



Kevo: A sustainable travel product

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Bachelor's Thesis

2021

Bachelor of Hospitality Tourism and Experience Management

Abstract

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Degree Bachelor of Hospitality Tourism and Experience Management
Report/thesis title Kevo: A sustainable travel product
Number of pages and appendix pages 19 + 3
Abstract <p>For the past decade, the tourism industry has experienced an immense surge in popularity, with some destinations even getting overloaded. In national parks, the overtourism issue is also beginning to become prevalent, and in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, the industry is likely to face a great number of travelers again. I have therefore chosen to plan a sustainable travel product in one of Finland's less known national parks, Kevo national park.</p> <p>This is a product-based thesis with the final goal of an ecologically sustainable and unique travel product. The thesis is not created for any specific commissioning party, but rather as a potential product to be sold in the future. The aim of the product is to act as an example for travel agencies, demonstrating how travel packages could be developed in less popular areas to spread out the amount of travel in national parks around Finland. The product should also act as an example for sustainable product development and good practice with regards to protecting the nature in the destination.</p> <p>An overview of sustainable tourism, adventure ecotourism and hiking trips is included in the thesis to provide context for the product development process. Based on research, a set of sustainability criteria are introduced and these criteria should be followed during the product development process. The most important criteria are then selected for the product plan and will be put into practice within the product. The product itself is included as an appendix to the thesis and includes a summary of the activities for the duration of the hiking product.</p> <p>The end result of the project is then examined based on the criteria and goals set at the beginning of the process and the author's personal and academic learning outcomes are discussed.</p>
Keywords Ecotourism, Sustainability, Travel, Lapland, Kevo

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1 Introduction

The travel industry has grown immensely in the past two decades. During these decades, the industry has gone through many changes as well as both highs and lows. Over the decades of growth, one issue has presented itself and proven to be a major problem caused by the travel industry. This problem is known as overtourism. In Finland, tourism has grown from 3.36 million international arrivals in 1999 to 7 million in 2019. (UNWTO, 2019) That means an increase of 48% in only two decades. Tourism is likely to keep growing and consequently, it is also likely that the issues will keep growing as well. It is therefore important for the Finnish travel industry to prepare for the growth as much as possible while we still have a chance to do so in Finland.

After traveling to the Finnish strict nature reserve Kevo in northern Finland last summer, I came to realize that Finland is filled with excellent opportunities for adventure tourism and travel in locations that most tourists do not know of. Therefore, I thought it would be interesting to design a travel product to Kevo strict nature reserve with principles of sustainable tourism in mind.

1.1 Aim and objectives

The aim for this thesis is to design a travel product in the most environmentally friendly and responsible way possible, to show what a travel experience can be like when appropriate measures are taken to make the product sustainable. The thesis will examine different ways the guests on a hike in Lapland can ensure the continuing beauty of the landscape and how they can respect nature in the best way possible.

The purpose of this thesis is to create a travel product that is designed from the bottom up as a sustainable experience, and that this product can act as a guide for travel agencies wishing to supply travel products in Kevo and Lapland. I feel it is important to design modern travel products in a sustainable manner as the global travel industry has grown exponentially in the past decades. Designing and marketing products which take overtourism and the environment into consideration is therefore increasingly important.

I became interested in writing about this topic when I travelled to Lapland last year. I went there in the first week of September, just a few weeks before the autumnal peak season hit and noticed that it was very quiet in comparison to the mass travel that happens during ruska, the time of year when the autumn foliage changes colours. Furthermore, I have also read several articles about how much travel to the region has increased during the

past years and found that during my studies in Haaga-Helia, sustainable tourism has always been an interesting topic for me. Therefore, writing a thesis discusses that topic has been my plan for quite a while.

This product focuses on Lapland and mitigation of future potential overtourism in the area. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Lapland was generally positive for the summer season, as many Finns who would normally travel abroad are now going north. Taking the time during this pandemic to plan a more sustainable and ecological travel industry is important to prevent any potential issues in the future.

The best method of preventing issues such as overtourism is taking pre-emptive measures and making sure that the industry is developing in a sustainable direction. There are plenty of materials available as guidelines for traveling in national parks around Lapland, but it requires some digging. This is where a travel product that could educate people about ecologically sound practices comes in. For example, travellers could learn about methods to reduce waste that they bring into nature and ways they can recycle by taking their rubbish out of the national park with them.

1.2 Sub-Goals

To make the process of designing of this product more manageable and the writing of this thesis clearer and more concise, I will set sub goals to focus on to complete the thesis. These sub-goals will guide me through the writing of the thesis, and they assist me in singling out the parts I want to focus on the most.

For this product, my sub-goals are:

- Making a product plan and forming a timeline for the project
- Learning about the destination through personal experience, to have as much information about the product as possible.
- Finding a system of sustainability criteria and destination criteria for the product.
- Before publication, editing the thesis and making changes to the product based on feedback received.

While designing this product, I will keep these goals in mind and, once I have completed the product and thesis, refer to my original goals and schedules in order to decide whether or not I have made a realistic plan for the work. These goals will help me with keeping myself on the track that I initially set for myself and allow me to work on the thesis bit by bit, sub-goal by sub-goal. It is my hope that these sub-goals will also assist the reader in following my train of thought and the angle from which I intend to approach the design of this product.

2 Kevo as a destination

Kevo Strict Nature Reserve (*Kevon Luonnonpuisto* in Finnish) is a national park and strict nature reserve in the northernmost reaches of Lapland, Finland. The national park has been open since 1956, has been a Natura 2000 special protection area since 2005, and a special area of conservation since 2015. (Natura 2000, 2018) The park covers an area of 712 km² and hosts the largest canyon in Finland as well as lots of open fell landscape. The park offers vast amounts of nature in the purest form available, and is therefore an ideal place to travel with a group and teach them about responsible travel in nature and what they can do to respect the environment that we exist in.



