

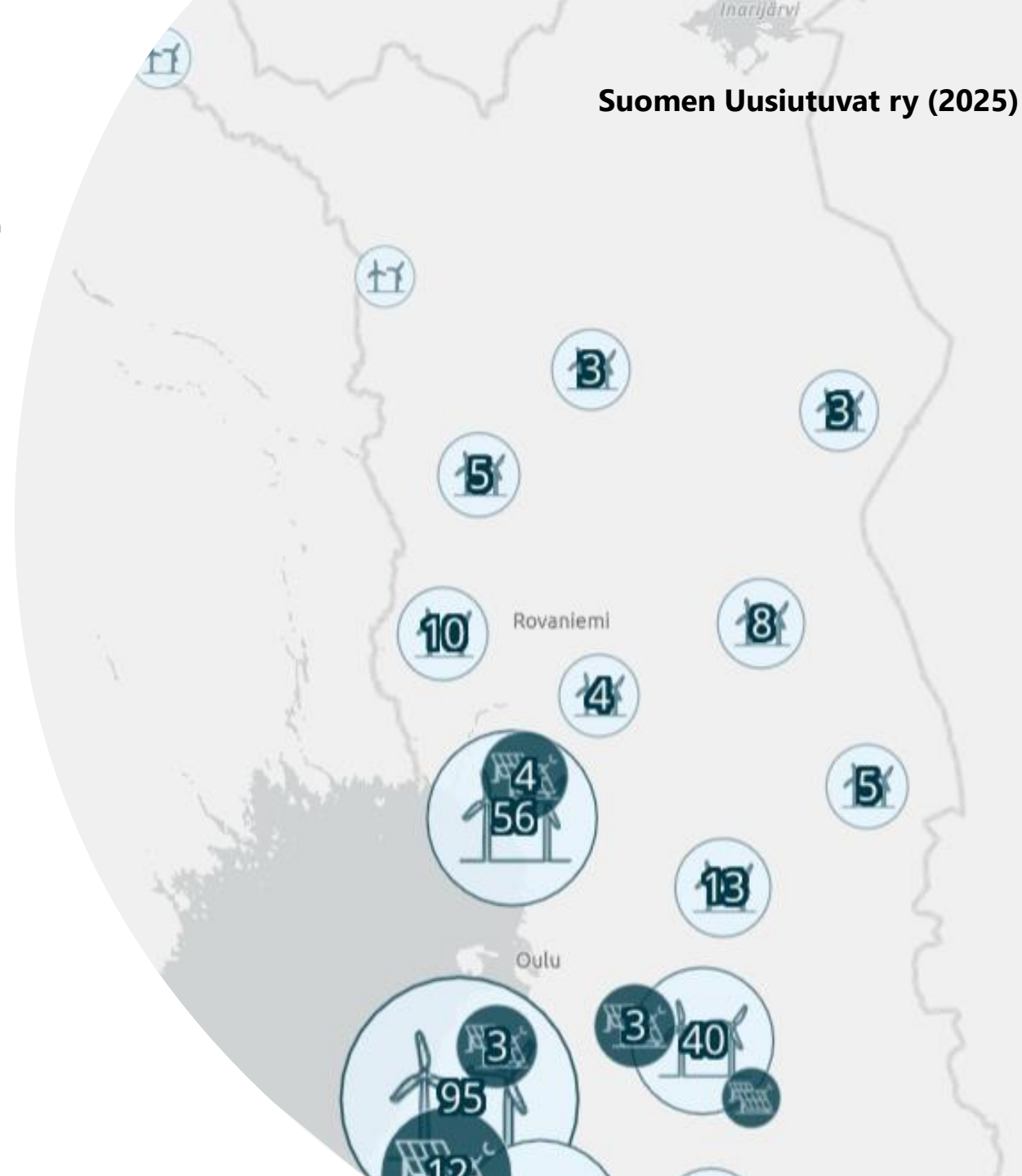
What happens when the energy transition arrives?

