

Resilience and autonomy at stake: The public construct of the Paf gambling company in the Åland Islands community

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Abstract: The gambling business entails geo-economic opportunities for islands, especially in times of online gambling. However, it also involves risks like ill mental health, debt, and social problems. Furthermore, a heavy reliance on gambling revenues involves great moral dilemmas, especially when the gambling provision is operated within a not-for-profit public regime. This study concerns how these aspects are negotiated in the public discussion in Åland Islands, an autonomous group of islands situated between Finland and Sweden. By ruling of its regional parliament and the Finnish Lotteries Act, the Åland-based gambling monopoly company Ålands penningautomatförening (Paf) has the right to provide onshore gambling on the Islands, on the Internet, and on cruise ships trafficking the Baltic Sea. The study examines Paf's role as a pillar of the local community, and the ways in which this position is sustained and contested. By analyzing a corpus of 862 online texts from local newspapers and public radio services from 2006–2018, this study demonstrates how Åland depends on an incongruous public construction of Paf as a responsible actor that is simultaneously criticized for not exercising greater transparency and responsibility, highlighting a contradiction between the provision of harmful gambling products and economic benefits for the community.

Keywords: Åland Islands, archipelago, Paf, gambling, media

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Introduction

Gambling is a lucrative business with geo-economic relevance for island communities. As a leisure activity it attracts tourists, the most well-known example being the Chinese special administrative peninsula Macau, where public gambling revenues add up to 40% of the total state budget (Huang, 2011; Sulkunen et al., 2019). However, gambling is also a complicated commodity for water-demarcated societies, shown to bring about negative circumstances

such as an increase in the price of goods, increased rates of crime, and the expansion of various pollutants (Wu & Chen, 2015).

With the rise of online gambling, the geographic location of gambling companies has become less relevant. Customers can be reached in their homes all over the world: all transactions are executed online; there is no need for transport of people or products. This has been particularly advantageous for European islands with low taxation rates: the republic of Malta, for example, has a legal advantage in having free market access to online gambling licensing (Mangion, 2010). Due to tax advantages for companies registered on the island, Malta has turned into an iGaming and online gambling hub (Gouder & Scicluna, 2018). The Channel Islands constitute another example; here, gambling companies pay a minimal fixed annual fee, but do not pay income-, corporation- or value-added tax, nor any other duties (Connell, 2014; Sutherland, 2014).

This study concerns the unique island-based gambling system of the Åland Islands, situated between Sweden and Finland. This system deviates from the business models of the other European low-taxation islands. It is a non-profit aimed monopoly system that annually generates approximately EUR 20 million for a society with an inhabitant size of 30,000 (Ålands statistik- och utredningsbyrå [ÅSUB], 2019). The company, called Ålands penningautomatförening (Paf), incorporates a business model comparable to something between the systems of Finland's gambling monopoly and Sweden's license system. No other company is allowed to sell gambling products in the Åland Islands or on the tourist cruise ships travelling between Finland and Sweden. However, unlike Finnish gambling monopoly company Veikkaus, Paf is allowed to sell its products, buy companies, and apply for licenses in other countries. As with numerous other operators, online gambling has become the most important income for Paf. However, its online products have created some concerns for Finnish mainland officials, as they constitute an 8% share of online gambling among Finns (Salonen et al., 2019).

The Paf gambling system is unique and peculiar in view of the aims of the neighboring countries' and the whole region's regulation of social- and public health-related harm from gambling. Situated between two high-powered economic regions – the South of Finland and Stockholm in Sweden – provides numerous advantages and reduces economic vulnerability of the region (Fellman et al., 2015.)

Public media portrayals of phenomena tap into the background of intertextual meanings that construct social reality and, at the same time, these representations are produced within social reality itself (Fairclough, 1995). This study provides evidence of how principles of autonomy and protection are weighed against each other in the public constructs of the local Ålandian mass media. In this study, we provide an assessment of how Paf works as a sociocultural force in the Åland community. We inquire into how the company and its activities are publicly construed as a benefactor and pillar of the Åland island community and how this is weighed against the moral dubiousness of gambling as a commodity.

The Åland Islands and Paf

The Åland Islands (also referred to as Åland) is an administratively autonomous group of islands, forming a large archipelago between Finland and Sweden in the northern Baltic Sea. As a Swedish-speaking territory of Finland, Åland received a co-sovereign status from the League of Nations in 1921. The duality of remaining an integral part of Finland, yet still distinct with

various cultural and linguistic safeguards, has meant that Åland has not easily lent itself to typical discourses pertaining to political space (Ackrén, 2017; Joenniemi, 2014). Still, Åland has its own political system: a parliament with 30 members, which appoints the regional Åland Government. The Parliament passes laws in areas relating to the regional affairs and exercises its own budgetary power. The income consists of Åland's own revenues as well as a lump sum received from the Finnish Government, which constitutes a form of repayment of a portion of the taxes paid by the province to the Finnish state. The Åland Government oversees Paf; it collects the revenues and manages the grants that are channeled to third sector organizations.

As part of Finland, the monolingual Swedish-speaking status differentiates Åland from Finnish mainland. By law, Åland is politically neutral and entirely demilitarized, with residents being exempt from military service in the Finnish Defence Forces. It has its own economic order, which is dependent on the right to local land – *the right of domicile* – for ownership of property and pursuit of business, which restricts foreigners from acquiring and holding real property or providing certain services (Ålands landskapsregering, 2020a; Öst, 2016). Åland's economy is heavily reliant on shipping and trade, as well as the approximately 2 million tourists that visit or pass through the harbor in passenger ferries each year. Shipping represents about 40% of Åland's economy, with several international carriers owned and operated from Åland (Fellman et al., 2015).

