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Ilomantsi as a destination for German-speaking tourists

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<p>Germany is the second largest tourism market for Finland, which makes it an attractive market for Ilomantsi. Further, Switzerland has been a steady growth market and Austrian interest in Finland increased as well. These German-speaking countries share many similarities, which allows marketing a bigger and broader group of people.</p> <p>This thesis looked at Ilomantsi as a tourism destination and studied in this context the motivations, values, and main factors for the destination choice of German-speaking tourists. The aim was to give ideas for improving Ilomantsi's existing products and services and a starting point for a marketing strategy towards the German-speaking market. The theoretical framework introduced target marketing, consumer behavior in tourism and an overview about the German-speaking tourism market.</p> <p>The empirical part used a qualitative research method and was carried out in the form of semi-structured theme interviews. Therefore, five German-speaking repeat visitors and cottage owners of Ilomantsi were interviewed and the collected data was analyzed through data-driven content analysis. As a result nature, location, infrastructure, communication and offering emerged as five common themes from the analyzing process.</p> <p>The researched group of tourists desired activities, services and products that involve nature, learning about the culture and contact with locals. Further, the main reasons for the destination choice were getting away from everyday life and relaxing in nature, the available activities and learning something new. Nature, wilderness and little civilization showed to be the motivations and pull factors for German-speaking tourists who travel to Ilomantsi. The results suggested that niche marketing is vital to make marketing efforts more effective and efficient and further, to make the destination more attractive.</p>		
<p>Key words Tourist motivation, target marketing, consumer behavior in tourism, German-speaking tourism market</p>		

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1 INTRODUCTION

The German-speaking tourism market offers great potential as a target market for Finnish tourism. Combined, Germany, Austria and Switzerland have almost 100 million inhabitants and the countries have a strong and stable economy, which leads to a population with high living standards. (Plecher 2018.) Already before the Corona pandemic, Germany was one of the key markets for Finnish tourism and the German travel intentions has scarcely decreased during Covid-19 according to a recent survey, carried out by ReiseAnalyse (Sperling 2020). Further, Austrian and Swiss interest in Finland as a holiday destination has been growing steadily over the past decade (Visit Finland 2019). The German-speaking countries have many similarities in values and lifestyle (Plecher 2018), which offers great potential to target all three countries with similar strategies.

Nature plays an essential part in the decision-making process of German-speaking tourists for their holiday (Sonntag & Wagner 2016; Statista Dossier: Reiseverhalten der Österreicher 2020; Statista Dossier: Reiseverhalten der Schweizer 2020). Ilomantsi has several interesting sights, traditional cuisine and beautiful sceneries that are embraced by two national parks, namely Petkeljärvi and Patvinsuo. Further, North Karelian cultural heritage is being showcased in Ilomantsi. (Website of Visit Karelia n.d.) All these characteristics give Ilomantsi great potential to attract German-speaking tourists and turn them into repeat customers. Interest in Finland as a holiday destination exists amongst the German-speaking tourist market. However, the interest in Finland is bigger than the actual decision to experience it. (Sonntag & Wagner 2016.) Thus, target marketing is important, in order to attract this potential market.

The topic of the research is to identify the motivators and pull factors of Ilomantsi for German-speaking tourists. Hence, next to target marketing, the theoretical framework looks at consumer behavior in tourism and at the German-speaking tourism market, to gain an understanding about the subject. The findings should offer ideas of improving

existing, and further, to develop new tourism products and services, as well as to give a base for creating a marketing strategy directed towards the German-speaking market. The co-operation with Ilomantsi Tourism Association for this thesis was a result of the author's previous internship at a bed and breakfast in Ilomantsi. During the practical training, the potential of Ilomantsi as a tourism destination for German-speaking people was recognized. It gave inspiration for improvement possibilities to enhance tourism in Ilomantsi.

2 RESEARCH STARTING POINTS

As a tourism destination, Ilomantsi experiences difficulties with increasing the number of repeat customers and tourists that stay longer than one or two nights (Tuomisto, personal communication on 16.3. 2021). Germany is the second largest tourism market for Finland, which makes it an attractive target market for Ilomantsi. Further, Switzerland has been a steady growth market and the interest of Austria for Finland as a tourism destination has been increasing over the past decade. (Website of Business Finland n.d.) Each of these countries has its own characteristics and dynamics, however, they share many similarities. This gives the opportunity to market a bigger and broader group of people with more or less the same strategies. (O'Neill 2021.) These facts indicate that the German-speaking tourism market could be a promising target market for Ilomantsi.

2.1 Purpose and objectives

The purpose of the thesis is to study the motivations, values and main factors for the destination choice of German-speaking tourists in order to improve Ilomantsi's existing products and services. Further, it aims to provide a starting point for a marketing strategy towards the German-speaking tourism market. Thus, the theoretical framework introduces target marketing, consumer behavior in tourism and an overview about the German-speaking tourism market.

The main research question seeks to *identify the tourist motivators and pull factors of Ilomantsi for German-speaking tourists* and is assisted by three sub-questions:

- What do German-speaking people value on their holiday?
- What are the main reasons for the destination choice?
- What kind of services and products do German-speaking tourists expect from a destination?

2.2 Usability and delimitations

The research puts the focus on German-speaking repeat customers and cottage owners of Ilomantsi. Identifying the reasons why this customer group keeps coming will give Ilomantsi Tourism Association a better idea about the motivations, values and desires of the German-speaking target market. The findings of the research can help to develop products and services that attract German-speaking tourists. This can give Ilomantsi a competitive advantage for drawing more tourists to the destination and help to enhance tourism in Ilomantsi and North Karelia.

Not all German-speaking people have the same wants, needs and desires and thus, it is necessary to include delimitations for this thesis to establish concrete results. Further, the results are created for Ilomantsi Tourism Association, hence the study considers their resources and requests. Therefore, the thesis focuses only on repeat visitors and property owners of Ilomantsi, which results in certain delimitations. Leaving out a wider group of German-speaking tourists including those who only came once, can lead to not gathering potential valuable information such as the reasons for not coming or revisiting.

3 RESEARCH COMMISSIONER

A previous internship of the researcher in Ilomantsi inspired to do a tourism thesis in connection with Ilomantsi. Finding possibilities to enhance tourism in Ilomantsi and improve products and services for the German-speaking market are important elements for a destination and its marketing. Thus, the commissioner for this thesis is Ilomantsi Tourism Association.

3.1 Ilomantsi Tourism Association

Ilomantsi Tourism Association is an organization that seeks to generate more tourism activity and income for Ilomantsi region. The association consists of many small tourism enterprises from the area and is also the organization behind Visit Ilomantsi. Thus, they are responsible for marketing, tourism development projects and advisory services of Ilomantsi area. (Website of Visit Ilomantsi n.d.)

The association wants to improve and develop tourism in the region through cooperation between its members. Activities aim to increase the attractiveness and visibility of the destination and to secure the common interests of the local tourism enterprises. (Tuomisto, personal communication on 16.3. 2021.) They seek to add value to Ilomantsi through participating in different development projects that support tourism networking and sustainable practices for nature-based tourism. Ilomantsi Tourism Association cares strongly about non-destructive tourism uses of natural landscapes and wants to maintain many typical, local cultural characteristics. (Website of SHAPE Project n.d.)

3.2 Ilomantsi as a tourism destination

Ilomantsi is the easternmost municipality of Finland and situated in North Karelia province, close to the Russian border. The 1875 founded village counts almost 5.000 inhabitants and looks back at a great war history. North Karelian cultural and natural heritage is being showcased in Ilomantsi through Karelian traditions and building

heritage, music, military history, art, traditional cuisine, Orthodox religion and nature. (Website of Visit Ilomantsi n.d.)

Ilomantsi is also known to be the Kalevala municipality and its nature offers a rich combination of marshlands, hills, forests and water bodies. Nature conservation areas and reserves make up 25.000 hectares of the municipality and provide hundreds of kilometers of hiking trails. Further, stunning nature can be found in two national parks, namely Petkeljärvi and Patvinsuo National Parks. All these characteristics are taken into account by the destination when creating customer products and services. (Website of Visit Ilomantsi n.d.) Therefore, it can be said that Ilomantsi has great potential to improve tourism activity.

Considered from a tourism point of view, Ilomantsi is a small place and therefore, no detailed tourist statistics are available specifically for Ilomantsi (Tervakorpi 2021). Nevertheless, to gain some understanding of the tourist situation in Ilomantsi, it was looked at statistics from the region of North Karelia as demonstrated in Table 1. Displayed below is the development of the tourism numbers between the years 2019 and 2021. It shows the registered bed nights by country and their percentage shares. In order to give an understanding of the situation before Covid-19, it was looked at the year 2019. Further, the year 2020 gives an idea about the position during the height of Covid-19. Lastly, the year 2021 aims to indicate potential developments after Covid-19 restrictions have tailed off due to the vaccination coverage. (Website of Visitory 2021.)

Table 1. Registered Bed Nights by Country of Arrival (Website of Visitory 2021)

Country	Jun-Aug 2019	Jun-Aug 2020	Jun-Aug 2021	Share 2019	Share 2021
Finland	208.000	194.000	215.000	87,3%	96,5 %
Total Foreign	30.400	6.500	7.800	12,7%	3,5%
Germany	5.300	2.500	2.100	2,2%	1,0%
Austria	930	500	570	0,4%	0,3%
Switzerland	1.800	360	280	0,8%	0,1%

It can be seen that Finnish tourists have always been the biggest customer group of North Karelia, which also has not drastically changed during the Corona pandemic.

On the contrary, foreign visitor numbers have changed enormously between 2019 and 2021. Already before the pandemic, foreign counties have had a relatively small market share in North Karelia, however for obvious reasons, the numbers have decreased from a 12,5% market share in 2019 to a 3,5% share in 2021. In the year 2021, the overall foreign bed nights started to recover slowly again. Interesting to see is that compared to Austria and other foreign countries, where the numbers improved in 2021, the numbers of Germany with 2.500 nights in 2020 have decreased to 2.100 nights in 2021. The same counts for Switzerland, which had 360 nights in 2020 and 280 nights in 2021. (Website of Visitory 2021.)

Even though German tourist numbers have dropped recently, people in Germany are still interested to travel to Finland. A recent study by ReiseAnalyse showed that 11,1% of the German population (equals about 7,8 million people) are planning to visit Finland within the next three years. (Sonntag 2021.) In order to gain a market share in North Karelia, Ilomantsi should look at the visitor profiles already existing in North Karelia. By doing so, they can reason how to attract these visitors and make them choose Ilomantsi instead of other destinations in North Karelia. Possible visitor profiles for Ilomantsi are discussed later in Chapter 6.2.

4 TARGET MARKETING FOR A DESTINATION

Tourism destinations are places with a physical or perceived boundary, in which a tourist spends a minimum of one night (World Tourism Organization 2007, 1; Kotler, Bowen, Makens & Baloglu 2017, 346). The destination system is supported by external and environmental aspects, consisting of sociocultural, economic, political and physical factors (Wang & Pizam 2011, 3). Combined, all these components lead to the destination's attractiveness, which is being shaped by its attractions, facilities and services, accessibility, human resources, price and image (World Tourism Organization 2007, 1-2; Kozak & Baloglu 2010, 6). Through identifying the tourist motivators and decision-making factors of German-speaking tourists, Ilomantsi's marketing can improve.

Tourists differ in their wants, characteristics and buying processes, thus a destination cannot appeal to all of them. Each destination varies in its abilities to serve different segments of the tourism market and therefore a destination has to identify the segments that it can serve best and most profitably. Using the concept of target marketing as seen in Figure 1 helps to identify market segments and select the right ones, to design products and services tailored to each group. In context with Ilomantsi Tourism Association, this means that they should focus on customers who have a high interest in the values which Ilomantsi creates best. In doing so, it can assist in improving the destination's competitiveness. (Kotler, et al. 2017, 150.)

