Customer experience in responsible tourism from the perspective of volunteer tourism

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Volunteer tourism is rapidly growing trend in which individuals combine travel and voluntary work. The existing literature has been providing an optimistic view of volunteer tourism. Thus, the negative impacts of volunteer tourism has been recognized lately and the importance of its responsible management has been highlighted. Customers are the company`s most important and valuable assets and customer experience has recently become a very commonly used phrase. Creating a great customer experience requires the knowledge of the customer journey and its touchpoints.

This thesis is commissioned by Ecotravellers Ltd, a Finnish company operating in volunteer tourism as a sending organization. The purpose of this thesis is to explain how companies operating in volunteer tourism field can improve their customer experience by following responsible strategy. It aims to give ideas for the commissioner of how to create value to the company from deeper understanding of their customers` journey and how to enhance their services from the customers perspective. It gives good advices to other companies operating in the tourism industry as well and it is raising the knowledge of how to manage these two big trends; responsible tourism and customer experience

The theoretical framework of this thesis covers theories on the commissioner, responsible tourism management, volunteer tourism and customer experience. The research was conducted by using qualitative research approach. Six structured interviews and two participant observations were implemented in Helsinki during spring 2018. The data was analysed by using content analysis.

It was found that Ecotravellers` volunteers had a common purpose to volunteer and it was to protect endangered animals and nature while travelling. All of the respondents thought that Ecotravellers work responsibly which is reflected in the company's way of acting and they would recommend Ecotravellers to others. All of the respondents told that they have changed their own behaviour after this experience. The responsibility from the local provider`s side was lightly criticised in terms of recycling. Training that was given to the volunteer's prior their volunteer work experience was experienced of being too narrow.

Based on the results of observation and interviews, Ecotravellers customer journey was created. Customer journey mapping gives ideas to Ecotravellers how to improve their services and strengthen the communication with their customers. The findings of this study are useful to other companies operating in the field of volunteer tourism and responsible tourism. Further research of the relation between customer experience and responsible tourism is needed to fully understand the phenomenon.

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1   Introduction

More than ever before, responsible tourism will be front and center in 2018. Year 2017 was dominated by over-tourism when more downsides than upsides where seeing from local peoples` perspective. Tourist are now increasingly looking for a responsible way of travelling and empowering local communities for instance working with local people around their culture and ways of life. Thus, doing the right thing and travelling in authentic way leads to more enjoyable experience. (Buckley 2018.)

Tourism is an industry that has a special position in sustainable development. Tourism activities involve a special relationship between consumers, the industry, the environment and local communities. In tourism sector, the consumer (the tourist), travels to the producer and to the product. Tourism is a service industry that involves a large amount of interaction between visitors, host communities and their local environments which makes the relationship special. This close relationship creates a situation where tourism can be both damaging but also positive for sustainable development. (Frangialli & Toepfer 2005, 21.)

Volunteer tourism is a rapidly growing trend in which individuals combine travel and voluntary work. The existing literature has been providing an optimistic view of volunteer tourism. Thus, the negative impacts of volunteer tourism has been recognized lately and the importance of its responsible management has been highlighted. The sending organizations plays a big role in the achievement of this goal through active management prior, during and after their volunteer tourism experiences. (Raymond & Hall 2008, 530.)

Customers are the company`s most important and valuable assets and customer experience has recently become a very commonly used phrase. Every company provides customer experience when they interact with their customers and offer services or products. Creating a great customer experience requires the knowledge of the customer journey and its touchpoints. Most of these touchpoints are under the control of the company, so creating extraordinary customer experiences requires the knowledge of the customers and the experience economy. (Richardson 2010a.)

This thesis is commissioned by Ecotravellers Ltd. It is a Finnish company operating on the protection of endangered animals and nature by providing volunteer tourism experiences worldwide. The company has started their operations in the year of 2008 but the new owner of the company started in 2017 and changed some of their co-working projects and destinations. Her idea is to build a new brand and expand the potential customer segment

by strengthening Ecotravellers key vision to provide volunteer tourism experiences as responsible way as possible.

The author of this study is personally highly interested in responsible tourism and customer experience. The author chose this topic based on her previous knowledge, specialization of the studies and future goals in her professional career. The author did brainstorming sessions with few industry professionals and as an outcome of those, the author decided to research the combination of responsibility and customer experience in tourism industry. Combining those two factors that are presented in this study is relatively new approach that has not been researched largely yet. The topic was narrowed down to view the subject from the volunteer tourism perspective because of the co-operation with the commissioning party who wanted take be part of this research.

The purpose of this thesis is to explain how companies operating in volunteer tourism field can improve their customer experience by following responsible strategy. It aims to give ideas for the commissioner of how to create value to the company from deeper understanding of their customers` journey and how to enhance their services from the customers perspective. It gives good advices to other companies operating in the tourism industry as well and it is rising the knowledge of how to manage these two big trends; responsible tourism and customer experience.

As a result, this study will provide answers to the following questions.
Main question:
– How to improve customer experience and responsibility in volunteer tourism?

Sub questions:
– What is the importance of company`s responsibility for the overall volunteer tourism experience?
– How to create value to the company from customer experience?
– What are the touchpoints in Ecotravellers` customer journey?
– How responsibility can be connected to the Ecotravellers` customer journey?

2   Ecotravellers Oy

Ecotravellers Finland Ltd, the commissioner of this thesis, is a company focused on the protection of endangered animals such as sea turtles. Ecotravellers is based in Helsinki and they are operating in outbound tourism field. Through Ecotravellers, volunteers can protect endangered animals and nature in well-chosen destinations abroad. They started their operations in 2008. Already from the beginning, the goal was to support the projects that were proved to be good and particularly focused on the sea turtle protection. Until last year the company focused only on sea turtle rescue projects. Because of the long cooperation, it is possible to monitor what volunteers do and recognize the impact of their work. Ecotravellers are committed to continue long-term cooperation with the organizations and aim to be sustainable environmentally, socio-culturally and economically. (Ekomatkaajat Oy 2018.)

Maria Ojajärvi, the current chief executive officer of Ecotravellers, started in February 2017. She has expanded the volunteer projects also to protect large endangered animals such as elephants and lions. "Now customers can choose between five destinations that are Zanzibar in Tanzania, Marakele in South Africa, Linosa in Italy, Tenerife in Spain and Phra Thong in Thailand. We are not a tour operator so we do not provide flights to the destination. Our customers can choose how they will arrive to the destination. Beside the volunteer work, we offer basic accommodation in every destination and some meals depending on the location." (Ojajärvi 27 March 2018.)

2.1   Ecotravellers destinations & projects

Ecotravellers` destinations are well chosen and the local volunteer organizations are our long-time partners. In Marakele, in Linosa and in Phra Thong, the volunteers are focusing on sea turtle projects and the work at the destination consist of different tasks. The work might be for instance monitoring the beach, giving information to the visitors or helping out the turtles that are in trouble; unable to swim or dive. In Tenerife, the volunteers are working in a large dolphin and whale watching centre where they help in different tasks for instance sharing information with the visitors about the project and marine life protection, helping to enter the data to the computers and analysing it. It is also possible to join other activities and support other animals in Tenerife, for example taking care of homeless dogs at the dog shelter. In Marakele, the volunteers are working in a national park supporting big endangered animals such as elephants and lions in various tasks. Working days are long and spent in the national park. One of the main tasks is to take pictures of the animals that will help to identify them and build comprehensive information. (Ekomatkaajat Oy 2018.)

2.2   Ecotravellers responsibility

"In Ecotravellers we only promote destinations where we have been ourselves and projects that we know and trust. We will not guarantee anything to our customers whether they will be able to release the sea turtles or see any specific endangered animals during their volunteer experience. The idea of responsible volunteer tourism is that the volunteers will work where it is needed at that time. For example, in Marakele national park, sometimes the most important thing to do is to cut the plants that absorbs water because there is only limited amount of it, keep the roads in a good shape or stay in the national park in the night time which keeps the poachers away. Sometimes the organisations are moving male animals to another park to keep the number of females and males balanced which is necessary for the continuation of the species. (Ojajärvi 27 March 2018.)

When people consider if they should go on a volunteer project only for a limited amount of time and does it really help, my opinion is that even a short time is better than nothing. Usually a person who has been on a volunteer project will tell about it to the others and in that way, share their knowledge and information. One who has been taking part of volunteering will not be the same person anymore after returning home. When you have not been taking a straw away from the nostril of a sea turtle you will think twice next time whether you want to drink with a straw or without. (Ojajärvi 27 March 2018.)

We, as a company know the negative impacts of travelling and therefore want to be as responsible as possible. Most of the time, volunteers are staying in the destination for a longer period of time and really learn about the local environment, people and culture. The accommodation is basic and hosted by the project organizations, shared rooms and limited amount of electricity, no swimming pools or such. The project fees go directly to the local organizations and local people. Also, the activities are important and necessary to protect the endangered animals and in every destination, we protect the local services. Ecotravellers dignify the cultural heritage of the destinations and offer a lot of information about the nature- and animal protection in the company`s communication channels. Our customers will choose themselves how to get to the destination and Ecotravellers are giving information about the flight compensations and different ways of travelling sustainable. Ecotravellers do not have own office in Helsinki but we are sharing an ecological co-working space with other companies." (Ojajärvi 27 March 2018.)

3 Responsible tourism management

(ABTA, 2018) claims that almost 70% of people in 2017 believed that travel companies should verify that their holidays help the local people and economy. Public awareness of environmental issues, human rights and working conditions has increased for instance by different media channels and campaigns. The welfare of animals has become a mainstream issue and big tour operators have already taken an action such as removing animal excursions from their activity offers.

Challenges such as climate change, political and social changes in the world are also bringing new opportunities for the tourism industry. At the core of these challenges is the need for tourism industry to become a leader in the greening of the economy. Because tourism industry has multiple dimensions, it is one of the most overpowering industries. It is driving the processes of globalization where even the smallest communities are having the expanding linkage between global and local. Tourism involves travel and it requires that destinations are protected and enhanced since they attract visitors. The destinations that attract visitors are not only great assets for the industry but also for the local communities. The industry must integrate sustainability for its own future and for the entire human future and only the tourism providers that adapt this way of thinking will survive in the future. (DeLacy, Hawkins, Jiang, Lipman & Vorster 2012, 2-4.)

3.1 Sustainable tourism development

In 1992, the international community gathered in Brazil, Rio de Janeiro to discuss what sustainable development means and how to operationalize it. During this Rio Earth Summit, as it was called, the world leaders adopted Agenda 2. They had specific plans to realize sustainable development at national, regional and international levels. This was followed by 2002 in Johannesburg and Plan of Implementation was adopted. In 2012, twenty years after the Earth Summit world leaders gathered again and Rio+20 was implemented. Two main focus areas were "1) green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and 2) institutional framework for sustainable development" (United Nations, 2012a.)

Sustainable development has increased as a guiding principle for a long-term global development. It consists of three pillars; environmental protection, economic growth and social development in a balanced manner. (United Nations, 2012b.) UNWTO launched the Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals Programme that aims to inspire and empower the tourism sector as a patrimony of the International Year of Sustainable Tourism of Development 2017. In includes for instance "Tourism and SDG`s" online

platform for tourism providers to co-create and act. (UNWTO World Tourism Organization, 2018.)

