Tourism, Human Capital & Regional Development in Three Communities in Greenland: Ukkusissat, Narsaq and Qaanaaq

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Communities in the High North, peripheral and of a small scale, struggling for economic self-sufficiency and with a decreasing population, are trying to find new development options and ways to bring in revenues. Tourism has proven to be one of the options, but not all places respond in an equal way.

When talking about the development of tourism at a regional scale, local communities are rarely involved in the tourism planning process. Indeed, tourism is a way to develop something that has an important component, “the human capital”, where the relationship between tourism development and community dynamics directly involves the local residents.

For local communities, a significant socioeconomic factor is the proportion of tourism income that can be captured by the local economy. Such income is generated through employment in tourism-related services, such as food and lodging, gasoline, local tour guiding, and selling of souvenirs. Small tourism businesses can often be a good option for young men and women.

In this paper, after an overview about the development of tourism in Greenland, I present the achievements and drawbacks of three peripheral Greenlandic communities: Ukkusissat, Narsaq, and Qaanaaq, which are trying to develop tourism as a possible source of additional income. Specifically, I discuss the role of the local person in charge of tourism, the lack of information and access to resources for the local population.

The three cases presented here are derived from field work and research projects done in Greenland at different points of time.

Tourism in Greenland: A Brief Overview

Development and Planning of Tourism in Greenland

In Greenland, organised tourism started in the late 1950s. Greenland’s status as a colony changed in 1953, when Greenland became a Danish province and the authorities decided to open up certain areas to tourism. The first charter flights started from Iceland at the end of the 1950s, bringing tourists to Narsarsuaq in the South or for a day trip to Kulusuk in the east of Greenland.

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In the mid-1960s also SAS, a Danish carrier, started to bring tourists to Narsarsuaq and the number of tourists grew steadily.\(^1\)

During the 1970s the Pegatigiiit Kalaaliit (PK)\(^2\) association, the Greenlanders living in Denmark, aware of the potential of the tourism business, wanted local residents to be actively involved in the rising business and not just passive observers (Egede Hegelund 2009). Several meetings were arranged in the 1970s with the municipal authorities and with the local people along the coast of Greenland.

In South Greenland, cooperation with the local sheep farmers started, offering as facilities small cabins at the farms and tourists were offered local food and sold sheep wool knitted items. Several Danish Leisure Associations\(^3\) took part in the programme, and maps of the area for tourism purposes were produced.

At the end of 1975 PK further structured the activity establishing a travel agency, INUK travel\(^4\), and making arrangements with air carriers and travel agencies in Denmark with the purpose of having tourist groups coming to Greenland. Things did not turn out as wished; recommendations made by a report published in 1974 by the Ministry for Greenland’s Working Committee on Tourism in Greenland recommend the building of large hotels, the construction of airports and the purchase of aircrafts. This was too challenging for the PK as they felt these recommendations were too much in favour of big business such as the Danish air carriers SAS, Grønlandsfly (Air Greenland) and hotel owners; the local involvement in the tourism business was merely ignored and the impression was that the very large part of the profits derived from tourism activities would go back to Denmark (Egede Hegelund 2009).

At the first conference on tourism in Qaqortoq in 1975 the general agreement was that the Greenland political authorities needed to adopt a national tourism policy.

From the seventies onwards, Greenland - which in 1979 with the Home Rule became a self-governing part of the Danish Realm - was more and more involved in the decision-making process regarding the development of the tourism industry. With the cooperation of the Danish Tourism Board, tourist numbers reached a record of 10,000 in 1981. However unsuitable marketing decisions led to a drastic reduction of these figures to 3,300 in 1987.

In the same period, the Greenland Home Rule Government had to face a series of difficulties, most notably unemployment caused by a crisis in the fishing and fish processing industries (95% of the exports) and the closure of a zinc and lead mine at Maarmorilik.

During the late 1980s the general recognition of the potential of tourism created some expectations for the future development, and in 1990 the Greenland Landsting (Greenland Parliament) approved the first general Tourism Development Plan\(^5\) for the period from 1991 to 2005. The analysis was based on the tourism resources and the attractions of Greenland, and the objective of the plan was to reach a total of 3,000 tourists in 2005 creating as many as 2000-2500 direct jobs and another 1000-1500 jobs in related businesses. Basically, the goal of the plan was to turn tourism into the main industry in Greenland, and thereby replace the income and jobs lost by the decline of the fishing industry, reduce unemployment and absorb the growth in the workforce.

