created a list of questions that were asked in certain, previously decided order. Interviews as a method of gather-

ing information were chosen due to the fact that they are a good way to gain detailed and qualitative data and find out what the interviewees consider to be important regarding the subject of sport tourism and marketing. (Long 2007, 76) In-depth interviews are usually conducted with a fairly small number of subjects encouraging them to talk about the subject in hand (Veal 1997, 132). The author conducted two interviews in Lahti with members of the Lahti region development company; one of the interviewees, Mrs. Tiina Kallio, is an event manager at the development company and Mr. Jussi Voutilainen is a board member specializing in sport and wellness tourism issues. Both of these interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees and lasted from half an hour to one hour. The author was also given a permission to mention the interviewees in this thesis. The transcribing of these interviews took roughly one day. Marketing executives and customer service managers of Innsbruck Tourism were contacted for an interview, but after initial promise of an interview they later declined or did not answer to interview requests.

The questions asked during the interview were closely related to destination marketing and sport tourism. At the beginning the interviewees were requested to tell about the city of Lahti as a tourism destination and to describe the city's marketing organization, their tasks and marketing measures. This was done to find out how the city is marketed, who works within the destination marketing organization and to get a general knowledge of Lahti as a tourism destination. Further interview questions touched upon the subject of sport tourism; asking about sport tourism's role in Lahti, who the visitors coming to the city for sport tourism purposes are, why these people choose to come to Lahti, whether the city is identified through sports, what are seen as the town's advantages and disadvantages as sport tourism place and how current tourism trends affect Lahti. These questions were chosen due to the fact that they reflect upon the theory that has been previously presented in this thesis and help the author gain knowledge on visitor flows, the importance of sport tourism, travel motivations and on what kind of issues might be affecting sport tourism in Lahti in the future.

Due to the fact that the author was not able to obtain interviews from Innsbruck Tourism, other means of collecting data were used. One method was benchmarking that was done in person in Innsbruck during January 2013 and in Lahti in January 2013. Benchmarking is usually understood to be comparison analysis of at least two entities, in this case the cities of Innsbruck and Lahti (Business Dictionary 2013). The author toured sport tourism venues and locations in the cities and paid particular attention to how they were promoted and what kind of information was available, how easy they were to reach and what services were offered. In addition to that, the author chose to analyze marketing material available for tourists both in print and online to determine how sport tourism is represented in marketing.

## 5 Innsbruck and sport tourism

### 5.1 Strengths

One of the most significant strengths Innsbruck has is that it possesses an image of being a sport city and people associate it with sports. As Peters and Pikkemaat (2003) state in their study, Innsbruck has become famous for hosting the Olympic Winter Games twice and ever since that winter sports have been dominating the city image. Furthermore, the city's sport image is constantly highlighted in the marketing material with reminders such as "—boasting state-of-the-art competition venues, Innsbruck also plays a significant role as a major international sports hub located in the heart of the Alps" (Innsbruck Tourism online 2013).

Important sport related landmarks such as the ski jump tower are constantly used in the city's marketing material and many of the tourism office's suggestions for winter holidays are centered around winter sports and events. (Innsbruck Tourism online 2013; Innsbruck Tourism 2012a, 12, 14, 28 - 30) This is a clear indicator that Innsbruck understands it is seen and experienced as a city of sport and that the tourists coming to the city will be interested in sports one way or another. Thus it can be argued that Innsbruck has managed to create an image that makes most people connect the town with active lifestyle, sports and world class events.

Something that is closely related to Innsbruck's image as a sport city is the legacy it has from having staged the Olympic Winter Games and Youth Olympic Winter Games more often than any other city. The iconic Olympic rings adorn the sites where the events took place and are a constant reminder of the city's success as an Olympic host. As mentioned before, these events are noted in the marketing material and they play a vital role in ensuring that Innsbruck will be remembered as a place for sport and unforgettable events. (Innsbruck Tourism online 2013) Having the Olympic legacy is something that works in Innsbruck's favor as mega-events like the Olympics are often referred to with the city and the year they took place in. As a result, Innsbruck will be remembered for hosting the Games even among those who do not pay huge amounts of attention to sport events in general.

Yet another strength Innsbruck has when talking about sport tourism is the large amount of information available both on the internet and in the form of brochures, a good number of which can also be obtained through the tourist information office's website. Both the Winter Active and Summer Active brochures, the main materials when it comes to finding information about where and when to do specific sports, are available in six different languages: German, English, French, Italian, Spanish and Dutch. This ensures that many of the tourists visiting the city will find important sport-related information either in their mother tongue or in a language they understand. (Innsbruck Tourism online 2013)

In addition to offering both physical brochures and downloads, the tourist information office provides a great deal of information on their website on multiple languages further making sure that potential visitors will find information in their own language. The brochure and online language choices are backed by statistics showing that the six biggest market areas producing tourists to Innsbruck are Germany, domestic Austrian market, Switzerland and Liechtenstein, Italy, the Netherlands and France (Innsbruck Tourism 2012d, 23). This is a proof that Innsbruck Tourism is well aware of their main markets and is working on catering for their needs.

