

Leading Places on the Map: Opening up Leadership Practices in Two Estonian Peripheral Places

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ABSTRACT

This paper sheds light on processes of place leadership that are enacted through visibility practices. While this strategy to "lead places on the map" has had some intended effects, such as increased tourism and lobby opportunities, this external orientation led to other consequences as well. First of all, it has led leadership to include a wider array of actors than the "traditional" place leaders that are bounded to a certain territory. Secondly, it points to the limitation of leadership in places that are in-between networks or "off the map", thirdly, to the tension between a homogeneous outward image and the inherent heterogeneous nature of all places. Overall, this paper goes beyond a functionalistic understanding of place leadership and provides a more political understanding of how places are led. This contribution is based on fieldwork conducted on the Estonian island of Kihnu and the Estonian town of Järva-Jaani.

Keywords: Place Leadership; Peripheralisation; Visibility; Estonia

1. Introduction

The acknowledgement of the importance of leadership for the development of places is widespread in the academic literature and among policy makers (Beer and Clower 2013; Sotarauta et al. 2012). The aim of this paper is to understand the dynamics of leadership in two peripheral places of Estonia by focusing on its practices and processes. While Central and Eastern European countries in general have seen a closing of the gap in economic performance compared to their Western European counterparts, this has mostly benefited the metropolitan regions of these countries and left their peripheries behind (PoSCoPP 2015). Witnessing these increasing disparities within Central and Eastern European countries in the last few decades, leadership in the so-called peripheries seems ever more crucial. Even though scholars have tried to understand the emergence and reproduction of spatial polarisation between core and peripheral places, these studies have focused mostly on the more

structural and/or economic approaches towards development and have often neglected the role of human agency (Kühn 2015; PoSCoPP 2015). Since human agency in the form of place leadership is seen as promising and as a crucial factor in the in-between position of certain places (Grootens and Horlings 2016), this opens an interest to look at processes of leadership in places which are affected by peripheralisation processes. Especially in the more centralised context of Estonia, as shown by Kettunen and Kungla (2005) and Sootla and Laanes (2015), leadership is said to be of even more importance (Beer and Clower 2013; Sotarauta and Beer 2017). This article will show in which way the leadership of these places is living up to its high expectations. Thus this paper will go beyond a functionalist exercise of analysing what leaders “ought to do” in peripheral places, instead this paper aims to understand the ways in which leadership is enacted in these places and with what consequences this is accompanied.

2. Context of peripheralisation

In this paper the focus is not on the core metropolitan buzz regions of this world, but places which can be seen as peripheral. In studying these places, Kühn (2015) and PoSCoPP (2015), among others, propose a relational process-based approach. They prefer to speak of peripheralisation, a concept that emphasises processes and relations over the notion of peripheries as static localities. This also enables a view of peripheries as produced “through social relations and their spatial implications” (Kühn 2015, 368). In this relational approach, material as well as discursive processes are highlighted and peripheralisation is very much linked to processes of centralisation. This also connects to a more general relational approach to places, in which places are constantly produced and reproduced by various actors and at different scales (Massey 2004; Massey 2005). With the move from studying peripheries as static localities defined by their population figures, often portraying these places as “geographically remote, economically marginal, politically powerless and socially inhomogeneous” (Blowers and Leroy 1994, 203), to studying the process of peripheralisation, attention is drawn back to the actors in these processes, and the human factor of leadership is highlighted in seemingly structurally defined processes.

Kühn (2015) mentions the fuzziness of the concept of peripheralisation due to the many different elements it entails: seeing peripheralisation as relational, process-centred, multidimensional, multi-scalar and temporal does not make it an easy process to analyse and understand. This paper mainly focuses on the political and social elements of the peripheralisation process and the actors contributing to these elements. From a socio-political perspective, processes of peripheralisation and marginalisation are mainly associated with power in the decision-making process and control over agenda setting (Herrschel 2010; Kühn 2015). Going beyond structural, economic approaches toward development, a socio-political view on peripheralisation processes is then characterised by an uneven distribution of power and the exclusion of networks and resources. Kühn (2015) mentions the possible conflicts between central and peripheral elites, the exclusion from resources of power and the overall insufficient possibilities, abilities or willingness to create counter-power. In this regard, the space for negotiation is seen as limited, and the peripheries are

affiliated with powerlessness and the cores with power. There is, on the other hand, perhaps also another perspective possible, in which the promise of leadership in the peripheries can be identified.