Åland holds an exception in EU law which allows it to maintain tax-free sales on the ferries between Sweden and Finland (provided that they stop in Åland harbors). Åland is also a separate tax-zone, meaning that tariffs must be levied on goods brought to the islands. However, Åland does not compare to typical tax-free islands or offshore havens (Sewell, 2017). It follows the example of its neighbor countries and their Nordic welfare models (Karlsson, 1999): its protectionism is construed more in terms of values pertaining to language politics and demilitarization, as compared to the Canary Islands, for example, which is one of the 17 autonomous communities in Spain, and has been culturally and politically connected to mainland Spain since the late-15th Century (García-Rodríguez et al., 2018).

Åland is allowed to operate its own gambling company even though mainland Finland has a strictly protectionist gambling monopoly system (see Selin et al., 2019). In 1966, the Ålandian third sector organizations Folkhälsan in Åland, Save the Children, the Red Cross, and the Today's Children Foundation founded the Ålands Penningautomatförening (Paf). By the rulings of its own regional parliament (Ålands landskapsregering, 2020b) and the Finnish Lottery Act §12, Paf has the right to provide gambling on the Internet, both at sea on the area's cruising ships and on the islands of Åland. Paf provides Electronic Gaming Machines (EGMs) on a total of 33 ferries trafficking the Baltic Sea (Paf, 2020a). Through licenses and gambling company purchases, the company has become more international over the years, and now has online licenses in Estonia, Latvia, Spain, and Sweden (Paf, 2020b).

Paf generates approximately EUR 20 million in annual revenues that are distributed to associations, sports, welfare, culture, and art. According to the Paf website, the company's mission is to create a profit that is distributed to good purposes in a responsible manner (Paf, 2020c). Fellman and colleagues (2015) speak of a success story when referring to the conditions in which the monopoly expanded and emerged in its current format to become a societal actor of its own in the Islands. They point out that even if the specific jurisdictional status of Åland was a necessary condition for the development of the company, the autonomy alone was not a sufficient condition for the business expansion (Fellman et al., 2015). An

important circumstance has been the Internet, which opened up a new range of markets and opportunities for e-commerce with gambling products. A monopoly for the provision of those gambling products on the cruise ships trafficking between Sweden and Finland provided the necessary income required for new business investments.

In accordance with the Local Lottery Act (Ålands landskapsregering, 2020b), the local Lottery Inspection, *Lotteriinspektionen*, is the supervising authority of lottery and gambling activities, and is an independent authority functioning beneath the Regional Government. According to a 2016 survey by ÅSUB, 52.3% of the citizens of Åland had gambled during the past 12 months (as compared to approximately 80% in mainland Finland) and the respondents used approximately 23 euros per week for gambling that year (ÅSUB, 2016; Salonen & Raisamo, 2015). Comparing the Ålandian gambling survey with a similar survey from mainland Finland (Salonen & Raisamo, 2015), problem gambling is more common in Åland (4.3%) than in mainland Finland (2%). In addition, the number of risky gamblers in Åland was 2.1% as compared to the mainland share of 1.3% (ÅSUB, 2016; Salonen & Raisamo, 2015). It should be noted, however, that the results are not directly comparable between the regions due to methodological differences across studies.

Paf has figured scarcely in research to date. There are some dissertations and other scientific publications that involve reflection on Paf within historical overviews of the production and consumption of gambling in 20th century Finland (Matilainen, 2017), as part of analyzing the political economy of online gambling in the European Union (Myllymaa, 2017), and as part of a review of Nordic gambling markets (Cisneros-Örnberg, 2006). The company has been mentioned in several studies on gambling markets and policies (e.g., Marionneau, 2015) and it also appears as a game provider in survey-statistics of Finnish gambling (e.g., Salonen et al., 2019). In research databases, we found examination and theses works from polytechnics or universities of applied sciences that have, for example, looked at gambling revenue-supported NGO activities (e.g., Johansson & Jansson, 2017) and the practices of the company in responsible gambling (Karlsson & Lindberg, 2017). Still, we have not been able to find any previous research inquiring into the sociocultural position of Paf within its local community.

Within our assessment, Åland's dependence on Paf as a company must be approached as integrating both typicalities and exceptions pertaining to its status as an autonomous island community. The objective of this study is to further knowledge on the sociocultural meanings of this particular industry within an island community. We take account of this within a large-

In the next segment, we review our material and methods, after which we will present the results of our inquiries into the public construction of Paf in the Åland media. We end the study by drawing some conclusions regarding the inter-dependent relationship existing between the company and Åland society.

Material and methods

The data for this study consisted of a corpus of 862 media items published between the years 2006 and 2018. This time period was selected as it is the time from which there is an online electronic archive of media outlet content. Data was systematically collected from the online archives of three local media outlets: Ålands Radio och TV (n=548), *Ålandstidningen* (n=149), and *Nya Åland* (n=180). In comparison to its population, Åland has a relatively active media landscape. Much of this is due to the great competition in sales and circulation between the

two Åland-based daily newspapers, *Ålandstidningen* (Å) and *Nya Åland* (NÅ). The six-daily *Ålandstidningen* (est. 1891) has a circulation of 9,577 copies, and the five-daily *Nya Åland* (est. 1981) has a circulation of 6,464 (Jyrkiainen, 2020). The Ålands Radio and TV corporation, ÅRTV, is a public service company owned by the local government. It was founded in 1996 when it took over the operation from the Finnish Broadcasting Company, YLE. It then developed from a four hour airing slot to a 16.5 hour airing (Ålands Radio). ÅRTV upholds a webpage that gathers background stories, news, livestreams, and programs.