One of the most obvious strengths Innsbruck has as a sport city is that there are numerous sport activities one can participate in both during winter and summer. A visitor in the city can do anything from skiing and snowboarding to biking and playing golf. The Alps surrounding the city offer many places with differing stages of difficulty for doing sports. It is also worth noting that there are sports facilities around the town, not just in the mountains. Such facilities include the Olympiaworld, where the public is given a chance to ice skate and go see a football match or an ice hockey game, the many public ice rinks in the old town and city centre as well as a good number of tennis courts and halls in various parts of the city. It can be further argued that the options for sports to do in the city increase during the summer. Most of the winter time activities promoted by the tourist information center around skiing and snowboarding whereas during the summer more activities such as golf, hiking, white-water rafting and even extreme activities like paragliding and rock climbing are highlighted in the marketing material (Innsbruck Tourism 2012c, 16, 34, 40). Thus it can be said that having the summer and winter holiday suggestions heavily rely on sports activities is a clear sign that Innsbruck identifies through sport. The tourism office knows that the opportunity to do sports is what visitors are looking for when they choose to go to Innsbruck.

Innsbruck is and has been a host for many events. As previously mentioned, the city has a history of hosting the Winter Olympic Games and Youth Winter Olympic Games in the past years. The event that puts Innsbruck in the spotlight every year is the Four Hills Tournament in ski jumping. However, it is not the only event taking place in the city annually. More recently the Bergisel ski jump stadium has also become a home for the Air & Style snowboarding contest that gathers thousands of snowboard enthusiasts to the city at the beginning of February. In 2013 the event is celebrating its 20th installment, which is a proof that Innsbruck is interested in organizing different kinds of events more than once. (Billabong Air & Style 2013)

Finally, Innsbruck's location at the heart of the Alps in the middle of Europe is a great advantage. Within a 250 kilometre radius of Innsbruck live approximately 16 million people and that alone means there are plenty of potential visitors just two or three hours away from the

city. It is easy for sport lovers from all over the world to reach the city. Especially those visitors from nearby countries such as Germany, Italy and Switzerland benefit from Innsbruck's location as the city is easy to come to either by using public transport or by driving one's own car (Innsbruck Tourism 2012e, 47). On top of that, there are regular flights to Innsbruck and big cities in nearby countries which makes it relatively easy for tourists from further away to reach the city. What is more, the public transport system in Innsbruck has been designed to take sport tourists in consideration and many of the buses and trams get the sport enthusiasts right to the sport venues and ski slopes. During the winter, a free-of-charge ski bus (picture 3) departs from the city center and takes people to the skiing areas further from the city. At summer time, a similar bus offers transportation to hiking routes.



Picture 3. Sign for a free ski bus in Innsbruck city centre. (Ahvenainen 2013)

To conclude, Innsbruck's strengths as a sport city stem from the image it has. Innsbruck is associated with sports due to the legacy and events it has. It can be argued that if it were not for the Winter Olympic Games and the Four Hills Tournament in ski jumping Innsbruck would not be as known around the world as it is these days. The location of the city is optimal in Europe as it is right in the middle of the continent and reaches millions of potential sport tourists with ease. On top of that, visitors are offered a great deal of information on the city and sport options to help them make decisions.

## 5.2 Weaknesses

Innsbruck has a large array of strengths, but it also has some weaknesses. One of the most significant weaknesses the city has is its strong focus on winter sports. Majority of the events and activities associated with Innsbruck take place in the winter and as a result the visitors

may have trouble differentiating the city from other Alpine towns during the summer. In the winter Innsbruck can attract people by promoting the Olympic ski slopes, but during summertime it does not have a similar trump card. While the mountains offer excellent terrain for hiking and mountain biking, they are fairly similar to other mountains in the area and in other countries. This is a challenge many Alpine regions face, differentiating from one another during the summer. Innsbruck does not have one special sport tourism attraction that would make tourists choose it over other cities in the summer. The statistics show that more and more people visit Innsbruck during the summer, but most of those people are attracted by cultural events rather than the sport tourism offer of the city (Innsbruck Tourism 2012d, 5).

Secondly, Innsbruck's prominent profiling as a city hosting events such as the Four Hills Tournament and the Olympics can also be a disadvantage. While the ski jumping competition takes place in the city annually, it only lasts a few days at the beginning of the year (Innsbruck Tourism 2012a, 14). Therefore, having visitors associate the town with the tournament may leave tourists with an image that nothing else happens in Innsbruck and that the city only comes alive during those days. Having a regularly organized event of such big scale is a remarkable strength for the city when it comes to sport tourism, but it creates challenges because it would be good if the visitors remembered the city of something else too and did not expect to have something Four Hills Tournament related happening in Innsbruck all year round.

Among the biggest weaknesses Innsbruck has is the fact that the city is heavily relying on natural resources when it comes to sport tourism. Skiing and snowboarding happens on the mountains and requires large amounts of snow. Many of the summer activities also direct visitors to the Alps. However, when it comes to winter sports, there is a trend of decreasing snowfall in the mountains. As Steiger (2009) shows, already in the 2006/2007 winter season snowfall in the Alpine regions went down 30 to 50 percent compared to the mean snowfall during the period from 1971 to 2000. This is an indicator that global warming is affecting not just Innsbruck, but other Alpine towns too. When Austria was hosting a meeting regarding climate change in 2007 researchers stated that the prevention of climate change is not what should be focused on, but coming up with strategies for adapting (Washington Post 2007). While Innsbruck has allocated money for the restoration and upkeep of existing slopes and hiking and biking trails, it will continue to face issues that winters with less snow bring (Innsbruck Tourism 2012d, 9 - 10). Therefore, basing the majority of the winter sport activities and a large part of the summer sport activities on natural resources is the city's weakness.