Within this socio-political view, Herrschel (2011) differentiates between spatial and social-communicative peripherality, and in this sense talks about peripheries as characterised by a certain “in-between-ness”. This peripherality is then based on the exclusion from networks instead of being excluded on the basis of territory only. As a consequence, new peripheries result from communicative distance to core networks, and not primarily from spatial distance between core and peripheral areas. In order to dig deeper into these socio-political elements of peripheralisation, this paper emphasises not only the spatial peripherality, but also pays attention to the in-between-ness of places, as can be seen in the cases used in this article. Moreover, this in-between-ness of certain places is not a static state, but a position in which actors and leaders of these places can play crucial roles. In other words, looking at socio-communicatively disadvantaged places opens back up the possibility of human agency and leadership.

3. Placing Leadership

As mentioned before, leadership is seen as a promising factor for regional development, but first it is important to critically look at this concept. Raelin (2016) has framed leadership as a vague concept, as overused and oversold. It is often accused of meaning nothing and everything at the same time, and, above all, the concept is even seen to be missing any “real” substance apart from being (mis)used by some actors (Kelly 2014). This article will plead for an understanding of leadership that will contribute to a deeper understanding of processes of leadership, which, this article shows, are in fact political processes.

3.1 Leadership as the promise

Leadership in general has been studied intensively from varying research disciplines. Depending on the strand of literature, different conceptualisations and definitions can be found. In the literature, the terms leader and leadership are often used interchangeably. In a classic definition by Kellerman and Webster (2001), a leader is seen as the one: “who creates or strives to create change, large or small” (487). In this approach leaders are seen as the heroes in a time of crisis, a conceptualisation that does not provide any understanding of the processes of leading and merely results in a normative confirmation of what “good” leaders should be like. As Beer and Clower (2013, 5) also mention, “too often leadership is associated with the near deification of great persons.”

But the field of leadership has moved beyond only looking at the heroes of change. Some of these approaches focus on behaviours of leaders (transactional, transformational approaches), while others focus on leaders in times of crisis or on ethical aspects of leadership. In general, however, most of these approaches have quite an individualistic focus (Alvesson and Spicer 2012; Raelin 2016) and do not have an eye for the context in which leadership is enacted. As Liddle (2010, 658)

mentions, “Several flawed assumptions have arisen from applying individualistic ‘traits’ models of leadership and reductionist/mechanistic models of organisations to complex multi-agency situations/environments inhabited by 21st-century public leaders.” Therefore, authors have pointed at the role of leadership in the development of places, in so-called place leadership. In this strand of literature, authors focus on the potential room for manoeuvre in a complex multi-actor and multi-relational regional setting (Sotarauta et al. 2012; Collinge and Gibney 2010). According to these authors leadership of place connects to a collaborative nature. It crosses disciplinary, territorial, hierarchical, horizontal and thematic boundaries, leadership can be formal as well as informal and is based on mutual trust and collaboration. Hereby it goes beyond only looking at the context of leadership in businesses or organisations, but deals with leadership in the more complex environment that places offer (Collinge et al. 2010).

3.2 Beyond what leaders ought to do

While this conceptualisation of place leadership fits the complex environment in which leaders in local and regional development are operating, it also has a quite functionalistic and normative focus, portraying leaders as connectors and boundary spanners and hereby focusing on what leaders “ought to do”. But in order to go beyond this functionalistic approach to studying leaders, it is crucial to first turn to some philosophical underpinnings of some of the studies on leadership of place. As Mabey and Freeman (2010, 506) emphasise: “much writing about LP [leadership of place] draws, not always consciously, upon an eclectic mix of theories” which can be divided into different discourses: the functionalistic, constructivist, dialogic and critical discourse. Depending on the discourse followed, studies can have different views of leadership and different understandings of the leadership phenomenon. This contribution follows a dialogical understanding of leadership in which there are no universally applicable truths and measurable leadership outcomes (preferring duality over dualism), and furthermore the places in which leadership is enacted is seen as multiple, heterogeneous (highlighting dissensus over consensus). In this discourse, the focus shifts from the identification of a single leader towards a “multi-actor process of place-making – brought about through relating and talking”, (Mabey and Freeman 2010, 509) and the emphasis moves away from leaders and their capabilities to the act of leading, identifiable in negotiating, consultation and meditation of the possible futures ahead (Sotarauta 2016). This also connects that what Allen and Cochrane (2007, 1191) have named “an assemblage of central, regional and local actors engaged in a complex set of political mobilizations at one point in time”. Leadership is therefore understood as the process in which actor(s) consciously shape certain places, in which places are seen as inhomogeneous, relational and socially (and always) under construction (Massey 2005).