The data sample of this study can more or less be viewed as representing the total current social-cultural public construct of Paf in Åland. As a whole, the material reflects the culture and reality in which Åland as a community sees itself and the premises under which it functions internally and as part of the surrounding world (see Fairclough, 1995).

The material, which was gathered with search term practices, represents different newspaper text genres: news (87%), editorials (6.5%), opinion pieces (5%), and other story formats (1.4%). It was read and analyzed in several stages, which entailed various categorizations of themes and constructs. In order to understand what sort of meaning-making these thematic traits gave rise to, themes were formulated during the reading (Tuomi & Sarajarvi, 2009).

After reading and categorizing the texts, the frequencies of the themes were counted. Themes were calculated in terms of prevalence of constructs, and were counted for every time they appeared in the material. Themes could figure several times in the same text, and a text could involve several different themes. Once thematic categories had been identified and a coding scheme had been established, an analysis software tool (ATLAS.ti) was employed to analyze and arrange the ways that Paf was positioned within the different thematic categories. The results of these analyses follow.

Results

Through the analysis outlined above, five thematic categories (see Figure 1) and six positional constructs (see Table 1) were identified.

Theme categories

The first inductive thematic analysis gave rise to a five-category coding scheme: (1) *control and regulation of gambling*; (2) *gambling revenues*; (3) *corporative*; (4) *administration*; and (5) *gambling-related problems and addiction*. The frequency and division of the themes are displayed in Figure 1.

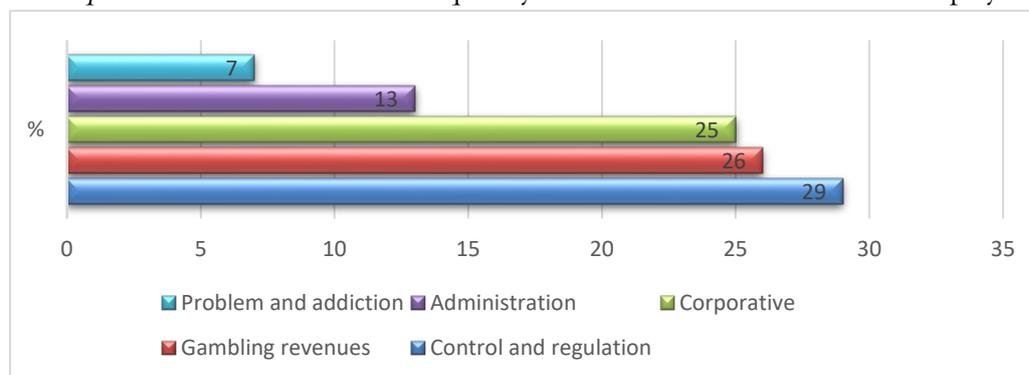


Figure 1: Themes that concern Paf in the local media.

The theme of **control and regulation of gambling** (29%) emphasized the aspect of gambling regulation and control concerning the gambling operator Paf. The media pieces of this theme reported on the law and order, and especially on gambling-related criminality.

For the theme of **gambling revenues** (26%), reporting typically centered around how the gambling revenues of Paf were channelled to charitable causes in Åland society. For instance, in 2014 it was reported that the regional government had granted EUR 2,000 in Paf funding to a working group of the World-Wide Fund for Nature, WWF Finland (“WWF får Paf-pengar”, 2014). However, the gambling revenues are not channeled only to third sector organizations. The news article with the title “Paf money for biogas planning” (Orre, 2018) is a good example: Svinryggens Deponi ab – a waste collector company – was reported having received EUR 48,000 of “Paf money” for planning biogas facilities.

Pieces within the **corporate** theme (25%) described the development of Paf as an enterprise. The majority of these media texts reported the company’s business results. An example is a piece from February 2016 entitled “Paf increases profits by 35 percent” (Rosenqvist, 2016). In addition, these media texts included reporting on the new games of the company and collaboration with other companies or news on Paf’s business abroad.

The theme of **administration** (13%) consisted of reports on the administration of Paf, such as news on the staff or the Board of Directors. For example, in 2016 Paf dismissed its incumbent CEO, Anders Ingves (see Sundberg, 2016). According to the media material, the reason for the dismissal was that Paf needed a different type of leader in order to be successful in its international expansion (Dahlgren, 2016), although local journalists speculated whether there were other reasons behind the decision (Bladh, 2016).

The fifth and smallest theme was **gambling-related problems and addiction** (7%). These media texts discussed research results concerning problem gambling, peoples’ own experiences, and life narratives (e.g., interviews or a ‘dialogue’ between the readers and the representatives of gambling companies; letters to the editor), but also reporting on the prevention of gambling-related harm and the questions of responsibility.

These themes already tell a great deal about the public local construct of the company, and bear similarities with McMullan and Mullen’s (2001) categorization of the discursive features of news coverage of electronic gambling in a Canadian province (see also Lerkkanen & Marionneau, 2019).

Positional constructs

As mentioned above, after pinpointing the most discussed thematic categories, an analysis software tool was employed for structuring and analyzing the positions and roles of Paf within the different thematic categories. This exercise led to the identification of six main constructs: (1) *the local benefactor*; (2) *the responsible gambling operator*; (3) *the resilient company*; (4) *dependency on gambling revenues*; (5) *Paf as a morally contradictory actor*; and (6) *questioning Paf as a responsible gambling operator*.