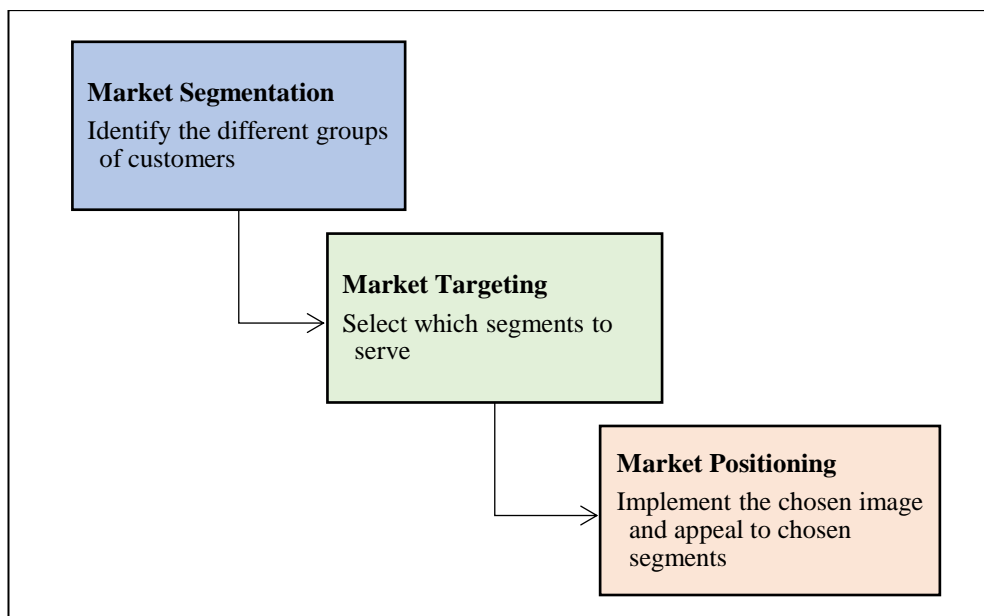


Figure 1. Steps of target marketing (Strong 2014, 140)

Segmentation, targeting and positioning make up the three main steps of target marketing as can be seen in the figure above. The first step is market segmentation, which involves dividing the market into different groups that demand separate products. In this stage, different methods of segmentation are explored, and profiles of possible customer segments are created. Next, the market targeting looks at the attractiveness of each segment and then selects one or more target segments. The final step is the market positioning, where the development of a competitive positioning strategy for the product or service takes place and therefrom a marketing mix can be developed. (Kotler et al. 2017, 150.)

Within this chapter, it will be looked at how target marketing can help to market a destination more effectively and create value for the targeted customers (Tsiotsou & Goldsmith 2012, 3). The process of target marketing is a chain of events, and all three steps rely on each other to work. The theory of target marketing and its steps of segmentation, targeting and positioning can help Ilomantsi Tourism Association to develop a marketing strategy.

According to Kotler, Armstrong & Opresnik (2018, 74), a marketing strategy is an organization's strategic plan for reaching potential customers and turning them into their customers. This is done by creating value for customers and building profitable customer relationships. It involves the decision about which customers will be served

through segmentation and targeting and further, how to serve those customers through differentiation and positioning. Within the marketing strategy, the seven marketing mix elements (product price, place, promotion, people, process and physical evidence) should be covered because they assist in giving a service or product a strong positioning on the market. A good marketing strategy communicates to customers what the organization stands for, how they function and why they are the right choice for the service or product. The aim of a marketing strategy is to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage over competing organizations in the market.

4.1 Market segmentation

Market segmentation can be defined as dividing the tourist market into smaller customer segments or groups that share common characteristics (World Tourism Organization & European Travel Commission 2007, 3; Kotler et al. 2017, 150). Identifying homogenous tourist segments helps to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of marketing because it allows marketers to see the needs, desires and preferences of the different tourist segments more specifically. Therefore, it enables to do more cost-effective marketing through specific purpose-designed products that satisfy the needs of the identified target groups. (Middleton, Fyall, Morgan & Ranchhod 2009, 101.) Further, market segmentation gathers important information for a strategic marketing plan. It can help to develop tourist products and services for specific segments and thus, give a competitive advantage when it comes to winning customers. (Tsiotsou & Goldsmith 2012, 3.)

Several segmentation variables for consumer markets exist but according to Kotler et al. (2018, 213), the basic variables are demographic, geographic, behavioral and psychographic as can be seen below in Figure 2. The geographic variable helps marketers to categorize people based on different geographical boundaries to better serve customers from a particular area. Not only geographic units can be used for this segment, but also characteristics such as climate, cultural preferences and population density. A segmentation that divides customers based on age, life-cycle stage, gender, religion, income, occupation or ethnicity is based on the demographic variable. (Kotler et al. 2017, 151.) Another segmentation variable is psychographic, which helps to

segment customers based on their attitudes, lifestyles, interest, values and personalities (Kotler et al. 2018, 214). The last of the classic segmentation variables is the behavioral variable, where marketers divide customers based on what they do and use insights coming from customers' actions and behavior patterns (Kotler et al. 2017, 154). Besides the classic variables, tourism-specific methods have been developed by different researchers (Swarbrooke & Horner 2007, 92). Below, in Figure 2 a comparison between the classic segmentation variables and tourism-specific segmentation variables is illustrated.

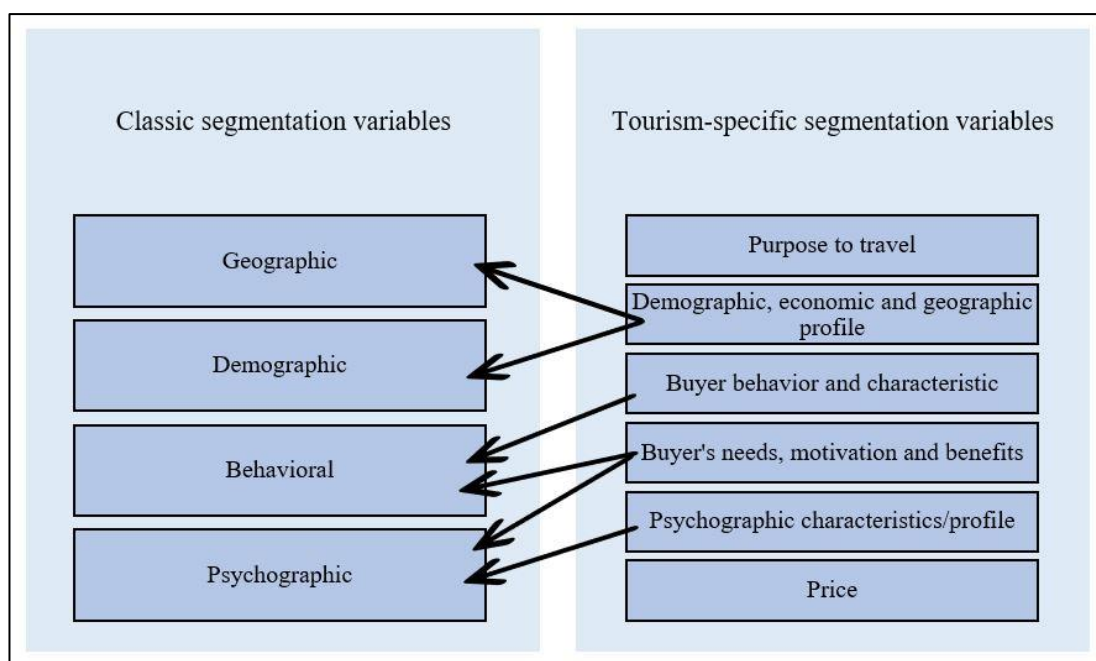


Figure 2. Classic segmentation variables in comparison with tourism-specific variables (Middleton et al. 2009, 103; Kotler et al. 2018, 213)

Both, Middleton et al. (2009, 103) and Swarbrooke & Horner (2007, 96) suggest a similar approach of segmentation methods that apply to tourism. In Figure 2 six methods for segmentation are listed that these authors believe to be most relevant in tourism markets: 1) purpose of travel, 2) buyer needs, motivations and benefits, 3) buyer behavior and characteristics, 4) demographic, economic and geographic profile, 5) psychographic characteristics and 6) price. When examined more closely, it can be seen that four variables are similar to the classic segmentation methods. Those variables are just named differently and only the purpose of travel and price were new and added. In this context, Kotler et al. (2017, 357) further mention that tourists can be segmented through benefit segmentation and base it on the push and pull model.

Therefore, the push factors are considered as socio-psychological motivations that influence an individual to travel. The pull factors, on the other hand, are a destination's attributes that attract an individual. This approach is commonly used in destination marketing.

A mixture of different segmentation techniques can lead to successful marketing instead of one single segmentation technique. In tourism, segmentation differs depending on the occasion and will change over time. Geographical variables can be linked with personality, or one can focus on motivation in relation to demographic factors for example. (Swarbrooke & Horner 2007, 98.) Demographic, socioeconomic and lifestyle variables are used most often in tourism. Tsiotsou & Goldsmith (2012, 6) recommend particularly the use of demographic characteristics, activities, travel expenditure, benefits, value and motivation for tourist segmentation.

Visit Finland commissioned Nepa with a motive-based segmentation in 2017, to optimize their marketing activities. The aim was to use the segmentation analysis as a foundation for many business areas such as market understanding, portfolio management, pricing, product development or communication strategy. Within this analysis, they used the variables of values and attitudes, needs, situation, behavioral, demography and sociography. The data for the segmentation project was collected in the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan and China through online interviews and the results presented six new customer profiles for Finland. (Visit Finland 2017.) These segmentation variables seem to be similar to the above-mentioned tourism-specific segmentation methods of Swarbrooke & Horner (2007, 96) and Middleton et al. (2009, 103.) Finnish tourism organizations with limited resources could use this segmentation as an orientation for their business. The process of segmentation is a cost intense undertaking and involves a lot of time and effort. In the context of this thesis, Ilomantsi Tourism Association could use the identified tourist segments of Visit Finland and select the ones who seem most suitable and promising for them as a starting base.

To finish the step of segmentation, four elements need to be considered for successful segmentation. Marketers aim to identify smaller, better-defined target groups and thus, they rarely limit their segmentation analysis to only one or a few variables (Kotler et al. 2017, 155). Table 2 shows the elements for effective segmentation.

Table 2. Elements for successful segmentation. (Kotler et al. 2018, 221)

Elements	Explanation
Measurability	The members of the segment need to be identified in some way and it should be known how many of them there are.
Accessibility	It has to be possible to communicate with the segment as a group and to cater the product to them.
Substantiality	The segment needs to be big enough to be worth aiming for.
Actionability	Resources need to be considered in order to develop effective marketing programs for the segment.

To begin with, the size and purchasing power of the market segments need to be measurable. Therefore, one has to know where the customers are, who they are and some basic numbers. Further, the market segments should be accessible, meaning that the company has to be able to reach and serve them. Another element that is necessary for a good segmentation is substantiality. Here, this means that the market segment needs to be large or profitable enough to serve as a market. Lastly, the market segment should be actionable. This means that the degree to which an effective marketing program can be designed for attracting and serving a particular segment needs to be carefully considered. (Middleton et al. 2009, 101; Kotler et al. 2017, 156.)

4.2 Market targeting

The previous process of segmentation helps marketers to target potential customers. A specific group of tourists, sharing common needs and characteristics can be defined as a target market. Thus, targeting involves the decision about which segments a destination or company wants to serve and how customers are targeted in the segments that a destination wants to compete in. (Kotler et al. 2018, 221.) Successful target marketing involves the evaluation of previously identified market segments and the selection of promising market groups (Tsiotsou & Goldsmith 2012, 4). Collecting information about current tourists is another way to identify and evaluate natural target markets for a tourist destination (Kotler et al. 2017, 361).

Within the targeting phase, two steps need to be done. First, the evaluation of market segments, which involves analyzing the different market segments by considering the segment size (number of customers), growth (expected profitability and sales) and segment-structured attractiveness (suppliers, competitors, alternative products and buyer power). (Tsotsou & Goldsmith 2012, 4.) Further, it is also important to take the resources and objectives of the destination into account. These criteria help to decide how many and which segments the destination can serve better and more profitably. (Kotler et al. 2017, 156.)

The second step is to select the market segments that seem most promising for the destination. Once the decision on the segments has been made, a market-coverage strategy needs to be determined. Figure 3 demonstrates the three strategies for market targeting. (Kotler et al. 2018, 222.)