Finally, focusing on active sports can be counted as one of Innsbruck's weaknesses. The tourism office's website offers a multitude of options for winter and summer holidays, but almost all of those options are related to actively doing sports yourself. For those tourists who are

seeking to visit a spa or would be interested in getting to know Innsbruck's history as a sport city better there are no suggestions. (Innsbruck Tourism online 2013) Wellness services are not widely available in the city and the Bergisel ski jump stadium is the only sight in town where one can learn anything about the Olympic history of Innsbruck. Even then, the exhibition at the stadium is understandably focused on ski jumping. For a city that has been the Olympic Games host thrice, there is very little that commemorates the Olympic history besides the mentions of those events in marketing material.

In conclusion, some of the sport tourism strengths Innsbruck has are also the city's weaknesses. The city has a strong focus on winter sports, which makes it difficult for tourists in the summer to associate it with sports. Innsbruck does not have a similar advantage as a summer sport destination as it has as a winter sport destination with the Olympic ski slopes and ice halls. Additionally, many of the events the city hosts nowadays take place in the winter, possibly leaving a potential tourist wondering if there is anything happening during the summer months or whether there is something happening related to those winter sport events. Innsbruck also relies on natural resources a lot and is facing a battle with global warming to ensure that the sport sites will stay attractive to visitors even during tougher times. Finally, while Innsbruck has a strong Olympic history, there is very little that actually commemorates that in the city and the visitors are thus forced to find out about the past events themselves.

### 5.3 Role of sport tourism in marketing

Sport tourism has a notable role in Innsbruck's marketing material and the tourism office has put a great deal of effort in including different sports in the brochures. For example, when looking at the basic brochure of Innsbruck, roughly one third of all pictures are one way or another related to sport tourism. They portray both professional athletes as well as regular sport enthusiasts taking part in various activities. (Innsbruck Tourism 2012e) Additionally, in the tourism office's annual report almost half of the images relate to active sports and sport events. (Innsbruck Tourism 2012d)

The aforementioned basic brochure of Innsbruck has dedicated a separate section for sports altogether with a title "sport city in green and white" indicating that Innsbruck is strongly aiming to attract sport tourists all year round (Innsbruck Tourism 2012e, 23). The presence of sports does not end with one section but continues with pages of suggestions for what to do when one takes their summer holiday in Innsbruck and lists a selection of activities ranging from mountain biking to climbing and from extreme sports to golf. When it comes to winter sports, the brochure dubs Innsbruck as the "city of gold" and promotes skiing in the Olympic slopes without forgetting the big winter sport events taking place in the town (Innsbruck Tourism 2012e, 31).

With the way sport-related images and information on sporting activities and events seem to dominate the marketing material of Innsbruck, it can be argued that sport tourism has a crucial role in the marketing of the city. The city is increasingly famous for the sport events taking place there and there are numerous possibilities for a visitor to actively do sports. Therefore it is advantageous to use that information and imagery in the marketing material. Extending outside physical brochures, the tourism office website is filled with sport tourism related information and the tourism office promotes sport events through videos. In addition to the tourism office's marketing measures, local entrepreneurs and shopkeepers are also using sport tourism and event related images in their windows to remind customers of all the possibilities the city has to offer. Finally, the numerous events taking place in the city are contributing to marketing with their own promotional material by not only naming the event but also highlighting the fact that Innsbruck is the host city and this way possibly bringing the city to the attention of new potential visitors.

## 6 Lahti and sport tourism

### 6.1 Strengths

One of the most significant strengths Lahti has as a sport city is its location. The city lies about an hour away from the biggest airport in Finland, is an important railway hub and can easily be reached by car due to the fact that one of the most important main roads in Finland goes by the city. This means that Lahti is within a two-hour trip for approximately 4 million Finns and thus can attract large numbers of visitors from all around the country, but especially from southern and central Finland. (Voutilainen 2013) The location also ensures that tourists from abroad who are considering visiting Lahti can do it with very little hassle as the city is reachable from all directions. Additionally, when tourists arrive in Lahti by train or by bus they arrive right in the city centre and from there it is only a short walk to the main sport tourism sights and venues.

Lahti has been regularly hosting national and international sport events and will be staging the Nordic World Ski Championships again in a few years. This indicates that Lahti is famous for being a city that knows how to organize events and that is one of the biggest strengths that should be highlighted. Like Kallio (2013) says, for Lahti "sport events are not just sport events, they are very central tourism contents". The city has a long history with various events (picture 4), especially in the winter and by continuing to host them annually Lahti is showing that sports and sport tourism are important for the town. The city has plenty of knowledge when it comes to hosting sport events and a large reserve of volunteers who are interested in working within the events to ensure that the athletes and visitors alike will be



enjoying their time in Lahti. Sport events are seen as a positive thing in the city council as well and there is a certain amount of money put aside just for sport events and possible sport event application processes every year. (Kallio 2013) It can be argued that if sports and especially winter sports were not important for the city, it would not be organizing the Lahti Ski Games for the 88th time in March 2013.