Kevo National Park on a map (Finnish Forest Institute 2021 ETRS TM35FIN)

Located very close to Inari and Utsjoki, the national park is quite easily accessible for travellers flying to Inari airport. However, Kevo is one of the less popular national parks in Finland, with only 45,200 visitors last year. (Finnish Forest Institute 2020) This is only a 0.05% share of the total 8.2 million natural parks visitors in Finland in 2020 (Finnish Forest Institute 2020a). Therefore, it is an excellent destination for redirecting tourism away from more popular national parks in the area, such as Pallas-Yllästunturi, which had over 500,000 visitors last year. (Finnish Forest Institute 2020a).

2.1 National park tourism is on the rise

The number of visits to national parks globally has been on the rise for the past two decades. This is especially noticeable in the United States, where for example the Grand Canyon national park has seen visitor numbers surge from 4.43 million visitors in 2008 to 6.38 million visitors in 2018, which constitutes an average increase of 4.4% per year. (National Park Service, 2020) This clearly shows that there is an interest in visiting national parks on a global scale, because the Grand Canyon is visited mostly by international tourists, as reflected by the statistics from 2020. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, visitor numbers dropped from 5.97 million visitors in 2019 to 2.9 million visitors in 2020. (National Park Service, 2020) Despite this dip caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the trendline is still pointing upwards. This shows that interest in visiting national parks, regardless of reason, is growing at a similar rate to the rest of the travel industry.

According to the UNWTO statistics from the year 2020 and 2021, global tourism has seen an 87% decline due to the COVID-19 pandemic but is expected to rebound by summer 2021 and it has been predicted to return to normal numbers by the end of the year. The UNWTO proposed two potential future scenarios for global travel. "The first scenario points to a rebound in July, which would result in a 66% increase in international arrivals for the year 2021 compared to the historic lows of 2020. In this case, arrivals would still be 55% below the levels recorded in 2019." (UNWTO, 2021) "The second scenario considers a potential rebound in September, leading to a 22% increase in arrivals compared to last year. Still, this would be 67% below the levels of 2019". (UNWTO, 2021)

The travel product I intend to design is suitable for most people interested in visiting a national park for a few days of hiking. Additionally, the planned route can be shortened, and the amount of physical effort required can be minimized to accommodate travellers who may not be in peak physical condition. However, this experience can by no means be compared to a visit to e.g., the Grand Canyon, which has been highly commercialised and where there is easy access by car, plenty of infrastructure available for dining, and even a multitude of lodging options. This experience is therefore not suitable for 'bucket list travellers' looking for a tour where you only visit the main attraction to take a few pictures and subsequently check it off your list of places to visit.

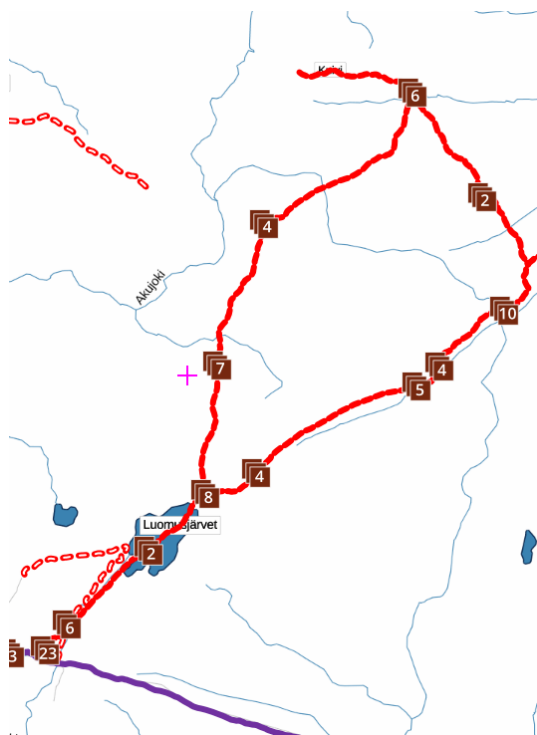
2.2 Overtourism in Finnish National Parks

According to statistics by the Finnish Forest Institute, visitor numbers in Finnish national parks have grown from 1.95 million visitors in 2010, to 3.95 million visitors in 2020, meaning a yearly increase of 7.6%. (Finnish Forest Institute, 2020b) The most dramatic increase happened last year, from 3.2 million visitors in 2019, to 3.95 million in 2020, meaning a 23% increase in visitor numbers in just one year. (Finnish Forest Institute, 2020b)

These statistics in combination with the UNWTO's scenarios mentioned above are a clear indication that the global tourism industry is expected to have a full recovery once the pandemic is over. However, this also means that the issue of overtourism is likely to become more prevalent and consequently, destination management becomes more important than ever before. The tourism industry in Lapland has been growing steadily and the area is able to handle the current levels of arrivals fairly well (Finnish Forest Institute, 2020b). However, overtourism can easily become an issue in the near future, and this trend can already be identified especially during the winter season when visitor numbers to Lapland's ski resorts skyrocket. Even in 2021, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the popular skiing centres of Ylläs and Levi have seen visitor numbers increase, as the Finnish population opted to travel north instead of their traditional holidays in the ski centres of the Alps (YLE, 2021).