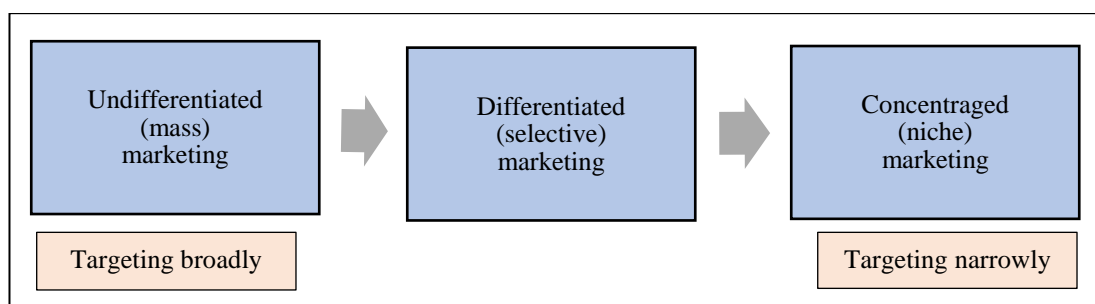


Figure 3. Market coverage strategies. (Kotler et al. 2018, 222)

The whole market can be targeted with one offer, which is known as undifferentiated or mass marketing. Another option is differentiated or selective marketing. In this case, several segments are targeted with different offers for each segment. Lastly, concentrated marketing, also known as niche marketing, means to target one or a few small segments that have a large share of the market. (Kotler et al. 2017, 157.)

It is important to consider different factors when choosing a market-coverage strategy. Firstly, the degree of product homogeneity is one factor that will influence the target marketing. Companies that offer homogeneous products are better suited for undifferentiated marketing since their products are of similar type. Next, market homogeneity is yet another factor that influences the choice of strategy. It describes the degree to which buyers have the same tastes, buy and react the same way. Lastly,

one more relevant factor is competitors' strategies. Observing competitors and their choices can bring advantages. (Kotler et al. 2017, 158.) Table 3 shows examples of the factors that influence the choice of market-coverage strategy.

Table 3. Factors for choosing a market-coverage strategy. (Kotler et al. 158.)

Factors	Examples
Degree of product homogeneity	Hotels and restaurants offer in general products that vary in design and thus, differentiated or concentrated marketing seems more suitable.
Market homogeneity	Undifferentiated marketing is appropriate when there are customers that have the same tastes, buy the product in the same amounts and react similarly to marketing efforts.
Competitor's strategies	If a competitor uses only undifferentiated marketing, it can bring a competitive advantage for a business to use segmentation, differentiated or concentrated marketing.

The most common market targeting approach in tourism according to Tsiotsou & Goldsmith (2012, 5) is differentiated marketing. In addition to the three above-mentioned factors, it is always important for any type of company or destination to consider its resources in order to choose a market-coverage strategy (Kotler et al. 2017, 158).

In the context of this thesis, an important factor is a destination's resources and thus, concentrated marketing can be beneficial when limited resources are in place. As mentioned in Chapter 4.1, looking at the target profiles of Visit Finland might help Ilomantsi Tourism Association to discover similarities with their German-speaking customer group. Further, it could help to explore different kinds of target segments and with choosing a market-coverage strategy.

4.3 Market positioning

After having identified the market segments and decided which ones to focus on, it needs to be considered how to compete effectively in the target market and how to serve the customers in the chosen segments (Kotler et al. 2017, 159). This is done

through market positioning and is the last step of target marketing (Tsiotsou & Goldsmith 2012, 12).

The destination's image and attractiveness to its target market are influenced by the positioning (Strong 2014, 140) and essentially involves the development of a value proposition for the targeted segments (Tsiotsou & Goldsmith 2012, 12). Within this step, the offering and image of a destination are designed, to give differentiated value to the targeted segments and create superior customer value (Tsiotsou & Goldsmith 2012, 5). Hence, through expressing the value proposition and the sustainable competitive advantage of the destination and product in an attractive and emotional way, the position can be defined (Strong 2014, 140).

Thus, it is important to identify the right positioning strategy. Market positioning and value proposition should be created from the customer's point of view because it is they who buy the products and services. (Tsiotsou & Goldsmith 2012, 6.) A customer's value proposition is what is promised by a company's marketing and sales effort and then fulfilled by its delivery and customer service processes. Further, value proposition refers to the full mix of benefits on which a destination or product is differentiated and positioned on the market in the eyes of the customers. Therefore, it can help with the selection of an overall positioning strategy. (Kotler et al. 2017, 164.)

Various positioning strategies exist, and tourist destinations need to choose a strategy that considers their mission and goals, as well as their competition (Tsiotsou & Goldsmith 2012, 5-6). Destinations seek to have the greatest advantage possible in their selected target markets and therefore, the positioning needs to be chosen carefully (Kotler et al. 2017, 159). Positioning can be done for instance by attributes, use, benefits, product category, price or quality (Tsiotsou & Goldsmith 2012, 12).

A popular positioning strategy is by specific product attributes. With this strategy, certain features are used to position a product or destination. As an example, it can be looked at Subway, which has successfully positioned its sandwiches as a healthy alternative to fried fast food. (Kotler et al. 2017, 159.) In the case of tourism destinations, market positioning is often based on the physical attributes of a

destination and thus, involves the consideration of all touristic resource types as can be seen in Table 4 (McCabe 2008, 161).

Table 4. Touristic resource types (McCabe 2008, 161)

Touristic resources of a destination	Examples
Culture and society	Food and drinks, history, tradition, work, leisure and social organization, hospitality
Heritage	Built and natural heritage, archaeological, industrial and cultural
Wildlife	Marine, birdlife, farming, flora and fauna
Climate	Lack of rain, abundance of sunshine or a good balance of climate without extreme heat or cold
Landscape and physical attributes	Mountains and lakes, beaches and seaside, countryside and nature or cityscapes and architecture

The touristic resource types of a destination demonstrate the different physical qualities on which a positioning strategy can be based on and presents similarities to the positioning strategy by specific product attributes. Positioning against another product category is also a common approach. For example, bed and breakfast accommodations position themselves as home-like alternatives to other forms of lodging or cruise ships position themselves against opposites to destination resorts. (Kotler et al. 2017, 159.) Another strategy is by the benefits that products offer. Kotler et al. (2017, 164) explain that a restaurant can also be positioned as a fun place instead of only by its use.

Positioning through the marketing mix is one more way. This method is not described in detail in this thesis since the aim is to only give a basic idea. The marketing mix refers to a combination of factors, which can be controlled by a destination or business to influence customers to buy its products and services. It is a useful and flexible tool that can be used to achieve the desired positioning and create customer value. (Kotler et al. 2018, 78.) Product, price, place, promotion, people, process and physical evidence are the seven strategic elements of the marketing mix that assist in developing strategies to position and market services and products. Combined, these seven factors represent ingredients that can create strong positioning in the target markets and are referred to as the “7 P’s” of the marketing mix. Focusing on a marketing mix helps

organizations make decisions when launching new products and services. (Lovelock & Wirtz 2011, 22.)

The aim of market positioning is to create value for the targeted customers and involves the process of differentiation and positioning (Kotler et al. 2018, 212). Thereby three steps are involved. First, the identification of possible distinctive competitive advantages on which a position can be built on. Then, the right advantages need to be selected in order to choose an overall positioning strategy. Lastly, marketers have to communicate and deliver the chosen position effectively to the market. Choosing and implementing a positioning strategy requires identifying a competitive advantage that differentiates tourism destinations and companies from others. (Kotler et al. 2017, 160.)

A competitive advantage can be defined as a circumstance that puts one in a favorable position over competitors, which was gained by offering greater value to the customer. This can be achieved through lower prices or by providing more benefits that justify higher prices for example. Thus, tourism destinations and businesses need to differentiate their products and services from their competition. It can be differentiated by physical attributes, personnel, service, location or image. (Kotler et al. 2017, 160.)

After having identified possible competitive advantages, it needs to be decided on how many and which differences the positioning strategy will be built on (Kotler et al. 2018, 231). The question here is how many differences are adequate and marketers argue about that. Some think that it is best to focus on one strong competitive advantage, whilst others believe that a destination should position itself on more than one distinctive factor. However, there is also a risk of losing a clear positioning when too many differentiating features are being used. In general, there are three major positioning errors to avoid. (Kotler et al. 2017, 162.)

Firstly, one mistake that can occur in this case is over-positioning. This means using too many differentiating factors brings the risk of giving the customer a too narrow picture of the destination. Next, on the other hand, using not enough or no differentiating factors, bears the risk of not positioning the destination at all because

customers do not know anything special about it. This is referred to as under-positioning. Lastly, leaving customers with a confused image of the destination is one more risk and is called confused positioning. (Kotler et al. 2017, 162.)

Communicating and delivering the chosen position is not an easy task. Once the decision for the positioning strategy has been made, it needs to be communicated clearly to the targeted market segments. The positioning strategy must be in line with all marketing efforts. (Kotler et al. 2017, 163.)

Perceptual mapping is a tool that can help to measure the position of a destination in comparison to others in the market (Kotler et al. 2017, 163). It is a map that helps to visualize the target customer's perceptions of competing destinations on different dimensions (Blythe 2012, 90). For instance, a perceptual map can be created that shows different tourism destinations and the attributes that tourists associate with each destination. Thereby tourists' views of destinations can be tested in relation to attributes such as convenience, excitement or learning. This can also help to test images that tourists have of different destinations.

To conclude Chapter 4, it is important to note that target marketing and all its steps should be reviewed and repeated after a certain time. This is because the needs, wants and preferences of customers change over time due to more attractive products of competitors or changes in demographics and lifestyle. (Tsiotsou & Goldsmith 2012, 6.)

5 CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN TOURISM

It is essential for tourism destinations to understand their customers' needs and wants and thus, the marketplace in which they operate (Kotler et al. 2017, 18). Behavior patterns show what customers want to buy, as well as how and why they buy. Further, in the context of tourism, it indicates which locations they prefer and what kind of amenities are important to them. (Kotler et al. 2017, 118.) Marketing activities aim to develop, promote and sell tourism products, and consumer behavior plays a vital role in this undertaking. Understanding why and how consumers make decisions to purchase or use tourism products and services assists in optimizing the effectiveness and efficiency of marketing efforts. (Swarbrooke & Horner 2007, 3.)

In general, consumer behavior refers to the process of selecting, purchasing and using a product or service to satisfy consumer needs and desires (Juvan, Gomezelj Omerzel & Uran Maravic 2017, 24). Differences between consumer behavior and tourist behavior exist. One significant difference is that consumer behavior mainly focuses on the choices of products and the satisfaction with them, whilst tourist behavior involves tourists to plan and fantasize about their travels usually for a longer period of time ahead. Further, the pre- and post-travel phases are essential subcomponents in tourism. (Pearce 2005, 9.) Consumer behavior is a difficult subject to research, especially in tourism because the consumer's purchase decision is of emotional significance (Swarbrooke & Horner 2007, 3). The scope of this subject area is considerable and few comprehensive studies about the concepts and models exist. However, this topic remains amongst the most researched areas in the tourism field and therefore, is often referred to as tourist behavior. (Cohen, Prayag & Moital 2013.)

New technologies and globalization have made the tourism market very competitive and destinations that understand their customers best can gain an advantage in the market (Kotler, et al. 2017, 118). Buyer behavior models are a good tool and starting point to help understand tourists better since they attempt to provide a simplified version of the various factors that influence tourist behavior (Swarbrooke & Horner 2007, 40). Different versions of buyer behavior models exist, and Figure 4 illustrates Middleton et al.'s (2009, 78) version of the buyer behavior model in tourism.

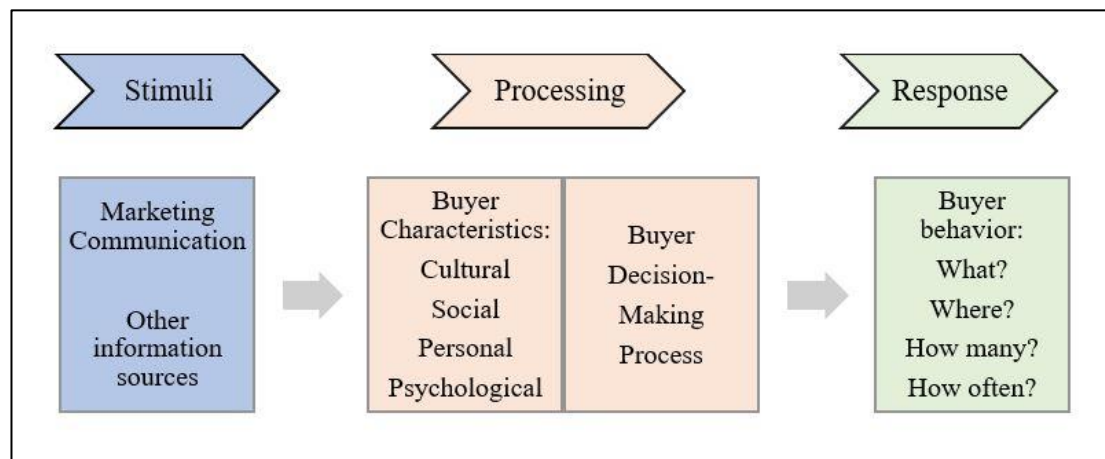


Figure 4. Model of buyer behavior (Middleton et al. 2009, 78)

Similar to Kotler, et al. (2017, 118), Middleton et al. (2009, 78) discuss tourist behavior through the stimulus-response model, which is described as a process that consists of three basic components. Stimuli, processing and response are the integral parts, with the potential tourist as a buyer in the center (Middleton et al. 2009, 78.) The model in Figure 4 describes how a tourist receives the stimuli from the external environment, wherefrom information is absorbed, and an image of the tourism products, services and destinations is shaped (Kotler et al. 2017, 118). The received information can come from different channels such as marketing communications, conversations with friends or the media. Next, within the processing phase, all pieces of information are influenced by the individual characteristics of the potential traveler and further processed. Following this, the decision-making process takes place and leads to the response, which is the final component. It involves a set of choices that the tourist makes depending on the basis of the previously mentioned sequences. (Middleton et al. 2009, 78.)