Picture 4. Case displaying Lahti's history as event host. (Ahvenainen 2013)

While winter sport events play a major role in the city, sport tourism does not revolve around wintertime alone. During the summer there are things happening in the field of athletics and rally, there are national league football matches annually and the city has co-hosted the women's football European Championships in 2009. In the summer of 2013, a large gymnastics event will be taking place in Lahti and thus proving that the city is attractive during other seasons than winter too. (Lahden kaupunki 2011) In addition to events, the lakes and nature in and around the city offer tourists places where to do leisure sports during the summer months.

Due to the long history of organizing sport events, Lahti has become known as a sport city in Finland. While most Finns may not be able to name extensively athletes from Lahti or point out venues on the map, it can be argued that if asked on the street, many would associate the city with sports one way or another. (Kallio 2013) One of the biggest contributors for associating Lahti with sports has its origins in the 2001 Nordic World Ski Championships, mostly

known for the doping scandal within the Finnish team. While the memories and repercussions of the event may not be entirely positive, the media has had a habit of reminding people of the event on regular intervals. That in turn has left a mark on the minds of people and even those who do not actively follow winter sports can tell that Lahti is a place where winter sports have a significant role.

When it comes to event venues or places where an individual can do sports, Lahti has a lot to offer. The sports center and its surroundings can be used for more than one kind of event. During the winter the sports center and the ski jump hills are the place for the Ski Games, in the summer the pit of the large hill is turned into an outdoor swimming pool, manifesting both creativity and the desire to have sport-lovers come to the site all year round. The surroundings of the sports center house cross country skiing tracks in the winter and running paths in the summer which shows that that area is not reserved just for professional athletes, but that regular citizens can enjoy it too. (Lahden kaupunki 2011) The existing facilities also ensure that applying to host events is made easier when there is no need to build new venues since there already is infrastructure to take advantage of.

In conclusion, it can be argued that Lahti has many significant strengths as a sport city. The most important of these are the location of the city within the country making it easy to reach and providing quick access to sport tourism venues and events. Lahti has a notable history of organizing sport events and they are one of the reasons why the city is often associated with sports. There is a great deal of existing infrastructure which makes further development of sport tourism and events a somewhat easier task than it would be if new venues were needed. Having the sort of legacy as a sport city as Lahti has works in favor of ensuring that the city will be known for sport and world class events also in the future.

## 6.2 Weaknesses

While Lahti is rather well-known as a sport city in Finland, it is not similarly recognized abroad. This is a problem many Finnish cities save for Helsinki face and it takes time to make your city known. There is a lot of potential in making Lahti famous through sports in other countries, but very little of that potential has been used so far. However, those tourists that make the effort of going to Lahti usually do so because they are interested in sports and are aware that Lahti is one of those cities in Finland where especially winter sports are important. (Kallio 2013) When it comes to events, there is usually a clearly defined focus group of people who are interested in the sport and would consider traveling to cities like Lahti to see an event. The issue lies in how to make Lahti seem as attractive as possible to get those fans make the decision to go.

Due to the fact that Lahti is relatively unknown outside of Finland, the amount of tourists who eventually visit the city ends up being rather small. There are some Russian and German-speaking tourists - mostly from Germany and Austria - who go to Lahti to see the sport venues and maybe buy a ticket for an event, but the number is annually very small and it is likely that those tourists do not even show in the tourism statistics (Kallio 2013). Big events such as the Nordic World Ski Championships attract visitors to Lahti, but of those visitors usually only the athletes and crew stay in the city for a longer time, spectators merely tend to come for the event and leave very little money in the region as a consequence.

One of the weaknesses Lahti has is related to the services provided for tourists who come for sporting events. As all tourists going to a new city, these sport tourists would like to gain more knowledge of what to do aside from participating in the event, what to see and where to eat, very basic things like that. However, that is something that is very badly handled in Lahti at the moment. Many of the event organizers do not have any information on sights or restaurants on offer and the visitors are likely leave the city feeling that it is an unwelcoming and badly organized place. (Kallio 2013) Of course the quality of services and lack of information is not only tied to sport tourism but tourism in the region in general. Providing basic information on the destination is vital for tourists and not telling sport fans about all the possibilities Lahti has to offer is a wasted potential.

It was previously stated that the location of Lahti is one of the greatest strengths the city has. On the other hand, the location is also one of the biggest weaknesses. It is very easy for people from all around Finland, especially from the southern parts of the country, to travel to Lahti, but it is just as easy for them to leave. Thanks to the good transport connections many visitors tend to think that they would rather spend the day in the city and return to their homes in the evening instead of staying overnight in Lahti. (Kallio 2013) While the city can do nothing about its location, the fact that Lahti is not being marketed as a sport city worth staying in before and after an event is a significant weakness. Like Voutilainen (2013) mentioned, the city has a tendency not to boast about the sites and venues it has for the public to use and rather keeps them as some sort of secret that you will only find out if you are willing to do extensive research.