Experiences and insights from (northern) Finnish municipalities

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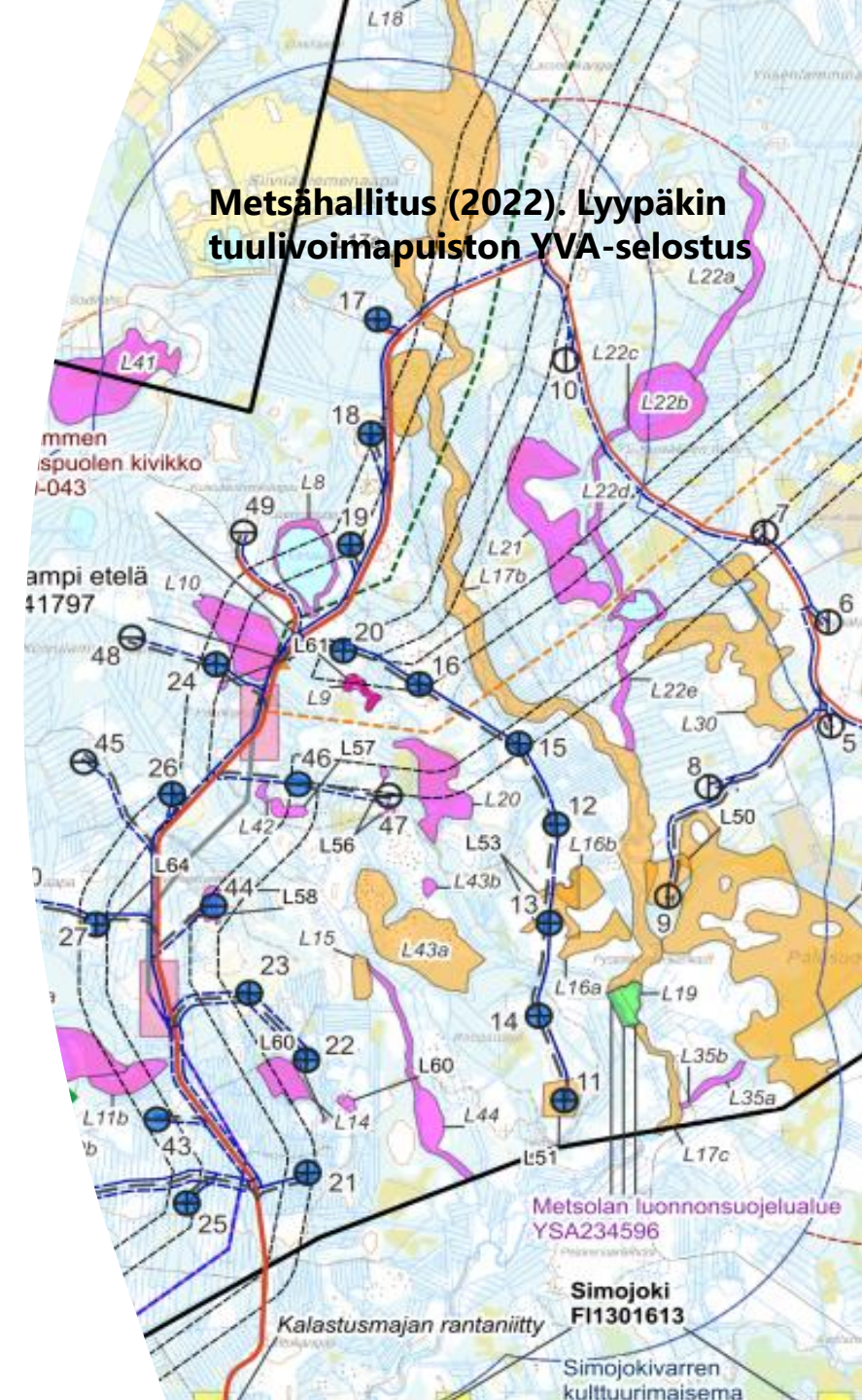


Today's talk based on

- [*Peripheral Visions – When global energy agendas meet Nordic energy peripheries*](#), Future Challenges in the Nordics, 2022-2026
- *Path to a peat-free energy system - International examples and producer perspectives*, Maj and Tor Nessling Foundation, 2020-2022
- Comparative study of Northern Swedish and Finnish media representations of wind power with Therese Bjärstig (awaiting final acceptance after revisions with title "*Navigating the Winds of Change: Regional Newspapers' Representations of Wind Power Development in Northern Sweden and Finland*")
- Lempinen, H. (2023). *Pohjoissuomalaisen turvesiirtymän koettu energiamaisema*. [Alue ja ympäristö 52:2](#); fieldwork at an active peat bog in Lapland and interviews with northern Finnish small-scale peat entrepreneurs