This departure from functionalistic accounts also means a move away from seeing leadership as only collaborative, based on trust and collaboration. As this might be true for some “successful” cases, the aim of this paper is not to judge or evaluate certain leadership qualities or outcomes, but to come closer to an understanding of how leadership takes place by focusing on 1) the open-ended processes of leadership,

instead of a focus on single charismatic actors and defined outcomes only and 2) not necessarily assuming that this process is a harmonious exercise; leadership is often-times also enacted in a quite non-collaborative and disharmonious way. Hereby it can move away from positivistic approaches to leadership only, away from what leadership “ought to do” (Raelin 2016), since this will only reinforce the normative assumption surrounding the concept and will only reinforce the image that surrounds “successful” leadership. Furthermore, this shift also allows moving away from a merely functionalist account of leadership in which the focus is often on traits and skills that certain leaders need in order to achieve measurable progress of some kind (Mabey and Freeman 2010), and in which place leadership can more appropriately be approached as a political process and not as a technocratic exercise (Sotarauta 2016).

Seeing place leadership as a political process also connects to the direction in which critical leadership studies have moved, whose scholars “try to denaturalize leadership (by showing it is the outcome of an ongoing process of social construction and negotiation), study it reflexively (by reflecting on how the researcher and her methods are implicated in producing the phenomena of leadership), and treat it non-performatively (by breaking away from attempts to optimise leadership)” (Alvesson and Spicer 2012, 373). This more dialogic understanding of leadership turns the attention to leadership more to issues of negotiation, power and politics. By looking beyond only the assigned leaders, and also including non-assigned leaders, the actual influence of leadership and the power of certain actors comes to the fore, which is in fact much more difficult to detect (Crevani, Lindgren and Packendorff 2010; Sotarauta 2016).

3.3 Leading in places – practicing and negotiating visibility

Connecting the two literatures of peripheralisation and leadership of place provides the possibility to look at leadership of in-between places and also points attention to the more concrete ways in which leadership is enacted and as a multi-actor process of place-making. Beyond only the material practices in which leadership can be enacted, this article focuses more on the immaterial elements, such as images, visibility and marketing. Seeing places as having material and more symbolic elements (Jones and Woods 2013), leadership can likewise be enacted in more material and symbolic forms. Material practices can, for example, be the construction of community buildings, improving road accessibility, while the more symbolic elements include place marketing, image-making etc. It is especially these symbolic practices of leading in places on which this article focuses. Halfacree (2006) has named this dimension of rurality the representation of the rural. But as Eriksson (2008) has shown, the representation of the “peripheral” can have “real” material consequences. This will make it hard to distinguish between the material and the symbolic *per se*, since they are often intertwined, as Halfacree (2006) also observes. Paasi (2002) also emphasised the power of words and publicity for “making” regions and hereby affecting the lives of the people living in these regions in a “real” material way.

Literature on representations of the rural often leans in the direction of active agency in order to develop places in the sense of place marketing or branding. Kavatzis and Ashworth (2008) show that active image-making is not a new phe-

nomenon and could already be identified when the American West was promoted by governments and other agencies for new settlers to come live in the land of opportunities. When looking especially at places that are seen as invisible and socio-communicatively peripheral image-making, practices such as place marketing can be seen as a way to get out of the invisible positions. This can take place in rather “odd” and non-standard ways, such as the round hay bale festival, illustrated by Vik and Villa (2010) in their case study of a small town in Norway. In this town, the image of being a small, quiet and picturesque book town has, at the same time, also led to other rural development aspects, such as internal mobilisation of the community and an overall sense of optimism. Another reason to become more visible is to gain political attention and lobby possibilities. Especially in centralised governance systems, the extra funding or national programme for regional development seems crucial. Kettunen and Kungla (2005) mention the case of Estonia, where, despite having a centralised system with less room for manoeuvre in the formal channels, other channels have gained in importance. See, for example, the importance of party channels in Estonian grass-roots mobilisations (Kettunen and Kungla 2005).

Apart from these positive image-making practices, such as place marketing and lobbying, images also stick to places in more negative forms in the form of stigmatisation. While stigmas can be seen as something that sticks to places and over which people have no control, there are actors behind these images, as well. In this regard, Bürk et al. (2012) mention the importance of the stigmatised and the stigmatisers as actors in these processes. Different actors have a role in these image-making practices, such as officials, NGO-leaders etc. National media play a key role in this, as well, as Plüschke-Altof (2016) shows in her analysis of how the rural is portrayed in Estonian print media. Also, Nugin and Trell (2015) describe how rural inhabitants are usually depicted as “lagging behind, disconnected from the rest of the world and very likely coping with an alcohol problem” in the Estonian media (Nugin and Trell 2015, 265).

However, Vik and Villa (2010) also mention the paradox regarding the practices of connecting rural development to image making. On the one hand, attention and visibility is seen as necessary for striking and impressive images, which also need to be narrow and to have a certain exclusivity. On the other hand, the heterogeneity of different interests, people and relations in the development of places requires a certain broadness and inclusiveness. They emphasise that a certain balance is needed between this broadness and narrowness in this image making for rural development.