Geographically, tourism was supposed to be divided: 40% of tourist in South Greenland, where there has been a long tradition of tourism; 30% in the Disko Bay, where tourism was fast-growing during the 1990s; 20% on the East Coast, which could boast the highest number of day Tommasini
tourists from Iceland during the 1990s; and 10% in Central Greenland, where the redevelopment of the decommissioned American base was planned to be the centre for tourists in connection with meetings and conferences. The development was primarily focused on Denmark and Greenland as the main markets for the future (Tourism Development Plan 1991: 4.3.2).

The National Tourist Board of Greenland

Greenland Tourism (GT) was established in 1992 as National Tourist Board of Greenland. The aim was the development of a viable tourism industry in Greenland, to have control over the tourism, creating their own programmes, contacts and having their own guides. In 1994 the concept of “Outfitters” was developed with the goal of having local tour operators. The driving idea has been to give the hunters training on tourism and related aspects, such as service, use of the radio, English conversation, and some professionalism in dealing with tourists.

From 1997 GT assisted the regional tourist boards, called “Destinations”, in building capacities and in the improvement of a framework, mainly dealing with legislation and public investments, for the development of tourism in Greenland.

Another issue was the image of Greenland, which for a long time has been promoted and consequently identified only with two elements: ice and dog sleds which with time, have been transformed as very strong icons. For instance, the regions below the so-called “dog line” felt disadvantaged as the entire southern part of Greenland suffered from the generalisation of the image conveyed by the marketing campaigns.

In 2005 the board changed its name to the Greenland Tourism and Business Council, a government owned agency for the development of tourism and business in Greenland, providing consultancy for entrepreneurial self-starters and small companies focusing on tourism. The goal was to develop and promote Greenland as an adventuresome and exclusive cruise destination through destination development, regional and national branding and innovation & product development.

The strategy was to create and develop a brand encompassing Greenland as a whole and strengthening regional diversities, creating a synergy between the business sectors able to support the overall national brand of Greenland, support regional networks, use knowledge and expertise to guide decision-makers in making the best possible legislative framework for tourism development, and focus and prioritize to ensure the optimal use of the resources. A new web page (http://www.greenland.com/) and a new brochure were developed for the new image and marketing strategy, which created a new world around Greenland.

The Three Case Studies

The research focused on tourism, on peripheral places, and on the available development options in remote areas in Greenland. The three cases presented here derive from field work and research projects done in Greenland at different points of time: in the South of Greenland, Narsaq and its area, in 2001; in West-North Greenland, Ukkusissat part of the Uummannaq area in 2005; and in Greenland High North, Qaanaaq, in 2007 (Tommasini 2011).

The fieldwork consisted of a first part devoted to the collection of information, and the building up of a catalogue of tourism attractions and potentials of the area. The second part focused on the interviews with the population, giving special attention to their necessities and expectations.
Data were collected using qualitative methods aimed to obtain an in-depth insight on the basis of a relatively small number of respondents or observations. A mix of different techniques were used: questionnaire, interviews, official as well as informal meetings and group discussion. A questionnaire was used at the beginning to obtain some basic information and to facilitate the comparison of the data.

The main purpose of the surveys was to investigate how, in a peripheral place, the local community perceives tourism, particularly as a possible source of additional income, and generally intended as a tool for development in the area. The interest of the community to start or increase tourism activities, in addition to the traditional ones, has been one of the interests of the research project.

Other questions, relating to the level of information about tourism as well as tourism development planning, were asked, to know how informed the population was about how to start and develop business in tourism, and how to benefit from it, possibly avoiding the negative effects.

**UKKUSISSAT (Uummannaq Region, West-North Greenland)**

Ukkusissat is part of the Uummannaq region, one of Greenland's northernmost towns (and former municipality). The region, although considered to be a peripheral location, is a highly...
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attractive tourist destination. Its impressive landscape contains all the elements of a tourist attraction: harsh landscape with tall mountains, rare vegetation, glaciers and icebergs. It is also attractive for its being “peripheral”, which is also part of the tourist lure. Beside the landscape, many attractions can be found in the area: the Qilakitsoq mummies (a burial site containing a number of mummies around 500 years old), the rich geology of the area, extreme events such as the shark challenge and the settlements, like Ukkusissat, where hunting and trapping activities are a great cultural attraction for tourists.