It is important for destinations to understand how stimuli are transformed into responses and what happens within the processing stage. The buyer characteristics affect the buying behavior, which is connected with the buyer's decision process and subsequently the buyer's response. (Kotler, et al. 2017, 118.)

Tourist behavior has many influences, which can be roughly divided into external and internal influences. The economic, technological, political and cultural environment

can be considered as external influences (Juvan et al. 2017), which not only influence individuals but moreover jointly can decide volume and patterns of travel and tourism within a country (Middleton, et al. 2009, 77). These external factors might show tendencies to participate in tourism and the overall demand, however, it does not describe individual product choices made by different people. Thus, it is crucial to understand how internal, psychological processes influence individuals and make them select different holiday destinations and specific types of products and services.

Cohen et al. (2013) name in their research nine key concepts for tourist behavior, which they believe to be essential. Decision-making, values, motivations, self-concept and personality, attitudes, perception, expectations, satisfaction as well as trust and loyalty are considered as the most important conceptual dimensions. Further, Weeden (2013, 18-20) states that tourist behavior is closely connected with decision-making and motivation. A lot about the knowledge of decision-making comes from understanding the tourist motivation. According to Sharpley (2006, 35), the demand for tourism relies on motivation and thus, tourist motivation plays an important influential role in tourist behavior.

Within the following subchapters, a closer look will be taken at what factors influence tourists in their decision and what steps are involved in the buying process. (Middleton, et al. 2009, 77.) Further, the thesis puts focus on tourist motivation. Examining the above-mentioned concepts can help to find approaches that assist in understanding why German-speaking people decide on Ilomantsi and what attracts them to the destination.

5.1 Characteristics influencing the buyer behavior

A range of personal, psychological, cultural and social factors influence how potential travelers receive and process the stimuli (Middleton, et al. 2009, 80). Although these personal and social characteristics cannot be controlled by marketers, for the most part, they should be considered (Kotler, et al. 2017, 118). Various factors impact the choices that customers make. This includes personal factors, which reflect needs, wants, motivations, previous experience and further, a person's lifestyle and interpersonal

factors, such as culture, social class and family. (Anderson & Westcott 2021). In this chapter, a short overview of the different characteristics will be given, which are demonstrated below in Figure 5.

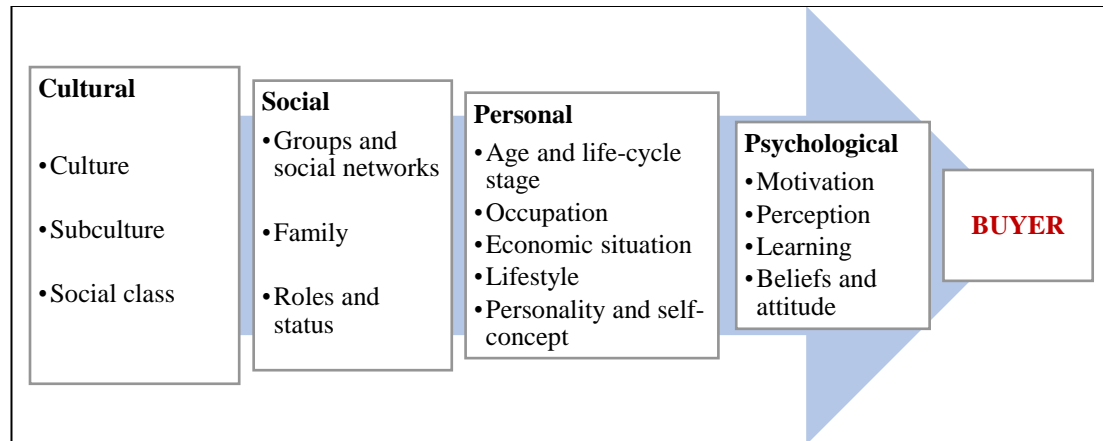


Figure 5. Characteristics influencing buyer behavior (Kotler, et al. 2018, 159)

The cultural factor is considered as a broad and profound influence on tourist behavior (Kotler et al. 2018, 159) because the society in which someone grows up influences an individual's basic values, perceptions, wants and behavior (Kotler et al. 2017, 118). Culture can be explained as the combined values, attitudes and behavior of a social group (Middleton et al. 2009, 82) such as family and other important institutions (Kotler et al. 2018, 159). Further, culture is what unites one group and at the same time distinguishes them from others (Middleton et al. 2009, 82). Each culture has smaller subcultures and social classes, which belong also to the cultural factor (Kotler et al. 2017, 131). The way people choose and experience tourism products and services can be influenced by the values of their cultural background (Middleton et al. 2009, 82). Thus, it is a fundamental cause for a person's wants and behavior (Kotler et al. 2018, 159).

In this context, tourist behavior and decision-making are further influenced by social factors which include family, social networks, roles and status (Kotler et al. 2018, 162). Family is a strong social influence on tourist behavior and decision-making (Kotler et al. 2018, 164), especially for holidays, which are often undertaken with family members (Middleton et al. 2009, 82). Their role and influence vary also in cultures. Further, friends and family are important sources of information because people are

motivated by the need for belonging and status. Thus, their opinions have a strong influence on the type of holiday, destination and activities someone chooses.

Personal factors are another characteristic that affects the buyer behavior of tourists. Ngoc Khuong & Duyen (2016) state in their research that these characteristics are particular to an individual and might not relate to other people within the same group. Variables of personal factors are occupation, age and life stage, lifestyle, economic situation, personality and self-concept (Kotler, et al. 2017, 122). The economic situation of a tourist influences what kind of products and services can be bought and is strongly affected by the income and occupation of an individual (Middleton et al. 2009, 81). Further, over time, the interests of people change and thus tourism offerings change related to age and life-cycle stage (Kotler et al. 2018, 167). People sharing the same culture and occupation might still have different lifestyles. This can be expressed through one's activities, interests and opinions and therefore shows an individual's pattern of acting and interacting with the world. Unique and psychological characteristics distinguish a person and influence its buying behavior. (Kotler et al. 2018, 168.) These particular traits can be referred to as personality and the attributes differ in dominance, self-confidence or aggressiveness for instance (Gajjar 2013). Furthermore, they can assist in analyzing tourist behavior, product formulation and promotional messages (Middleton et el. 2009, 81).

Lastly, an important element of buyer characteristics is the psychological factor. It consists of motivation, perception, learning, as well as beliefs and attitudes. (Gajjar 2013.) Motivation is strongly connected with needs and wants. Thus, a motive can be described as a need that directs someone to satisfy it. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is an important model that helps to explain this concept. (Kotler et al. 2017, 124.) Motivation drives someone to act and the perception affects how a person acts in a certain situation. The perception differs from person to person. It is the process of how people select, organize and interpret information. Thus, not all people with the same motivation act the same way. (Kotler et al. 2017, 125.) Through acting and learning, beliefs and attitudes are obtained, which further affect the buying behavior of consumers (Kotler et al. 2018, 173).

For this research, the psychological variable of motivation plays an integral part. Thus, tourist motivation will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. In Ilomantsi, little research has been done in identifying the motivations of German-speaking tourists and the reasons why they choose Ilomantsi as a holiday destination in particular. Examining the concept of tourist motivation seeks to provide a theoretical base for why German-speaking people come to Ilomantsi.

5.2 Tourist motivation

Motivation for travel is considered as a vital parameter and driving force behind tourist behavior and decision-making (Weeden 2013, 20). In tourism, a great deal of attention is paid to motivation due to its importance in different marketing decisions such as product development, segmentation, advertising and positioning (Cohen et al. 2013). It further, aims to explain the tourist behavior by investigating what influences individuals into action and how a decision is reached (Yousaf, Amin & Santos 2018). Cohen et al. (2013) describe motivation as psychological needs and wants, which include integral forces that spark and influence a person's behavior and decision. Thus, motivation can be considered as a dynamic process in buyer behavior that connects the felt need with the decision to act (Middleton et al. 2009, 80).

Tourist motivation seeks to understand why people want to travel and involves tourists' needs and wants. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is one of the most influential motivation theories and many tourism researchers base their analysis on it. The theory was developed in 1943 and was originally meant for clinical psychology. Over the past decades, however, this premise has proofed to be applicable for marketing and tourism as well. (Woodside & Martin 2007, 14-15.)

Different tourist motivation theories have been established and it appears that Maslow's hierarchy of needs in Figure 6 inspired many of them. For instance, Dann's Push and pull theory of tourist motivation in 1977, Pearce's Travel Career Ladder Model (TCL) in 1988 or Pearce and Lee's Travel Career Patterns (TCP) in 2005 are theories that were established specifically applicable to tourism behavior on the basis of Maslow's theory. (Yousaf et al. 2018, 205.)

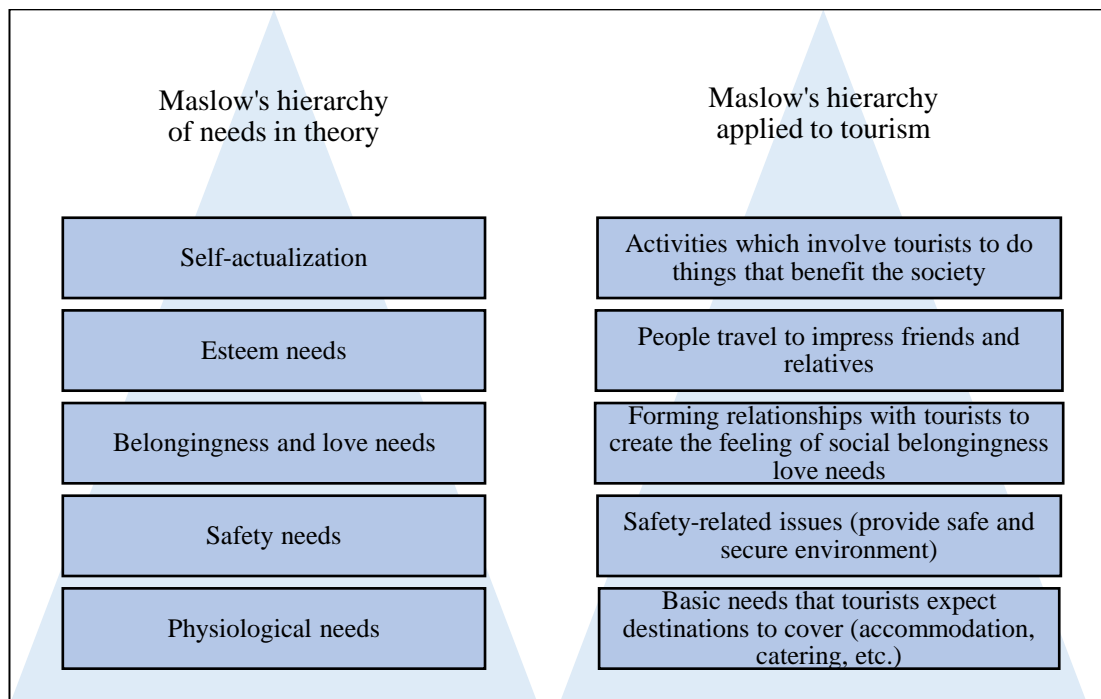


Figure 6. Maslow's hierarchy of needs applied to tourism. (Woodside & Martin 2007, 15; Yousaf et al. 2018, 205)

The figure above illustrates Maslow's hierarchy of needs in the left pyramid and their application to tourism in the right pyramid. The theory explains that human needs can be put in a hierarchical order of five categories, starting with the most basic category of physiological needs such as hunger, thirst and sleep. From there, the needs gradually ascend to safety, belongingness and love, esteem and lastly to self-actualization. In general, the fulfillment of one need leads to another need on a higher level and thus, follows the hierarchy from lower to a higher level of human needs. However, there are cases where higher needs dominate in individuals even though lower needs have not been fulfilled. (Kassean & Gassita 2013.) Yousaf et al. (2018) applied this concept to tourism. The lowest level of needs shows the tourism products and services that aim to cover the basic needs of tourists in a destination such as accommodation, food and water for instance. From there, similar to Maslow's hierarchy, it then ascends step by step to the highest level, which is self-actualization and involves tourists doing activities that benefit society.