Despite the surge in winter travel arrivals, Lapland is still a developing destination during the summer months, and therefore it is still possible to plan ahead and mitigate the effects of overtourism. If a major tourism boom hits when the pandemic is over and when borders reopen, destinations such as Lapland need to be prepared for record numbers of visitors as many may be keen to travel again, but in order to build the necessary infrastructure and accommodation for those incoming tourists, the destinations require funding.

2.3 The routes



Kuivin Reitti on a map (Finnish Forest Institute 2021 ETRS TM35FIN)

Kevo national park has two hiking routes which differ slightly. The first route is Kevon reitti, a route that goes along the canyon starting either from its northern or southern end. This route is 63 km long and of a medium difficulty, which mainly depends on how long your hiking days are and how many times you stop along the way. More stops mean that the hike is easier, as the hikers are allowed more time to rest, but this also requires more supplies as it will take more time to complete the route. Conversely, making less stops requires travellers to bring less supplies as they will complete the tour in a shorter amount of time, but this is more physically taxing on the hikers. The general recommendation is to plan 3-5 days for this route.

The second route is Kuivin reitti, which is a longer route that partly follows the same route as Kevon reitti, but then turns back and takes a different way across the fells back to Ruktajärvi. Kuivin reitti has the benefit of being a round-trip route, meaning it begins and ends at the same place, thus eliminating the need to organise transportation from the finishing point of the route. Kuivin reitti follows the canyon until Fiellu waterfall, where it soon diverges to the west and into the fells of Lapland. This route is approximately 86 km long and is slightly more physically demanding than Kevon reitti. For this route, the recommended duration is 4-6 days. The product I intend to design will be based on this route, as it is the hike I have tested myself and thus have more knowledge about.

2.4 Hiking products

Hiking as an activity has been growing in popularity in recent decades. Parallel to the growth of tourism, the demand for hiking routes and outdoor activities has increased dramatically. The rising popularity of hiking reveals that travellers more often want to find new ways to interact with nature. (Gherda Ferreira 1998) According to a study by Gherda Ferreira, "hiking trails are ideal for environmental education, if the intention is to introduce people to the natural environment and its related problems." (Gherda Ferreira 1998) The optimal length for an educational hiking product seems to be about 5 days. (Gherda Ferreira 1998) Travel guides play a key role in educating the visitors about nature during hiking trips, and thus, guides who are knowledgeable about nature and the methods used to protect the nature of their destination are essential to the sustainable development of educational hiking products.

A typical hiking product includes transportation to the location and rental gear if the travellers do not have their own gear already. Food and water are also provided. As an example of a typical hiking product, I will use the Tour du Mont Blanc travel product by Wildland Trekking. In their product, the group is provided transportation from Geneva International Airport to the destination village and starting point for the hike. (Wildland Trekking, s.a.)

During the hikes in this product, the average walking time per day is 7 hours and the average distance is 16 km. The product consists of shuttle transportations from destination to destination, which means that the travellers have the opportunity to familiarise themselves with a variety of hiking routes in the Mont Blanc massif. (Wildland Trekking, s.a.) The travel product I have planned differs from this one because instead of combining many hiking routes and staying at hotels overnight, my hiking products follows a single long route and the travellers are accommodated in tents at designated camping grounds along the route.

3 Sustainable Tourism

The tourism industry is a growing global phenomenon that, for the time being, is experiencing a bit of a standstill due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When the pandemic is over, the tourism industry will undoubtedly face a very stressful period with a large tourism boom that eventually will balance out and return to pre-COVID numbers. Therefore, it is essential to take the time now to ensure the tourism industry is prepared for travel on a scale that has not been seen before. To make sure that the impact of travellers on local communities is as positive as possible and on the local environment is as minimal as possible, developing solutions for sustainable tourism is of utmost importance.

Sustainable tourism is defined as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities”. (UNWTO, 2005 p. 11-12) Sustainable tourism development, i.e., taking sustainability factors into consideration when planning and developing the tourism industry, can also be applied in every form of tourism and instead of being considered a niche form of tourism development, it should rather be utilized in all forms of tourism development. As a term, sustainable tourism should not be considered a type of tourism, but rather a condition for tourism. (UNWTO, 2005 p.11-12)

According to the UNWTO, sustainable tourism should:

- 1) Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural resources and biodiversity.
 - 2) Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.
 - 3) Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities and contributing to poverty alleviation.
- (UNWTO, 2005 p. 11)

3.1 Criteria for Sustainability

The sustainability criteria utilised in the planning of this hiking product will be based on a mixture of guidelines, from the general guidelines by the Finnish Forest Institute to taking inspiration from other sustainably developed travel products in different destinations. The product will be developed with these criteria in mind and must meet the criteria to be considered a successful travel product. In the following sections, I will describe the criteria for sustainability that I have focused on when developing my travel product.

3.1.1 Rubbish-free travel

To reduce the amount of waste the travellers leave in the environment, the waste-management facilities available at campsites will only be used for composting during this experience. All other waste will be carried out of the park and sorted at a proper recycling station. (Metsähallitus, 2016)

Food will be brought to the park in reusable and washable containers, and any glass, metal or plastic that is not reusable must be carried out of the park when the group leaves. (Metsähallitus, 2016). To reduce waste, when the reusable dishes are washed, the dirty water will be poured out into the outhouses available at the campsites, where the waste will be processed in an ecological way. (Metsähallitus, 2016)

3.1.2 Sustainable transport

To be as sustainable as possible, the group will travel via bus from Helsinki to Kevo, or alternatively, if the group is already flying to Ivalo, they will be transported to Kevo by bus from Ivalo airport. To cause as little carbon emissions as possible, the chartered bus from Helsinki will be filled with other people traveling to Lapland, which can be coordinated with e.g., other travel providers. The average bus produces 26 g/ passenger kilometre of carbon dioxide (VTT Lipasto, 2020). This means a carbon dioxide consumption of 32 kg per passenger on the way to Kevo.