In the village of Ukkusissat, with its 184 inhabitants (in 2005), fishing is the main activity. There is a fish factory from Royal Greenland and, in 2004, the Ulu- Nujus, a factory for drying fish, started again. Traditional food is still important: seal, narwhal and fish (halibut, cod, and ammassat) are the basic diet, also for the approximately 350 dogs.

Here, cruise ship visits are welcome. The engaged inhabitants offer a whole entertaining program for the tourists. The benefits are shared among the people involved and used for social purposes in the community.

Tourist activities started after 1997, when the inhabitants contacted the cruise ship “Disko” that passed by and asked its passengers to come ashore and visit. Before the tourists arrive, there is a general cleaning of the beach and the village. People are engaged in the cleaning, on the reception or in the dog feeding, the national costumes display or the kayak show work.

The local tourist committee, composed of members of the village, is quite active and young people are interested in future development and in more involvement in tourism activities. They declared to be ready to have more tourists, and are prepared to offer more activities, such as visiting the near old mine of Maarmorilik, fishing in the fjord, offering Kaffemik, the traditional Greenlandic coffee and cake meeting. For this purpose, the tourist committee works on a tourism development plan consisting of a list of attractions and on how to get tourists there.

Findings

The salient aspect, which came out from all the interviews is that the village wants to do its development at its own pace. They want to keep the control over the resource and its development. They want to decide the kind of development that is suitable for the size and the structure of the village. In Ukkusissat there is good cooperation among the residents and between the different institutions. Interviewees declared to have many ideas for future tourism development, from making a web page to considering buying a boat for tourist tours. However, the tourists, predominantly cruise tourists, stay only for three hours, and not very often does anybody else come to Ukkusissat.

The village won an initiation prize from the Home Rule Government in 2003 for tourism initiatives. Ukkusissat showed, as interviewees proudly declared, that they did not need money to start and were able to give a good service.

NARSAQ Region (South Greenland)

The Southern part of Greenland - which includes Narsaq - is the most diverse region in Greenland, rich in natural, historical, and cultural attractions. The Narsaq area (2,076 inhabitants in 2001) is the farmers’ region in the South of Greenland.
Forms of rural tourist activities started in the area during the 1960s. Tourists - mostly hikers with limited travel budgets -冒险ed there in order to experience the beauties of the landscape, and enjoy contact with the local population, staying by the sheep farmers who provided plain accommodation and facilities.

Tourism became very popular and seemed, during the 1970s and 1980s, to be a growing activity. From the tourism point of view, South Greenland is known as the area of the sheep farms, Norse and Inuit ruins, tiny villages and great scenery. The major tourist season is the summer season, from the beginning of July to the end of September.

During the 1970s and the 1980s, the Danish Hikers Organisation (Dansk Vandrelaug) in South Greenland was quite active in organising outdoor recreational activities such as trekking and hiking. Sheep farmers offered houses or cabins and provided facilities for the hikers. This kind of accommodation became very popular in many ways for both tourists and the local population, as the unique experience was possible without high expenses. It also gave way to close contacts with the relatively unknown local population. Besides offering the accommodation, there was a possibility to sell souvenirs, such as carved and sewed items, and sell local products like fresh lamb meat, which generated supplementary income for the inhabitants.

Contrary to the organised package tours, the tourist expenditures were retained locally for the benefit of the local population, and despite the shortness of the "good" season this was an important source of additional and most of all, secure revenue.

Accessibility to the area was not a problem thanks to the vicinity of the international airport of Narsarsuaq. Bringing the tourists to the settlements was not a problem either. Farmers provided the transport from the harbour to the cabin by a tractor and local outfitters managed the local boat transportation.

This beneficial form of regional development declined during the 1990s, when other forms of tourism based on ice and sledge activities were privileged by the National Tourism Board of Greenland. Nowadays some of the farmers who took over the farms from their parents or deliberately chose to become farmers are looking for new ideas to increase the revenues and the quality of life. The most concrete alternative is represented by the production of vegetables, and, again, by tourism.