This brings us to yet another weakness of Lahti's, namely that finding updated and relevant information on the city and the sports there is challenging. There is a website aimed at visitors available in Finnish, English and Russian, but a lot of the content is based on 'read more' type of introductions and finding the information you are looking for is hard (Kallio 2013). Moreover, getting opinions from other visitors regarding the sporting activities or events in Lahti is fairly complicated. Browsing popular attraction rating sites such as Tripadvisor high-

lights the problem as the only sport related sight in Lahti found there is the Ski Museum, leaving the potential visitor thinking there is nothing more to see in the city (Tripadvisor 2013). As Kallio (2013) mentioned, if one is not able to get information on the go, either on one's smart phone or on one's tablet, a tourist is likely to think there is no information available on the subject they were searching. Online and mobile presence is increasingly important on this day and age and currently it is one of the most substantial weaknesses Lahti has.

To conclude, Lahti is not well-known outside the borders of Finland and does not attract large numbers of foreign visitors. The city has not been branded as a place of sport abroad and it is difficult for tourists visiting Finland to associate Lahti with anything. There is a lot of potential to market Lahti during and through sport events, but that potential is not being used in the city's advantage. Additionally, services offered for those sport tourists who eventually go to Lahti are lacking in quality and partly in quantity. While the sport event itself may be well organized and all the needs of those participating have been taken into consideration, the spectators have been neglected and they are not aware of everything the city could offer. This is largely due to the fact that finding relevant information on Lahti is difficult. Lastly, the location of the city is disadvantageous as it is just as easy to leave as it is easy to go to.

### 6.3 Role of sport tourism in marketing

In the interviews both Kallio (2013) and Voutilainen (2013) stated that sports and sport tourism play a remarkable role in the marketing of Lahti. Sport in general is one of the most important themes the city uses in the marketing material as it is something a majority of people associates the city with. Therefore, it is seen to be important to bring up themes such as sport and active lifestyle to help branding the city.

As Kallio says, sport is one of the things people connect Lahti with and rhetorically asks "why not use one corner [sport tourism] in marketing if it raises some thoughts". It gives the people working within marketing one clear and defined area to work with and makes the process slightly easier. Like Kallio (2013) said, many may feel that taking conference visitors to see the ski jumping hills is something that has been done one time too many, it might also help those visitors to remember the city through sport and possibly mention it to others as well. The sport related images and places stay in the minds of people and help to ensure that said images might help even those people who do not actively follow sports remember and associate Lahti with winter sports and active lifestyle.

Sport tourism, sport and active lifestyle are key elements in Lahti's marketing and for example, the images used in brochures tend to highlight the possibilities of actively doing sports in the city (Kallio 2013). However, there are places like the lakes in Lahti that could be used

more in the context of sport tourism to help promote the town (Voutilainen 2013). As Voutilainen (2013) says they are "one thing that for one reason or another have not been used as an advantage". In conclusion it is evident that sport tourism has a major role in the marketing of Lahti and sport in general is one of the themes that features most heavily on the brochures and images used online. Sport related imagery is used due to the fact that Lahti is already associated with sport tourism and that is a good place to start working on making the city known better.

## 7 Results and development suggestions

This final part of the thesis will present a comparison of the two cities that have been researched and analyze the current and future role of sport tourism in Innsbruck and Lahti overall. Some possible development issues and suggestions will also be discussed. All in all, this part aims to give answers to the four questions posed in the beginning of this study regarding the importance of sport tourism, the strengths and weaknesses of Innsbruck and Lahti, the representation of sport tourism in marketing and how to develop sport tourism in these two cities.

### 7.1 Similarities and differences of Innsbruck and Lahti

Innsbruck and Lahti have various similarities when it comes to sport tourism, but there are also certain differences. To begin with, both of the cities have an excellent location within their country. It is fairly easy to reach both cities by using public transport if one wishes not to drive themselves. Both Innsbruck and Lahti are major railroad hubs and are served by regular bus connections as well. They also have the advantage of being situated near large airports. Innsbruck, in addition to having its own airport in the city, lies approximately two hours away from the Munich Airport in Germany. Lahti in turn is about an hour away from the Helsinki International Airport, which makes it relatively easy for foreign visitors to reach the town too. For well over a million people Innsbruck and Lahti are within a two-hour drive in their respective areas.

Secondly, another distinct similarity Innsbruck and Lahti have is that of their strong focus on winter sports. The two towns are known for the numerous winter sports events they have hosted in the past or are organizing annually. Moreover, these two cities offer sport tourists places for actively doing winter sports themselves, mostly in a skiing center when it comes to Lahti and in the mountains in the case of Innsbruck. For summer sports there are no such significant sites for a specific discipline. Adding to the strong role of winter sports in these cities is the fact that a good deal of the images used in marketing is related to winter sports, mainly because that is what the destinations are associated with.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, both Innsbruck and Lahti have made a name for themselves by organizing numerous sport events throughout the years. A casual sport enthusiast would be more likely to know an event that took place in either of the cities than be able to name main sights of these two places. A good deal of the recent history of Innsbruck and Lahti is closely related to organizing various sport events and leaving a mark in people's minds that way. In some cases the connections people make between an event and a city may not be all positive, but those cases are a starting point when it comes to creating awareness on what kinds of sport events the cities will host in the future.