Especially when there is only one image to portray to the outside audience, these images often give the illusion that places are harmonious and consensually constructed (Mabey and Freeman 2010; Paasi 2013). Buizer and Turnhout (2011) mention that regarding the different multiplicities in place making, the processes behind the inclusion or exclusion of multiplicities in place making processes themselves are especially important elements in understanding exactly how place making occurs. Pierce et al. (2011) point to the process of negotiating the different place-frames as a way to also capture a relational making of places, a place politics that is not necessarily constrained by administrative boundaries. In this sense, leading through image-making and the negotiations over these images becomes very political again, understood in the way that Grémion (1976, 464; cited in Carter and Pasquier 2010)

has noted: “Critically, it was defined as actor interactions in the exercise of authority and in the name of the local – a politics in the formation of collective decisions.” It is exactly these actor interactions in the name of the local that makes the enquiry into place leadership as a process an interesting exercise.

4. Methods

This article is based on repeated field work, in-depth interviews and participatory observation from 2014 to 2016. Interview partners were people considered to be active in the development of the place, and hereby perceived as important in shaping the place by local, regional and national actors. Additionally, public events were attended where the topic of place development was discussed, with actors from central and/or regional government also present. In these events, the leadership could also be witnessed in a more natural environment, in contrast to the denaturalised context of an interview situation.

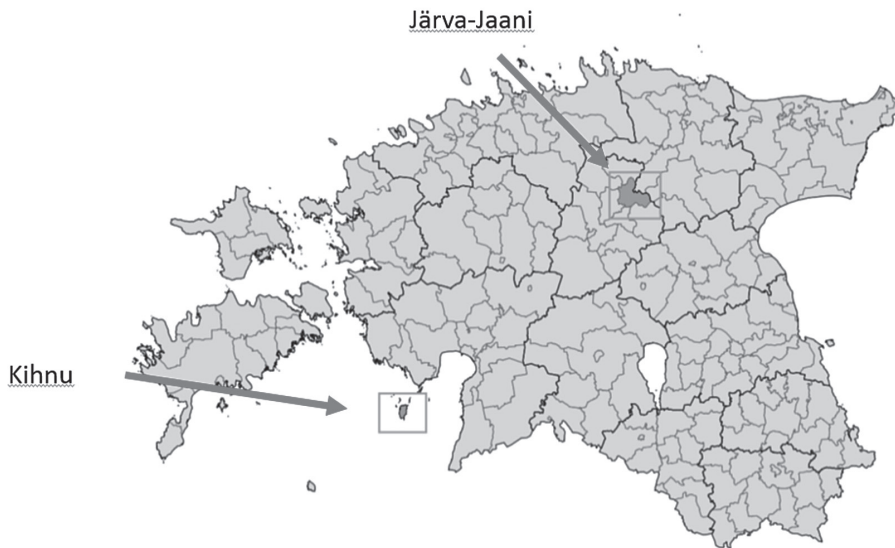


Figure 1: Case study areas (adopted from Tamm 2016)

The selection of the cases is based on similarities in terms of problems these places are facing, which are common to so-called peripheral places. Both Kihnu and Järva-Jaani are small places in Estonia with population sizes in 2015 of 689 and 1613 respectively. They both deal with a declining population and struggle with keeping inhabitants and young people as well as their schools and other amenities (Järva-Jaani Municipality 2015; Kihnu Municipality 2015), which are all elements of the more structural factors that peripheral places are dealing with. In another way, these peripheral places can be seen as each other's extremes. While Kihnu can be seen as the “classical” spatial periphery being an isolated island, socio-communicatively it is quite well connected to relevant policy networks, as also a member of the local

government in Kihnu mentions: “We are an island it will make us a peripheral place, but still it will in some way put us in the centre of ... everything, sometimes.”

Järva-Jaani, on the other hand, has a much less “classical” peripheral location, being in the centre of Estonia, but has much more socio-communicative distance to functional networks. Based on interviews with regional and national policy makers, Järva-Jaani is not as well connected in functional networks as is Kihnu. Therefore, these cases are chosen to show a similarity in the expected problems of living in the peripheries (in terms of declining population, lack of jobs etc.), but also a structurally different environment in terms of socio-communicative peripherality. Choosing two dissimilar cases with respect to their socio-communicative peripherality made it possible to see the relationship between this environment and the room for manoeuvre for leadership practices in these places.

5. Results

In the following section, this article proceeds with giving an overview on the question of the enactment of leadership in the peripheral places of Järva-Jaani and Kihnu. The results will be structured by first focusing on who is leading, then describing the practices and processes of leadership. After describing the cases individually, the article will proceed with a comparison of the cases and finish with the conclusions.