**Findings**

Many of the interviewees thought about initiating activities related to tourism, and some had already started. Their starting points are different. Some have been involved by an external organisation, the local tourist office or a tour operator, while others have been self-initiated.

Many factors influence the decision of starting a tourism activity. Sometimes there is a wish to do something different, and tourism seems to be a suitable activity. However, as interviewees declared, there is lack of information and support, and even the strongest motivation to start something new sometimes gives way to some disenchantment. Nevertheless to these young, motivated farmers it is clear that it takes time to have some tangible effects. Start-up capital has to be put into the initiative, and for some time gains will be not of importance, even with the good initial performances of the enterprise. Some of the interviewed recognised the discrepancy between all the talks about “tourism is equal to money” and the reality.
In general, tourism is considered as having positive effects. The idea of hosting tourists or being involved in some tourist activity is well considered by the farmers, who are thinking not only of the perceived economic advantages, but also about the possibilities of meeting people, and becoming acquainted with new places and ways of life.

People expressed the need for more local presence. They would like to have a local association for the development of tourism, and to be connected with the main ones. They would like to have more contact with the people in charge for the development of tourism, for the farming opportunities, e.g. vegetable production. As interviewees declared, there is lack of a local leader, or expert to address concerns and issues.

**QAANAAQ**

The community of Qaanaaq (652 inhabitants in 2007) is to be found in the most northern district in Greenland, Avanersuaq, which means the place of the farthest north. Archaeological evidence suggests that the first settlers of Avanersuaq arrived some 5000 years ago after crossing Smith Sound from Canada. The direct ancestors of today’s Inuit belonged to the “Thule” culture and reached Avanersuaq soon after 1000 A.D.

Qaanaaq was established in 1952 following the Danish authorities’ decision to move the local population, Inughuit (the great people) from their home village Uummannaq (Dundas) because of its close proximity to the American Thule Air Base. Greenland’s most northern town has a number of facilities including a hotel, a supermarket, a bakery, a post office, a tourist office, and a little, well-equipped hospital, as well as a museum, which is housed in the former home of the famous arctic explorer Knud Rasmussen, who in 1910 established the district’s first trading post called Thule (named after the Latin name of Ultima Thule).

In Qaanaaq, like in the other peripheral districts, hunting activities are predominant and are substantial components of the informal economy and of the subsistence sector. The possibilities to diversify the activities, and thus, having an extra income, are rather limited in this peripheral and scarcely populated area. Besides some administrative jobs, there is a Handicrafts Centre, managed on a cooperative basis but administratively and financially supported by municipal authorities, with facilities for making handicrafts and a shop for displaying and selling.

Some tourism activities are taking place in the area, thanks to the impressive landscape and its remoteness. This together with the mythical aura of the Ultima Thule, has great potential for tourism. The region is not always easy to reach and symbolizes one of the last frontiers in tourism. For this reason, tourism is a recurrent issue in the community discourse and is considered as “the” option for future development.

The craft and souvenir shop in Qaanaaq, which is also the Tourism Office, has a variety of activities to offer to the tourists, as well as accommodation in Qaanaaq and the surrounding settlements.

The local hunters and fishermen are involved in the tourism activities. The revenues from tourism activities are considered important in the community, where the main source of income is hunting-products, followed by tourism. However, the number of tourists remain very small. In the 1990s larger groups of tourists (10–16) arrived whereas today, it is mostly individual travellers or smaller groups (2–4) that land in Qaanaaq. Reasons for this trend are among others, more expensive air tickets that were introduced after the building of the airport in 2002.
So far, apart from some seasonal tourism activities, involving a small fraction of the local population, only a little tourism development has taken place.

**Findings**

Generally, the interviewees agree that it is a good income to have tourists especially now, that the ice is becoming thinner which is making hunting places difficult to reach. Some of them would like to work mainly as guides, with hunting as a side-activity. However, they admit that they do not have as many sled-dog tourists as anticipated, but on the other hand they recognize that the profits stay in the community.