Some of the biggest differences Innsbruck and Lahti have stem from the nature of their tourism markets and from the intensity of tourism flows. In 2009, Lahti had around 195,900 registered overnight stays. Most of these tourists came from other Finnish cities, with some hundreds of visitors arriving from Russia, Germany and Sweden. (Lahti region 2009) In Innsbruck, at the end of the year 2011 there were over 2.5 million overnight stays registered. As is the case with Lahti, the majority of Innsbruck's visitors also come from the domestic market. However, Innsbruck is also popular among tourists from Germany, Italy, Switzerland and the US. (Innsbruck Tourism 2011) While there are no statistics regarding how many of these people participate in sport tourism in either of the cities, it is evident that Innsbruck attracts much more tourists worldwide and has a larger tourism market than Lahti. Some of this may be due to Innsbruck's location in the middle of Europe and being surrounded by countries with large populations, but the significance of marketing cannot be ruled out.

Marketing measures in these two cities are very different. Innsbruck's tourism office has about 16 million euros to dispose of, of which roughly 5 million euros are reserved for marketing alone. Lahti region, the company responsible for developing tourism and living in the region, is working on an approximately 2 million-euro budget. These numbers show that even if Lahti would be eager to market itself more and would hope to attract more visitors through that, it simply does not have the finances for large-scale marketing campaigns like Innsbruck does. This in turn means that for an average sport tourist Innsbruck is a more familiar place as they may have seen an advert showcasing what the city has to offer. In the meanwhile, Lahti hopes to gain more visitors by actively hosting events and gaining visibility through them.

Finally, the sport tourism venues and infrastructure in Innsbruck and Lahti differ from each other even though there are some similarities. The most recognizable sport landmark in both of these cities is a ski jump tower, but the resemblances end there. Lahti has a noteworthy amount of built sport infrastructure ranging from the Sports Center to various ice halls. The city has some natural resources such as the lake Vesijärvi that can be used for sport tourism

purposes, but the city mainly relies on man-made infrastructure. In Innsbruck, however, a good deal of sport tourism happens on the Alps during all seasons and save for cable cars and lifts, built infrastructure is not much used among tourists.

In short, Innsbruck and Lahti are rather similar when it comes to their locations within Austria and Finland, respectively. Both of the cities have a strong focus on winter sports and by offering possibilities to actively do sports or to participate in an event the towns have become known among winter sport enthusiasts. Also, these two destinations regularly organize sport related events. However, when it comes to the nature of tourism markets, Innsbruck and Lahti are significantly different. Some of that is due to the fact that their marketing measures are dissimilar. Finally, for Lahti, a central location in terms of sport tourism places, built infrastructure is important while Innsbruck, a more peripheral location, relies more on natural resources.

## 7.2 The importance of sport tourism for Innsbruck and Lahti

This thesis started on the basis that sport tourism is important for both Innsbruck and Lahti and one of the main aims was to find the extent of the importance. After conducting the research it can be said that the role of sport tourism in both of the cities is significant and that sport is something that both cities are associated with. In addition, sport and sport tourism related imagery are essential staples in the marketing of the destinations.

It can be argued that while both Innsbruck and Lahti are also known as destinations for cultural tourism, sport is the main attraction for visitors in the cities. Innsbruck's image is largely based on how inviting the various venues for doing sport are and how the city is welcoming professionals and enthusiasts of a great number of different disciplines. Innsbruck also has a clearly designed brand that is captured in the slogan "the capital of the Alps", suggesting that everything one could ever want is available in one place and that Innsbruck is one of the most important cities in the Austrian Alps when it comes to sports, especially during the winter. This includes the possibilities for both actively and passively participating in sports and enjoying the atmosphere of a city full of active living where there is something sport related around every corner. The importance of sport is highlighted in the material Innsbruck is marketed with. The brochures the tourism office produces all have images of sports, be it someone doing an activity such as skiing or hiking or pictures of sport events that have taken place in the city. Furthermore, the tourism office is committed to presenting current sport events and activities on their website.

For Lahti, sport and sport tourism are important due to the fact that the city is in the domestic scale known for its sport venues and the events taking place there. The city offers sporting

places for both individuals and businesses ranging from having meetings at the ski museum to going to Messilä for a day of skiing with one's family. Lahti has a great deal of infrastructure that can be used in many ways for mass events, but it also has natural sport places for activities such as cross country skiing or biking. The importance of sport tourism for Lahti becomes evident when taking a look at the events that have been organized in the city. The city has been profiled as a place that can arrange large-scale winter sport events successfully. As a testament for this, Lahti has been chosen to host the Nordic World Ski Championships for a historical 7th time in 2017, thus making the city the most used location for the event. Additionally, sport plays a significant role in the city's marketing material with images emphasising active lifestyle, wellbeing and events suitable for all ages.

To conclude, it is evident that sport tourism has remarkable importance in the cities of Innsbruck and Lahti. Both cities are actively promoting sport tourism for visitors and matters related to developing sport tourism in the cities are well received in the city councils. Both Innsbruck and Lahti are devoted to organizing sport events during all seasons and have successfully used these events to attract visitors. Moreover, sport related images play a big role in the cities' marketing material. Thus it can be said that sport tourism is important for Innsbruck and Lahti and that both cities are generally associated with sport, both domestically and abroad.