In Finland, the train is the greenest alternative, only producing 1.4 g/ passenger kilometre of carbon dioxide on the journey from Helsinki to Rovaniemi and back to Helsinki, (VR GROUP, 2018) with the total emissions for getting to and from Rovaniemi amounting to 2.2 kg. However, this requires changing to a bus at Rovaniemi and may cause problems with the logistics of getting as many people on the bus as possible, which is necessary to offset the carbon emissions. Furthermore, getting all the gear and equipment required for the journey to Kevo is much easier by bus.

3.1.3 Everyman's right

In Finland, there is a general rule for movement in nature called Everyman's right (*jokamiehenoikeus* in Finnish). This right is not written in law but is more of a general guideline for people roaming in Finnish nature. The Everyman's right entails a certain set of dos and don'ts for those moving in nature and is based on the principle that nature should be free for people to enjoy. Generally speaking, people are allowed to roam freely in nature as long as they do so respectfully and responsibly. (Ministry of the Environment, 2017) However, the Everyman's right does not always apply as such in nature reserves or otherwise protected areas, e.g., national parks, as there may be tighter restrictions in place which protect the sensitive flora and fauna of the area. When visiting national parks, one must follow the movement restrictions and other rules that apply to the park in question. (Ministry of the Environment, 2017)

However, this does not mean that the Everyman's right is irrelevant in the context of national park travel. While the particular movement restrictions for each national park are of

course the main rules to follow, there are still general principles included in the Everyman's right that should be considered when visiting a national park. Among these general guidelines are the following: one may not cause harm or annoyance to others or to the environment, one may not disturb nesting birds or wild animals, and one may not chop down or harm trees, litter, or drive with a motor vehicle in the terrain without the landowner's permission (Ministry of the Environment, 2017). These principles are ones that are especially important for my planned hiking product.

3.2 Adventure Ecotourism

Ecotourism is a form of travel defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of local people, and involves interpretation and education" (TIES, 2015). The concept of ecotourism is one that applies especially to the responsible traveller and is a refreshing angle to marketing a travel package. Ecotourism raises awareness for the impact tourism has not only on local economies, but also on the local culture and environment as well. The notion that ecotourism would require you to feel uncomfortable is not true, and it is fully possible to travel in an ecologically sound and sustainable way even with some or most of the comforts of home, provided the trip and the destination has been planned with the ecological impacts of tourism in mind. (Carter, B s.a.)

Adventure ecotourism combines a variety of outdoor activities, such as hiking, rock climbing, and biking, and usually includes visits to places that are meaningful to the local population, such as historical sites. An adventure ecotourism trip should include some form of education about the local community and the history of the area, as well as education about the significance of the nature that the group is visiting. The guide for a trip like this should be either native to the area or someone with a deep knowledge of the local population. (Carter, B s.a.) Furthermore, promoting collaboration and connection with the local residents is a great way to bring positive social experiences between the travellers and the local people.

For this product, adventure ecotourism is a marketing segment where I deem most of the interest for this product will come from. Marketing this product and other products like it with adventure ecotourism values in mind also enables the sustainable development of the product and reduces the chance of the guests being unaware about the environment. It also has the potential to raise the travellers' interest in what they can do to keep the environment as clean and nature as undisturbed as possible.

4 Process description

In this section of the thesis, I wish to provide a detailed description of the entire process I have gone through while writing this thesis, from conducting background research to designing the finishes product. This section is also aimed at providing insight into the plan I made before beginning the project. The below graphic shows the steps I will follow to complete the product.