5.1 Kihnu, Leading, while already being on the map

In Kihnu, leadership is mostly directed towards preserving the cultural heritage. Already from the 1950s on, interests in its folklore and traditions, which have mostly been preserved exactly because of their spatially peripheral position, have been recorded by scientists. From then on, this attention has grown amongst local actors, as well as amongst external actors such as artists, scientists, journalists and lobbyists (Rüütel 2004; Rüütel et al. 2013). Partly because of these efforts, since 2003, Kihnu has been on the representative list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity of UNESCO. This is seen as an important milestone for the community, since this is the symbol of the recognition that this culture should be protected, internally as well as for the outside world. Leadership is mostly shown in the maintenance of cultural heritage and is mostly enacted by a coalition of people from different fields (tourism entrepreneurs, teachers etc.) of whom some are also part of the local municipality council. Next to the actors living on the island, there are also external supporters with functional networks connected to the capital city, Tallinn. As already noted in an earlier study (Kuutma 2007, 193), there is a “negotiation of agendas by cultural insiders and outsiders on local, national and international level”. In this case, it is therefore not only leadership that is bounded to the territory of Kihnu, but much more a multi-actor process of leading on multiple scales. At the same time, this is not a coalition in which the whole community is represented; there are groups living on the island that are not part of this coalitions. As Kuutma (2007) also mentioned, Kihnu is not a homogeneous community and has different camps inside the community, of which not all are represented in the local council.

The preservation of the Kihnu culture has been the common aim in the fragmented leadership of this place. This shows in the development of a Kihnu museum, exhibiting local culture, the organisation of events for the community in the cultural house, the preservation of the Kihnu language, and the promotion of music lessons in traditional instruments in primary school. Outwards, the preservation of culture is practiced, for example, by making documentaries, broadcasting a weekly Kihnu radio, and by connecting this image to tourism aims. The targeted audience is not only limited to Estonia, since also foreign television crews, folklorists, musicians and tourists come visit the island, who all have their different expectations of the island which should be met. In this way, leadership in Kihnu is directed towards protecting local culture and also protecting the livelihoods of the people practicing this culture on the island.

The way in which this process is conducted is mainly by using its image as an island with its specific cultural value in need of protection. The instrumentalisation of this image is done, first of all, using this image as a resource in itself. The most tangible example of this is the Kihnu Cultural Programme, a direct sum of money which can be spent for the preservation of the Kihnu Cultural Space, recognised as such by UNESCO. A board consisting of Kihnu inhabitants, regional and national actors decides which issues this state money can and cannot be spent on. Protection in the intangible heritage list of the world therefore also comes with very tangible material consequences in terms of funding. Next to this very material usage of image, local-municipality officers use this label of Kihnu to get things done at the national government. As an employee of the municipality mentions, “Kihnu, it is like a business card: I’m from Kihnu, please help.”

It opens doors for the leaders of Kihnu, only by mentioning the “brand” Kihnu. This also shows that this symbolic shaping of a certain image can have real material consequences in the form of achieved lobby outcomes and a direct sum of money to spend via the Kihnu Cultural Programme. Also, certain visits to the island are organised in which the island and its cultural heritage is shown, and in which certain locally important issues can be discussed. This direct connection is seen as the most beneficial, and sometimes visits are connected with lobbying activities as one of the active cultural persons on the island mentions: “They have visited my home and have been on Kihnu island, and I hope that it helps because when there is some discussion about Kihnu culture in parliament, they support it.” The leaders themselves also see their cultural heritage and identity as a resource. When asking for examples of why other regions in Estonia are not supported, one of the local leaders mentions: “Usually the problem is that they don’t have culture, roots, tradition anymore. This is a difference.” Having this special label, therefore, seems to legitimise the special support for this respondent.

The process of using this image as a resource is not done in isolation. One important partner for Kihnu’s leadership towards staying on the map is the media. When some issues arise which need external help, the route to the media is not long. As one of the local inhabitants mentions: “Media help in this as well, oh, small island Kihnu, you can’t get there, how does Estonia, as a country fail in these transportation issues and so on. And then all the officials are running.” Facebook was especially used by one of the active local people in order to keep the network of journalists, artists,

scientists and general public updated about the island and to instrumentalise this network to the benefit of the place. A clear example of a case in which this was used was with the issue of bird hunters on the island who would hunt for singing birds, which was problematic for some of the islanders. Because this information was shared on the Facebook page of one of the active local inhabitants, this got so much feedback and support from functional networks in Estonia that this local problem was discussed in the National Parliament of Estonia. Overall leadership in Kihnu emphasises the homogeneity of the island as a cultural space and as a place in need of help and uses this image in getting state support (directly and via lobbying).