Next, we present what these mean for the negotiation of the sociocultural understanding of Åland society as entangled with Paf as a company. Table 1 displays the themes within which these positions of Paf occurred. The six perspectives on Paf as part of Åland society can be said to involve the core reasoning in the sociocultural Paf/Åland-entanglement. The first three categories can be seen as scaffolding a position of the company as important and valuable, whereas the latter three categories can be viewed as problematizing

and questioning the same. The main arguments in these perspectives are disclosed in the analysis which follows. Table 1 also illustrates how the themes, positions, and main questions overlap with each other within the media context.

Table 1: The themes and positions of Paf in the local media.

Position of Paf and main question	Control and regulation	Corporative	Gambling revenues	Administration	Gambling-related problems and addiction
Important and valuable for Åland Society:					
The local benefactor		X	X		
The responsible gambling operator	X	X			X
The resilient company		X			
Problematization of the company in Åland society:					
Dependence on gambling revenues			X	X	
A morally contradictory actor	X		X	X	X
The questioning of Paf as a responsible gambling operator	X	X		X	X

The local benefactor

The benefactor role is crucial for the legitimacy and public trust in the Åland gambling monopoly system. In the media, Paf is construed as a societal benefactor in different senses of the word: as an economic pillar, as guarding Åland interests, and as a globally unique philanthropist that cares for the local society’s wellbeing. The concrete positive image and position of a financial actor are construed in the headlines of news pieces such as “Paf-money for youth activities” (“Paf-pengar till ungdomsverksamhet”, 2010) or “Paf distributes 20 million for public good purposes” (Abrahamsson, 2016). The benefactor position is emphasized as unique in interviews with representatives of the gambling company. For example, in September 2011, *Nya Åland* reported on the increasing turnover of Paf in the year 2011 (Törnroth-Sarkkinen, 2011). CEO Anders Ingves commented:

We highlight our heritage as the only gaming company in the world where profits go exclusively to social and non-profit purposes. The fact that we were not so proud of when we were to be internationalized has become a great thing for us today. (Törnroth-Sarkkinen, 2011)

The role of Paf as a local society benefactor was underscored in a 2011 report on an unsuccessful attempt to collaborate with aid organizations in Sweden and how this project did not happen in the end (Orre, 2011a). In an article from the same year, the balancing between a market logic and company dealing with ‘vices’ was demonstrated:

Paf’s attempt to create goodwill by supporting large aid organizations in Sweden has met unexpected resistance. Postkodlotteriet [Post-code lottery in Sweden] has the exclusive right to donate money according to signed agreements. This was a surprise

for Paf, who recently took the initiative to collaborate with the aid organizations, says Paf's relations director Inger Holmström: She starts by explaining why Paf wants to collaborate with the aid organizations. Paf exists to generate growing revenue for the Åland community, she emphasizes, and to achieve that goal, Paf must act to be successful in the market where it operates – in Sweden, among other things. “It is important for our customers to see that some of the money they are playing for goes to a good cause. This way, we can get more customers.” (Orre, 2011b)

Paf representatives emphasize how different the company is compared to other gambling operators because of its “mission is to make profit that goes to good causes,” (Orre, 2011b) as described by the former CEO, Anders Ingves.

Politicians also contribute to this benefactor representation in the media texts. For instance, Finance Minister Mats Perämaa (Lib.) was reported to describe Paf as “a piece of crown jewels” (Eriksson, 2017) at the Annual General Meeting of the company. He explicitly mentioned the lead of the company:

It is something absolutely fantastic that we in Åland can have a gambling company that contributes to public benefit in this way. I don't think there's anything comparable in the whole world. (Eriksson, 2017)

It is emphasized that the gambling system works not only for the third sector work's common good but also more generally “for the best of Åland.” In an interview in 2011, former CEO Andres Ingves was quoted as saying, “We have not tried to hide that we are far from satisfied with Paf's last year's results. But we are proud that we made it in and make an effort to increase the result for Åland's best” (Orre, 2011b). Similarly, Finance Minister Mats Perämaa (Lib.) has expressed that “we want a long-term return that will be of benefit to Åland society for many years to come” (Eriksson, 2017).

The construct of Paf being an economically important societal actor is expressed by different actors in the media discussion: by representatives of Paf, by politicians, and also by the journalists in the local newspapers. In 2017, three existing Finnish gambling monopolies merged into the state-owned monopoly Veikkaus Oy, which became the only legal provider of gambling in the mainland of Finland. In an editorial, journalist Niklas Lampi (2016) argued against the Finnish gambling monopoly's CEO Velipekka Nummikoski's suggestion to integrate Paf into the mainland gambling monopoly fusion. According to Lampi (2016), Paf should be kept in Åland's hands:

Paf is and will remain as an extremely important employer locally. For many years, it has enabled a silver lining for third-sector activities, investments and provided a general economic relief for the [Åland] region. In addition, Paf is also a clear expression of [Åland's] autonomy in the economic sphere, something Åland is not otherwise too spoiled with. This freedom has been used to seek our own paths in a manner that has had extensive positive effects for the local community.

Overall, the media discussions express the view that the gambling system is appreciated and important for the local community and it should not be taken away from the Åland Islands.