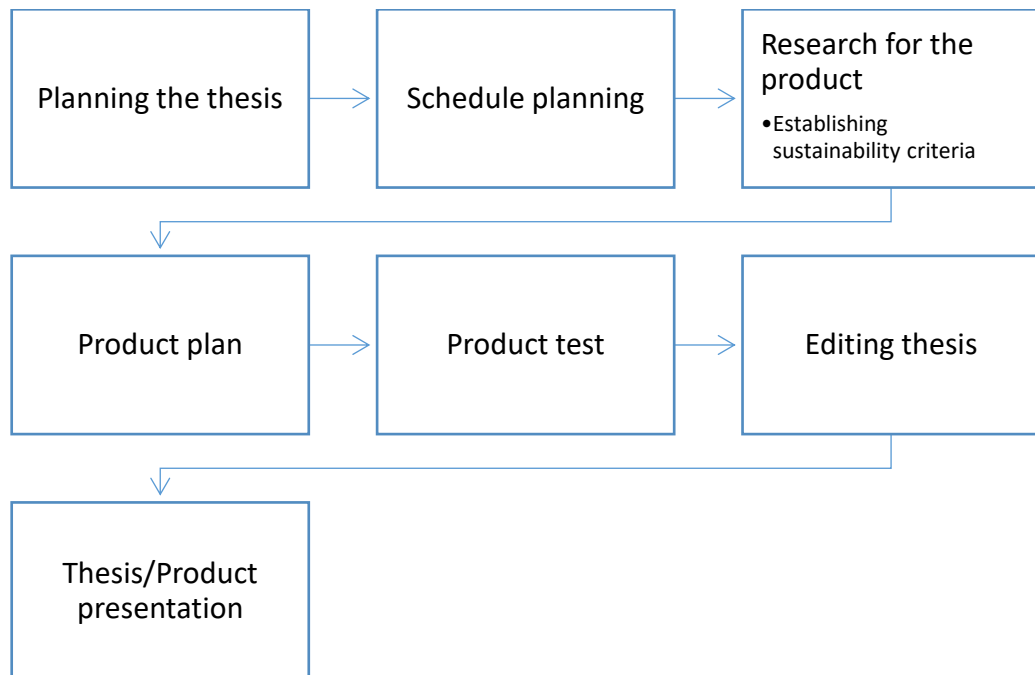


Figure 1. The planned process for the product and thesis

4.1 Project plan

The first step in the process was making the plan for the project. This step was essential to have a clear idea of what I will be doing at the different stages of the project, as well as having an clear-cut plan before beginning the writing process. In the planning stage I also considered a multitude of destinations for my product before deciding to make Kevo strict nature reserve the destination of my product. I settled on Kevo due to my personal experience of hiking in the reserve, as this experience greatly impacted me. Additionally, the planning stage was also focused on creating an outline for the project, making an initial table of contents to then be used while conducting research for the product and as mentioned before, to provide a clear picture of what the contents of the project would be.

4.2 Research

The research for this project was conducted using mainly scientific articles and official government sources. My purpose was to find out how I could make the product sustainable, to establish the criteria for sustainability that I wish to use in this product, as well as finding ways to enforce the criteria while the travellers are in the strict nature reserve. Research was also conducted to find statistics on tourism in Lapland and national parks in general, to have a clear picture of the global impact of tourism on national parks.

The main source of information for this project was the Finnish Forest Institute, as they had plenty of guidelines for how they wish visitors in Kevo National Park should behave and what they should do to keep the wilderness as untouched as possible. Furthermore, I looked up information about other hiking travel products similar to the one I was planning in order to give context to what a typical hiking travel product may include and how my product does things differently in order to be more ecological.

4.3 Product Test

The product was tested prior to the actual product plan was made, when I travelled to the national park in September 2020. This experience has been used in planning the route and has helped immensely in the entire process. During this test, I checked the available infrastructure in the area, how many people could fit at each campsite and how comfortable the overall experience was. The product test also helped me outline the time it takes roughly to complete a hike this long, and how demanding it is physically. The product test also allowed me to take pictures in the area to present the national park in its full beauty with my own pictures.

4.4 Limits of Acceptable Change- method

There are certain practices in place for preserve the nature of the natural parks of Finland, but which still allow the building of infrastructure, provided that the infrastructure aids in keeping the national park clean and that the positive impact of the built infrastructure outweighs the negative ecological impacts of building said infrastructure. This method, with some modifications, can also be applied to product development. It is a good tool for developing a sustainable product which is in line with the goals of the Finnish Forest Institute and their vision for ecological travel in national parks. This is measured using the Limits of Acceptable Change- method, the LAC method in short. The LAC method was first developed by Stankey Et. Al 1985, and has since been modified and is used broadly by institutes similar to the Finnish Forest Institute globally and is also in use with the Finnish Forest Institute today.

The first step in the LAC process is to specify what conditions, both socially and in terms of resource use, are both achievable and acceptable. In the case of my product this includes attempting to identify ecological risks, such as ground erosion, littering in the environment, as well as causing more noise than necessary. (Mccool, S 1997) The second step is to identify when this limit has been exceeded. In the context of the planned hiking products, this entails identifying when the group is not acting responsibly and respectfully, and setting appropriate limits for noise, littering and other ecological factors.

The third step is defining actions that are to be taken in order to prevent these limits being exceeded. (Mccool, S 1997) For example, if the group is making too much noise by yelling or moving outside the marked trails, the guide needs to step in and remind the guests that they are in a strict nature reserve and should remain on the marked trails and keep excess noise such as yelling at a minimum. One of the major risks for this product is the negative ecological impact the group can have on the environment, for example by leaving rubbish in the park, by leaving the marked trails, thereby causing damage to the sensitive landscape, or by making excessive noise, which may disturb protected species such as birds during their nesting periods. In order to prevent this type of misbehaviour, the group will be educated about the ways they can minimize their impact on nature during the trip.

4.5 SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis is another popular tool used by many businesses these days in a variety of industries for determining the potential of their business ventures. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. "SWOT has been around for decades and could lay claim to being the most widely used strategy tool in modern times. It is used by industry, commerce, and charitable and voluntary organisations" (Sarsby, A 2016)

SWOT is a useful tool mainly when planning business strategies, as the results of the analysis can assist in having a clearer view about particular ideas as well as the opportunities and obstacles these ideas bring along. However, according to Sarsby, "[i]t is dangerously easy to undertake a SWOT analysis that does not result in a strategy" (Sarsby, A 2016) In a SWOT analysis, you categorize the factors into strengths and weaknesses, which are internal factors that you have control over, and opportunities and threats, which are external factors that you do not have control over. The strengths and opportunities are categorized as helpful factors and the weaknesses and threats are categorized as harmful factors. (Sarsby, A 2016)

In the following sections, I will discuss each of the four SWOT factors in the context of my planned hiking product to Kevo strict nature reserve.

4.5.1 Strengths

The main strength I see with this product and Kevo as a destination is the fact that it is a lesser-known national park which is still maintained to a high standard. This allows for comfortable adventure ecotourism in the area, which is the main marketing standpoint of the travel product. Transport to the area can be arranged from Helsinki via a private bus, or from Rovaniemi with a public bus, as public buses go to and from Kevo every day. From a product development standpoint, Kevo is also ideal as the area lends itself very well for teaching people about ecological travel in nature. It is also easier to make a structured plan and contingency plans in the national park due to the restricted movement in the area.