In the context of tourism, it needs to be noted that not all tourists have the same needs. Thus, segmentation is important in order to find out the needs and motivation of each

segment. Destinations have to adapt their offer regularly to meet tourists' needs and expectations since they evolve constantly and differ between individuals. (Yousaf et al. 2018.)

The Travel Career Ladder Model (TCL) created by Pearce in 1988, is another research that investigates tourist motivation based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The Travel Career Ladder specifies five travel motivations connected to relaxation, stimulation, relationship, self-esteem and development or fulfillment. Furthermore, the model categorizes travel motivations into two groups, namely needs that are self-centered and needs that are directed at others. Later, in 2005, Pearce and Lee developed the Travel Career Patterns (TCP), which can simply be considered as an enhancement of Pearce's TCL model and thus, is also based on Maslow's theory. The Travel Career Pattern model centers on 14 motivational factors. (Yousaf et al. 2018, 203.) These popular tourism-specific theories agree with Maslow's theory since they suggest that needs drive a tourist's motivation to travel.

Another popular and widely used approach for tourist motivation is Dann's Push and Pull Theory due to its simplicity and intuitive approach (Cohen et al. 2013). Created by Dann in 1977, this model considers that multiple factors can motivate tourists to visit particular destinations and categorizes them in either push or pull motivations. It is a model that is largely accepted in tourism research. (Yousaf et al. 2018.)

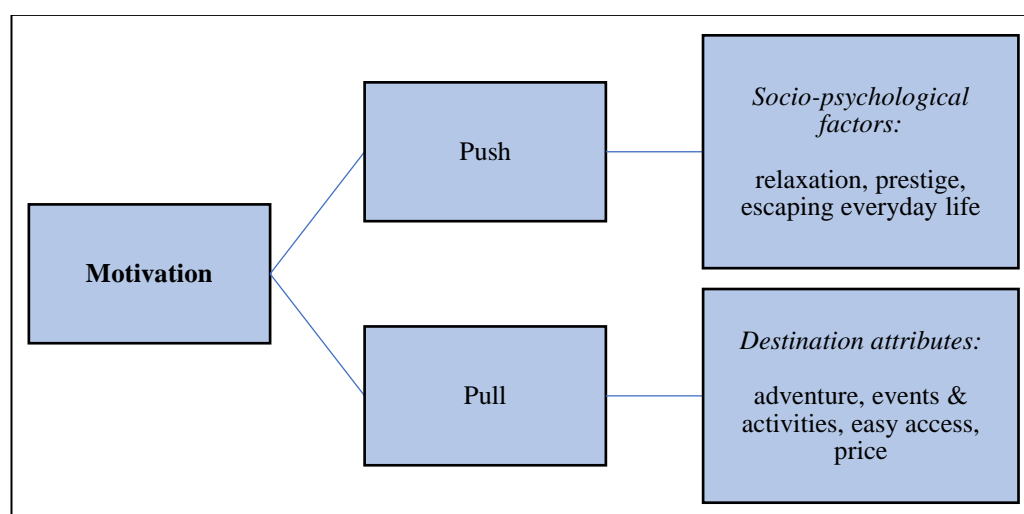


Figure 7. Dann's theory of Push and Pull Motivation. (Baniya 2016)

Push and pull factors are what drive a tourist's motivation to travel. Different research discusses the Push- and Pull Concept, which indicates that tourists are motivated by certain factors about their travel motivation and choices. (Weeden 2013, 20.) Push factors are considered as socio-psychological needs and defined as the internal forces that make individuals want to reduce their needs and thus, encourage people to travel (Yousaf et al. 2018). On the contrary, pull factors evolve from external forces, which are destination-specific attributes and the knowledge that tourists have about a destination (Woodside & Martin 2007, 18). Yousaf et al. (2018) state that pull factors can also help to trigger push factors. According to Weeden (2013, 20), this binary approach of seeking and escaping is widely used as the two basic motivational dimensions.

Considering both sides, the demand from tourists and supply from destinations, the push and pull theory can help to explain the travel motivation. The push and pull theory tries to explain why travelers choose a destination, how they perceive a destination and why tourists adopt certain behaviors. (Kassean & Gassita 2013.)

It is vital to identify tourist motivation to understand the desires of travelers in today's competitive tourism market. Further, it can be used as a segmentation method that can help to allocate scarce tourism resources more efficiently. (Yousaf et al. 2018.) Motivation helps to create and design more attractive tourist products and services, which relates to customer satisfaction (Kassean & Gassita 2013). Knowing and understanding what motivates tourists can lead to indicators for their behavior (Yousaf et al. 2018) and thus, can help tourism planners to understand tourist decision processes better (Kassean & Gassita 2013).

5.3 Tourist decision-making and buying process

After a short introduction to tourist behavior and highlighting tourist motivation and which characteristics influence buyer behavior, a closer look will be taken at the tourist decision-making and buying process. The previous chapter talked about tourist motivation, which according to Van Vuuren & Slabbert (2011, 296) initiates the decision-making process. Further, similar to motivation, understanding the decision-

making of certain tourists can help to improve the destination's products and services and marketing efforts.

In context with tourism, decision-making is one of the major components in tourist behavior. In order to understand the tourist decision-making process, one needs to understand the different variables that affect what and how tourists think, feel, learn and behave. (Guleria 2016.) Thus, the buyer characteristics mentioned in Chapter 5.1, and the motivation, mentioned in Chapter 5.2 are of great importance to understand the decision-making, which leads to the buying process.

Decision-making is closely connected to consumer behavior. In the past, consumers' buying behavior was assumed to be rational, and the decision-making process was described with models, suggesting that consumers make purchases only after a long decision process. The importance of exogenous factors such as culture, society, motivation and personality, which build the basis of today's multi-variable models of decision-making was only discovered later. (Weeden 2013, 18.) Further, most tourism research assumes that travel decisions are thoroughly planned. However, there are researchers that challenge this thinking and argue that tourist decisions include planned, unplanned and impulse purchases. (Cohen et al. 2013.)

Tourist decision-making is a complex process and involves how a potential tourist uses the available information to make the decision whether to visit a destination and buy tourist products and services or not (Middleton et al. 2009, 87). It represents the second step of the processing phase of tourist behavior, which ultimately leads to the buyer's response. Within the classic buyer decision process, there are five stages: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase behavior. (Kotler 2017, 127.) Many decision-making models have been developed by consumer behavior researchers and psychologists, which were later used and adapted for tourism (Björk & Jansson 2008). In the context of tourism, Sharpley (2006, 30) suggests a slightly different order as can be seen in Figure 8.

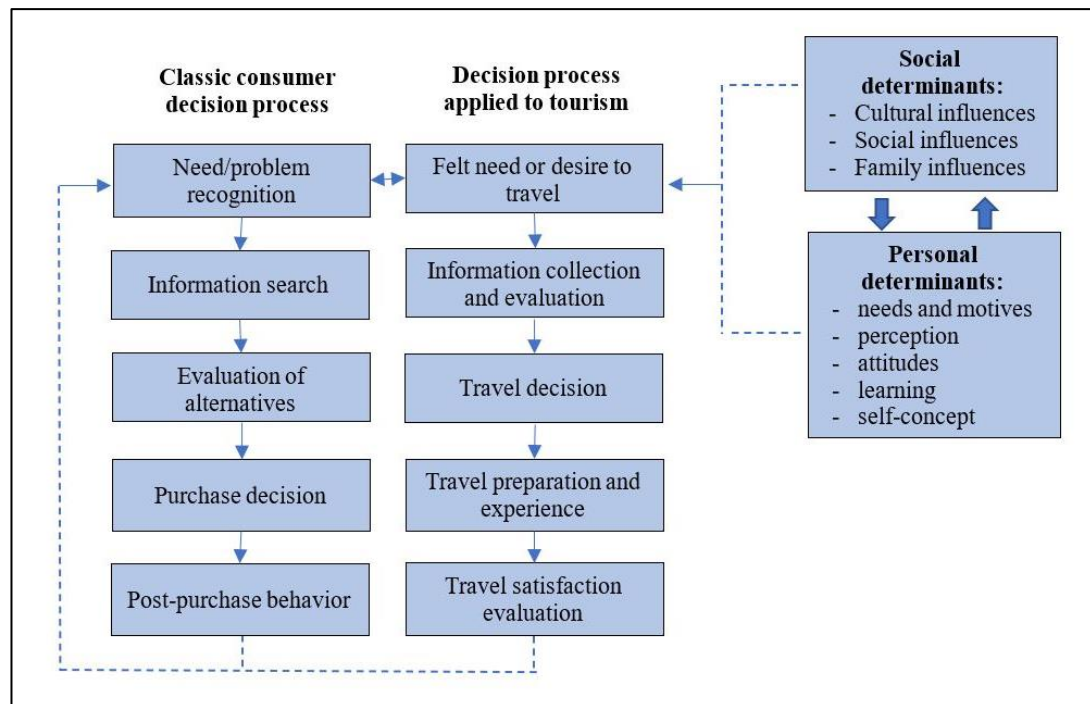


Figure 8. Consumer buyer decision process (Kotler, et al. 2017, 127) in comparison with the decision process in tourism (Sharpley 2006, 30)

Both models describe the buyer decision process in five steps. Although the names vary and the steps are in a slightly different order, the meaning is the same. The first stage involves the need or problem recognition, which describes in the tourism context, to become aware of the need for traveling (Kotler et al. 2017, 128). The desire for traveling is being influenced by personal and social determinants (Nuraeni, Arru & Novani 2015), which were described earlier in chapter 5.1 and can be seen in the model above. Following the information search takes place, which usually occurs after the need for a holiday was recognized and seems to be affordable. During this step, the potential tourist will start to search for information from all available sources. (Middleton et al. 2009, 88.) The information-gathering process is followed by the evaluation of alternative offerings (Sharpley 2006, 30). At this point, the order of the steps differs in the models, however, the meaning does not change. Thus, the evaluation phase involves the screening of the holiday features and an individual's mental list of attributes. Some attributes for instance are scenic location, close proximity to the beach or nightlife, price range and so on. (Middleton et al. 2009, 88.) After these steps, the tourist will make the decision to purchase. Once this has been done, in the tourism context, the travel preparation and experience follow, where the actual consumption of the tourism product or service happens. (Kotler et al. 2017,

129.) The last stage describes the evaluation of travel satisfaction. This step evaluates, similar to the post-purchase behavior, how the consumption experience affects the future attitudes towards the destination and tourism product. Exceeding expectations will make the tourist associate the destination with positive emotions and the chance of establishing a continuous relationship. If not and the experience was disappointing, the opposite can happen and the tourist might never visit the destination or buy the product again. In the worst case, family and friends get influenced by negative stories about their experiences. (Middleton et al. 2009, 89.)

The described model suggests that tourists follow all five steps with every purchase they make. However, in more routine purchases such as buying a beverage or ordering a meal in a restaurant, they might skip or change the order of these steps. This might also be the case for repeat visitors of a destination. (Kotler et al. 2017, 128.)

The buying decisions of tourists are influenced by an incredibly complex combination of internal and external influences (Kotler et al. 2018, 159). Chapter 5 sought to provide an understanding of the many factors of consumer behavior in tourism. The following chapter aims to give an overview of the German-speaking tourism market.

6 GERMAN-SPEAKING TOURISM MARKET (DACH REGION)

German-speaking Europe consists of Germany, Austria and Switzerland. In the tourism industry, the acronym DACH, which stands for Germany (D), Austria (A) and Switzerland (CH) is therefore being used frequently for the German-speaking market. Each of these three countries has its own characteristics and dynamics, however, they share many similarities, which gives the opportunity to market a bigger and broader group of people with more or less the same strategies. (O'Neill 2021.)