Interviewees recognise that in Qaanaaq, there is not as much going on with tourism as in other parts of Greenland. Among hunters and their wives, there are a lot of talks and some ideas about tourism, such as quick improvements in making food and hosting tourists. Life up there is still very traditional, as they said, so it can be a special experience for tourists to see the real life in this North. In turn, this would help the income of the families. However, it is very difficult to achieve tourism growth. It is often not only a matter of money or good ideas, but the need to have other people helping and supporting this development.

One of the hindrances is communication with the tourists. English is not always spoken in the community and so hunters cannot explain about their activity and way of life. As a result, tourists cannot have a complete experience because of this lack of language communication. Hunters wish to have courses to learn English and more advertising and a guides’ association. They also wish to have meetings and discuss the matters of tourism and to prepare a manual about guiding in order to be ready for tourism and tourists. According to the interviewees, there is a lack of human capital and of information for the local population on how to create a tourism business and to access the necessary resources to start.

**Conclusions**

A peripheral region is one that suffers from geographical isolation, being distant from the core sphere activities, with poor access to and from the markets, lacking in infrastructures, outmigration, with low or frequently declining population, accruing the sense of remoteness.

In terms of tourism, the characteristic of peripherality, long seen as a drawback, is now seen as offering opportunities. Isolation and remoteness represent peace, difference, even exoticism (Brown & Hall 2000). However, the realities of tourism are not always clearly understood.

Usually, peripheral tourism suffers also from a high proportion of small and/or family owned businesses, which limit tourism development. This may not be the case for the type of tourism which has emerged in peripheral areas in Greenland, i.e. in the settlements where hunters offer tourism services, boat or sledge rides, which fit well as side activities.

Other factors that contribute to the success of tourism development include, among others, the presence of a leader (or focus person) that provides motivation and directions for the stakeholders.

Hindrances include, among others, lack of control over negative impacts, lack of infrastructure, and difficulties with finance. Controlling requires monitoring, carrying capacity management, evaluating, and if necessary, correcting actions (Blackman et al. 2004). Characteristics that limit
tourism development in peripheral areas also include limited access to funding and capital, lack of appropriate skills, and high leakage of money to external suppliers of goods and services (Hohl & Tisdell 1995).

Success is associated with long-term financial support from the government, especially for the development and maintaining of the infrastructures and facilities (Blackman et al. 2004). The long-term success of the tourism industry depends upon the acceptance and support of the host community (Murphy 1985; Wearing, Mc Donald 2002). Research indicates that successful alliances require strong leaders, good cooperation, administrative support, resources and community understanding of tourism, and a shared vision and communication. (Selin, Myers 1998; Blackmann et al. 2004; Moscardo 2008).

The three study cases presented in this article are about places, of small-scale and peripheral, with dominant hunting and fishing activities. The development of tourism activities took place due to a combination of different factors including:

- spontaneous forms, i.e. in South Greenland with the sheep farmers;
- more structured, i.e. in West North Greenland;
- responding to the need of finding alternatives, i.e. the attempts made by the communities of the High North of Greenland.

Not all the places show the same degree of local dynamism and local cooperation. Sometimes it is a person, or a group, who is able to foresee and risk a new initiative, e.g. creating a tourist product for cruise ship tourists like in Ukkusissat. Generally, the attitude in regard to tourism development is positive, but local communities in peripheral areas seldom have the business skills necessary to engage successfully over the long term. The level of information among the local population regarding tourism development options and support is quite limited as shown by the field work. Also, financial and technical assistance as well as training on the different skills necessary when starting with tourism activities were deemed necessary. Interviewees asked for more structured courses and information. At present the involvement of the community in the process of development and planning is almost incomplete when not absent.

It is important to identify the interested actors and establish parameters for the participation and training of local residents in the tourism sector; identify linkages with the local (both, formal and informal) economy that can stimulate multiplier effects; and find the existence of tourist products and experiences that encourage a general approach to promote and enhance the development of tourism in the community (Tommasini, 2011).

When planning for community development, a successful development has to be established in cooperation with the local communities. Such development has to rely on:

- Local initiative (local people developing the living conditions within their own region).
- Local involvement (people who are actively and independently willing to participate in the process).
- Local partnership (cooperation based on the common aims of the local people).
Notes

1. Tourists were taken there during summertime mainly for angling in the rivers or hiking to the Ice Cap, accommodated in the dismissed huts of the American Army former base in Narsarsuaq.