This product is also very cheap to run, the budget for the whole package considering transport, food, and, if the guests do not have their own equipment, equipment rentals, will be approximately 300€ per person. The main cost for the trip is the bus ride from Helsinki to Kevo, or the flight-bus combination. The bus trip would cost 170€ per person on average and the flight and bus combination would cost approximately 200€ per person on average.

4.5.2 Weaknesses

The main weakness for this product is the limited flexibility offered by public transport, i.e., trains and buses, if this transportation option is chosen. While cheaper, the public bus will require a much stricter schedule for the trip, and the group must make it to the bus on time or face a long waiting period at the bus stop, as the bus away from Kevo departs only once daily (Matkahuolto, s.a.). A chartered bus to Kevo would be more costly but allow for a more flexible schedule, thus allowing travellers to take a bit longer breaks or to stop to take photographs without worrying about missing the only bus connection that day.

Another potential weakness of Kevo as a destination is that, as opposed to other parks in the area, Kevo restricts movement during the summer months and thus does not allow for free roaming. Therefore, the group may only hike along the marked trails and are not allowed to venture into the beautiful fell landscapes, which might be considered as negative by some travellers. During the winter, however, the park is fully open. A winter trip, albeit beautiful, would be more expensive due to added costs in material and gear. Additionally, a long hiking trip in the cold winter landscape of Lapland is not easily marketed to all travellers and would therefore most likely only be utilised by very experienced winter hikers.

Due to the added expense and niche nature of a winter hike, I would personally time the visit during the warmer months of the year.

4.5.3 Opportunities

A key benefit of Kevo as a destination are that it is an extremely large area, thus offering a variety of landscapes and views, but the options for movement are limited during the summer months as it is a strict nature reserve. This means that it is much easier to manage the impact travel in the area has on the environment. Every stopping point on the planned paths are well managed with points for leaving trash, outhouses, and fireplaces for cooking.

One of the main opportunities in Kevo as a destination is that the park is quite unique and does not have a lot of competition when it comes to similar landscapes in Finland. On a local level, the park has major potential to draw visitors and to act as a diversion from only traveling to the largest, most built up national parks in Lapland. The area is also exceedingly peaceful and is therefore also an excellent choice for a group of travellers that appreciate their own peace and quiet. While on the route, it is rare to see other people than the ones traveling in your group, and the ones that you do meet may engage in some friendly small talk but mostly give other travellers their personal space.

4.5.4 Threats

Due to the strict way the national park is governed, the biggest threat to a travel product in an area such as Kevo is that the infrastructure that has been put into place gets overloaded due to big groups of people. The Finnish Forest Institute has combatted this by introducing a fee for travel groups where the group pays 1,20€ per person per use of campsite infrastructure. The Finnish Forest Institute also has two partners who are offering experiences all around Lapland, but neither of these partners has made a package deal. Opting instead for a tailor-made experience for the groups they guide. These other partners in the area are operating mainly with domestic customers, and this product is different as it will be catering to both domestic and international customers. As far as I could find out through research, there are no international travel companies providing hiking trips into Kevo natural park.

4.6 Product Plan

The travel product can have two starting points: Helsinki and Ivalo. The trip can start off either in Helsinki with a chartered bus ride all the way to Kevo, or at Ivalo airport, from which a bus will take the travellers to Kevo. The bus from Helsinki will depart in the evening and travel through the night, arriving at Kevo early the following morning. During the bus ride and upon arrival there will be some commentary and briefing for the travellers about the destination, including a description of the natural significance of a place as unique as Kevo canyon in Finland.

Day 1. After the long bus ride to the destination, the first day will commence with an easy 10-kilometer hike to the first campsite at Ruktajärvi. This campsite has plenty of space for people to camp and includes an outhouse and waste management facilities. For this product, however, any waste that is brought into the park is also brought out of the park to reduce the required maintenance rides with ATVs into the park. This will help in minimizing the ecological impact that the group has on the environment and will act as a good example of sound practice in nature. At this campsite, the group will spend the first night and morning, including cooking food in the wild and sleeping in their own tents. In case the travellers are inexperienced at tenting and outdoors life, the guide will provide help as well as answer any questions the travellers may have. The guide will also teach the travellers about ecological travel in national park and good sustainable practices to follow in nature.

Day 2. The second day will be spent hiking from Ruktajärvi all the way to Fiellu, a distance of around 16 kilometres. This is one of the more strenuous days as this leg of the journey contains a lot of both ascent and descent, but the hikers are rewarded with unique views of the fell landscapes. There is a shelter along the way with a place to make a fire for food and a river where refilling water bottles is possible. At this shelter, the lunch for the day will be eaten and the travellers get some rest before the final push to see the best view of the entire route, the Kevo Canyon. Day two is by far the most visually stunning day and provides great opportunities for taking pictures of one of the most unique locations Finland has to offer. During the day, the guide will tell the travellers about the formation of the canyon and the significance of it to Finnish nature. At the Fiellu campsite, there is a small indoor shelter for cooking and many places for campfires. This campsite also provides wooden platforms to place the tents on, which gives an added layer of comfort for the night and reduces the impact of pitching the tents on nature. This campsite does have a waterfall right next to it, which causes some extra noise, but the noise is not too bad once you are in the tents.

Day 3. Day three will be spent hiking from Fiellu to Kuivi, which is around 10 kilometres and (for those who dare) up to the top of Kuivin tunturi, adding an 8 km extra to the day's total. The day mainly consists of walking across stunning open landscapes with views up to 5 kilometres in each direction. This day is the most peaceful during the whole experience and allows for a leisurely pace. Ending the day with a hike to the top of Kuivi is the icing on the cake, as the views from the top are breath-taking. You can watch the sunset and then walk back down to the campsite, where dinner will be cooked, and you can go to sleep feeling happy. During this day, the guide will be teaching the travellers about the local fauna and flora, and how significant the natural beauty of this place is.