3.2 From sustainable development to responsible tourism

As previously stated, in the 1990s the idea of sustainability was transformed to tourism and new concepts in production such as "alternative" and "green" become trends particularly in Western societies. Hence, new forms of tourism were created and terms as ecotourism and responsible tourism became familiar. Tourism industry has become more responsible from various aims in global and local scales and partly as an outcome of political decisions. (Saarinen 2013, 1-2.)

Tourism is constitutionally neither good nor bad but the word "tourist" has somehow degrading town and most of us would rather see ourselves as travellers or visitors. Tourism is still widely used to describe human activity and the experience. The services which facilitate tourism has both positive and negative impacts. (Goodwin 2016, 1.) Goodwin (2016, 1) explains that "responsible tourism is one response to the challenge of sustainability for a particular area of consumption; it is about taking responsibility for making the consumption and production of tourism more sustainable".

Often sustainable tourism and Responsible Tourism terms are mixed with each other but they are not the same thing. Responsible Tourism places the insistence on what individuals and groups do to address those sustainability issues. Sustainability issues increase in particular places, addressing local priorities, transparency reporting what is being done to address the local priorities. (Goodwin 2016, 17.)

Saarinen (2013, 2-3) stress that criticism between different meanings of the terms sustainable tourism and responsible tourism has occurred because of their guidelines and general aims which are rather similar. Some researchers believe that it is difficult or even impossible to discern responsible tourism from the concept of sustainable tourism. Indeed, it is important to identify who actually are responsible and for what. There has been discussion that is it the tourism industry, governmental agencies etc., responsible to local communities, societies and people in general, for instance, when aiming to develop and manage tourism in a responsible way. While there are over-lapping goals in sustainable tourism and responsible tourism, there is a contextual difference. Responsible tourism focuses on the consumer who does not necessarily consume less but consumes in a responsible way and it resonates well for instance with the concept of volunteer tourism. Sustainable tourism as a notion is more complex set of proseses, systems, aims and scales.

The main idea of Responsible Tourism by its heart is to make tourism better. If we individually and collectively take responsibility, all forms of tourism can be better and more responsible. The consumers, suppliers and governments all have responsibilities and that is the core of responsible tourism; to take action. (Goodwin 2016, 1.)

> We all make choices how we travel. Responsible Tourism is about taking responsibility and recognising that tourism is what we make of it. We can use Responsible Tourism to enhance the experience, to make it more real and authentic. The Responsible Tourism approach works best when it engages the consumer, enabling the traveller, the holiday makes, to have a better experience, and the community to have tourism on better terms. (Goodwin 2016, 5.)

When individuals, businesses or governments say that they are engaging in Responsible Tourism they should be able to answer questions such as what are they taking responsibility for and how are they going to take it, how much are they doing and what have they achieved. To analyse responsibility and whether it is being effectively taken, the outcomes and impacts are needed to proof it. (Goodwin 2016, 17.)

Tourism has a big economic value to the destination and some destinations, especially in developing countries, are economically tourism-dependent which means that tourism industry associates as many as 25 per cent of all jobs. Many jobs in the industry are seasonal or part time. However, employment in tourism sector is economically beneficial although effort is needed to create more full-time jobs within the industry. Tourism is considered to be the largest industry in the world and it is entrusted to be fastest growing. (Holloway & Humphreys 2016, 119.)

Holloway & Humphreys (2016, 135) stress that the rapid growth of tourism have produced both benefits and threats to local communities. Unrestraint and unplanned tourism management can easily exacerbate problems to the point where tourist no longer want to visit the destination and the residents do not want to receive tourists either. Factors that might affect the relationship with the residents and the visitors are for instance:

- The length of stay (usually when the visitors stay longer, they will adapt better to the local community)
- The cultural differences between locals and tourists (especially in international travel)
- Tourism industry dominance in the places where the tourism industry is leading compared to other industries (quantity becomes more important factor than quality)
- The ratio of tourists to locals (carrying capacity of the destination is not enough for the number of visitors, which leads the locals to feel overwhelmed)

Global warming and environmental crises have significant effect on tourism. The natural environments have always attracted people to travel in recreation, education or other forms of tourism and the tourism destinations are dependent on their natural environments. (Lew & Cheer 2018.) Tourism involves major components of air travel for example long-haul flights which yet cannot be sustainable and new sustainable innovation or limitation in global scale is needed. Hence, the responsibility of sustainable development in tourism is both local and global. (Saarinen 2013, 10.)

Tourism may be unsustainable in many ways and for many reasons. Some reasons are more easily addressed than others. Some can be caused by individual decisions (consumers and producers) but some are more intractable. There is a tendency to focus on one issue rather than major issues. The world`s population is growing rapidly and individuals have more time and money to travel. The tourism sector is responsible to raise consumer's awareness of the travel impact economically, socio-culturally and environmentally. Challenge is that individuals tempt to pursue for their own self-interest rather than common good and moreover that habit may result in ruin for all. (Goodwin 2016, 18-19.)

4   Volunteer tourism

Volunteer tourism is a combination of volunteer work and travel and has grown in importance since the 1970s. Nowadays it is a wide trend created by the changing dynamic of tourism where tourists seek purpose and meaning in their holidays. This form of travel usually interest volunteers from all over the world (mostly from developed countries) to such places as rainforests, conservation areas and biological reserves. People engaging in volunteer tourism pay to travel to a location where they choose to employ to a meaningful experience. This experience generally has an objective of helping local communities as providing necessities and other resources or protecting the environment and endangered species of animals. (Bidder & Polus 2016, 309-310.)

> Contemporary volunteer tourism has tended to suffer from a lack of differentiation from other forms of tourism or volunteering. Instead it has been the subject of selective pragmatism rather than specific definition or method, falling into areas such as alternative tourism, international volunteering, social work and conservation corps work. (Wearing 2001, 1.)

International volunteer tourism combines a wide range of organizations which often do not identify themselves as a part of tourism industry. These organizations include for instance non-governmental organizations, international development and humanitarian institutes, academic institutions and community development organizations. (Hartman, Paris & Blache-Cohen 2014, 4.)

4.1   The challenges of volunteer tourism

Volunteer tourism, or "voluntourism" is relatively new concept but has been growing rapidly in recent years. In this paper, volunteer tourism is the expression that is used. Volunteer tourism can take place in various locations from urban settings to rainforests or conservation areas. Activities vary a lot and can be such as scientific research, (land, water and wildlife) conservation projects, economic and social development, for instance agriculture, construction, education and cultural restoration. Volunteer activities can be for example surgery operations, planting trees, conducting a health campaigns, teaching English in the schools, improving village sanitation or constructing rainforest reserve. (Wearing & Mc Gehee 2013, 28.) This paper is focusing on wildlife protection because of the commissioner who is specialized on the volunteer experiences that aims to protect nature- and endangered species.

Interest of volunteering while being on a vacation may display a laudable development within the tourism industry. Yet, the reality should be critically analysed just like any other sector in tourism. Occasionally, the negative impacts of volunteer tourism appear. Those

impacts can be such as volunteer`s lack of skills, a neglect of locals` desires caused by a lack of local involvement and the deterioration of local employment. (Guttentag 2009, 537-538.) The negative impacts are possible outcomes that must be recognized and avoided. It is contended that all forms of tourism display positive and negative characteristics and should be viewed accordingly. Fortunately, the negative impacts affiliated with volunteer tourism are not necessarily unavoidable and can likely be relieved when projects are properly planned and managed. (Guttentag 2009, 548.)

The problems with short-term volunteering occurs because the work needs to be simple enough to be done in a short period of time. Volunteer tourism can also be hindered by large overheads needed to host voluntourists. Resources and funds are needed to build even the basic bunkhouses. The danger about the booming trend is that the organizations will focus on attracting volunteers rather than how their project impacts the communities. Volunteer organization should be transparent with their finances to show where the volunteer tourists fees are going. (Dunford 2010.) Many small organisations do not have the capacity to manage the volunteer properly. There are also several issues when it comes to cultural issues for instance local community not feeling comfortable with strangers and their culture not being protected and respected. Often volunteers do not know where they are going to be working when they arrive or what are they exactly going to do on the project. Volunteer organizations should ask a lot of information from the volunteers before they arrive to be able to match each individual to a specific role of the project. (Jenkin 2015.)

4.2   The motivation of volunteering

Wearing (2001, 1) defines volunteer tourists as a "tourists, who for various reasons, volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments, or research into aspects of society or environment".

The growth of volunteer tourism among consumers comes from the desire to avoid mass tourism and connect pleasure-oriented travel with a conscious search for deeper meaning. The dominant motive for mass tourism is identified as the desire to escape from the routines of everyday life. Volunteer tourism adds new dimension to that by establishing concept of "giving back" and "making a difference" as reasons for participating in volunteer tourism. Hence, the growing tendency of consumers to express themselves may be behind of the increasing interest in volunteer tourism. This trend influence on the consumers which are now purchasing increasingly to the services that are congruent with actual or aspirational self-image. Tourists are progressively seeking authentic experiences

and engaging with tourism service providers that are providing authentic experiences. Volunteer tourism can partially respond also to the demand for extended trip durations and more spontaneous community interaction. (Ong, Lockstone-Binney, King & Smith 2014, 681-683.)

4.3   Wildlife protection in volunteer tourism

"One of the aims of wildlife tourism is to educate visitors about the threats facing wildlife in general, and the actions needed to protect the environment and maintain biodiversity". (Ballantyne, Packer & Sutherland 2011, 1.) Mechanisation and urbanisation has led to a situation where wide amount of people feel disconnected from the nature. Without a connection with the natural environment, one has difficulties to understand the issues that comes from overuse of resources. Direct experiences in the nature can lead to emotional connection and relationship with it and turn to nature-protective behaviour. (Ballantyne & al. 2011, 1.)

Tourism experiences that contribute opportunities for direct contact with nature fulfil a positive and educational message to their visitors. Wildlife tourism offers possibilities to reconnect with the nature and may lead to life-changing experiences. Thus, it has become increasingly popular in recent years. Wildlife tourism can lead to positive short-term and long-term impacts on visitor`s environmental learning by raising awareness on environmental issues, promoting sustainable attitudes and developing appreciation for wildlife and nature. It can affect positively on environment itself by offering an income for the ongoing protection and sustainable management, encouraging visitors to make contributions to environmental causes and providing socio-economic inducements for the conservation of natural resources. (Ballantyne & al. 2011, 2.)

Whist, positive outcomes have been recognized, tourism has negative impacts on environment, which in turn impacts on the wildlife. Therefore, educational approach in wildlife tourism experiences is essential for the long-term development of an effective and sustainable wildlife tourism industry. In order to develop the positive impacts, research is needed to lead such long-term changes in visitors` environmental behaviour. Emotional attachment to wildlife plays an important role in motivating pro-environmental behaviour. (Ballantyne & al. 2011, 3.)