2. In 1939 the Association of Greenlanders living in Denmark, Pegatigiit Kalaaliit (PK) was established, organising cheaper travel from and to Greenland for the associated members.

3. Among others The Danish Ramblers Association and The Danish Mountaineering and Climbing Federation.

4. INUK travel bankrupt after 14 months of activity, being “unable to obtain by the banks a line of credit” (Egede Hegelund 2009:35); at the time there was no financial support for development projects.

5. This is the “Tourism Development Plan 1991 - 2005” from the Trade and Industry Department of the Greenland Home Rule, made by Hoff & Overgaard Planning Consultants, Copenhagen.

6. The “dog line” is in Sisimiut, and is considered the start of the dog sledding area.


8. From the field work done in 2005 in the areas of Sisimiut, Ilulissat and Uummannaq, where Ukkusissat is one of the surrounding villages of the latter for the research project: “Local involvement on tourism business, the dynamics of development at community-base”.

9. On January 2009 the original 18 municipalities of Greenland have been regrouped into 4 (Statistics Greenland 2010).

10. Otherwise no other experiences on tourism, except for the visit of few kayak drivers and some skiers.

11. The total number of the interviews was 18: 9 fishermen and fishermen wives, 3 informers (nurse, school teachers), 2 business owners, 4 young people.

12. There are different associations and many occasions to meet and discuss about matters. Once a year a general meeting is held, and the whole population of the village is invited to participate and discuss the different issues. The social situation in this small and peripheral village is not as problematic as in other places, with unemployment almost being non-existent and no significant social problems.

13. Presently private accommodation is not possible, houses are too little and crowded.

14. The price amounted to 25,000 Dkk (aver. 4,500 USD) to be used for tourism initiatives.

15. From the field work done in 2001 in Narsaq, Qassiarsuq, Igaliku and the sparsely located sheep farms for the research project: “Tourism as a tool for development in rural areas: the sheep farmers in the South of Greenland”.

16. At the time of the field work there were 31 farms in the area.
17. Commercial sheep farming activity dates back to the beginning of 1900, introduced as an attempt to create new livelihoods for the local population.

18. The Tourism Development Plan (1991) recognized that this being “South” was a major drawback “Because South Greenland is situated outside the dog area” (Tourism Development Plan 1991: 5.3.3). Greenland Tourism was seeking for a different image of tourism in Greenland based mainly on “ice-attractions” and dog sledge activities, not in use in the south of Greenland.

19. 11 interviews were recorded (16 farms were visited out of 31). The questionnaire was submitted to farmer families already involved in tourist activities, and farmer families that may wish to start some tourist activity in the future.

20. From the field work done in 2007 in Qaanaaq: “Tourism development in remote places and peripheral areas: Qaanaaq”.

21. From dog sledge to kayak or motorboat tours, to hiking trips to the ice cap, the icebergs, and the glaciers. Whale and bird watching trips are offered as well as ice fishing, and arctic char fishing parties. Tourists can buy a tourist’s license to hunt most game, except polar bear, walrus and whales. Short hikes to the ice cap and visits to archaeological sites can be arranged. The cultural offers include drum dancing, choir singing, showing and telling about traditional costumes, and a kayak show.

22. In Qaanaaq, besides the hotel (5 double rooms), there are nine rooms, which can be rented (at telegraph and ionosphere stations).

23. Actually, and as in many other communities, economic transfers are probably the main source of income in the community.

24. Before the airport was built the last part of the trip was a scenic helicopter flight to Qaanaaq. Now an extra overnight stay is necessary in Ilulissat making the trip more expensive. Before the airport, twin otter airplanes, which could land on the ice, came frequently from Resolute with groups of tourists.

25. In total 26 were interviewed: 13 hunters, 8 hunter’s wives, 2 business owners, 2 carvers, and the tourist office leader (1).

26. Instead cruise ship tourism is not seen as an opportunity because - interviewees said - cruise ship tourists come ashore to take a look around and go again, not leaving any money in the community. In summer 5 or 6 cruise ship arrive, normally with between 50 to 300 passengers (Tommasini 2011).

27. “We should offer to tourists Bed and Breakfast or full accommodation and not only sledge tours. I would like to know what the requirements are to start accommodating people” Wife of informant 4: Professional hunter, Greenlander.
References