5.1.1 Leadership in negotiation

This hegemonic image making and instrumentalisation of the image on the island has also led to some resistance. First of all, this tension is directed towards being visible at all, where the presence of media on the island is not appreciated by everyone, when, for example, an inhabitant does not appreciate the attention from tourism or the media or tends not to wear the local clothing. This same inhabitant mentions: “The attention to Kihnu can be positive, but also negative and ruin your mood for the whole day.” This comes close to what Kuutma (2007) has pointed out, that Kihnu could in some ways become a living museum. Also signs of irritation against certain media, film crews and exposure have been mentioned. In an example by one of the inhabitants, it is mentioned that more police control is possible on the island due to media exposure. Opening up to the world, on the one hand, creates more opportunities for some, but, on the other hand, also means that Kihnu is becoming more visible for mainland institutions. This shows that the openness to the outside world has also resulted in some less intended consequences, which could be seen as less positive by some of the inhabitants.

Secondly, the hegemonic perception of Kihnu as a cultural space and a consumption space for tourists sometimes clashes with other images of the island. For example, the strong focus on culture and tourism development does not always leave room for other views on how to develop the island. Agriculture and fisheries have received less attention in the place frame connected to culture and tourism, as mentioned by an inhabitant of the island. Within the images connected to culture, different images are required by different audiences. As one of the entrepreneurs mentions about Japanese tourists coming to the island: “near the lighthouse, they never enter, they don’t want to go to the lighthouse, they are not coming here for the lighthouse, they want to see handicraft and traditions.”

Dealing with different expectations of different tourists, the image of the island is constructed differently. But also on a national level, in terms of lobbying, the choice for a certain image is crucial and its importance is also seen by the leaders of the island. As one of the leaders also mentioned, there is a trickiness to investing in a positive image of Kihnu and keeping the national ministries willing enough to support them as an island in need of help at the same time.

5.2 Järva-Jaani, Leading onto the map

Järva-Jaani's leadership can be seen as a small town which characterises itself by doing many different, new and "interesting" things, events and activities. There is a wide range of sports clubs (e.g. disc golf, football, basketball, etc.), at least nine museums (among which the most famous is the old vehicles park with 451 old vehicles), a historical voluntary firefighting club, dancing, singing, music groups and an active church community. A lot of events are organised as well; festivals on the museum ground for old vehicles, a church festival with 200 young people in 2016, and many others. Leadership is seen as practiced by anyone who is active in the community. A main driving force, though, behind the activities in this town is the municipal leader, who is engaged in many community organisations, formal and informal (e.g. disc golf, rock band, football, dancing group etc.). Also, other active people in leading the place further can be found working for museums, the gymnasium, youth clubs, dancing clubs, church and other NGOs in the community. Overall, leadership is mostly associated with being an active part in the community.

The leadership of Järva-Jaani is mostly focused on engaging in many activities and local NGOs that are trying to make life more pleasant for the people living there, to attract new people to come live there, and to draw tourists to the attractions. New activities, a positive attitude and community engagement are emphasised when talking to the leaders of the place. Organising events, opening museums and drawing tourists is seen as a way to make Järva-Jaani visible, to keep local inhabitants and to attract new inhabitants.

In these practices, standing out or getting on the map is seen as something crucial. The activities taking place in this town seem to focus especially on the things that stand out. As the municipal leader mentions: "We are trying to be like a small centre; we are not big, but doing this interesting stuff." An example of this is the reform that has been made in the gymnasium. In 2014, a new principal started in Järva-Jaani gymnasium and started to make some changes. The school manages this by offering an innovative type of education or, as the school director has mentioned, "by offering something extra." This "extra" is provided, for example, by incorporating specialty knowledge from tourism and the internal security sector into classes, teaching physical education through collaboration with local sports clubs, etc. In this way, the gymnasium is trying to survive the expected closing of gymnasiums around the country, in light of the plans to have fewer state gymnasiums. Another way that leadership is enacted is through an emphasis on openness from the local government to the community. An example which shows this nicely is the process of how an indoor skate park was developed. The idea for this came from a girl from Järva-Jaani who proposed a plan for a skate park by visiting the office of the municipal leader. Some years later, by using the network of the municipal leader, the time and energy of the local community for bringing in and transporting the different parts of the skate park, and some crowdfunding activity, this project was realised.

Also in this case, the role of the media is important in leading this place. As was said by the municipal leader: "the staff of the local newspaper are good friends of mine, and they always try to make news positive." An example is when the

gymnasium fired a teacher and this teacher went to the media. Due to good relations with the media, according to the municipal leader, a “more neutral” story could be put forward. The media portray Järva-Jaani again as open, since the municipal leader also actively uses Facebook, writes a weblog about his activities, and discusses current debates (among which are also the less easy topics, such as administrative reforms).