The DACH region is a significant source market for European outbound travel. In 2019, the German-speaking market made up nearly 25% of all European outbound travel. (Website of Tourism Economics 2020.) European outbound tourism is a vital part of Europe's travel industry, with Germany being the biggest outbound travel market in the European Union. Together, the DACH region has almost 100 million inhabitants, making them an attractive target market. (O'Neill 2021.) Further, most German-speaking travelers name escape from everyday life, relaxation, sun, fun, gaining new strength, nature and spending time together as their travel motivations (Website of ReiseAnalyse 2021). This makes North Karelia and Finland in general, a potential attractive travel destination for the DACH region.

In Germany nature is an important motivation factor for holidays and is the fourth most popular type of holiday. For most travelers, nature, exercising in the fresh air and enjoying natural landscapes play a relevant role in their destination choice. Further, the topic of sustainability is also important for the majority of Germans. However, a gap between the sustainable basic attitude of tourists and sustainable behavior during the trip itself exists. According to a recent tourism analysis, nature is an important topic for travelers. More and more Germans, namely 43%, desire "green destinations" with natural landscapes and holidays that combine sustainability and experiencing nature. (Bauer 2019.)

6.1 German – Austrian – Swiss parallels in travel behavior

The DACH countries share many similarities as mentioned earlier. For this chapter, the researcher intended to look at different factors of travel behavior to identify commonalities between German, Austrian and Swiss tourists. Thus, within this chapter different statistics have been used to investigate the travel behavior of the German-speaking market to see if parallels exist. The discovered similarities between the DACH countries in their travel behavior are just as big or small as they can be within a country's population. Sometimes the commonalities are so small that they can be considered as the same. It has been looked at the factors of travel intensity, destinations, duration, means of transportation, expenditure, type of accommodation and type of holiday.

Overall, the **travel intensity** in the DACH countries can be considered as relatively high. When we look at the travel intensity within the DACH region, only the so-called main vacation trips were taken into account, not the short trips and business trips. However, these annual numbers are measured differently by Germany, Austria and Switzerland depending on the number of overnight stays. Germany requires a minimum of five overnight stays to count as a main vacation trip (Statista Dossier: Reiseverhalten der Deutschen 2021), whereas Austria uses four overnight stays (Statista Dossier: Reiseverhalten der Österreicher 2020) and Switzerland only three (Allianz Partners 2019). The used numbers are annual and were collected in the years 2019 and 2020.

In 2019, about 61% of the population in Austria went on one or more vacation trips with at least four overnight stays. Further, data on the travel intensity of the German-speaking neighboring countries were collected and states that in Germany, 78% of the German-speaking population took at least one holiday trip of at least five days in 2019. The statistics use a very similar methodology to the Austrian, namely five days and longer. The data for Switzerland, however, is only comparable to a limited extent, as all persons aged six and over and private trips from one overnight stay are counted. Accordingly, the rate is significantly higher. (Statista Dossier: Reiseverhalten der Österreicher 2020.) Thus, the travel intensity of the Swiss population in 2019 was at

88% (Statista Dossier: Reiseverhalten der Schweizer 2020). A study from Allianz Partners (2019) looked at the Swiss travel intensity with three or more overnight stays and presented similar results. The findings told that 88% of the Swiss population undertake at least one trip per year with three or more overnight stays. Thus it can be said that there are no visible differences in one overnight stay or three.

The referred statistics indicate that there are differences in the travel intensity in German-speaking countries. Because of the slightly different measures, there cannot be made an exact comparison. However, it can be said that the DACH countries like to travel and that the intensity with a range of 61% - 88% is relatively high.

The COVID-19 pandemic also influenced the travel intensity of the German-speaking countries. The pandemic year 2020, led to drastic drops in the travel intensity of those countries. In Austria it dropped to 31% (Statista Dossier: Reiseverhalten der Österreicher 2020) and in Germany to 63% for example (Statista Dossier: Reiseverhalten der Deutschen 2021). However, new surveys show that Germans are still eager to travel and the intention to travel once it is possible again has not changed much compared to years before the pandemic (Website of ReiseAnalyse 2021). This seems promising for the tourism industry, once traveling will become safer again.

The average holiday **duration** depends on the destination in all three German-speaking countries. Statistics show that Germans take the longest holiday with an average of ten days and even 12 days for holidays in Scandinavia. (Statista Dossier: Reiseverhalten der Deutschen 2021.) In Austria and Switzerland, the average is about eight days, whereat statistics indicate that the majority of the Swiss and Austrians plan a 7–14-day vacation (Statista Dossier: Reiseverhalten der Österreicher 2020; Statista Dossier: Reiseverhalten der Schweizer 2020). Thus, it can be said that the duration in all countries is relatively similar with seven to ten days.

Likewise, for all DACH countries, the most popular **types of holiday** are beach and bathing holidays and recreational relax holidays. Further, culture, sightseeing or city vacation trips are favored amongst German-speaking travelers. The interest in nature and sports holidays has increased over the past years. (Statista Dossier: Reiseverhalten der Österreicher 2020; Statista Dossier: Reiseverhalten der Schweizer 2020; Statista

Dossier: Reiseverhalten der Deutschen 2021.) The slow and steady increase of nature and sports holidays could further grow in regard to the corona pandemic and the people's demand for greener and less crowded destinations (Website of ReiseAnalyse 2021).

Considering the preferred holiday types and the main motivation of the DACH travelers, the most popular holiday **destinations** are southern countries that offer sun, beach and fun. However, in recent years the demand for nature, active and adventure holidays has increased. Thus, Scandinavia and Finland appear to be interesting as travel destinations for the German-speaking market. (Website of ReiseAnalyse 2021.) Sweden and Norway are strong competitors for Finland, and it seems like the interest in Finland is bigger than the actual traveling (Sonntag & Wagner 2016). Statistics indicate that Germans appear to be more interested in Finland than Austrian and Swiss. However, there is no sufficient research that describes the travel interest of Switzerland and Austria for Scandinavia and Finland. Therefore, no specific arguments can be given for the reason why.

Due to the corona pandemic, there was an overall decline in intra-European trips in 2020. More than half of the German population spend their main holiday in Germany in 2020 and thus, the most popular travel destination abroad was the neighboring country Austria. (Statista Dossier: Reiseverhalten der Deutschen 2021.) Traditional favorite holiday destinations for Austrians are Italy, Germany, Croatia, Spain, France and Greece plus neighboring countries such as Hungary, Czech Republic or Slovenia (Statista Dossier: Reiseverhalten der Österreicher 2020). The Swiss like to vacation in their own country and similar to Austrians, they prefer neighboring countries as travel destinations such as Germany, Austria, Italy and France. Further, they favor countries in the South-West of Europe which are warm and offer beach, sun and fun. (Statista Dossier: Reiseverhalten der Schweizer 2020.)

The research on the **travel expenditure** for the DACH countries looked at Eurostat's statistic from 2019. Many sources with vast differences for travel expenditure exist but since Eurostat is the statistical office of the European Union, it provided the most reliable and comparable information. Table 5 presents the average tourism expenditure of European Union residents per trip and night. The results show slight differences

between the German-speaking countries but overall the DACH region appears to have generous travelers which are ranked amongst the top spending nations. The spending amount lies between 948 euros and 1.046 euros per trip. Looking at the travel budgets of all DACH countries for outbound trips, the expenditure of around 1.000 euros is for all countries approximately the same. (Website of Eurostat 2019.)

Table 5. Average travel expenditure per trip and night of the DACH countries (Website of Eurostat 2019)

Country	Average expenditure per trip in 2019 (abroad)	Average expenditure per night in 2019 (abroad)
Austria	948 €	152 €
Germany	1.000 €	115 €
Switzerland	1.046 €	120 €

Austria appears to have the smallest budget per trip with 948 euros. However, when looking at the expenditure per night, it can be seen that they spend the most with 152 euros per night compared to Germany with 115 euros per night and Switzerland with 120 euros per night. Thus, it is important to mention that the expenditures vary depending on the length of the trip and destination.

Tourismusanalyse's statistics for the years 2019 and 2020 showed an interesting fact about Germans traveling to Scandinavia for their holiday. It states that Germans spent an average of 86 euros per day for their main holiday in Scandinavia in 2020, whereas they spent 105 euros in 2019. One could call the Corona pandemic as a reason therefore, however, it does not explain why the Germans spent an average of 100 euros per day on their main holidays in other European countries in the same year. This fact is interesting and could indicate that Germans might not use as many tourism products and services as in other countries. (Website of Tourismusanalyse 2021.)

The most common mode of **transportation** in the DACH region is the own car, followed by the airplane. The transportation preferences are the same for all DACH countries. The car is usually the most commonly used transportation mode when traveling within the country, but it is also popular for destinations abroad. Airplanes are another popular transportation mode, especially for destinations abroad. (Allianz

Partners 2019; Statista Dossier: Reiseverhalten der Österreicher 2020; Statista Dossier: Reiseverhalten der Deutschen 2021.)

Concerning the type of **accommodation**, it can also be said that the preferences in this category are very similar for all three German-speaking countries. Hotels are the preferred accommodation choice of German-speaking tourists. A large majority stays in hotels while traveling, followed by holiday apartments, cottages and houses. Statistics show that hotels and similar businesses are chosen most frequently as the type of accommodation for holiday trips, followed by free private accommodation with friends, relatives, acquaintances or at a second home. Camping is also used by the DACH travelers, however, it needs to be noted that this form of lodging comes after the above-mentioned accommodation types. (Allianz Partners 2019; Statista Dossier: Reiseverhalten der Deutschen 2021; Wirtschaftskammer Österreich 2021.)

6.2 Possible tourist profiles for Ilomantsi

Segmenting tourist markets has many benefits. It can help improve marketing efforts by reflecting on what tourism businesses are particularly good at compared to their competitors. Further, segmentation can help to understand the differences between tourists better, which allows tourism companies to match their resources with the customer needs. Thus, market segmentation can help to find the right customers whose needs match the organization's skill set and further, provide new insights and perspectives. (Dolnicar, Grün & Leisch 2018, 7.)

Visit Finland commissioned Nepa in 2017 with a motive-based segmentation to optimize their marketing activities. Within the analysis, six main segments could be identified: nature wonder hunters, nature explorers, activity enthusiasts, comfort seekers, city breakers and authentic lifestyle seekers. The research was conducted in four countries: the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan and China. (Visit Finland 2017.) Due to the topic of this Thesis, tourist profiles for Finland are of great interest. Conducting market segmentation can be a cost and resource-intensive undertaking. Thus, small destinations can benefit from Visit Finland's market segmentation and use the discovered tourist profiles for their purposes.

A survey of SHAPE (Website of SHAPE n.d.) asked people who already visit North Karelia about the most important aspects when deciding on a destination and about the strengths of the North Karelian Biosphere Reserve. As a result, scenic landscapes, unspoiled nature, cleanliness of the destination, diversity of nature attractions as well as environmental actions of product or service providers were mentioned as strengths and important determinants.

Germany is used as the main indicator for possible target segments of the German-speaking tourism market in this research because it is the biggest outbound travel market in the European Union and has the biggest population within the DACH countries. (O'Neill 2021.) According to Visit Karelia, Germans are the second most active nationality on their websites. The number of clicks that certain elements on their websites get, show what people are looking for and give insights into what they are interested in. Overall, the most visited topics from all nations were national parks, nature activities and Karelian culture attractions. (Tervakorpi 2021.)

Thus, based on the natural and cultural resources and characteristics, the most promising tourist profiles of the German market seem to be nature explorers, authentic lifestyle seekers and activity enthusiasts. Even though city breakers were one of the main segments of the German market for Visit Finland, this segment does not align with the resources of Ilomantsi and North Karelia. (Visit Finland 2017.)

Table 6. German segments sizes from Visit Finland's tourist profiles – attractive segments for Ilomantsi are marked in bold. (Visit Finland 2017)

Tourist segments of Visit Finland	Size of German segments and attractive segments for Ilomantsi
City Breakers	23%
Nature Explorers	17%
Nature Wonder Hunters	12%
Activity Enthusiasts	15%
Authentic Lifestyle Seeker	23%
Comfort Seeker	9%

Table 6 shows the identified tourist segments of Visit Finland on the left side. The right column demonstrates the segment size of the German market in percentage and suggests segments that might be attractive for the destination of Ilomantsi, which are marked in bold. Nature explorers and authentic lifestyle seekers seem to match with the given resources of Ilomantsi. Further, activity enthusiasts could be another interesting target market. (Visit Finland 2017.) Following a short description of these three tourist profiles will be given.