5 Customer experience

The focus on customer experience arises within the firms because customers now interact with them through countless touchpoints in multiple channels and media. This results in more complex customer journeys. Thus, customer-to-customer interactions through social media are creating substantial opportunities and challenges for firms. Customer experiences are now more social. Simultaneously, peer customers are influencing the experiences. Creating strong and positive experiences within the customer journey are believed to result in improvements to the bottom line by enhancing performance in customer journey at multiple touchpoints and through upgraded customer loyalty and word of mouth. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 1.)

"As goods and services become commoditized, the customer experiences that companies create will matter most" (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). Historically the literature in marketing, retailing and service management has not been focusing on customer experience as an entirely separate form. Yet, customer experience has been considered and companies have been creating experiential marketing by having customers feel, sense, act, think and relate to company. Customer experience is holistic and involves the customer`s emotional, social, cognitive, affective and physical responses to the provider. The customer experience comprises the total experience that includes the search, purchase, consumption, and after-sale phases of the experience. That experience involves multiple channels. (Verhoef & al. 2009, 31-32.)

Customer experience is significantly broader than customer satisfaction. Customer service typically involves complaint handling whereas customer experience covers everything from first consumer awareness of the product or service to final use and it insist support from the entire company. (Goodman 2014, 1.) Goodman (2014, 35) stress that delivering a great customer experience consist of four parts. First part starts from the marketing and sales phase which means that the marketing is honest and therefore customers' expectations are realistic. Customers require evidence that the company cares about their needs already at the first phase. The next phase is fulfilled when the company stimulates easy access to the service. When customers use the service, it is not just satisfying but it also creates emotional connection. After the service use, the company listen and learn from its customers and is willing to collect feedback and uses that feedback to improve the entire process.

The challenge in creating memorable experience is the fact that not all of the elements of the experience is under the provider`s control. It consists of various factors both within and outside service provider`s control. The rich conceptualization of the customer

experience should observe cognitive evaluations, affective responses and involve social and physical components. Theorizing and empirically investigating the impacts that drives on each of the components of customer experience are critical when researching in this domain. (Verhoef & al. 2009, 33.)

5.1 The experience economy

The economy has changed over the years. The 2000s brought forward a stronger focus on value extraction especially from the customer relationship viewpoint. The key idea of this approach is building strong long-term relationship with customers in which CRM system (customer relationship management) is based. Customer centricity as a valuable strategic approach has changed the mind-set of firms. This approach is based on understanding and delivering value to individual customers rather than mass or target markets. Whilst, it has been encouraging for several decades, this focus has come to realization with the omnipresent availability of individual-level customer data. Focusing on customer centricity as a strategy, the organizations are able to maximize the long-term financial value of those customers. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 5.)

The experience economy differs from the service economy hence that industry revenue increases when consumers enjoy their experience. People favour to pursue more multisensory experience-based hedonic consumption than utilitarian consumption. The theory of experience economy focuses on the hedonic needs of the individual, but the research of the experience economy is still at an early stage. (Chang 2017, 55-56.) Pine and Gilmore (1998, 102) stress that the experience economy is based on the four experiential areas that consist of entertainment (desire to enjoy), educational (desire to learn), escapist (desire to go and do something), and esthetic (desire to be in a particular place) experiences. Entertainment experiences are composed when guests passively participate as observers but their attention is fully engaged with the experience. Educational experiences are achieved when guests actively participate in the work and fully concentrate on the experience. Escapist experiences arise when participation of the guests influences the performance actively and they are physically or virtually part of it. Esthetic experiences appear when guests play a passive role as observers and physically or virtually feel what is been experienced. (Chang 2017, 56.)

5.1.1 The experience realms

(Pine and Gilmore 1998, 102) suggest that when creating experiences, it is mandatory for the companies to understand "The Four Realms of an Experience". The richest experiences encompass aspects of all four realms. That will melt to the "sweet spot", the area where all those aspects meet. Hence, the most important fact is that the company will find the specific experiences that they offer and that will come to define their business. Experiences have to meet customer needs; they have to work and be deliverable.
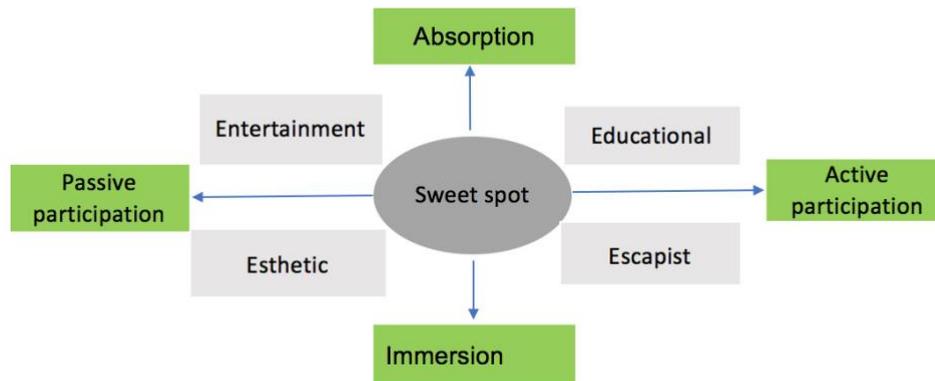

Figure 1. The Experience Realms. (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, 102)

On the horizontal axis, the first dimension of experience relates to the guest participation from passive to active. The passive experiences are usually the ones that people think of as entertainment for instance watching television or a concert. The connection with that kind of event is more likely one of absorption than immersion. Educational events such as attending a lesson tend to involve more active participation but the customers are still more outside the event than immersed in it. Escapist experiences can teach as educational events but they involve more customer immersion. That means acting in the event and being part of the event creation. If the customers active participation is minimized – the event becomes more esthetic. In esthetic realm customers are immersed in an activity but they themselves have only a little or no effect on it. (Pine & Gilmore 1998, 102.)

5.1.2 Designing memorable experiences

When designing the experiences, there are five key experience-design principles that has been commonly used. First of the principles is to theme the experience. "An effective theme is concise and compelling. It is not a corporate mission statement or a marketing tag line. It needn't be publicly articulated in writing. But the theme must drive all the design elements and staged events of the experience toward a unified story line that wholly

captivates the customer." (Pine & Gilmore 1998, 103.)

Pine & Gilmore (1998, 103) stress that harmonizing impressions with positive cues is one of the five most important principles in experience-design. That said, eliminating the negative cues requires more than the layering on of positive cues. Even the minor cues can lead to the creation of a unique experiences because they make the impressions that later creates the whole experience. For instance, if a customer does not find the right information, it can influence the whole experience.

If the customer will get some memorabilia from the experience, they will connect their memories to that even if it is a small detail. Certain goods have always been purchased because of the memories they bring. It is common for instance to bring some souvenirs from a holiday destination primarily for the memories they convey. (Pine & Gilmore 998, 104.)

> In 1990 the Ross School of business in Ann Arbor faced a miniature crisis. After the library announced that many journals and books would be available only in electronic form, the faculty rose up in protest. When asked to explain they're in opposing the switch, faculty members found it difficult to express their opinions. They came up with such responses as "I like to feel the paper", "I love the smell of libraries, or "It`s just not the same thing! (Aradhna 2013, 2.)

Engaging all five senses is important principle in experience creation because the more senses an experience engages, the more effective and memorable it can be. If the customer will be able to see, touch, smell, hear and taste the experience it will stick to their memory longer and involve more emotions. (Pine & Gilmore 998, 104-105.)

5.2   The concept of customer experience

Generally speaking "experience" is an interaction between a customer and a company (brand, product or service) and a customer is influenced by the context/environment in which the interaction takes place. (Ferreira & Teixeira 2013, 4.)

> The term customer experience (CE) means the sum of all experiences a customer has with a supplier of goods or services over the duration of their relationship. It is a journey which makes customer feel happy, satisfied, and justified with a sense of being respected, served, and cared for in accordance with his/her own expectations or standards. (Choudhury, Singh & Saikia 2016, 49.)

Businesses have been creating and managing experiences for years without really understanding their relation to creating value for customers. Today the customer experience concept is better understood and utilised strategy to create value and achieve a competitive advantage. Finally, service providers should try to influence both the purchase and consumption decision of the consumer. This can be done by creating an

experience based facilities that engage a customer during service use. A service provider should have enough flexibility for the differing preferences and knowledge structures of customers, so that each customer is able to create unique and personalised experience. Often customer participation is passive because service designers tend to design systems for standardisation and routines rather than active participant involvement at an early stage. To become succesfull experience organization that creates memorable and unique experiences, an active customer participation plays a crucial role. (Donnelly 2009, 27.)

For further understanding of the of customer experience, it is useful to differentiate it from other customer focused developments such as customer satisfaction and service quality. Customer satisfaction could be one part of the customer experience which concentrates on customer`s cognitive evaluation of the experience. One could even debate that customer experience is a wider concept of customer satisfaction, leading to a broader and richer view. Service quality would be premeditated an predecessor of customer experience, in line with earlier research. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 6.)

5.3   Customer experience in tourism

Various studies in hospitality and tourism have tried to understand the extent of experience. Numerous definitions of experience have been adjusted and at the same time, dimensionality approaches to experience have been suggested. The proper management of customer experience can create competitive advantage while turning customers into advocates. (Ren, Qiu, Wang & Lin 2015, 14.)

Especially in the tourism and leisure field, to understand the customer journey is implicit to the provider. The experience environment is more than a physical stage and it includes both consumers and producers. Tourist, as a participant is surrounded by a unique experience network of all stakeholders away from home. The tourist should be involved to the experience emotionally, physically, spiritually and intellectually. The customer assesses and documents each touchpoint based on their expectations towards a destination or product. Those can be then combined in service moments and thus be evaluable. Another point is how those experiences appeal to higher order needs of satisfaction and motivation. If the environments enable the tourism to become co-producer, then the perceived value arises and most likely the quality of the vacation experiences improves and contributes to tourist well-being. (Ivanov, Leigh & Webster, 2013, 157.)

5.4 Customer Journey

Especially in the tourism field, the essential idea of a customer journey become distinct. A customer experience in a service process consist of different touchpoints. A customer journey includes different touchpoints between the customer and the service provider. Those touchpoints include also indirect interaction between the customer and service provider such as review websites. Usually indirect touchpoints establish the starting point of a customer journey in tourism field (e.g. tourism review websites, blogs, mouth-to-mouth). The same touchpoints can be used in the post-service period to spread the information and opinions of the service influence which thus in return influence the other customers pre-service period. The customer journey visualizes the service process from the customer perspective. Thus, customers qualify which touchpoints are significant and which ones they ignore or overlook. There are various service design tools to gain customer insights such as shadowing, mapping, observation, user journals and interviews. (Stickdorn & Zehrer 2009, 7-8.)

In these days, customers are able to connect with products and services early in their purchase journey. Businesses needs to fully understand their customers in order to influence their purchase decisions at a very early stage. To operationalise customer journey, customer journey mapping is a useful tool to understand the journey that customers go through when using tourism services. For people, planning and experiencing holiday is truly emotional experience and therefore understanding the emotional journey becomes important to tourism provider. (Rowett 2017.)

The basic idea of customer journey map is to illustrate the steps that customers go thought when they are engaging with the company. The more touchpoint customer journey has, the more challenging the customer journey mapping becomes. Customer journey is most of the time non-linear, for instance someone going straight from the awareness to purchase while others are doing research in between. There are different journey mapping tools available and not a single right way to create a customer journey. (Richardson 2010b, 2-3.) In this study, the customer journey map is applied to the volunteer tourism services Ecotravellers are providing. The customer journey map is used in research approach that is later discussed in this study.