The responsible gambling operator

An important role of Paf in the media material is one of responsible gambling operator. In previous analyses of media representations of gambling companies, this has shown to be important for legitimizing and justifying the incomes from potentially harmful activities (see Lerkkanen, 2019). In the material reviewed for the current study, this role is repeated often in utterances by representatives of Paf. In May 2011, *Nya Åland* accounted for a meeting where it was informed that Paf was trying to become the most responsible gambling operator in the world (Orre, 2011b). Paf CEO at that time, Anders Ingves, emphasized the responsibility that Paf takes for players with a new insurance to help gamblers to identify when they have a gambling problem:

We phone up everyone who wins more than 20,000 euro, asking them to take a break from gambling, making sure that they have a financial advisor. We also follow up the players after the wins to see whether their gaming behavior changes. Nine out of ten players thank us. (Orre, 2011b)

The “accountable company” role is established through aims of taking care of the gamblers and trying to reduce the harm caused by gambling. The praxis accounted for above – the so-called gambling treatment insurance (*spelvårdsförsäkring*) – also earned Paf a nomination in the “social responsibility” category at the 2011 *eGaming Review Magazine* (EGR) Awards (“Spelförsäkring kan ge Paf pris”, 2011).

Drawing on the same type of societal function for the Åland community, the benefactor and the role of the responsible company are entangled constructs, frequently mentioned together. Paf is represented as a benefactor by the kind of gambling revenues that are generated through a responsible way of service provision. The next example illustrates this point of view:

In particular, [Finance Minister Mats Perämaa] welcomed the increased transparency as the Ålanders depend on how things work in the company and the regional government must continue to be justified to own the company despite the fact that profits are generated by games that are themselves controversial. Therefore, in addition to generating profits for the public good and contributing money to the public treasury, the goal of Paf by the regional government is to become the most responsible gambling company in the world. (Orre, 2011b)

This also illustrates that Paf’s position as a responsible actor depends on transparency: the Finance Minister has emphasized the importance to report openly how the regional Parliament-owned company is doing. In 2014, Paf was reported to have been honored in the “responsible gambling” category at the EGR Gala in London (Rosenqvist, 2014). These reports are part of a construct of moral soundness that is implied to balance the fact that gambling is a dubious and harm-causing commodity.

A resilient company

A third ingredient in the more positive media image of Paf is the reporting on its success as a company in a more classical entrepreneurial and business framing. This is a discourse that involves great pride for the company as a pro-Åland economic operator. This angle is

especially emphasized in view of the local prosperity and regional growth. All three media outlets report on Paf's annual business reports and how well the company has succeeded in the gambling markets.

In January 2015, there were news reports about the fact that Paf had bought an Italian online gambling operator and then-CEO Ingves commented that the acquisition was part of Paf's internationalization and expansion strategy (ÅRTV, 2015). In October 2018, Paf was reported to have bought the bingo provider Proactive Gaming Scandinavia AB. At the time, Christer Fahlstedt — who was appointed CEO after Ingves' dismissal mid-2016 — commented how the acquisition would give Paf the freedom and technical advantage needed to continue to develop bingo as a product and ensure that it offered new exciting gaming experiences for Paf's customers (ÅRTV, 2018).

“Paf is now number one of the list” (Orre, 2006), reports a headline to a piece from 2006 on the emerging online game repertoires, which helped Paf attain the position of the most successful company in Åland in 2005. Often, the texts communicate the company's ability to proceed despite challenges in international markets and adherent constant pressure to develop and modernize. Once again, in 2011, the CEO commented on how the competition within the online gambling field is tough, but the reason for Paf's success is that it differs from other gaming companies:

We are state-owned, we have responsible gambling insurance (*spelansvarsförsäkring*) and our revenues go to good purposes. We have also chosen to have a close dialogue with our customers with the help of, for example, surveys and events in which customers are allowed to compete for trips to, among others, Paf Open. (Orre, 2011c)

This example involves a construct of resilience: it may be hard to compete and succeed in the globalized gambling markets, but Paf represents something unique in its high morale as supporter and part of local society. By emphasizing its responsible and benefactor positions, Paf distinguishes itself from other gambling operators and justifies its existence on the markets, regardless of whether or not it is successful with its economic development. An essential part of the resilient positional construct is the reoccurring commentary regarding how the company is working hard for its success (e.g., Rosenqvist, 2011). For example, a Paf representative addressed the company's good results in 2010:

Our current customers are satisfied and continue to game with us. In addition, we have succeeded in attracting many new ones. We have worked hard during these two years to improve the site, change the communication, and also introduced a new betting, bingo and other new products. [...] We are undoubtedly concerned about the economic development of the world. Of course, it affects us. But at the same time [the market] has been shaky all autumn and we have still managed to grow, and I think we will continue to do so next year. (Rosenqvist, 2011)

This example exposes the greater narrative of Paf succeeding thanks to the hard work of the company. In the local media, the resilient position figures mainly in citations by the representatives of Paf.

Dependence on gambling revenues

The local media discussions also include critical points of view: even though Paf is represented as a benefactor, a more critical trait in the discussions concerns the Åland community's great dependence on the Paf-generated gambling revenues (e.g., Jansson, 2012; Erlandsson, 2018). This aspect is recurrent throughout the material and is expressed by different actors.

In October 2013, *Nya Åland* reported that the representatives of the Liberal party were skeptical to the circumstance that an increasing share of the Paf money was going into the provincial government's cash register. Liberals argued that Paf revenues would increase and decrease depending on yearly profits and that it was therefore not sustainable to rely on that money as the primary source for conducting business. A politician commented, "The provincial government is approaching something that can be called a public gambling addiction. At the same time as they express that we should commit to responsible gaming, Paf is increasing its profits" (Wallén, 2013). This view was also expressed in an editorial in *Ålandstidningen*: "Paf can contribute to the little extra and certainly also to other targeted development efforts. But if gambling revenues become a prerequisite for the landscape to cope with welfare and infrastructure, difficult moral and legal issues become apparent" (Lampi, 2013).