Nature explorers could be one possible target segment of Ilomantsi. This segment is characterized by the appreciation for nature, slow life and no rush. People within this segment want to relax, get away from the hectic everyday life, enjoy the peace and beautiful scenery. (Visit Finland 2017.) All these elements can be found in Ilomantsi and thus, this segment seems to be well suited for the destination. Eventually, the nature explorer profile conforms with the German holiday motivation of relaxing, experiencing nature, hiking and family (Website of ReiseAnalyse 2021).

The second profile that seems to match with the resources of Ilomantsi is **authentic lifestyle seekers**. This segment appreciates the experiences that show the lifestyle and culture of the country. They like to blend in with the locals and to feel how it is to live in the country. These travelers try to avoid places with many tourists. Things that are important to them are food, museums, local life, nature, sauna and culture destinations

for example. (Visit Finland 2017.) Therefore, this segment would fit Ilomantsi due to its special resources such as Karelian culture and traditions, North Karelian food, Kantele, Rune singer and Kalevala (Website of Visit Ilomantsi n.d.).

Lastly, one more segment that could fit Ilomantsi would be **activity enthusiasts**. For this segment, a vital element of their holiday is being active. They are curious and want to try new sports and different activities. Nature plays an important role for this segment and they want to experience it through natural scenery with activities and sports. (Visit Finland 2017.) With Patvinsuo and Petkeljärvi, Ilomantsi has two national parks, which give the possibility to go kayaking, canoeing, hiking or even cycling in a beautiful scenery. Fishing is another popular activity that can be done in Ilomantsi. Further, in winter there are activities such as cross-country skiing, ice fishing and snowmobiling available. (Website of Visit Ilomantsi n.d.)

The above information can assist in deciding what a destination should communicate and to whom. Further, it can stimulate considerations, where to communicate and to which time. (Visit Finland 2017.) Using some of these segments and adjusting them to Ilomantsi's skillset could help to improve the marketing efforts of Ilomantsi Tourism Association.

7 METHODOLOGY

After the theoretically elaborated part of the thesis, the empirical research was carried out in the form of interviews. Due to the topic of the research, the needs and wants of tourists were investigated. Identifying motivational factors can be challenging and thus, might be best addressed by using qualitative research methods (Weeden 2013, 22).

7.1 Research method

Next to quantitative research methods, the qualitative method is one of the primary approaches in research. This method uses non-numeric data that brings rich and valuable information from interviews and observation for example. It can provide new exploratory data or can also be used to explain and interpret quantitative data. (O'Gorman & MacIntosh 2014, 118.) Qualitative research is connected with questions, words and sentences. It examines the relationship between entities and their meanings. An entity can be people, groups of people or organizations for example or as in the case of this research tourists and the destination. Using the qualitative research method makes it easier to extract new knowledge out of the qualitative answers to the questions asked. (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill 2019, 179.) In this case, it helped to find new knowledge about the relationship of German-speaking tourists with the destination of Ilomantsi and their motivation, values and desires. The data for this research was collected through interviews, which presented new and exploratory information. Thus, a qualitative research approach was used for the data gathering because it allowed asking open questions to discover what is happening and gain insights about the examined subject (O'Gorman & MacIntosh 2014, 118).

In this regard, the research used an exploratory approach because it helps to examine and observe a phenomenon, issue or problem and try to describe it. Within this research, the motivations and values of German-speaking tourists were examined and thus the exploratory approach seemed to be helpful since it aims to clarify and improve understanding of a phenomenon or subject. Different ways exist to conduct exploratory

research such as a literature review, interviewing experts in the field, conducting individual interviews or focus group interviews. For instance, exploratory research can use well-defined theories to try to apply them in a newly emerged phenomenon, in order to see if these theories fit the phenomenon. This can be very useful when very little or no data exist on the examined phenomenon. The advantage of exploratory research is its flexibility and adaptability to change. (Saunders et al. 2019, 186-187.) This study used a qualitative research design with a single data collection technique, namely the semi-structured interview (Saunders et al. 2019, 179).

7.2 Research instrument

Interviews are an established research method, which helps to develop an understanding of a subject matter and the research questions through a conversation between the researcher and the interviewee (O'Gorman & MacIntosh 2014, 118). Research interviews can be divided into three basic methods: structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Wilson 2013, viii). This research used semi-structured interviews with a thematic approach, meaning that it used topics that derived from the theoretical framework (Saunders et al. 2019, 438). Using semi-structured theme interviews for this research helped to cover critical points through in advance prepared themes and questions. This assisted in the execution of the interviews and is especially useful when the researcher is inexperienced with the interview method. Further, it makes the experience for all participants more similar, which increases the reliability and scope for comparability. Another advantage that this research instrument brings is that the participants keep the freedom and flexibility to express their own views and to respond in a language that is natural to them. (O'Gorman & MacIntosh 2014, 119.)

Semi-structured interviews as a data collection method represent a non-standardized approach and thus, can be considered as a qualitative research method. The nature of the interview needs to be aligned with all aspects of the research, like the research questions, objective, purpose and strategy. (Saunders et al. 2019, 436.) It was expected that the obtained information from the interviews would be variable and complex and thus, semi-structured interviews were considered as a useful tool for this research.

(Veal 2017, 288.) Further, thematic interviews can be considered as a relatively informal approach, which is conducted in form of a dialogue between researcher and interviewee. The respondent's opinions and views about pre-defined themes are asked during the interview process. Therefore, the researcher chose a thematic approach because it allowed the interviewees to freely talk about their opinions through examples and stories. The focal point of theme interviews is to understand the meanings of what the interviewees tell and thus, considers both, facts and meanings. (Puustinen 2013.)

Semi-structured theme interviews use pre-defined themes with supporting questions and depending on the flow, allow the researcher at the same time to improvise if new topics emerge, collect more detailed information and clarify unexpected information. This type of interview is a common approach to gather qualitative data in research because it allows to collect valuable information about a topic or field which is less known or rarely studied. (Puustinen 2013.) Including certain topics requires knowledge about the existing theory from the researcher, as well as experiences with the subject by the respondent. Therefore, the right interviewees have to be selected carefully, who hold the information that supports the research objective. (Adams, Khan & Raeside 2013, 145; Saunders et al. 2019, 438.)

7.3 Process of the qualitative research method

The interviewees were German-speaking repeat visitors and cottage owners of Ilomantsi, which was anticipated to result in each interview being different and a story in its own way (Veal 2017, 290). Thus, the thematic approach presented a more structured aspect and led to the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee being similar for all subjects. Further, this method allowed to compare the different responses to each topic to identify and analyze the findings. The semi-structured approach enabled to reach more scope for elaboration and general discussion. (Wilson 2013, 24; Saunders et al. 2019, 437.)

The study's empirical data was collected through five interviews with German-speaking repeat visitors and cottage owners of Ilomantsi. The head of Ilomantsi

Tourism Association provided the contact to the interviewees and thus indirectly took part in the selection of the respondents. From the five interviewees, four persons came from Germany and one from Austria. Below in Table 7, basic information about age, country, gender and occupation of the respondents can be found.

Table 7. Basic information of interview respondents.

Identifier	Age	Country	Gender	Occupation	Own a cottage in Ilomantsi
R1	56	Germany	Male	Travel journalist	Yes
R2	45	Austria	Male	Entrepreneur	Not anymore
R3	59	Germany	Male	University Professor	Yes
R4	44	Germany	Female	Teacher	No
R5	50	Germany	Male	DJ, event organizer	No

Out of the five respondents, four were male and one was female. However, the results did not show significant differences in the answers between males and females. The age of the interviewees ranged from 44 to 59 years, which could indicate that this age group prefers Ilomantsi more than younger people. This, however, could not be proofed since the number of respondents was relatively small and the selection was made due to their relationship with the commissioner. All interviewees except one requested to know the interview themes before the interview. Thus, the themes were given to them before the interview took place.

In order to achieve a successful interview, careful preparation was required in advance. Thus, an interview guide was prepared, which can be seen in Appendix I. It contained a list of themes and questions that were covered during the interviews. Further, comments were included that assisted in opening the interview and provided tips and keywords for the researcher to help stimulate further discussion, as well as comments to close it. (Saunders et al. 2019, 438.) During the interviews, the focus was put on a minimalist approach to intervention, meaning that the interviewees were encouraged to talk freely with as little influence from the interviewer as possible (Veal 2017, 291).

The interviews consisted of five themes; motivation to go on holiday, values and reasons for destination choice, products and services in Ilomantsi, travel preferences for visiting Ilomantsi and experiences and activities in Ilomantsi. All interviews ended with a closing question that asked about suggestions for further development. During the interviews, the researcher asked each interviewee about the same themes and let them freely talk. Questions were only asked to clarify and make sure that all interview processes were as similar as possible.

With the first theme, the researcher was curious about the interviewee's motivation to go on holiday. Tourist motivation seeks to understand why people want to travel and involves tourists' needs and wants (Woodside & Martin 2007, 14). Thus, the aim of this theme was about the purpose of their holiday and why they go on holiday. The researcher was interested in figuring out how they found out about Ilomantsi, what role Ilomantsi is playing in their life and what keeps motivating them to come to Ilomantsi.

The next theme was about the interviewees' values and reasons for the destination choice. With this theme, the focus was put on why they choose a destination in general and what they value or find important in a holiday. Usually, the attractiveness of a destination is shaped by its attractions, facilities and services, accessibility, people, price and image (World Tourism Organization 2007, 1-2). The researcher's thought here was to find out why they come to Ilomantsi (national park, farms, atmosphere) and what the first thing is that comes to their mind about Ilomantsi. Further, the researcher wanted to explore what is different about Ilomantsi compared to other cities or regions.

Tourism products are a combination of tangible and intangible elements. Resources coming from nature, culture or man-made are combined with facilities, attractions, services and activities in a destination. Based on the resources and competencies of the destination, different products and services can be offered. (World Tourism Organization 2007, 83.) Thus, products and services in Ilomantsi were another theme of the interviews and the researcher wanted to find out what the interviewees expect from a destination in general and further, to hear about their opinion about the tourist products and services of Ilomantsi. The infrastructure was another factor within this topic, where the researcher wanted to explore what they think about the infrastructure

in Ilomantsi and if there was something that they would need to be there, which is not there yet.

The fourth theme was about the travel preferences for visiting Ilomantsi. With this theme, the researcher wanted to investigate how they travel, what kind of services they use and how they spend their money whilst being in Ilomantsi. The choice of their transportation mode and type of accommodation was an important factor within this topic, as well as to examine how long they usually stay in Ilomantsi and with whom they travel.

Lastly, the experiences and activities in Ilomantsi were discussed. The researcher wanted to find out what they normally do in Ilomantsi or what else they would like to do. Further, it was explored how they feel when being in Ilomantsi (relaxed, rested, active) and if something was missing.

The interviews were conducted online through Microsoft Teams between the summer months of June and August 2020. Due to the geographic distance between the researcher and the respondents, video interviews seemed to be the best choice. It further presented the interviewees with being in the comfort of their own home, which led to a relaxed atmosphere. All interviews were conducted in the daytime between 12 and 4 p.m. Some notes were made during the interviews. However, the recording of the interviews was crucial since it allowed to transcribe all interviews later in detail and thus, did not take away the attention of the researcher during the interview. For the recording consent of the participants was given. The transcriptions were made subsequently and provided the basis for the data analysis. Content analysis was the method choice since it seeks to systematically describe the meaning of the interview material.

8 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

All interview material was recorded and transcribed into word documents to examine the data. The interview transcripts were printed out and used as the basis of the qualitative content analysis. The analysis process started with reading all the interviews several times to examine the details of the discussions. Within this process, important words and phrases were highlighted and analyzed in terms of similarities and common themes but also in differences. An effort was required from the researcher to interpret the information accurately and make reliable conclusions since the transcripts offered together with the visual and audio recording, vast and rich information. The video recordings of the interviews offered additional information sources through body language, facial expressions and voice tone.

8.1 Content analysis

The data for this research came from semi-structured theme interviews. Therefore, the conducted interviews with the German-speaking people were transcribed. Otherwise, no special data preparation was needed. According to Schreier (2014, 174), a transcript should be complete and include all questions asked by the researcher. Nothing should be left out, even if it is considered unimportant. However, there is no need for a detailed description of how something was said. Using qualitative content analysis aims to reduce data in a systematic and flexible way (Schreier 2014, 170).