5.2.1 Leadership in negotiation

Tensions in leadership could be witnessed when looking at the hosting of two TV series in Järva-Jaani which portray this place as the rural backward countryside (including drunk villagers and bad local medical services). Even though these series, first of all, put Järva-Jaani on the map, some people question the benefit of this kind of image. This has led to some discussion (on channels such as Facebook and weblogs) on whether this visibility is good in itself for the place, and whether all exposure is in the end “good” for Järva-Jaani, or for all Järva-Jaani people. While some people emphasise the fun or the joke behind this show and actively use this exposure to create opportunities (by, for example, opening a hostel carrying the name of the TV show), others have emphasised that it is still the image that is connected to the name of Järva-Jaani. In the case of *Doktor Silva*, another TV show, the medical centre of Järva-Jaani is portrayed as having unqualified personnel, while one of the local inhabitants mentions: “but in our doctor’s centre, pereartsikeskuses, there are good doctors, very good doctors.” This raises the question whether visibility and exposure are good things in all cases at all costs, even if the image portrayed (and made possible by the actors in the place itself) is negative and can even be seen as stigmatising the place.

6. Comparing cases

Looking at the leadership of these two places, in both instances, visibility of the places is strongly emphasised. While being visible and “on the map” is something that in Kihnu is already established and can be instrumentalised, the leadership of Järva-Jaani is mostly concerned with getting on the map in the first place. While both seem to work towards attracting tourists and keeping local residents in their place, these places also depart from different starting points.

The biggest difference comes from either being on the map (as Kihnu) or trying to get on the map (as Järva-Jaani), since this gives these places differential access to functional networks. While Kihnu’s established role as a culturally unique island in need of protection leads to some advantages in terms of networks, state funding and a favourable national policy environment, the picture is different for the less visible Järva-Jaani. As one of the youth leaders mentions in Järva-Jaani: “Yeah, I think we don’t have that one thing. We don’t have that kind of thing. In Kihnu, they have all their Kihnu stuff, but we don’t have that.” The centrality and importance of Kihnu, already being on the mental map of policy makers, tourists and other functional relations, gives them extra opportunities, which are not available for the less visible Järva-Jaani.

This also reconfirms what Eriksson (2008) has argued, that these representations also have material consequences as can be seen from the increased lobby opportunity that Kihnu has gained, in comparison to Järva-Jaani not having these opportunities. Moreover, this shows that while the focus is often on human agency in understanding local leadership, this also shows some of the limits of leadership for places in an in-between position. As Herrschel (2011) also mentions, it is much easier to build bridges and highways to reduce spatial distance than it is to reduce communicative distance. The promise of networking and building relationships is therefore understandable, but should also be seen in its limited context, since not all places have been mapped yet and might never be mapped.

An element which could be witnessed in both instances was the role of the media as a partner in place making. For both the well-connected Kihnu and the lesser connected Järva-Jaani, media, including the newer social media, were seen as important partners. Even though the reach that both places had with their media differed considerably, they both used this external partner to connect to a wider audience. While the role of media in the construction of places has been recognised before (Paasi 2010), in these cases, oftentimes the rural places are seen as passive receivers and the media as the active agents, while both cases show that the leaders from these places engage in certain coalitions to portray the places in certain ways. It is not necessarily local image-making portrayed upon local places, but also a multi-actor process of image-making, in which these actors need each other; the media need (sensational) stories, and place leaders need their places to be on the map.

This also connects to the difference in the negotiation of leadership in both cases: While the image of Kihnu and its instrumental value is based on a certain homogeneous image of the island, this also leads to power for the people who are connected to this image of the place. Kihnu has created something similar to what Annist (2013) has witnessed in Setomaa, Estonia – support from national and international funding. This support is mostly aimed at the maintenance and preservation of one form of local culture and is framed more broadly as protecting life on the island in general. But it is important to know is that it is only protected in a particular way, and other ways are hereby excluded. Therefore, ideas about certain kinds of culture are supported by national funding schemes giving the actors dealing with this kind of culture certain powers in negotiation, and, at the same time, this exacerbates the exclusion of alternative viewpoints on the island's development. In the case of Järva-Jaani, the perceived need to be in the picture, even if the picture does not look so nice, has also left the inhabitants questioning against which costs certain images should be portrayed for the community? This links to the tensions that Vik and Villa (2010) mentioned between a certain necessary narrowness of an image to be effective and a broadness of an image to speak for the “whole” community. Images, therefore, can by definition not speak for all inhabitants of a community and thereby leave some out. This process of negotiating the images of a place and hereby seeing leadership of place as inherently political is exactly what a processual understanding of leadership enables to grasp.