Richardson (2010b, 3.) stress that it is consistently to look at the actions customers are doing at each stage of the journey;

- What actions they are doing to move to the next stage?
- What are their motivations to keep going to the next stage?

- What questions comes up at each stage
- What barriers there are standing on the way of moving to the next stage?
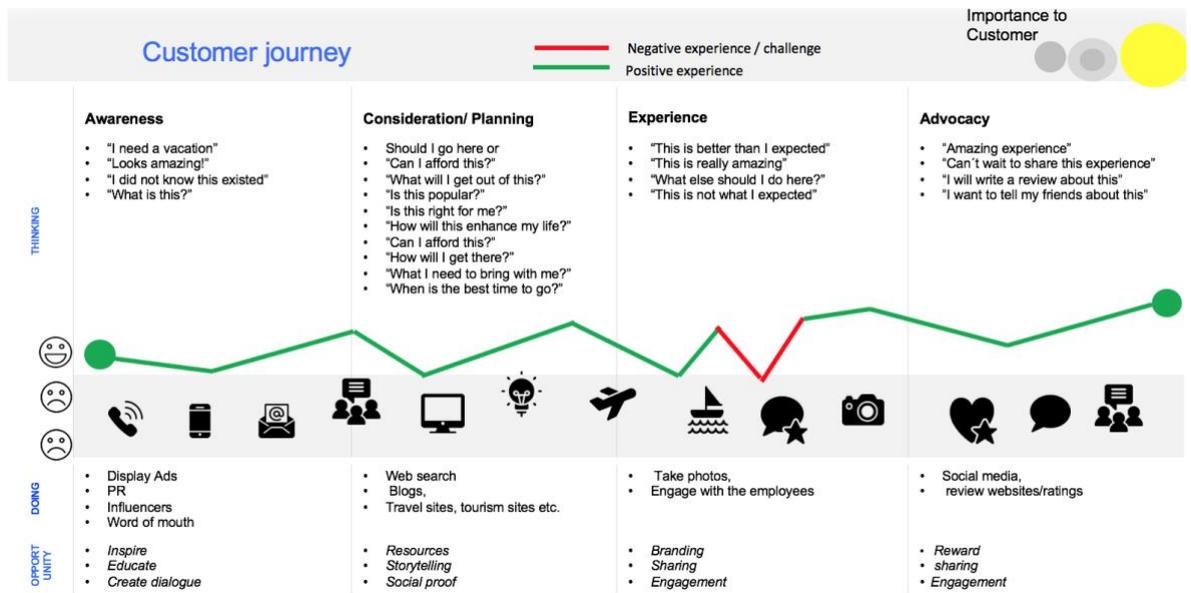
Figure 2. Customer Journey Map. (Peters, 2015.)

In the figure 2 above, customer journey is explained in horizontal axis in stages which are awareness, consideration and planning, experience and advocacy. In vertical axis are the opportunity (possibility for the company), doing (customers action) and thinking (customers thoughts) sections. The feeling of a customer is explained with the facial expressions. In the right corner, the importance to the customer is measured with the yellow spot. Green colour reflects to a positive experience and red colour to a negative experience or challenge. Later in this study, Ecotravellers customer journey is explained using the customer journey mapping tool above. The images are used to visualise the touchpoints of a customer journey.

Temkin (2010, 4.) highlights the key elements of customer journey map are the findings of how customers interact with the company, what they want from each interaction and how they feel about each interaction. Companies know a lot about their customers but often they are lacking the knowledge what customers care about most or how customers may think and act differently in a single demographic.

6   Methodology

Research methodology can be divided into qualitative and quantitative research approach. Mixed method which is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods can be used as well. Depending on the objective of the study, researcher decides which approach to use. (Edmonds & Kennedy 2017, 27.) Quantitative research approach is used when the aim is to describe the phenomena in the forms of variables while the qualitative research approach is expressed in motives and generalizations. Quantitative research methods and measures are usually universal for instance formulas for finding mean and mode for a set data. Qualitative research is approached individually and individual measures are developed to interpret the primary data. That approach takes into account the unique characteristics of the research. Quantitative research data appears in numbers and measurements and qualitative research data can be presented in images, words, transcripts etc. (Dudovskiy, J. 2017.) According to Dudovskiy (2017), the main differences between qualitative and quantitative research are as such:

- Quantitative research aims to describe the phenomena numerically and qualitative research in a narrative fashion.
- Qualitative research identifies major schemes and quantitative is described in statistics.
- Quantitative research scope is in specific questions and hypothesis while qualitative research scope is in broad and thematic concerns.
- Quantitative research has large sample size and statistical validity which reflects the population and qualitative research has rich, in-depth and narrative description of sample.
- Disadvantage of quantitative research is that it has shallow understanding of participants' thoughts and feelings and qualitative research has only small sample size which is not generalizable to the population at large.

6.1   Qualitative research approach

Qualitative methodology applies in the broadest sense to research that produces descriptive data of people`s written and spoken words and observable behaviour. Qualitative methodology is a way of approaching the empirical world. Qualitative research aims to understand people from their own frames of reference and experiencing existence as they experience it. (Taylor, Bogdan & Marjorie 2015, 7-8.)

> When we reduce people`s words and acts to statistical equations, we can lose sight of the human side of social life. When we study people qualitatively, we get to know them personally and experience what they experience in their daily struggles in society. We learn about concepts such as beauty, pain, faith, suffering, frustration, and love, whose essence is lost through other research approaches. (Taylor, Bogdan & Marjorie 2015, 7.)

Qualitative research aims to develop concepts, insights and understandings from patterns in the data. Quantitative research is collecting the data to assess preconceived models, hypothesis, or theories. When reducing people`s words and acts to statistical equations, it is possible to lose sight of the human side of social life. Qualitative research studies people personally and how they in interact, think and act. All perspectives are worthy of study and all perspectives are equally important. Qualitative research obtains first-hand and unfiltered knowledge of social life through operational definitions or rating scales. (Taylor, Bogdan & Marjorie 2015, 9-10.)

Qualitative research is an extensive umbrella term that consist of a broad range of techniques and philosophies. Various methods are used within qualitative research such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observation, content analysis, visual methods, and life histories or biographies. Applying the methods does not automatically make the study qualitative. Thus, one of the most distinctive feature of a qualitative research is the approach that allows the researcher to identify issues from the perspective of the participants, and understand the meanings and interpretations that they give to behaviour, events or objects. Qualitative researcher needs to be open-minded, curious, emphatic and flexible when listening people telling their own story. (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2011, 8-9.)

The purpose of this thesis is to provide understanding of customer experience in terms of responsible tourism to the commissioning party. Therefore, the thesis aims at understanding the views and perspectives of the Ecotravellers volunteer tourists and to analyse their experiences. It aims to give ideas to Ecotravellers how to improve their services and visibility through the knowledge of their customers experiences. Ultimately the guidelines are also hoped to benefit other companies in the industry as well.

As a result, this study will provide answers to the following questions.
Main question:

– How to improve customer experience and responsibility in volunteer tourism?

Sub questions:

– What is the importance of company`s responsibility for the overall volunteer tourism experience?
– How to create value to the company from customer experience?
– What are the touchpoints in Ecotravellers` customer journey?
– How responsibility can be connected to the Ecotravellers` customer journey?

6.2 Research methods

This study follows qualitative research approach. Structured interviews and participant observations were chosen to be the methods of data collection, interviews being the primary method. Observation is typical qualitative research method in service design. Observation is always as systematic as possible and focuses on particular target. The results are to be immediately taken into account. The role of the observer can be active as a consultant developing the organization, or passive observer that does not participate in the organization`s activities. In development work, the observer is usually something in between these extremities. Interview is always a communication process that requires trust between the participants. In the interview, the interviewer leads the conversation and is the information collector while the interviewee is the respondent and information provider. Interview as a research method aims to gather material to encourage the development work. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2014, 108-115.)

Richardson (2010, 4) highlights that to fully understand all steps on customer journey, the best way to study customer journey is using interviews and observations as research methods. Surveys and focus groups tend to go over too many details that are essential to really understand the customer experience. He stresses that a good way to research this topic is to ask customers questions that fill out their personal journey map.

6.2.1 Observation

Observation is important and useful method used in qualitative research. Observation technique enables to gain information for example about how people behave and what happens in their natural environment. Observation can be used to complete the data gathered from the interviews. It also helps to see if people behave the same way as they say and fulfill the information that has been said in the interviews. (Ojasalo & al. 2014, 114.)

Participant observation is used, for example, to analyze nonverbal expression of feelings, determine the interaction between participants and analyze the communication. The purpose of using participant observation technique is to develop holistic understanding of the phenomena under study, and as a consequence increase the validity of the study. Participant observation technique is also used to identify and guide relationships with informants, help the author to get to feel for how things are organized and prioritized, and to help the author to become familiar with the topic. (Kawulich 2005, 3-6.) Nowadays hiding the role of the observer is not considered desirable and it is important to build a trust between the participants and the observer. The information gathered from the

observation should be written down directly during and after the observation. Usually the participants` behaviour and facial impressions are also observed. (Ojasalo & al. 2014, 115.)

Observation was used as a second qualitative method in this study and aimed to fulfill the information that was gotten from the interviews. The author, as an observer, started this process already before the actual observation by asking the company if she is able to join the information evenings held by Ecotravellers. Ecotravellers invited their potential customers to listen stories told by the volunteers who have already been on Ecotravellers` volunteer trip. In the participant observations, two different groups were observed; potential clients and already bought customers who shared their experiences with the potential customers. The observation took place during the information evenings that were held at the Ecotravellers `office on the 28th of March and 4th of April. The observer took notes from the participants' behaviour and the behaviour of the volunteers who were presenting their own experiences in the evenings. Pictures and videos from previous volunteers` experiences were also showed during both of the information evenings. The data was analyzed from the customer journey viewpoint; pre experience (awareness, consideration and planning) and from the post experience (advocacy). Both customer groups, potential customers and previous customers were observed. The observer went to the event to gather notes about the overall atmosphere, people`s behaviour and to view Ecotravellers external communication through the presentations that were showed. There was no observation form used and the notes were taken freely concentrating especially to fulfill "Ecotravellers customer journey" which is later presented in this study.

6.2.2 Interviews

Interviews is the most common method used in qualitative research. There are various types of interviews in qualitative research but they all have the same purpose. They all aim to see the research topic from the perspective of the interviewee and to understand why and how they have this perspective. In qualitative research, the interviewee is seen as participant who actively shape the course of the interview rather than passively responding to the interviewer`s questions. Interview can be carried out face-to-face, via phone or internet. (Cassel & Symon 2004, 11.)

In qualitative research the questions should be open-ended which means that they require more than yes or no answers, and give as much information about the study phenomenon as possible. Open-ended questions can be answered in many ways and it gives more freedom for the respondents compared to closed-ended questions. (Gill, Steward, Treasure & Chadwick 2008, 292.)