Day 4. Day four is by far the longest day, hiking from Kuivi campsite all the way back to Ruktajärvi. This is roughly a distance of 23.5 km, but the terrain for the day is quite good, with little altitude gain compared to other days. During this day, there will be opportunity for pausing to eat at least three times, and if the group cannot push all the way to Ruktajärvi, it is possible to stay at one of the earlier campsites, e.g., Njavgoaivi, and rest an extra night. This day is a good example of how this product can be flexible in the way the experience is managed. You can have a group with a faster tempo and a group with a slower tempo, and both have access to well-kept campsites. Due to the toughness of this day, the group will be able to go straight to bed afterwards.

Day 5. Day five of the trip is the most rewarding, as you get to do the last stretch on the same path you walked on day one, which gives the guests time to reflect upon the trip they have just experienced and enjoy a calm pace for the final 10 kilometres of the journey. During the final leg of the journey, the guide can give a brief talk about nature conservation in Finland in general and then ask the travellers about their experience. The leisurely pace of the last day allows travellers to ask the guide any questions they may have about the destination, adventure ecotourism, or hiking in general, and the entire group can discuss their experience and any thoughts that have come up during the hike. Before getting on the bus, the guide will instruct all travellers to place whatever garbage they have accumulated during the hike in the appropriate recycling bins at the Sulaoja parking lot. After a short rest, the group will load the equipment onto the bus and then commence the journey back to either Helsinki or Rovaniemi.

4.7 Sustainability in the destination

To ensure that the product is sustainable it will use the criteria established in the section on sustainability criteria, and in case any of the travellers have questions about why they need to do certain things, the guide can explain the reasoning behind the steps taken. The group will carry any plastic trash and other non-biodegradable waste out of the national

park to minimize the number of times ATVs must drive into the national park to empty the recycling bins. ATVs make noise and cause damage to the nature in the area, even with the small tracks that have been made for the ATVs to drive along. (Metsähallitus, 2016). Therefore, it is good practice to take your own garbage out with you and use as many reusable items as possible. For example, food can be brought to the park in reusable and washable containers, and any glass, metal or plastic that is not reusable must be carried out of the park when the group leaves. (Metsähallitus, 2016).

Transport to and from the destination will be done using charter buses from Helsinki in order to minimize the carbon footprint of getting to the destination. Based on my findings while establishing the sustainability criteria, flights should be avoided as they pollute much more heavily than charter buses.

5 Discussion

Sustainable travel development is an integral part of the modern travel industry, and products that have been designed sustainably are generally more favoured as they take into consideration the ecological and societal impacts of travel to an area. In Finland, sustainability is taken into consideration in most of modern travel development, and it is extremely important to consider every possible way of being more ecological, especially within the context of national park tourism. There are plenty of uses for a sustainable travel product such as mine, for instance, if a travel company wants to develop a hiking product in a national park in Finland, this thesis and the product were meant to act as examples for these companies. In this section of the thesis, I will discuss the overall success of the project, the reliability of the information in the thesis and my personal learning outcomes from the thesis writing process.

5.1 Project success

In order to publish the final version of the thesis, I will evaluate whether the project is a success or not by examining if the thesis meets the aims and objectives that I set out at the beginning of the writing process. I will also examine whether I followed the schedule (Appendix 1) that I created at the start of the thesis process, and whether the contents of the finalized thesis match the plans I had at the beginning.

Overall, the sub-goals that I set at the beginning of the writing process were met, and the goals that I set for myself were realistic and manageable considering the time that I had to plan the finalized product. I feel like the final product could have gone more in-depth with displaying the way sustainability was taken into consideration during the planning process,

but if the product is put into practice, I feel like the sustainability criteria that I set for the product will meet the goal of protecting nature and educating the visitors about ecological travel. All the sustainability criteria that I have used in developing this product are used by multiple organizations and are from trustworthy sources when it comes to sustainable development.

5.2 Learning outcomes

Throughout the process of designing this product and writing the thesis, I have learned a lot about sustainable tourism management in national parks. Through researching the topic, I have gained insight into the good sustainable practices utilised in Finnish national parks to protect and preserve the beautiful nature of our country. The process has also taught me a lot about Finland as a potential tourism destination, as it is easy to see your own country as a boring place to visit. Finland has a lot of appeal to both domestic and foreign travellers and should be considered as a unique destination.

On an academic level, I have learned a lot about searching for reliable sources and utilising the information from those sources. The writing of this thesis has also taught me about structuring a report in a logical and coherent way. I have also learned how to design a travel brochure which highlights the most important features of the travel product in an easily digestible manner. I learned to write a thesis following the formatting instructions given by Haaga-Helia and using the referencing methods described in the thesis reporting instructions. As this is my first thesis experience, it will serve as an excellent background for potential future endeavours.

In terms of personal development, this process has taught me to be resilient and push through writing and research, which has been a difficult thing for me to do in the past. Most of my writing before this thesis has been less based in sources and more opinion based. For writing a thesis, references and a good research base to write the thesis on is essential. While writing the thesis has taught me to be resilient and to push through, I still feel I could manage my scheduling and time usage better.