7. Conclusion & Discussion

When viewing leadership as the process in which actor(s) consciously shape certain places, a tendency can be witnessed for Estonian peripheral places to try to lead their places on the map and then to instrumentalise this position (if possible) for the development of these places. Leadership is mostly directed towards visibility in several ways. In this article, it shows what consequences this has for a more thorough understanding of place leadership in peripheral places. When discussing leadership in places, oftentimes the emphasis is on what leaders ought to do and less on understanding the dynamics of leadership processes. This article has shown that when taking a more open-ended processual approach seeing place leadership as “future seeking but not future defining” (Sotarauta 2016, 55), place leadership can be seen as inherently political and always under negotiation. Based on these statements, the following can be concluded.

First of all, the range of actors involved in place leadership moves beyond only the formal leaders or development actors, but, moreover, can also include actors living in other areas or having different connections to the place; media, artists, entrepreneurs, formal leaders and NGO leaders can all act in a process of leadership. Even though Sotarauta et al. (2012, 2017) already pointed to this before, in this article, it is also shown that these collaborative leaderships of place are not bound to a certain scale. While sometimes leadership of place is seen as a local exercise that automatically contests the national-level actors, this article shows again that leadership can also work in coalition on multiple scales and involving a range of (sometimes unexpected) actors. This once again reaffirms the importance of a relational reading of place and place-making and not viewing places as bounded containers, reconfirming what Massey (2004) refers to as using a hegemonic territorial image in a very relational way. Hereby the shift in focus away from the traditional actors operating from within the boundaries of a place also points attention to networks for place leadership, which has been highlighted before by Sotarauta et al. (2012) among others.

Furthermore, this article has shown that relations do not only enable, but also constrain the agency of leaders. The networks themselves can also become structural elements defining the possibilities and impossibilities of place leadership. Some places are privileged with access to certain functional networks, as could be seen in Kihnu. This moves beyond the idea that networks are simply formed by actors if they wish to, but also points to a structural element in networkedness of certain places and the in-between-ness of other places, which cannot always be changed in the shorter time span of a certain leadership. Seeing networks and networkedness as a necessary and inevitable strategy for “good” leaders of places tends to neglect the exclusionary power of networks and the difficulty of getting inside these networks, when being outside.

Secondly, these cases have also shown that these coalitions in image-making are not necessarily harmonious or consensual per definition, but often tend to leave out. Especially when leadership of place is often seen as a consensual exercise in which the community (as if there is only one community) works together and collaborates, this heterogeneity and multiplicity of relations, people and strategies within places

should not be forgotten and should even be more central in our discussions on place leadership. It is exactly within the politics and negotiation within places where the dynamics of human agency (its leadership) can be identified. This processual, political understanding of leadership in heterogeneity should therefore be central in an attempt to understand place leadership. In this way, the often-used relation between leader and follower can be substituted by the relation between leadership and places, in which places are inherently open-ended, under construction and heterogeneous. It is exactly the heterogeneity of places that defines places and therefore also what should be central in an understanding of place leadership. As Amin (2004, 39) has phrased it fittingly: “different microworlds find themselves on the same proximate turf, and that the pull on turf in different directions and different interests needs to be actively managed and negotiated, because there is no other turf.”

This article hereby reemphasises the importance of the multiplicity and heterogeneity of all places, not only the urban dynamic places like London which are often talked about when taking a relational notion of place. By zooming in on image-making as a strategy, places are becoming dependent on a homogeneous image of a place, which neglects the inherent heterogeneity of all places. This is especially so when this strategy of visibility goes hand in hand with certain power relations, in which some images of places are hereby privileged over other images. Consequently, this gives power to a certain coalition of leaders who fit this image. Especially when external actors, government and funding bodies are involved in supporting certain development ideas, this gives power and resources to certain actors who fit this dominant frame and excludes those who do not fit this frame. This is particularly relevant in cases where these development ideas are connected to resources in a resource-scarce environment, like the peripheral places of our world. Actors in these places become more and more concerned with the visibility of their places via easily understandable homogeneous images. The consequences of this strategy of visibility is that it has the danger of hiding the inherent heterogeneity of all places and hereby excludes the actors who do not fit the dominant place frame. In this way, leadership that focuses on one dimensional homogeneous images, that aims to create a more balanced spatial development *between* places on a national scale could at the same time lead to more inequalities *within* places.

As a last point, the role that images have received as a resource for development in itself also questions the equality and uneven ground on which peripheral places themselves have to compete with each other and even with core regions. When visibility has become such an important resource in the development of places, this could potentially also create new exclusions in rural development, based on the “marketability” of certain places compared to others. And just because of the simple observation that one can only have so many UNESCO listings or hay bale festivals, what is then left for the so-called grey spots on our maps without their specific, unique and marketable element? This is a question that many “invisible” peripheries are struggling with today and for which there could also be more attention in policy and academic circles.

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