It is reasonable to first pilot the interview schedule (questions) on several respondents to refine the questions to be clear, understandable and capable of answering. The test helps to shape the interview schedule in intelligible form. One of the most important skill to the interviewer is to listen attentively what has been said. That gives the participants possibility to narrate their experiences as fully as possible. (Gill & al. 2008, 292.)

In this study, structured interviews with open-ended questions were used to analyze Ecotravellers customers` experiences. The interviews aimed to get answers to topics that were relevant to fulfil the objective of the thesis and highlighted the respondents individuality. The interviews were the main qualitative method that was used in this research.

The interview schedule was tested with three participants before the actual interviews. Seeing the feedback from the pilot, the interview schedule was narrowed down and the wording was changed to more clear and easier to understand. The questions were open-ended which allowed the respondents to give elaborate and thoughtful answers. There were six respondents in total. Five out of six interviews were held on the phone and one face-to face. Before the interview started, the respondents were familiarized with the interview schedule and given certainty about ethical principles, for instance anonymity and confidentiality. Names of the respondents are not presented in this study because of their privacy and data protection. The interviews were conducted within two weeks' time period in Helsinki during April 2018. Ecotravellers gave the contact information of the respondents. The respondents were randomly chosen but the criteria was that they have volunteered with Ecotravellers within a year, so the experience was still in a fresh memory. The interviews lasted between twenty to thirty minutes and all answers were recorded. The interviews were conducted in Finnish language because it is the respondents mother tongue. There were eighteen questions about the experience and five background questions, all together twenty three questions. The function of the background questions is to classify the respondents age, sex, nationality and when they have been on a volunteer trip.

7   Results

The data was analysed by using content analysis. The results are divided in the findings from the observation and findings from the interviews. The observation took place in Ecotravellers information evenings that were held in their office two times between March and April 2018. The observation results are divided in two parts; first information evening and second information evening. The interviews were conducted in April 2018 face-to-face and on the phone. All together six interviewees took part of the interview and the results are divided in three parts; pre-experience, experience and post-experience.

7.1   Findings from the observation

The observation took place in Ecotravellers information evenings. First information evening was held at the Ecotravellers office on 28th of March and the second one on 4th of April. The purpose of these evenings was to give information and promote Ecotravellers` volunteer trips in Spain, in Thailand and in South Africa. In both evenings, there were one previous customer of Ecotravellers to explain their own volunteer experiences. They had chosen the way of promotion/ presentation themselves. Pictures and videos were used together with the speech. In both evenings, there were participants listening to these stories and asking questions related to Ecotravellers and their volunteer projects. These participants joined the evenings from their own interest and they were potential future clients for Ecotravellers. The observation focused on customer journey aspect from the previous customer- and potential customer viewpoint.

7.1.1   First information evening

First observation took place in Ecotravellers office and it was focused on the project in Spain (Tenerife). The project is located at the dolphin- and whale conservation center. One Ecotravellers` previous customer told her own experiences from the trip and nine participants were there to hear her experiences and asking questions related to that project. The participants were Ecotravellers potential clients interested in going for this volunteer trip. The evening started with a short introduction about Ecotravellers and The Finnish Association for Fair Tourism (FAFT). There was a staff member from FAFT who shortly briefed about the association and their vision to make tourism industry more responsible. Ecotravellers is part of this association and they also quickly told what kind of actions can be taken on individual level to make travelling more responsible. Ecotravellers` owner also told the participants shortly about the project in Tenerife and some practical arrangements related to this project for instance the price, location, target

group of this project (suitable also for under 18 years old customers) and what the price includes (accommodation, some meals and the project fee but no flights).

The evening continued with the presentation of Ecotravellers previous customer. She showed pictures while she was explaining her volunteer experience in Tenerife in her own words. She had planned the presentation all by herself and while she explained her experiences, questions were asked from the participants. The presentation was made to explain her volunteer trip day by day at the destination and the pictures she showed during the presentation were fulfilling her story. She started her explanation from travelling to the destination, which in the customer journey map is part of the experience phase. She continued her story day by day and ended it with her feelings after she had arrived back home.

She explained as such; "I took a transportation arranged by the project organization from the airport to the destination so it was easy to arrive there. When I arrived, there was a group of kids showing a dance for me and the project organization explained shortly about the project. During the first day, I joined some construction work at the conservation center and got a brief about the project and our tasks as volunteers. I was not able to go on a boat during my first day so I did other things and waited until I could go on a boat and start observing dolphins and whales. Next day, when we were at the boat, we were supposed to observe the whales and dolphins, write down our observations and gather the information to the computer later on. It was so nice to see the dolphins and whales and learn about them and the differences between each individual. I learned to recognize what are the differences between each dolphin and whale individual. I was also able to join other volunteer activities so I went to the dog rescue center and took the dogs for a walk from there. It was so great experience. I was also able to go horseback riding during my time in Tenerife so we had a lot of free time from the volunteer project. Our main task was the observation but also to spread the word of animal- and nature protection to the tourists who were on a boat. I had an opportunity to strengthen my language skills and get to know people from other countries. I would recommend this opportunity to others as well but one should have an open-minded attitude when going for a trip like this. Things are changing fast and not always going the way they are planned. I was grateful to be able to accomplish my long-term dream in Tenerife."

The participants who joined this evening were all different ages, some under eighteen years old, few middle-aged and few young adults. In the beginning of the evening the atmosphere was a bit tense but during the evening it became more relaxed. There were only few questions that were asked from Ecotravellers and the previous customer of

Ecotravellers. The questions were practical, mostly about the travel insurance, safety and transportation. Ecotravellers do not book flights to their customers and they do not provide insurance, so the participants were guided to take care of those practical arrangements by themselves. Ecotravellers highlighted that they are always willing to help in case something happens during the volunteer experience.

7.1.2   Second information evening

The second information evening was held on the 4th of April and it focused on two projects; South Africa (Marakele National Park) and Thailand (Ko Phra Thong island). The project in South Africa concentrates on the protection of endangered species, so called "big five" such as elephants and lions. The project in Thailand is focusing on sea turtles. The evening started the same way as the previous evening; first short introduction of Ecotravellers and The Finnish Association for Fair Tourism. Later Ecotravellers owner told shortly about her personal experiences form South Africa and the project there. She was mainly explaining what kind of work tasks the days include, how the accommodation and living there is and overall information about the destination. Video greetings were showed as well from South Africa where Ecotravellers customer who was currently there told about her experiences. In the video, she was really excited while she explained her experiences from South Africa and the project over there. She said that the days are long but totally worth it and she has experienced nature and big endangered species living in the natural park from a very close perspective. The main topic of the evening was the project in Thailand and Ecotravellers previous customer was telling his experiences from that project to the participants.

Ecotravellers previous customer showed a PowerPoint presentation with text and pictures that supported his story. He started the presentation by telling shortly about himself and his strong experience from volunteer projects. He explained his volunteer experiences from Ecotravellers trip and his second volunteer trip that he did in the same place directly with the project organization. After the short introduction, he moved to the destination part, in which he explained where the project is located and how to get there. He continued telling about the family owned bungalow accommodation and meals that are included in the project fee. He also showed pictures about the accommodation, people working there and the destination itself. His presentation was really informative and he told a lot of facts about the destination that was fulfilling his story. After the brief about the location, destination, people and food, he explained informatively the daily tasks included in the project (beach monitoring, weather measurements and observing sea turtles eating habits). He also told the participants what kind of sea turtle species are living in that place and how to identify them.

"We were able to find only one sea turtle nest and we had to move it further from the beach to keep it safe. We hid it as well, so that the eggs were able to develop and hatch safely. We were also observing the turtles from the hill when they came to eat and wrote all our observations down. We were watching people`s movements if we saw a boat in that area where the turtles came to eat. People are the biggest threat to sea turtles because plastic and fishing kills and damages the turtles more than anything."

He continued his presentation by telling what other things and activities include in the project, for instance beach monitoring-trips to other island close by and self-selected activities that are possible to do with a little extra fee. He highlighted that they were also cleaning the beaches with other tourists and sharing information about the impacts of the waste that is thrown to the beach or to the sea. He told that there is a lot of free time and activities connects the volunteers with the local community very well for instance when they are eating dinners with the locals.

There were totally twenty participants listening to the information about the projects in South Africa and in Thailand. The participants were all different ages but all of them were adults (beside one girl who was there with her mum). The atmosphere was engrossing and the participants were actively asking a lot of questions. Many of the questions were related to safety, practical arrangements at the destination and preparation that is needed before travelling to the destination (for example insurance). There were also questions about the responsibility aspect in this type of travelling and the level of professionality at the destination. Questions such as; "Is there a vet that takes care of the animals if something happens in Marakele national park?", "Are there dangerous snakes or lizards in Ko Phra Thong?" or "Do Ecotravellers arrange insurance for me or do I need my own travel insurance?" were asked. The participants were curious about the daily schedule at the destination especially in Marakele national park that had a shorter brief compared to the sea turtle project in Ko Phra Thong. There were also questions about the vaccinations and flights. The participants were quite demanding and some of them aware of nature conservation already, so the questions were exact and expectations seemed to be high towards Ecotravellers, their responsibility and destinations.
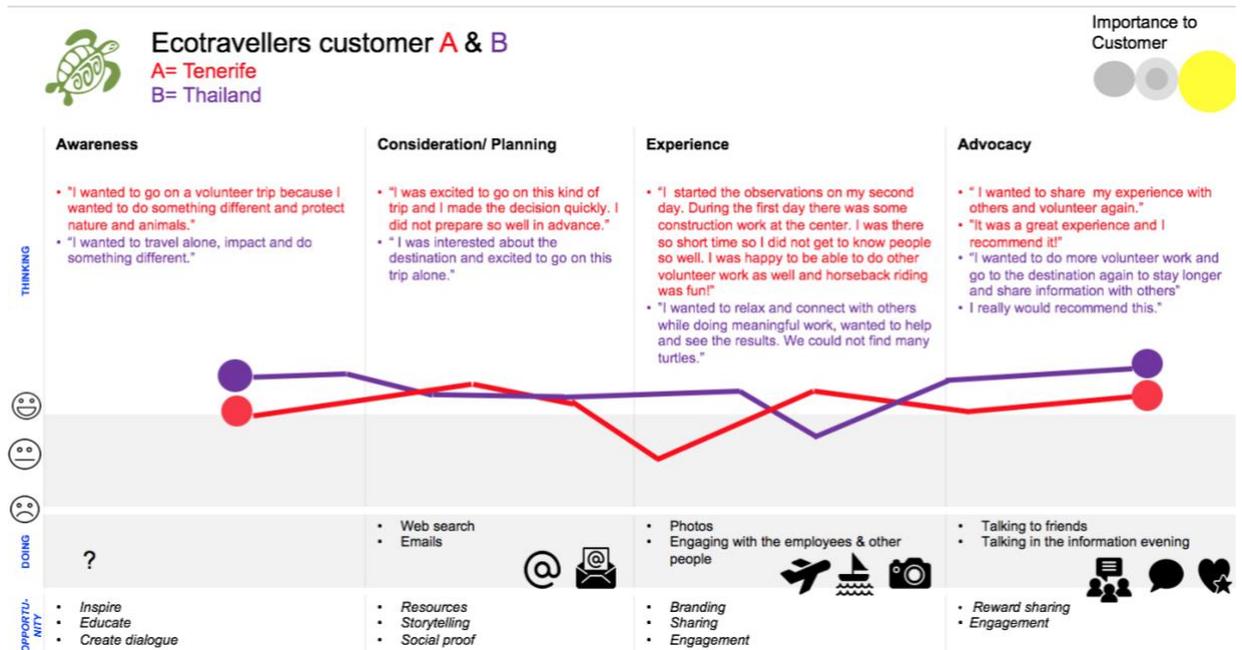
Figure 3. Ecotravellers customer journey, observation results.