Starting points: Energy transitions in municipal contexts

- **Energy transition** manifesting itself as
 - emerging low-carbon infrastructures, energy systems and 'green' economies
 - phasing out carbon intensive energy sources and industries
- Municipalities
 - Active agents **shaping** the energy transition; land use planning, permitting, strategies, education, collaboration with other municipalities, investors, industries...
 - **Shaped by** the energy transition
 - Social, environmental and economic impacts of low-carbon project development
 - "*Tuulivoimavaalit*" > stances on wind power defining municipal election outcomes and broader local politics



- Energy as a “master resource” (Strauss et al 2013)
 - Market commodity in itself, enabler of other industries and a **prerequisite of all daily life, a basic need and a service that needs to be provided**
- Not only sociotechnological or socioeconomic transitions, but also **sociocultural** transitions
 - Changing local ‘**energyscapes**’: planned low-carbon energy projects arrive into pre-existing social, cultural, economic and environmental settings
 - Multigenerational resource communities in transition: fossil fuels as a source of **livelihood and identity**



Active peat bog in Lapland.
Fieldwork photo.

Energy transitions as the emergence of low-carbon energy systems and economies

- Economic opportunities created by low-carbon energy investments and economies
- Incentivized by national policies: property tax revenues combined with government austerity policies
- Further motivated by geopolitical tensions > increasing emphasis on energy self-sufficiency

→ ***Energy transition transforming local realities and turning around decades-long patterns depopulation and (rural) economic decline***

- But: Expectations vs. reality?
 - Municipalities unevenly positioned to grasp low-carbon opportunities
 - Growing local resistance to renewable energy development

Lapista löytyi 46 seudullisesti merkittävää tuulivoima-alueita – kunnille tuloja, mutta porotaloudelle haittoja ja metsää kaatuisi

Yle 20.12.2022

Pieni kunta pui suunnitelmia 200 tuulivoimalan rakentamisesta – päättäjät jakautuneet kahteen leiriin

Yle 28.2.2024

“Social impacts includes all social and cultural consequences to human populations of any public or private actions that alter the ways in which people live, work, play, relate to one another, organise to meet their needs, and generally cope as members of society.”

(Vanclay 2002)

Energy transitions as industry phase-outs

- Decision to phase out nationally relatively insignificant energy peat has had locally significant impacts
- Peat phase out directly affecting
 - Local heat energy supply and municipal energy companies
 - Local employment prospects and regional economies
 - Individual and local identities
- Impacts exacerbated by failures in national transition policies and JTF



Fieldwork photo

“Too many will lose their jobs [...] Municipalities will lose many services and municipalities will have to take more debt and die out. Finland will run into debt and fall to its own impossibility, there will be no more euros for the national economy. There is no more future for the people, nor Finland”.

“Peat extraction has been like a family member to me. It has been everything in my life. Hobby. Summer holiday. Place to relax. Therapy. Business. Workplace. Now that my peat entrepreneurship is over I have become severely depressed.”

(Peat worker survey responses, cited in Lempinen & Vainio 2023)

Questions of justice at the heart of both sides of local energy transition debates

- Wide range of justice dimensions at play in local energy transition debates
 - Distributive – the (un)desired distribution of benefit and harm
 - Procedural – the (lack of) participation and influence
 - Recognitive – the (lack of) recognition of those who are impacted and the range of diverse impacts
 - Restorative – compensating for and restoring loss, damage and harm
- Within municipalities, between municipalities, between countries etc.
- Regional histories of forced modernization and (resource) colonialism shape today's low-carbon debates; 'poison-green colonial politics' (Lapin Kansa 17.3.2025) or "green colonialism"
 - Simultaneously little attention to global and nonhuman injustices upholding the current system

Concluding thoughts

- Energy transition has the potential to upend local politics, economies, environments and everyday lives
- Municipalities' possibilities and interest in energy transitions shaped both by contemporary conditions and historical experiences
- National policies and frameworks can shape and are needed to support but do not dictate municipalities' energy transition decisions
- Just transition demands in municipal contexts focus primarily maintaining the existing systems and power relations – how to fuel transformation?

Thank you!

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