### 7.3 The future of sport tourism in Innsbruck and Lahti

Based on the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the cities of Innsbruck and Lahti, a number of questions regarding the future role of sport tourism in these cities have arisen. Some of the questions apply to both of the cities and on how they are planning on addressing certain issues in the next years. However, there are some issues that are only applicable for one of the cities. The author of this work is only able to offer suggestions regarding possible improvements and changes and those should not be taken as something that the cities absolutely must do.

To begin with the summer sport tourism in Innsbruck and Lahti, this research has previously found it to be less significant for the cities compared to winter sport tourism. As a result, neither of the cities have a clearly defined image as a sport city during the summer although both regularly host events in the summer months and offer various possibilities for summer activities. It would be advisable for both Innsbruck and Lahti to focus on one or two core activities to use in the marketing like they have done with winter sports. Building a strong product around for example hiking or golf would help the two towns to attract visitors interested in these sports and create awareness of the cities as more than winter sport places. In the case of Innsbruck, it would differentiate the city from other Alpine towns that currently offer



similar sport possibilities and further strengthen the city's image as the place for a certain sport. In Lahti, strongly highlighting a summer sport activity would make it more evident that the city has more to offer for tourists than the winter sport options it is largely known for at the moment. Combining marketing material that is focusing on certain sports with a related event would be a powerful way of getting new kind of attention to the cities and attract even more tourists during the summer time.

Attracting visitors is something that both Innsbruck and Lahti may need to work on in the future. Innsbruck especially is enjoying good tourism flows at the moment, but given how popular the town has been among sport tourists for the past decades, it may need to find new ways to appear even more interesting in the future. While the ski slopes are likely to attract winter sport enthusiasts year after year, the tourism office has made it clear themselves improvements on some sites are needed. Furthermore, organizing different types of events, in particular during the summer, would be one way of making the city more appealing and make new groups of sport tourists interested in it. The possibility of visitors growing tired of Innsbruck might lead them to look for new destinations, which in turn might be an advantage for Lahti. It has been established that Lahti is not able to offer all the same sport options as Innsbruck, but it might market itself as a somewhat exotic and different destination. Also, given that Russian tourists are the biggest group of foreign visitors, Lahti could make itself look appealing with promises of excellent sport tourism options that are easy to reach and only a few hours away. Whether or not Lahti is capable of capitalizing on this possibility comes down to how much the city is willing to put money and effort on attracting visitors from new market areas.

Something Innsbruck is already facing is the flow of tourists from new areas. The city has generally been a popular destination for visitors from other German-speaking countries as well as people from Italy and other nearby areas. In the recent years new markets have emerged and according to Innsbruck Tourism's statistics (2012) the city has seen a notable 10.5% rise in the number of Chinese tourists. In addition to that, the numbers of Russian and Ukrainian visitors have gone up 20.4% and 32.7% respectively. The same statistics also show that there is a 21.0% increase in tourists from Arabic countries. Some of this the tourism office has already taken into consideration and offers information on the website in languages such as Russian and Chinese. However, the big issue is how to make these relatively new, large visitor groups interested in the sport tourism possibilities that are available in the city. Options would likely include creating packages to familiarize tourists with the basics of winter and summer sports or offering those people who already know the sports they are participating in a luxurious package with top-class accommodation and easy access to sporting venues. The latter option could be backed with the knowledge that especially Chinese tourists are increasingly interested in Europe as a holiday destination and are willing to spend significant

amounts of money during their trips (CNTV English 2012). Thus, coming up with sport tourism possibilities unique to Innsbruck would not only help improve the country's popularity among Asian tourists but also ensure that sport stays as one of the main attractions of the city.

Among other things to consider, Innsbruck is also facing the possibility that climate change might have a strong effect on the nature of sport tourism in the city. As was previously stated, the city relies a lot on natural resources such as the Alps and the skiing and hiking possibilities there. However, the fact that the Alpine regions are already receiving less snowfall than in the past decades was also established earlier. This means that maintaining ideal skiing conditions throughout the whole winter will become more and more difficult and that Innsbruck may need to find ways to provide visitors alternative sporting venues. There are snow-making machines that are already used, but putting them on regular heavy use rises the questions whether they will be part of the climate change problem instead of a tool for adapting. While it is virtually impossible to remove the core sport tourism attractions from natural places, it would be advisable for the city to think of ways to slow down climate change by creating even more awareness. Also, improving the existing infrastructure to ensure that during winters with little snow or summers with heavy rainfall there are sport tourism possibilities for the tourists to enjoy even if they cannot participate in the more traditional sport activities in the city.

One of the things Lahti will need to develop in the future is related to the city's online presence and brand. At the moment Lahti does have a website with a reasonable amount of information, but some of it is outdated and some is hard to find due to the fact that the navigation is somewhat complicated and it is not clear in which section the relevant information might be. The city needs a website that is, if not just for tourism, at least having a focus on catering to the needs of visitors. Clearly designed information portal with social media share options would be useful when trying to promote Lahti.