Third sector and cultural activities are portrayed as especially dependent upon Paf revenues. This was discussed in an editorial published in *Nya Åland* on how professionals in the Åland cultural field are supposed to handle the fact that they "depend on gambling money for running [their] business" (Erlandsson, 2018). The author also mentioned how the situation of gambling revenue dependence is not something unique to Åland but also a feature of the neighboring countries where gaming companies "provide money for good causes" (Erlandsson, 2018). In one opinion text (Jansson, 2012), the author questioned how the economic future of Åland would look if the regional government were to lose the revenues from Paf and the alcohol sold on the ferries. The dependency theme thus firmly situates Åland in its geo-economic position as an island society.

A morally contradictory actor

An event that received much media attention between the years 2012 and 2018 constitutes the most prominent example of Paf being questioned as a business: a bookkeeper gambled and lost around 800,000 euros between 2009–2012 and, in order to keep up her gambling habit, started to embezzle money from her clients. The trial process lasted several years and, in the end, she received a prison sentence. Paf was charged for failing to prevent money laundering and was sentenced to pay a fine of 50,000 euros, which was later raised to EUR 250,000. Former CEO Anders Ingves was also accused of money laundering but the charge was ultimately dismissed (Eriksson, 2018). Over the years, this particular case received a great deal of media attention both in local and neighboring countries' media (e.g., ÅRTV, 2013; Lohrâten, 2018).

The moral contradiction concerning the role of Paf is outlined in terms of its "double standards" (*dubbelmoral*). It figures in discussions on whether a regional government-owned gambling operator can at the same time be a successful and resilient company which is important for the community's economic development on the one hand, and a responsible benefactor of society and mitigator of gambling-related harms on the other (e.g., Fellman, 2012; Gustbée, 2016). The next opinion piece exemplifies this dilemma:

In order for Paf to yield profit, a large number of private individuals must lose money. The more private individuals as a group lose [on the games], the more Paf gains. That is not straightforwardly virtuous, is it? From the perspective of Åland's society, [the idea of] Paf remarkably benefiting the society via revenues channeled to many good purposes in Åland is a completely different story. (Gustbée, 2016)

According to an editorial in *Nya Åland* (Erlandsson, 2018), almost half of the regional government's budget for cultural activities is supported with Paf money — and this “testifies to a fundamentally strange cultural view”:

On the one hand, Paf is actively trying to work against gambling addiction, on the other hand the gambling money is given to culture. When gaming abuse decreases, [...] Åland's cultural life is also likely to decline. So, abusive gambling is justified but it also creates an addiction among the beneficiaries of the gambling money. [...] If Paf succeeds in its preventive activities and gambling abuse declines, the Theater Association in Mariehamn and the Åland Literature Association receive less money for their activities. In the long run, this way of building a society is not sustainable. (Erlandsson, 2018)

The critique of the double standards of the system is repeated throughout the material and is constructed by different actors. For instance, representatives of the Liberal party comment that politicians are simultaneously emphasizing the importance of regulating gambling addiction while an increasingly large part of Åland's public budget stems from it (Wallén, 2013). This illustrates the fact that the critique is not just against Paf but it is also directed against the regional government that owns the company.

However, the contradictory point of view is not only about the arguments that Åland, and especially the third sector of Åland, is dependent upon the gambling revenues. Another point of view concerns the origins of the money. Politician Mika Nordberg (Ind.) commented in 2007, “It is a fact that sales of Paf are over EUR 100 million. In other words, it is 100 million euro that someone has spent and lost on gambling” (“Lagtingsman: jag spelar ibland lite för mycket”, 2007). A 2017 editorial piece entailed a critical discussion concerning the contradictory position of Paf:

It is fundamental to Paf's credibility and the reputation of the whole of Åland that the sensitive business of a regional government-owned gambling company conducts its business in a responsible manner. The whole idea that some of the very welcomed money that Paf contributes to children and young people in sports and cultural life stems from abuse and personal tragedy is offensive. (Lobråten, 2017)

Questioning the responsible operator

Yet another critical angle on the dependency of Åland society on Paf raised within the media material relates to the credibility and reputation of the company. Journalists, citizens, and politicians all question the responsibility of Paf. For instance, an editorial in *Ålandstidningen* questioned Paf's transparency, asking why a company owned by the regional government has not been open with its annual reports (Lampi, 2011).

Often, this questioning of Paf's responsibility is connected to its capability to prevent gambling-related harm. For instance, a person who has experienced problems with gambling ("Ledsna finansiären", 2012) argued:

It is ridiculous that Paf presents itself as a charitable company that benefits society but really, behind the money is a lot of anxiety, suicides and divided families and the bitter truth is that if Paf had such a good control system as they say, Paf would not generate as much money as they do. [...] Paf can easily uphold this drug [the gaming addiction] and hide behind a curtain of false smiles and words like social benefits and the slogan "Play among friends". I want to see a better control of the games and a better regulation.

In a letter to the editor, two private citizens reacted to the embezzlement case, asking if all Paf revenues could not in fact be regarded as stolen money and why Paf had not returned the stolen money to the citizens of Åland (Grönlund & Rustner, 2018). This critical discussion and questioning of the reliability of Paf concerning the criminal case has continued over several years in local media reporting. As early as 2013, a journalist brought up the case in an editorial entitled "Place your cards on the table, Paf" (Bladh, 2013). According to that author (Bladh, 2013), Paf has failed in accountability and transparency:

The company has everything to gain from showing its actions to the public. Continuing with the secrecy leads at best to more people questioning Paf, at worst the company's general image becomes one of having something to hide.