Overall, writing this thesis has taught me a lot about myself as a writer and has served as a good way to find things within myself that I need to improve upon. I feel like having a partner or a commissioning party for the thesis would have helped me in pushing a bit harder and may have resulted in a more detailed research base. Having people on the inside of the industry the thesis is designed for would have helped a lot in gaining information about the current situation of sustainable development for products such as mine. All in all, I am rather happy with how the product turned out and I strongly feel that it could

be used in the future as an example for sustainable product development for the tourism industry.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Schedule

The following is the schedule that I made for writing the thesis in the beginning of my writing process, this schedule and whether or not I have held to it is discussed in the Discussion segment of the thesis.

January	February	March	April	May
Planning the thesis	Research for the thesis	Writing the thesis	Writing/editing the thesis	Presentation and grading of thesis
Thesis outline	Framework/Table of contents	Further research	Sending thesis in for comments	
Schedule plan		Product plan	Final version by end of month	
		Product test (done previously)	Publishing thesis	

Figure 2. Estimate of the schedule.

Appendix 2. Product description



THE TRIP TO KEVO NATIONAL PARK INCLUDES

- 01** Transport to the destination and back via bus from Helsinki
- 02** Hiking equipment, food, water, and a guide
- 03** A 5-6 day hike through some of the most breathtaking and idyllic scenery in Finland
- 04** Education about ecological hiking, and detailed explanations about the nature the group moves through.



The first day of the hike will be a relaxing 10 kilometer walk to the first campsite at Ruktajärvi, through wooded areas and walking on a ridge between two lakes, this day offers a peaceful and serene ambience and serves as a great warmup for the tougher days ahead. The total time taken for this day is about 3 hours of walking. In the evening, the guide will explain to the group about ecological camping and sustainable practices while camping.



The second day of the hike is 16 km long, and involves a lot of ascent and descent, through beautiful valleys and open fell landscapes, with a lunch at a campsite on the way to the most striking view of the hike. The daily hike will end at Ejellu campsite. This day will take around 5 hours of walking in total. During the day, the guide will be providing information about the nature and the way the canyon has been shaped over thousands of years.



The third day is a relaxed 10 km walk to the campsite at the base of Kuivi fell, where the group can decide who wants to go to the top of the fell. This day involves mainly open fell landscapes but also some beautiful rock formations. Without going to the top of the fell, the duration of the days hike is 3 hours. This day at the campsite and during a pause in the hike, the guide will be describing the fauna and flora of the region and the significance of it.

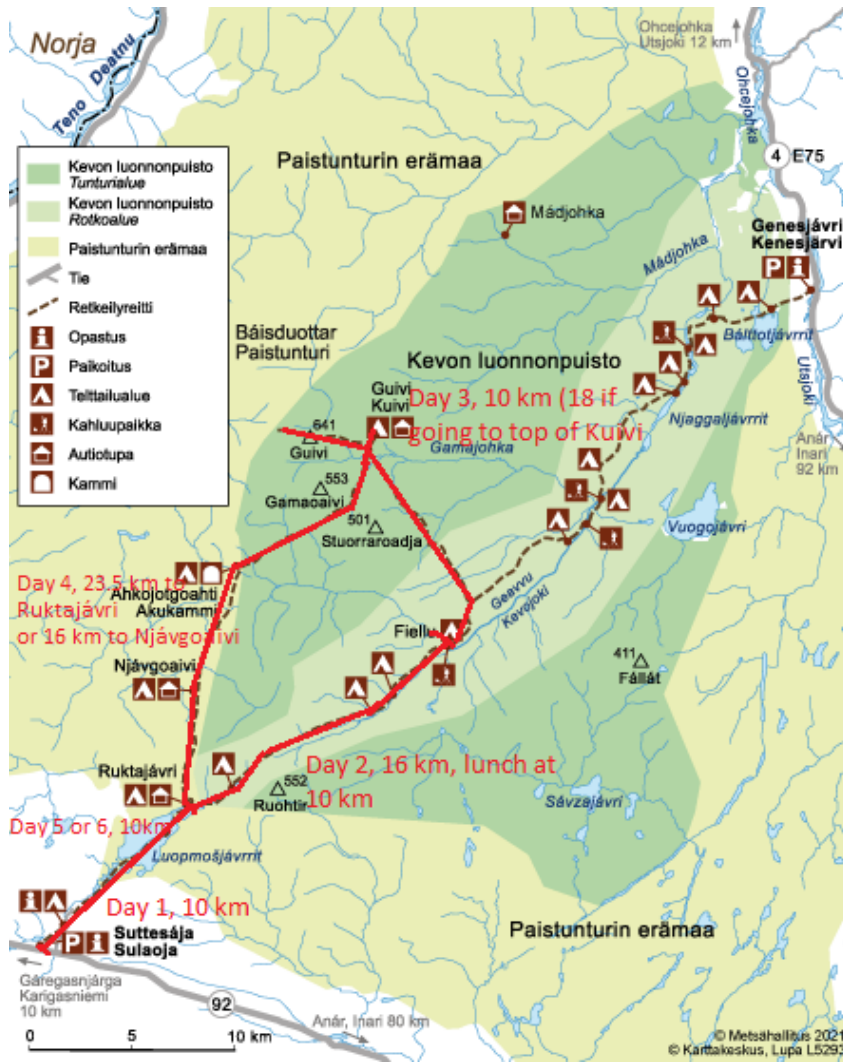


The fourth day is the longest walk during the entire hike, 23.5 km, and can be split into a two-day hike, with one day being 9 km and the second being 14.5 km. This day offers up an excellent chance to see open fields, with fells surrounding you in the distance during the whole day. This day is the most challenging and at the campsite there will be no planned activity, and the group can spend their free time however they wish.



The fifth and final day is 10 km long, retracing the steps from day 1 through the ridge between the two lakes, and ends at the parking lot, where the bus will be waiting to take the group back to Helsinki.





Planned route map