Currently the site does not have a separate section for sport tourism, information for such activities can be found under that title "nature & activities". Given how important sport tourism is for the city, it would be beneficial to have the word sport already in the title leading visitors to the right direction. It would also be good for the Finnish and English version of the site to have the same information instead of providing more information in Finnish under titles differing from the English version. Having a well-designed, clear and informative website would help to give publicity to the city and all the options it has to offer. It would also be a powerful tool in creating a brand for Lahti and could be used to promote various events that might attract tourists to the city. As it has been established that sport in general is very important for the city, using that as an advantage in online presence would be a good starting

point. After all, a lot of all marketing happens online these days and as Kallio (2013) stated: "if information is not available on your phone or electronically, it does not exist".

To summarize, in the future Innsbruck and Lahti will need to find ways to attract visitors during all seasons and for this reason it would be important for both of the cities to create new products and events that would appeal to tourists especially in the summer. Additionally, taking into consideration new and rising markets, the cities must find out how to cater to the needs of unfamiliar tourists. These means may be providing service in the visitors' language; offering services that are uniquely tailored or it can be something completely different. Innsbruck and in a smaller scale Lahti are facing the issue of climate change and it is imperative to adjust to the challenges it brings. Finally, it would be advisable for Lahti to work on creating a strong online presence to use to provide useful and updated information.

## 8 Conclusions

### 8.1 Conclusions on research

To conclude this thesis, it can be stated that all the four questions regarding sport tourism and destination marketing discussed in the beginning were answered. The theory brought forth the ideas of different types of sport tourism and sport tourists and emphasized the fact that different sport tourism markets are looking for different things. The separation of sport tourism places in peripheral and central locations turned out to be significant when taking a look at Innsbruck and Lahti; the former being a mix of both peripheral and central location qualities whereas the latter is clearly a central location. Some of the trends discussed in the theory part of this thesis are more relevant to the cities studied than others, especially trends such as the role of social media, population ageing and climate change.

The role and importance of sport tourism in the cities of Innsbruck and Lahti was confirmed to be significant and some development issues were brought up. Comparing these two cities was beneficial as it allowed a broader look into sport tourism in different countries and areas than focusing on one city would have had. This comparison highlighted the fact that both of these cities have a strong focus on winter sport tourism and a notable legacy as sport event organizers. However, this study also showed that while both cities have a great location within their own country, Innsbruck has been more successful in attracting visitors from other countries and has a clear and identifiable brand, which is something Lahti needs to work on in the future. Innsbruck and Lahti both have a working destination marketing organization, which should help these cities further develop sport tourism in the cities through marketing and introduction of new sport events.

The comparison of Innsbruck and Lahti was a working method as it gave new insights into sport tourism in Europe. It also helped to see which areas in the cities' sport tourism and marketing are currently working well and which might need development. This research has introduced new perspectives to destination marketing that might be useful especially for the city of Lahti. It is also evident that further research on this subject can and should be done, for example by taking a closer look at the tourists' motivations for visiting these two cities or finding out about the effects current and upcoming trends have on sport tourism and marketing.

## 8.2 Thesis process

The writing of this thesis has been a long and sometimes challenging process. If I started the whole process now, I would make sure to draw up a better schedule and stick to it. In the beginning narrowing down the research topic was the hardest part as there are so many aspects to sport tourism that I would have been interested in studying more in depth, especially the role of social media in marketing and motivations for travelling for sport tourism purposes. However, I am content with the topics I chose and found researching them compelling. Familiarizing myself with the theory of sport tourism and destinations was one of my favorite parts of this research. I learned a great deal of new things related to sport tourism and understood that it is crucial to pay attention to all the aspects of the concept instead of focusing only on events or winter sport tourism. It needs to be said that I greatly enjoyed doing interviews as well as they brought into my attention things I had not thought of myself before. Among those things was the importance of politics and economics, how big a role they play in sport tourism development and how they can impact the city or the whole region. It would have been great to obtain interviews from the tourism professionals of Innsbruck as well as the analysis of the city now heavily relies on my views alone and due to that reason may not be entirely reliable.

Overall, this thesis confirms my thoughts on Innsbruck being a more popular and more successful sport tourism destination. That being said, I will be interested in seeing how the new Lahti region development company and upcoming sport events manage to influence Lahti's image and position as a global sport city. This entire thesis process has definitely enforced my interest in sport tourism in general and producing a professional work where I needed to stay objective has also taught me to look at sports from more than one side.

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## Appendix 1 Interview questions

1. How would you describe your city as a tourism destination?
2. What kind of destination marketing organization does your city have?
3. What are the most important tasks that the destination marketing organization is responsible of?
4. Do you think there are challenges in destination marketing?
5. How would you define 'sport tourism'?
6. What kind of effect does sport tourism have in your city?
7. What kind of a role does sport tourism have in the marketing of your city?
8. Where do most of the sport tourists in your city come from?
9. Why do you think people choose your city over other destinations? What do the sport tourists look for in your city?
10. When it comes to sport tourism, what advantages does your city have? How about disadvantages?
11. Do you think your city is or could be identified through sport? If yes, how? If not, through what is it usually identified?
12. What do you think are the most important trends in tourism? Do you think these trends will have an effect on your city? If yes, how?