When the public raises doubt regarding whether Paf really did the right thing, the company loses its most important asset: trust. It is precisely the confidence that, paradoxically, one wants to safeguard by not putting the cards on the table in this case.

One must also put Paf's actions in the light of its being a community-owned company and thereby having other moral requirements than many of its privately-owned competitors.

The author went on to express that Paf is "a part of Åland, a part of the image of Åland and thereby you also have a responsibility to take into account what the region [of Åland] looks like in the eyes of the outside world" (Bladh, 2013). When Paf's reputation is at stake, the same is true for the whole Åland province.

The public discussion has prevailed over time, and Paf has also reacted to the critique. For example, in 2014, a company representative defended Paf as responsible and building on a higher morale than other commercial operators:

Some argue that the gambling industry produces a double standard. They also say that you want to take responsibility even though what you really want is just to make money. This may be true to some extent, but for us there is no contradiction in this. Paf's mission is to raise money for the Åland society through gambling and we believe that we can best achieve this by taking care of our customers and building long-term relationships with them.

Thus, being responsible is largely a business decision on our part. In other words, it is no secret that we want to make money, but the difference between us and our

international competitors is that our profits go to public benefit instead of shareholders, and that we have a great focus on reducing risks for our customers. (Sims, 2014)

In June 2018, the local media reported that Paf was establishing a permanent yearly limit that applied to all customers who play the company's online games (e.g., Hendersson, 2018). This so-called "loss limit" (*maxgräns*) of EUR 30,000 was realized in September 2018. According to the media material, this new limit was created as a reaction to all of the critique that Paf was receiving from the events surrounding the accountant's fraud. In a 2018 guest editorial, CEO Christer Fahlstedt wrote that the company needs to win back the trust of the Ålanders and this was the main reason for the introduction of the loss limit, underscoring Paf's responsible position and importance for Åland:

The Ålanders own Paf. Period. What the Ålanders want Paf to do, be and become is also what we must do, be and become. If you follow the debate in the media and other channels, it feels very clear that the attitude LR [the regional government] expressed is also the one that the actual owners of Paf (i.e. the Ålanders) share. Paf must quickly regain the trust of its owners – that is always the first priority of all companies and here we obviously have a lot to work with. The only problem is that we have actually worked on this for many, many years. We ARE the best in the world on responsible gaming. There is no other competing company that is even close to what Paf is doing today.

But obviously that is not enough. All the work we put into trying to prevent gambling addiction does not give us credibility in the eyes of our owners (the Ålanders).

Paf has publicly expressed an aim to be the first in the world who sets this kind of loss limit, even though this will result in decreased revenues:

Should the Ålanders own a gaming company? Can you build nice activities like culture, sports, sea rescue, and more on money that comes from gambling? The answer is: Of course!

Gambling is fun and will always be there. As many people as possible should gamble in as controlled forms as possible – and it does not get any better than at Paf. And what better can the money that is left over be used for, in addition to making our fine society even finer and stronger? (Fahlstedt, 2018)

This part of the media material illustrates the continuous interaction between the company and the rest of the Åland society as part of one and the same sociocultural entity: Åland; and, as part of Åland: Paf. The new responsible gambling tools, for their part, are presented to be a result of public pressure in the local society.

In Figure 2, the six positional constructs of Paf are presented in a pie chart. From this, it is obvious that the main constructs of the company are positive: it is a local benefactor, a responsible gambling operator, and a resilient company. These three constructs make up almost 80% of the codes of our analysis, whereas the discourses that question this narrative only appeared in 23% of the cases in the coded material.

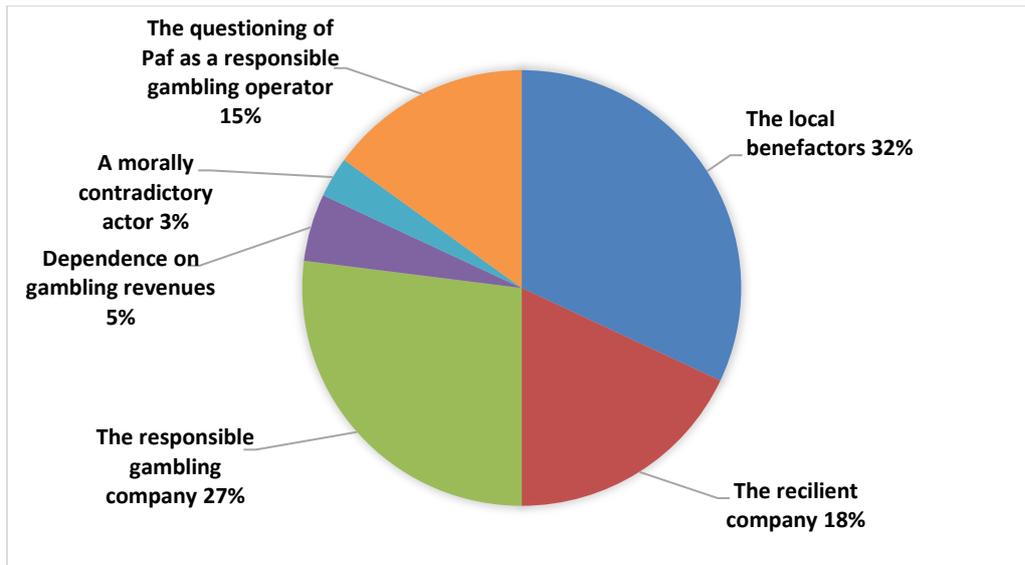


Figure 2: The positions given to Paf in the local media reporting.