In the figure 3, Ecotravellers customer A and customer B journey is filled based on the information they told during the evenings that were observed. Both of them started telling their story from the experience phase. Some of the questions that participants asked during those evenings related to awareness, consideration and planning and that enabled few touchpoints from those phases to be filled as well. Customer A is marked with a red color and she is the one who was telling her experiences on the first evening (Tenerife) and customer B is the one who was presenting on the second evening (Thailand). The happiness is measured by the face expressions, words and feelings that were used and described during the presentations. The importance to the customer is presented with a yellow spot in a right corner. The images visualize the journey and its touchpoints.

As it can be seen from the picture, the information of how these two customers found Ecotravellers did not become clear from their presentation and that is why it is marked with a question mark. They both told that they were contacting Ecotravellers through email and looking for information from the website or getting it in email when they were asked about the preparation before the experience. The experience phase was filled according to their own presentations where they showed pictures and told about their journey from the arrival until the departure and arrival back home. Some of the expressions they told during the presentations is explained in the "thinking" box to give ideas what kind of things they told and how did that connect to the overall journey. Opportunity part explains what opportunities the company has in that phase of the customer journey to strengthen the engagement with the customer in every touchpoint. Both of them were using words and

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facial expressions that described their satisfaction and there were only few challenges that became apparent throughout their speech. For person A, it was that when she arrived at the destination, she had to wait for a day to be able to start the observation at the boat and for the person B, it was the challenge that they were not able to find many sea turtle nests from the beach and therefore directly helping them became a challenge.

7.2 Findings from the interviews

The results from the interviews are presented here and conducted by the author. The interviews were themed into three different categories following customer journey map presented in figure 2 and background questions. The interview schedule was in Finnish and it is translated to English in this study. Before the actual interview questions, the respondents were asked few background questions; age, gender, nationality and occupation. All of the six respondents are Finnish citizens. Five out of six respondents are female and half of the respondents are entrepreneurs, two of the respondents are students in which one of them working as an employee beside studies and one respondent is working full-time as an employee. The respondents are in between 26-43 years old. Half of the respondents are 33 years old and the rest 26-, 30- and 43 years old. They all have volunteered with Ecotravellers within one year in between March 2017 and 2018.

7.2.1 Pre-experience

The first theme is the customer journey pre-experience phase which includes awareness, consideration and planning. In this part, the respondents were asked to describe their motives on going for a volunteer trip and why did they choose to volunteer with Ecotravellers. They were asked about their opinions of the content in Ecotravellers social media channels and website. The participants were also asked to describe what kind of reviews they heard or read from other customers before making the purchase decision. They were asked if they joined any events organized by Ecotravellers before the purchase and if yes, did that affect their decision to choose Ecotravellers. They were also asked to mention three to five most important reasons why they chose Ecotravellers. Pre-experience takes place before the actual experience and includes the touchpoint with the company also through external communication such as social media and website, blog posts, reviews from other customers, events and PR.

All of the respondents had a common motive to go on volunteer trip and that was to protect nature and animals and to do something good while travelling. Two respondents mentioned that they have already wanted to go on a volunteer trip for a long time and this

was their long-term dream. One respondent stated about her motive to go on a volunteer trip as " I have travelled a lot and this time I wanted to find a new way of traveling and to give back to the nature. I have always been interested about the protection of nature and I wanted to combine my holiday with something useful." Another respondent explained as "I wanted to help and influence. I wanted to do something different than typical hotel vacation and I also wanted to travel alone."

All of the respondents had found Ecotravellers through different channels. One respondent said that she has known the owner of Ecotravellers and that is why she found the company. Another respondent answered that her friend knew the owner of Ecotravellers and in that way she became familiar with the company. One respondent found Ecotravellers from the travel fair already three years ago and another one met the owner of Ecotravellers in the entrepreneurs` event. One respondent said that she found Ecotravellers from a Facebook page that was intended for people who search travel companions abroad. She explained that there was a link to Ecotravellers website and someone recommended this company to the other members in that Facebook group. One respondent told that she was searching volunteer travel companies from internet and she compared Ecotravellers to some other company organizing volunteer trips but decided to choose Ecotravellers because of their clear and easy website. When the respondents were asked how did they find information about Ecotravellers and what was their opinion of the content, two respondents claimed that Ecotravellers website was not so informative at that time so they had contacted Ecotravellers through email directly. One out of six respondents had joined information event organized by Ecotravellers and five of them said that there were no events or they did not know if there were any available before their volunteer experience (expect the fairs that Ecotravellers had been part of). Email was the main channel for most of the respondents before they made the buying decision and after that when they were communicating with Ecotravellers and getting more information. One respondent mentioned that she did not like the communication through email so much because it takes time and therefore she would have preferred chat or WhatsApp-conversation instead. Two respondents told that they read blog post which were the main channels for them to gain information of the project and destination they were interested about. The respondents highlighted the most important reasons to choose Ecotravellers as follows:

- – Good location, timing and reasonable prize
- – Trustworthy and loyalty
- – The communication with Ecotravellers was transparent
- – Company`s positive image that came across through the website
- – Unique experiences and destinations available

7.2.2 Experience

The second theme is the customer journey experience phase that consist of the trip from travelling to the destination until the departure from the destination. The respondents were asked to explain how their travelling to the destination went and what was their first impression of the place when they arrived. After that they were asked if they got any training before they started to work in the project and how they experienced the importance of the training considering the success of their own trip and its influence on the overall project. The respondents were also asked to explain how they experienced the importance of their own input to the project`s overall goal.

Two of the respondents experienced travelling to the destination really challenging. One of them explained that "It was a catastrophe to get to the destination due to the weather conditions. Ecotravellers did their best to help us but I spoke the local language myself so in the end it was easier to communicate directly with the project organization. It was all worth it when we finally arrived to the destination and the feeling of the place was really positive." The other one said as "I was really annoyed at that time because of the weather conditions we could not get to the destination on time. When we finally arrived to the destination after this adventure, it felt quite unrealistic." All the other respondents told that their arrival to the destination went well and they did not have any problems during their travel. One respondent mentioned that she got good advices from Ecotravellers about the cheap flights so she took her flights according to the low price when another one claimed that he wanted to take direct flights because of their ease and in that way, minimize the negative impacts on the environment.

One from the six respondents claimed about her first impression of the destination as such "My first impression after arrival was not negative nor positive but I expected something different. People seemed to be a bit tired and not so welcoming." All the other respondents explained that their first impression of the destination after arrival was really positive and welcoming. One respondent explained that the first impression was even better and more welcoming than what she had expected.

All of the six respondents had gotten some kind of training before they started to work in the project. Some of them mentioned that they got information package from Ecotravellers already before they arrived and more practical information was given at the destination. One of the respondents explained as "There was not that much training or introduction before we started working. We basically started working almost immediately. It could have been useful to get more information because I realized some of the important things when

I had started working already. I honestly believe that my input for the overall project was not so huge." Another one claimed that "The training was practical and it was a surprise for me that Ecotravellers were not the project organization at the destination but instead there was another organization that I worked for." One respondent had experienced that most of the information that was given was not in english and that is why she felt that the training was a bit weak. One out of six respondents experienced that the training was wide and informative including some history and detailed knowledge of the project. All of the six respondents thought that the training is important for the overall success of the project.

When the respondents were asked how did they experience their own input and its importance of the overall project, two of the respondents experienced their work and input really meaningful considering the overall project. One of them explained how she impressed that she did even too much work because she felt the work so important. Four out of six respondents felt that they could have done more work than what they were able to do. Three out of these four respondents explained that one reason for this was the timing which was not the best considering the amount of work they were able to do. They experienced this volunteer trip more as a holiday and they felt that they did not do so much work but the little work they were able to do was meaningful and important. "Also the money I paid for this trip was useful and important for the overall project even though my own input was not so huge". One of the respondents mentioned that she was at the destination only for a week and that is why she did not feel her own input so important. "I did not know the aim of the overall project so well but I knew that they had lots of different things going on for instance research and disseminate awareness. For me it was a bit unclear what is the main goal of this project."

Next, the participants were asked how they experienced the responsibility of the project organization and to mention some practical examples of how it was reflected or not reflected in the destination. They were requested to mention if they were in contact with Ecotravellers during their stay abroad and what are the situations they could imagine that communication with Ecotravellers would be useful. The last question of the experience phase was to mention the most meaningful or vivid experience of the whole trip.

All six respondents experienced that the project organization worked responsibly. All of the respondents also mentioned some practical examples how this was implemented in their daily work. "A marine biologist was responsible of the project and they taught us a lot about the turtle species living in that area. We got huge amount of information in terms of plastic and its disadvantages." One respondent explained that since the accommodation was owned by a local person, also the money paid of this experience went to them. "We

tried to use local ingredients and ate a lot of vegetarian food. Sea turtles were very well taken care of and the staff really knew what they were doing. If we saw a plastic bottle somewhere, we immediately took it away" one respondent mentioned. Three out of six respondents explained that the locals did not recycle so well because of their culture and the overall level of recycling at the destination. "Everything was local, we used local services, ate local food and we took care that the environment was clean. We did recycle a bit but not as much as we do in Finland. I do not know how is the recycling situation in that island overall. The community togetherness was displayed well to us and everyone, including locals, seemed to be interested about the project."

When the respondents were asked if they were in contact with Ecotravellers during their stay, five out of six respondents said that they were in contact with Ecotravellers mostly through messages. All of the respondents highlighted the importance of being able to communicate with Ecotravellers during the trip if something happens. One respondent mentioned that travelling alone can sometimes be lonely in a different culture so it is important to get support from Finland and in some situations it might be really useful. Two of the respondents had been communicating with Ecotravellers a lot in the beginning of their trip when they had logistical problems to get to the destination.

Everyone mentioned the most vivid or memorable experience similarly with each other. All the other respondents said something related to the animals and nature except one who experienced togetherness with the people and community being the most vivid experience. "The feeling when I saw the dolphins and whales for the first time in their natural environment." One explained her most vivid experience as "It was so great to see the turtles and to be so close to them. Also the moment when we walked up to the volcano and watched the sunset." One respondent was really excited when this question was asked and began to explain the following "During my first week we found a big herd of elephants and their babies. It was unbelievable to see so close these spectacular creatures. Another strong experience was when a lion couple snooped around us and lied next to our jeep. It was a bit scary and amazing at the same time."