Conclusions

With the rise of online gambling, new possibilities have opened up for gambling enterprises in remote areas to build revenues for local communities: gambling and its payment transactions no longer require transportation over water. This has been shown to greatly benefit island entrepreneurs (see Vlcek, 2016).

However, this study has demonstrated that, as a commodity, gambling constitutes a morally dubious product. The fact that the revenues are channeled into local good causes can make territories dependent on people’s harmful gambling, causing stress for local communities not only in terms of gambling-related harm (Kato & Goto, 2018) or shady business (Mangion, 2010), but also at the level of public morale. This study has demonstrated how the small island community of Åland construes its dependence on gambling revenues as a unique system for which the public often expresses joy and pride but, at the same time, comes face-to-face with numerous ethical dilemmas. The latter still makes up a marginal share of the total media representations of the company during the studied 12-year period (2006–2018).

Paf’s position as a responsible gambling operator and local benefactor relies on its gambling revenues being channeled to good causes. The company is profiling itself as the most responsible gambling operator in the world, which connects with a positive image of the whole of Åland. In the context of the globalized gambling markets, this differentiation from other operators can be seen as a survival strategy, allowing the company to continue developing new and better products.

A conclusion to be drawn from the versatile perspectives contained in the reviewed material, with respect to the repertoire and depth by which Paf was portrayed, is that the Ålandian media and the Åland public supports the gambling company, while nevertheless still being open to a critical discussion about the moral ambiguities inherent to the current system.

In comparison to the corresponding media discussions on the Finnish mainland (see Lerkkanen, 2019), the Åland portrayals seem to incorporate a critical stance on the morally dubious nature of its gambling system at an earlier stage within the reporting, and to a more poignant degree. This can perhaps be best explained by the benefits endowed by a strong

fourth estate, serving as a watchdog for the interests of the local community with regards to its rights and wrongdoings (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999). As such, this might be seen as a form of socially innovative support that is uniquely provided within independent local regions (Muštra & Škrabić, 2014). A broadly representative and open media debate underpinning a multi-layered and stringent local development strategy may also be the reason why Paf has recently seen a need to position itself in a way that speaks to the self-pride of the community, profiling itself as a unique object of pride in view of other commercial enterprises in the gambling industry.

Karlsson (2009, p. 140) presents the “ideal-type” sub-national island jurisdiction (SNIJ) as one which demonstrates the resourcefulness of jurisdictional powers, particularly in the strategic and economic development of an island community. Such an ideal-type SNIJ “is characterized by a perfect match between jurisdictional powers and economic capacity: that is, jurisdictional powers can be fully and intelligently utilized so as to match the state and current potential of the economy” (Karlsson, 2009, pp. 140–141). While Åland has been described as pertaining delimited jurisdictional powers and strong economic capacity (Karlsson, 2009), the case of Paf may present an example of a better match due to its government-steered model. In the case of Paf, the economic capacity does not seem to override the available jurisdictional powers and the scrutinization by the fourth estate of the local media. This is a contrary situation to that of the shipping industry, which Karlsson (2009) uses as an example of jurisdictional powers failing to match the challenges face by the core industry, which can in turn negatively affect Åland’s economic capacity.

The significantly differing framings of Paf as a benefactor and a resilient company both involved parallel use of the terms “Paf” and “Åland society”, at times making the words interchangeable. The strategy of Paf to uphold its credibility and accountable image by profiling itself as different and unique in view of bigger, less ethical international gambling operators is also a common way to additionally construe Åland as a meaningful constituent of society; being different and unique, yet resilient in maintaining itself between two countries and cultural contexts. If one is to believe Fellman et al. (2015), this is a sociocultural position that serves successful business strategies in Åland: a combination of a strong island rootedness with successful expansion into much larger national, regional, and international markets is presented as the key to success. The likelihood of success regarding online gambling as a product has been discussed from the small island community perspective: being small and based on a peripheral island does not present any disadvantages in exploiting the opportunities presented by the growth of modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Aloisio, 2015; Baldacchino & Fairbairn, 2006).

One of the most prevalently discussed topics in the media content was the fraud case, which nourished significant critical discussion surrounding the role and function of Paf in Åland society. In light of this discussion, the positive public image of the operator was questioned. At the same time, Paf is represented as a responsible, resilient company which is, above all, a benefactor, thanks to its gambling revenues. In May 2019, the local media in Åland Islands reported that Paf would pay back the bookkeeper’s customers from whom she had stolen the money to gamble with (Hendersson, 2019).

As a great economic contributor to Åland society, Paf incarnates a typical two-pronged dilemma of gambling systems: public dependency on revenues while simultaneously causing gambling-related harm. To balance out such a composition involves a multidimensional social

contract that pertains to more than just public incomes versus public spending. There are several ethical dimensions involved in a circumstance in which the very same regulating body that oversees gambling provision, in the name of social welfare and the prevention of crime, is — through grants that it provides to civil society — dependent upon the revenues resultant from trade conducted in these practices themselves (Sulkunen et al., 2019).

To develop our understanding of Paf and its role and function concerning Åland society, it is important to continue this research through comparison of media discussions in other countries. Other prominent approaches include inquiring into how Ålanders themselves perceive their gambling policy and system, particularly in view of the benefits and challenges they present for the local society.

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