7.2.3 Post-experience

The third and the last theme is the customer journey post-experience (advocacy) that consist of the experience that happens after arriving back home and later. In that phase, six questions were asked from the participants. They were asked how Ecotravellers were in contact with them after their volunteer trip and how did that feel and if they were not in contact how they experienced that. They were asked to describe from their own experience, if they would go again on a volunteer trip with Ecotravellers and why, and if

not, why they would not like to go again. The respondents were asked to explain what they would tell others about this experience and have they shared it with others for instance face to face, in social media or somewhere else. In the end they were requested to explain from their own opinion if Ecotravellers, as a company, work responsibly and how it can be seen from their behaviour and if not, how does it show. Last question of the interview was to explain if the respondents' behavior have changed after this volunteer experience and what did they learn from this trip.

Five respondents told that they got a feedback form to their email from Ecotravellers when they arrived back home and one respondent had not received any email or feedback form. The one who did not receive any email said that it would have been nice to fill a feedback form or similar. One respondent explained that the feedback form was very difficult to fill and did not function well with a phone or a computer so it was frustrating to fill it. Other respondents explained how it felt personal and comfortable to give feedback and to be in contact with Ecotravellers after their volunteer experience. All of the six respondents said that they would like to go again on Ecotravellers` volunteer trip. Reasons to choose Ecotravellers again as a volunteer organization were as following;

- Already familiar with a company and easy to choose
- Satisfaction with a previous trip and interesting other destinations available
- Ecotravellers are doing this "with a full heart" and not only trying to get a maximum profit
- Ecotravellers provided everything that was needed and took care of the preparations before the experience

All six respondents told that they have shared their volunteer experiences with other people. One respondent had written blog posts about the experience and another one told that she had shared blog posts about this experience. Five out of six respondents said that they have shared their experiences in Instagram or Facebook, posted pictures and tagged Ecotravellers in their pictures. All of the respondents had talked about the experience face to face to their friends and acquaintances. Three out of six respondents also told that they have been in Ecotravellers` events after the volunteer trip and shared their experiences to the public in those events (Matka travel fair and Ecotravellers` information evenings).

When the respondents were asked about Ecotravellers` responsibility and how it can be seen in their actions, all of them highlighted about the information Ecotravellers` share in their social media channels. Also the fact that Ecotravellers know their own destinations very well, they are able to give detailed information about the project and the company`s transparency were pointed out. "Ecotravellers are doing a lot of good things and trying to

share information about the waste problem and the importance of nature protection especially in their social media channels." Another respondent claimed as "Travelling is always travelling and specifically flying is doing a lot of harm to the environment but Ecotravellers are trying to do their best by sharing information to the people of environmental issues." One respondent told that Ecotravellers could be even more responsible and concentrating on small things as well, for instance marketing material such as fliers being made from environment friendly paper and other small actions.

Finally, the respondents were required to explain what they have learned during this volunteer experience and how their behaviour have changed when they arrived back home. Everyone mentioned some actions that they have changed in their behaviour and especially the usage of plastic. All of the respondents told about the issues of plastic and how they have started to avoid it after this experience. One respondent mentioned that she is trying to avoid meat and has started to eat more vegetarian food. Few respondents explained that they have been thinking about environmental issues already before they chose to go on a volunteer trip but this trip affirmed that behaviour. "I have always been aware about my behaviour when it comes to the environment but this experience made it even more concrete what happens to the animals if we do not care about the environment. We were watching the sea turtles who could not dive because they had eaten plastic and it was horrible to see the beaches full of plastic. This is something that most people do not see in touristic areas where the beaches are cleaned every morning." Another respondent explained as "I learned so much about the environment and the importance of all species to the ecosystem on my trip. Now I consider carefully what I buy so I could avoid plastic as much as possible and I have realized that even small actions matter in a big picture."

Figure 3. Ecotravellers customer journey, interview results.

In figure 3, Ecotravellers customer journey is presented according to the information that was gathered from the interviews. Positive thoughts are presented in green colour and negative thoughts or challenges in red colour. The number of respondents are measured with a blue colour to give explanation of how many respondents answered accordingly. The feeling is expressed with face expressions by the average from all answers. The importance to the customer is presented with a yellow spot in a right corner. The images visualize the customer journey touchpoints.

Some of the expressions that were told at the interviews are presented in this journey map to explain the biggest positive experiences and the biggest challenges or negative experiences the interviewees had during their journey. As it can be seen, many different channels are used before the actual experience to gain information, communicate with the company and to read reviews or other customers` experiences. The main challenges before the actual experience was to find enough information or to communicate efficiently with Ecotravellers. During the experience, transportation was a challenge for few respondents and therefore the red curve is presented in the beginning of the experience phase. Post-experience/ advocacy is mainly only positive except one red curve that comes from the comments related to the feedback form; its functionality or that it did not arrive at all. As the journey map visualizes, the customer journey of these six respondents is mainly in the positive side and marked with a green colour. Opportunity part declares

the elements that the company has as a possibility to improve and strengthen their customer journey. The experience was somehow life-changing experience for all of the respondents as all of them said that this experience has affected their behaviour and way of thinking afterwards.

7.3   Conclusion of the results

As a conclusion of the results it can be said that Ecotravellers customer journey was mainly positive but few challenges occurred in every phase of the experience. As the sample size is small, all interviews have a significant effect on the overall results. Most positive results came from the personal touch and engagement Ecotravellers has with their customers, their good knowledge of the projects and willingness to help. Company`s transparency, trustworthy, loyalty, positive image, good variety of destinations and reasonable prizes were the most important reasons to choose Ecotravellers. The information given at the website was criticised by two respondents and all of the respondents had been in contact with Ecotravellers through email. The experience was mainly really positive. Few respondents had challenges on arriving to the destination and one with the first impression of the destination. The rest had really welcoming and good impression when they arrived. Five out of six respondents had challenges with the training before the actual work started and they experienced it for being too narrow and practical. The waste sorting and recycling was criticised not being as good as in Finland and few respondents were wondering where does the waste goes in these destinations. Thus, the project organization and their professionalism was considered as being good and the animals well taken care of. All of the respondents experienced this volunteer trip somewhat life-changing experience and all of them told that they would recommend Ecotravellers to others and volunteer themselves again. Five out of six respondents had been sharing this experience in social media or other media and half of them have been talking about it in public. The observation showed that the participants who joined the Ecotravellers information evenings were really interested and aware of the nature and animal protection. Lots of questions related to responsibility of the project organization and practical arrangements before going on a volunteer trip were asked for instance carrying out the insurance, vaccinations and such.

8 Discussion

The purpose of this research was to explain how companies operating in volunteer tourism field can improve their customer experience by following responsible strategy and aimed to give ideas for the commissioner of how to create value to the company from deeper understanding of their customers` journey and how to enhance their services from the customers perspective. The key findings of this research were that the interviewed volunteer tourists appreciated the company`s transparency, professionalism and engagement throughout the volunteer experience, their aim and vision to protect the nature and the possibility to give feedback after the volunteer experience. This shows that the responsible management of the organization has a positive correlation with the overall customer experience. The volunteer experience was important to the respondents and has affected their behaviour especially considering the environmentally friendly thinking. The participants were interested about protecting the nature and its animals and that has motivated them to take part of this trip. They appreciated the responsibility of Ecotravellers and the project organization which affected positively to their overall experience.

Few negative experiences related to responsibility (recycling in the destination and the training prior the actual volunteer work experience) occurred during the journey and it influenced the overall experience which shows that responsibility is important element in volunteer tourists` customer journey. Thus, the outcome of the whole customer journey was positive and customer engagement was strong as all respondents said that they would like to go again to Ecotravellers` volunteer trip, they have recommend it to others and it has affected their behaviour afterwards. All respondents would like to go to another trip with Ecotravellers and almost all have shared this experience in social media or elsewhere and half of the respondents have been talking about this experience in public. This shows that positive customer experience can add value to the company by turning the customers into advocates of the company. Main challenges among participants were the lack of information before the actual experience and the effectiveness of communication, arrival to the destination and the limited knowledge of their own area of responsibility for the overall project goal.

The majority of the respondents were female. Only one male respondent took part of this study. All of the respondents were 26-43 years old Finnish citizens. As Guttentag (2009, 537-538) states, the growth of volunteer tourism among consumers comes from the desire to avoid mass tourism and connect pleasure-oriented travel with a conscious search for deeper meaning. All respondents of this study claimed that their biggest motive to go on

this trip was to protect nature and animals, do something different and good which affirms Guttentag`s statement.

As Stickdorn & Zehrer (2009, 7-8) explains, a customer experience in a service process consist of different touchpoints. Usually indirect touchpoints establish the starting point of a customer journey in tourism field (e.g. tourism review websites, blogs, mouth-to-mouth) and the same touchpoints can be used in the post-service period to spread the information to the potential customers. The results of this research show that all of the respondents had found Ecotravellers through different channels and most of them read information and reviews from blog posts and other media. This confirms that the pre-experience phase often starts from indirect touchpoints that are not under the providers' control. Responsibility is linked to the communication Ecotravellers share with their customers as the respondents explained that the communication was transparent and they had a positive image of the company beforehand. The information Ecotravellers share about animal and nature protection received praise from the respondents as well. All of the respondents had talked about their experience to others. Almost all had shared content in social media and half of them had been talking about it in public. Ecotravellers customer journey touchpoints includes awareness, consideration, planning, experience and advocacy in which all of them responsibility should be strongly linked because their customers main motive to go on this trip according to this research is to protect nature and animals and to do something good. This means that their expectations are high towards this experience and it is important for them to feel that their work is meaningful.

As Goodwin (2016, 1) explains, "responsible tourism is one response to the challenge of sustainability for a particular area of consumption; it is about taking responsibility for making the consumption and production of tourism more sustainable". The results of this study show contradictory outcomes of a responsibility. All of the respondents declared that the project organization and Ecotravellers worked responsibly. Examples such as transparency, sharing information of nature and animal protection, being professional and endorsing the local community were revealed. Thus, most of the respondents claimed that the training was too narrow, mostly practical and they learned by doing during the project. Sorting of waste and recycling in the destination was criticised by few respondents as well.

As Ballantyne, Packer & Sutherland (2011, 2.) states, wildlife tourism can lead to positive short-term and long-term impacts on visitor`s environmental learning by raising awareness on environmental issues, promoting sustainable attitudes and developing appreciation for wildlife and nature. As the study results show, all respondents had learned something

from their volunteer experience and it has affected their environmental behaviour. Especially the usage of plastic and its avoidance was highlighted. Actions that the volunteers had taken after this experience were directly linked to the environmental impacts and the awareness of these issues. None of the respondents mentioned socio-cultural or economic impacts as their learning outcomes, although few of these impacts were mentioned regarding the experience-phase questions.

8.1 Practical implications and further research

Overall the respondents had really positive experience with Ecotravellers. In few touchpoints, there were some issues or challenges that the respondents mentioned. As Ecotravellers do not provide transportation, transportation issues are not strongly under their control. As a service provider, the better and more honest information they are able to share about these issues that might occur during the transportation, the more realistic expectations their customers have when they are going for a volunteer trip.

All of the respondents thought that Ecotravellers is a responsible company and acting accordingly by sharing information about nature protection but none of them mentioned it as a reason to choose Ecotravellers for their volunteer experience provider. Thus, positive image, trustworthy and loyalty were mentioned which refers to responsibility. Ecotravellers could engage responsibility aspects in all of their customer journey touchpoints and act accordingly. In practise, this could be for instance when they suggest flights to the customers they could promote direct flights, carbon footprint compensation and even train connections to European destinations and share these tips in their website. Few respondents claimed that they did not receive enough information from Ecotravellers` website and they had to ask more information through email. Websites and social media channels could therefore be more informative and include sections such as "how to travel to the destination responsible way", "how to protect the local community" and other practical examples in individual level.

Responsibility should be strongly linked to the experience phase as well and as these study results show, customers who go on Ecotravellers` volunteer trip want to protect nature and its animals. Prior the actual project, volunteers should be given a wide and informative training of their own role and the overall goal of the project should be clearly explained. Almost all respondents experienced the training too narrow and half of them did not feel their own input as an important part of the overall goal. This is one development section in Ecotravellers` customer journey and as they want to be as a responsible provider as possible, the training plays a major role in the overall success of a volunteer experience. Training prior the experience could be considered as well to be

more informative, for instance providing "e-learning" material or such. This e-learning would be as well cost-effective way to train the volunteers and they could do it at home before the experience.

Ecotravellers shared good advices in their information evenings about their responsibility as a company and actions that can be taken in individual level. They could transfer this information to their website and social media channels in "short action lists", so that their communication and marketing would function even better with their vision. Also, as one respondent suggested in the interview, even fliers and other marketing materials could be made from eco-friendly paper and all the details thought to support this responsible image of the company. The importance of social proof is now becoming more and more important and as the results of this study show, people are looking for reviews, blog posts and comments before they make their buying decision. Ecotravellers could use influencers, for example bloggers, to share content and in that they widen their visibility and strengthen the information provided in customer journey pre-experience phase.

Observation results show that questions related to practical arrangements and preparation before the travel experience were asked from the participants. Ecotravellers` focus in the information evenings was to share previous customers` experiences. Previous customers could be instructed to explain their journey starting from the pre-experience phase and in that way the given information would better reach the participant`s needs and expectations. Participants were interested and curious about the responsibility aspect and wanted to know detailed information about Ecotravellers` and their volunteer trips. It shows the importance of transparency, truthful information sharing and engagement with the customers already during the pre-experience phase.

Ecotravellers could highlight the importance of staying longer than a week or two in the destination considering its significance to the overall project and local community. This would as well strengthen their responsibility in the overall volunteer tourism experience. As three out of six respondents felt that their own input was not so huge for the overall project, that could be taken into account when promoting the length of stay or the most ideal time to go on a certain destination. Socio-cultural and economic impacts are as important as the environmental impacts in responsible tourism management. Therefore, all three aspects should be carefully managed and communicated to the consumers. Considering responsibility, the respondents mostly highlighted the environmental impacts when they were asked about their learning outcomes. The importance to empower the local community and culture could be communicated better to the consumers through different channels of communication in all stages of customer journey.

The results of this study show that Ecotravellers' customers learned something new from their volunteer experience which reflected their behaviour afterwards. This is major part of the customer journey and in best scenario leads to a customer lifetime value. This could be used in Ecotravellers` marketing even more efficiently. More content around this "life changing experience"- theme could be shared in storytelling style (such as blog posts, Instagram stories and Facebook posts). As one respondent claimed, email is quite slow communication channel and to establish the pre-experience phase, Ecotravellers could communicate with their potential clients also through WhatsApp or a chat that is implemented in their website. The results of this research show that the feedback form was experienced as an important and good channel for communication during the post-experience phase. Ecotravellers could be in contact with their customers also after that for instance by asking their opinions in service development, send newsletters, organize different kinds of events and give some kinds of rewards for the loyal customers. In that way, they could keep their customer engagement strong and strengthen the customer lifetime value. As a conclusion, the main findings from the research are listed below.

Overall really positive experiences:
– Doing something good and "giving back" to nature
– Transparency and strong customer engagement
– Life-changing experience that has affected the participants` behaviour and strengthen their environmental learning

Few challenges that could be developed:
– Effectiveness of communication and the amount of information during the pre-experience phase
– Transportation issues (communication to the customers plays a crucial role)
– Training before the volunteer work started was mainly experienced being too narrow and practical (e-learning course as an option to develop it)
– Responsibility better linked to all touchpoints of customer journey (everything from the pre-experience phase to the post-experience phase thought as responsible way as possible for instance finding solutions for the recycling in the destination)
– Socio-cultural and economic impacts of volunteer tourism communicated strongly to the customers as well

The results of this research raised a lot of interesting possible future research topics. Customer experience, responsible tourism management and volunteer tourism are relatively new topics and further research is needed to explore the relationship between customer experience and responsible tourism management and their relation to the company`s value and success. These results also raised new thesis topics for Ecotravellers such as creating sustainable marketing plan, customer journey implementation into practise, developing training course for volunteers or creating a

measurement tool of the impacts Ecotravellers` projects have for the environment and local communities.

8.2 Reliability and validity

Validity refers to the accuracy and trustworthiness of the data gathered and it is the most important factor of a research. The questions should be set in such a way that the interviewees are not guided to respond in a certain way and the results and discussion derived from the data are valid. Reliability refers whether the same answer is gotten by using an instrument to measure something more than once. (Bernard 2018, 41.) Thus, validity is particularly differently understood in qualitative research than in quantitative research. Reliability is equated with trustworthiness, dependability and predictability. In qualitative research, a precise documentation of information sources includes exact specification of the sources from which information was obtained. (Flick, Von Kardoff & Steinke 2004, 187.) That can be for instance verbal statements of interviewees, recording the meaning of interviewees' statements, the context in which the statement occurred, the investigator`s observations, hypothesis and interpretations on the part of the investigator. Specifically, when researching topic that relates to the respondent's values, there is an ethic risk which means that the respondents formulates their answers so correctly that it might conflict with their other answers. (Kallio & Nurmi 2006, 11.) "Qualitative research is frequently criticised for lacking scientific rigour with poor justification of the methods adopted, lack of transparency in the analytical procedures and the findings being merely a collection of personal opinions subject to researcher bias." (Noble & Smith 2015, 34.)

Like every other research, there are limitations in this research that should be reflected when considering the results. Qualitative research and especially observation method cannot be considered as the most reliable one. Observation results were gathered in two promotional evenings which set limitations especially to the information that was gathered from the presentations. The evening was a promotional evening mainly attracting new customers for Ecotravellers. A risk that the information shared was not fully honest occurs or personal opinions of the researcher bias appears even though that was tried to be avoided as good as possible. Data collected from the participant`s behaviour in the information evenings that were observed was under the author`s own interpretation of the reserve. The interviewees were selected by the commissioner and the sample size was small consisting only six interviewees which sets limitations to the reliability of the results and so forth cannot be reflected to entire group of volunteer tourists as a whole. As Kallio and Nurmi (2015, 34) states, when the research topic relates to the respondents` values (as in this case when studying responsibility), the risk that the answers are shaped too correctly or in the way that they are assumed to be answered appears.

The same questions were asked from all six respondents in the same order. The interview schedule was tested with three persons beforehand and the respondents were informed about the ethics and trustworthiness of this study which enabled them to give honest answers and to build trust with the author. The interviews were held in Finnish language because that was the respondent's native language and therefore the interview schedule was easier to understand in Finnish. The author translated the answers of the interviews and the observation results into English which has a slight risk that the sense has changed. The research methods of this study, observation and interviews, were in line with previous studies of customer experience. Interviews could have been implemented to a wider customer group as semi-structured or unstructured interviews to gain better understanding of customer behaviour and also weak signals that might become future megatrends.

8.3   Learning outcomes

This thesis process increased the author`s knowledge of customer experience, responsible tourism management and volunteer tourism. It also raised the knowledge of research approach in general and strengthened the interviewer skills of the author. The author`s information search skills and critical thinking developed during the process as well as time management and identification of the important information from the wide amount of information that was available. The author became even more interested about the topic of customer experience and volunteer tourism through the knowledge of responsible tourism management. The author herself became interested to go on a volunteer trip and to promote and sell these kinds of experiences to the potential customers. The author will be able to use the knowledge gained from this research in her professional career and will continue strengthening her experience of these topics. Responsible tourism, volunteer tourism and customer experience are growing trends and therefore it is important for the author to constantly continue learning and growing as a professional.

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Appendices

Ekomatkaajat haastattelurunko:

Taustakysymykset:

- Minkä ikäinen olet?
- Sukupuolesi?
- Kansalaisuus?
- Titteli:
- Milloin toimit vapaaehtoisena Ekomatkaajien matkalla?

Ennen kokemusta (tietoisuus)

- Miksi päätit lähteä vapaaehtoismatkalle?
- Miten löysit Ekomatkaajat?

Ennen kokemusta (harkinta & suunnittelu)

- Millaisena koit Ekomatkaajien kotisivut ja sosiaalisen median kanavat? Mitä kautta itse hankit informaatiota yrityksestä?
- Osallistuitko Ekomatkaajien järjestämään tapahtumaan/ tapahtumiin? Jos osallistuit, miten se vaikutti ostopäätökseesi? Jos et osallistunut, miksi et?
- Millaisia kokemuksia luit/kuulit Ekomatkaajien aiemmilta asiakkailta? Miten ne vaikuttivat ostopäätökseesi?
- Mitkä olivat tärkeimmät syyt valitessasi Ekomatkaajat vapaaehtoismatkasi järjestäjäksi? (Mainitse 3-5 tärkeintä syytä).

Kokemus kohteessa

- Miten matkustaminen kohteeseen sujui ja mikä oli ensivaikutelmasi kohteesta saapuessasi perille?
- Saitko perehdytystä ennen projektin aloittamista kohteessa? Millaisena koit/koet perehdytyksen merkityksen oman matkasi onnistumisen kannalta, entä kokonaisprojektin kannalta?

- Millaisena koit oman työpanoksesi merkityksen projektin kokonaistavoitteen kannalta?
- Koetko, että kohdeorganisaatio toimi vastuullisesti? Kerro käytännön esimerkkejä, miten vastuullisuus näkyi/ ei näkynyt kohteessa?
- Olitko yhteydessä Ekomatkaajiin matkasi aikana? Millaisissa tilanteissa koet yhteydenpidon tärkeäksi matkan aikana?
- Mikä oli kaikkein voimakkain tai merkityksellisin kokemuksesi matkan aikana?

<u>Matkan jälkeen (suosittelu)</u>

- Miten Ekomatkaajat olivat yhteydessä sinuun kotiin palattuasi? Miltä tämä sinusta tuntui? Mikäli eivät, miltä se tuntui?
- Kokemuksesi perusteella, lähtisikö Ekomatkaajien kautta vapaaehtoismatkalle uudelleen? Miksi/miksi et?
- Mitä kertoisit matkakokemuksestasi muille asiasta kiinnostuneille?
- Miten olet jakanut kokemustasi muiden kanssa? (esim. kertomalla kasvotusten, sosiaalisessa mediassa tai muualla).
- Toimiiko Ekomatkaajat mielestäsi vastuullisesti? Miten tämä näkyy/ ei näy?
- Onko ajattelu- tai toimintatapasi muuttunut jollain tavalla matkan jälkeen? Mitä matka sinulle opetti?