Data coming from interviews are usually qualitative and thus, come in a non-numeric form. It is necessary, therefore, to do qualitative analysis to understand and interpret the collected data. Different methods exist for qualitative data and next to thematic analysis, content analysis is one of the most popular approaches. (Adams et al. 2013, 159; Schreier 2014, 170-171.) Content analysis allows to go in-depth in the interview content and helps to structure its meanings, identify the main concepts and further to analyze and summarize them on a general level (Schreier 2014, 171).

Further, content analysis helps to process and describe large amounts of data (Schreier 2014, 170). This is done through a classification process that includes coding and identifying certain themes and categories. The categories highlight the reliability and replicability of the interview data and its interpretation. (Schreier 2014, 173.) This method helps to quantify and analyze meanings and relationship and their occurrence (Adams et al. 2013, 159; Schreier 2014, 170). The steps of content analysis involve choosing the data sources, coding the data, developing categories, assessing the validity and reliability and lastly, analyzing the results (Schreier 2014, 174).

Analyzing the data from the conducted interviews aimed to find out the tourist motivators and pull factors of German-speaking tourists. The findings sought to understand why they travel and what they value on their holiday and therefore, to help improve Ilomantsi's existing products and services. The meaning of the data was described by assigning the most important parts of the material to codes and categories (Griffiee 2005; Schreier 2014, 174). The coding process used color-coding to highlight particularly interesting passages. This technique helped to decide on the importance of information before determining which codes to use. Following, the coded segments of the data were marked with category names, which were then grouped into themes. (Schreier 2014, 178-179.)

Thus, categories refer to data coming from different passages of the interview transcript and a coding frame evolves from these categories. The coding frame is considered as the heart of this method since the analysis and interpretation are based on it. (Schreier 2014, 174-175.) Within the analysis, the researcher selects and focuses on certain factors, which are the most important aspects related to the research questions. The content analysis seeks to examine how different parts of the data compare and relate to each other. (Schreier 2014, 170.)

A data-driven approach was used in this research for the analysis, meaning that the researcher got familiar with the data and therefrom used emerging categories to establish the new themes (Griffiee 2005). Unlike the theory-guided approach where categories and themes are pre-defined by existing theory, the data-driven approach uses codes and categories that emerge from the data based on a detailed analysis of the interview material (Griffiee 2005; Schreier 2014, 176). This means the data-driven

approach has no theory in the background, only the data which will be interpreted. It is also possible to combine theory-driven and data-driven approaches for the data analysis since the coding frame is flexible. (Schreier 2014, 171.)

This research aimed to examine the data without preconceived notions or categories, explore new findings and look for the unexpected. After creating the coding framework, patterns and connections were identified. They assisted in summarizing and interpreting the research findings. (Schreier 2014, 180.) This was done paper-based with the help of sticky notes and creating mind maps on Canva. For the data analysis, no software was used.

8.2 Interpretation of the results

The collected data was analyzed by using a data-driven approach for content analysis. Five new common themes emerged from the analyzing process: nature, location, infrastructure, communication and offering. The results are illustrated and described in the following figures. To start the interpretation of the results, the nature concept is described first, since it was the most distinct concept from the collected data. Figure 9 shows all subcategories that were used in connection with the nature theme.

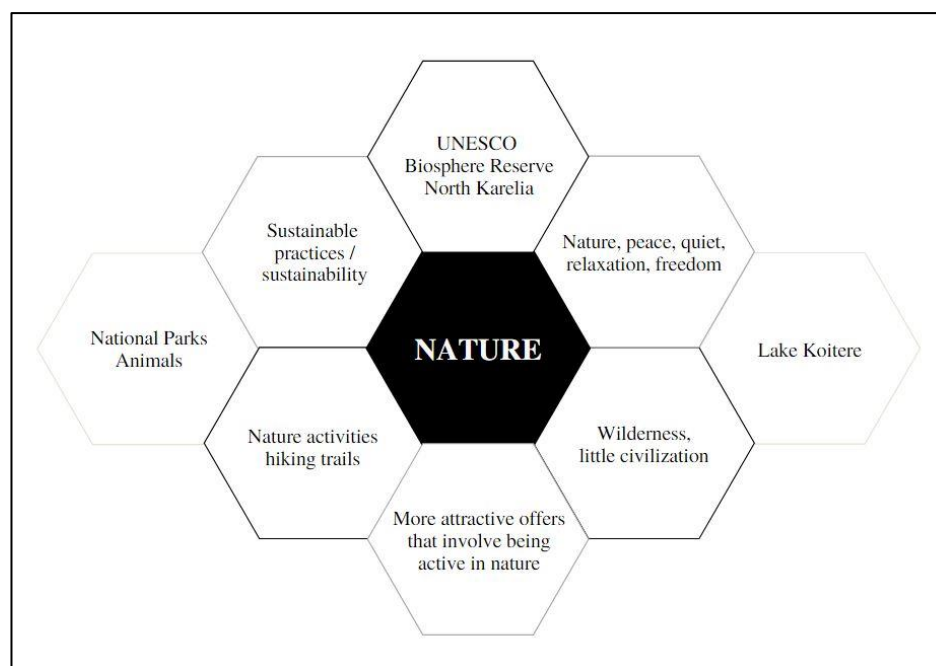


Figure 9. Interview finding – Theme: Nature (Lampert 2021)

The interview data indicated that nature plays a vital role in the respondents' motivation to go on holiday. Nature, peace and quiet, as well as relaxation and freedom were the driving motivations for the interviewed German-speaking tourists on their holidays. Further, it was one of the main reasons mentioned for what they value about Ilomantsi, why they went to Ilomantsi the first time and kept coming back. They claimed that they want to get away from their busy jobs and everyday life.

Wilderness and little civilization was another attractive factor and one reason how they discovered Ilomantsi the first time. Wild animals in the great outdoors were something very special and exotic for the respondents since this is rare in Central Europe. Bears, wolves and moose were mentioned many times by the German speakers. Overall, the nature factor showed that the German-speaking tourists liked to be active in nature and appreciated national parks and activities in nature. Further, the interviewees wished to find more attractive offers that involve being active in nature.

Lake Koitere was only mentioned by one respondent, who stated that the lake would offer great possibilities for tourism. However, no tourism-related infrastructure, products and services and information about it would exist. The North Karelian Biosphere Reserve was another thing that was mentioned by some of the interviewees and was important to them. On the contrary, some respondents wished for more protected areas and did not know about the Biosphere Reserve at all. Sustainable practices were mentioned by all respondents and they claimed that this was something that they value about a destination.

The next concept that occurred in all interviews was the location, which showed pluses and minuses for Ilomantsi. Figure 10 illustrates the subcategories that were made related to the concept of location.

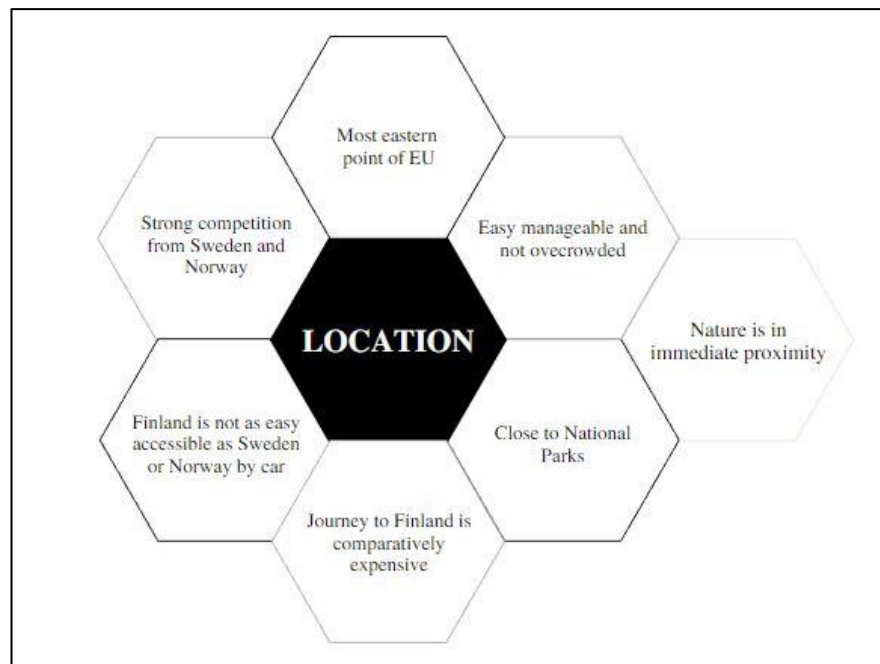


Figure 10. Interview finding – Theme: Location (Lampert 2021)

Ilomantsi being the most eastern municipality and thus, having the most eastern point of the EU, showed to be a pull factor, that attracted the interviewees and made it interesting and special. The close proximity to national parks and the fact that nature is all around in Ilomantsi was another positive point. On the other hand, the geographic position of Finland was something that was perceived to be challenging for Ilomantsi since Finland as a holiday destination had strong competition from Sweden and Norway in the eyes of the interviewees.

During the interviews, it was further shown that German-speaking people perceived the journey to Finland as expensive compared to other European countries. This confirmed their statement that Sweden and Norway are easier accessible by car for German-speaking tourists than Finland. Lastly, the respondents valued about Ilomantsi that it is not overcrowded and easily manageable, meaning that it is clear in its system and structure in one glance.

The third concept that emerged from the interview data was communication. This concept showed many differences in the respondents' narrations and Figure 11 demonstrates the statements related to communication.

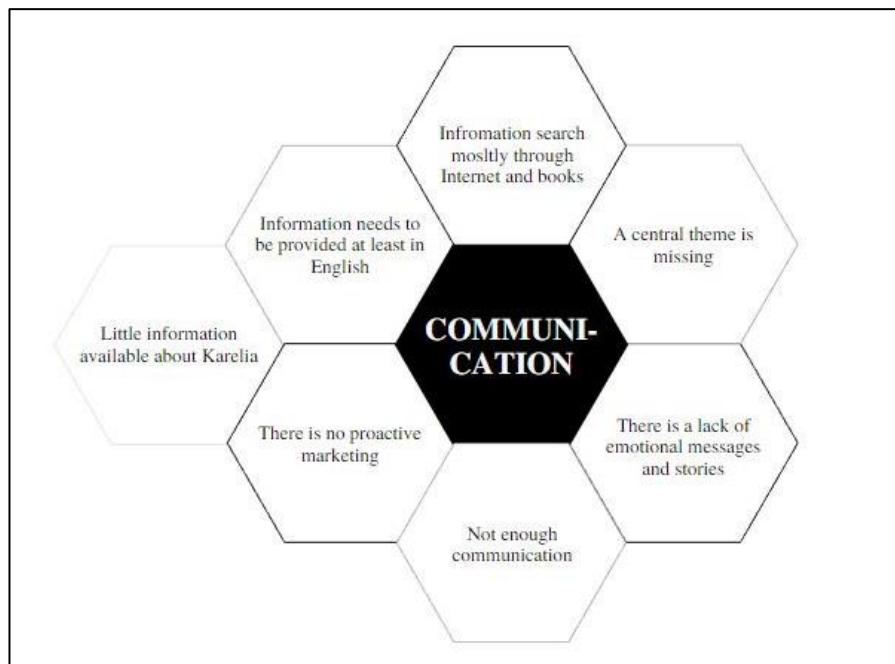


Figure 11. Interview finding – Theme: Communication (Lampert 2021)

The respondents claimed that Sweden and Norway are much more popular in their home countries and that less information is available about Finland in general. Thus, if they looked for information online or in books, the majority of information was about Helsinki, Lapland, the South and the West of Finland. Further, information about the Lakeland area was also available but very little information about Karelia.

Another important point mentioned was that they felt that there is no proactive marketing for Ilomantsi and they lack emotional messages and stories. One respondent stated that Ilomantsi is not in the heads of people and what it has to offer. Other interviewees thought that a central theme in the destination is missing. The marketing does not differentiate them enough from Sweden, respondents claimed that many people in their home countries perceive Finland and Sweden as the same. Thus, the marketing aspect was something that the respondents mentioned and some of them believed that Ilomantsi markets itself with outdated attractions, which do not pull tourists specifically to the destination. All respondents agreed that it is necessary to communicate information in English. German was not demanded but would be a plus and could attract more possible tourists according to interviewees.

Another interesting concept that came up during the interviews was the infrastructure of Ilomantsi. This topic arose next to the tourism products and services of the destination. Below, in Figure 12 the subcategories are shown.

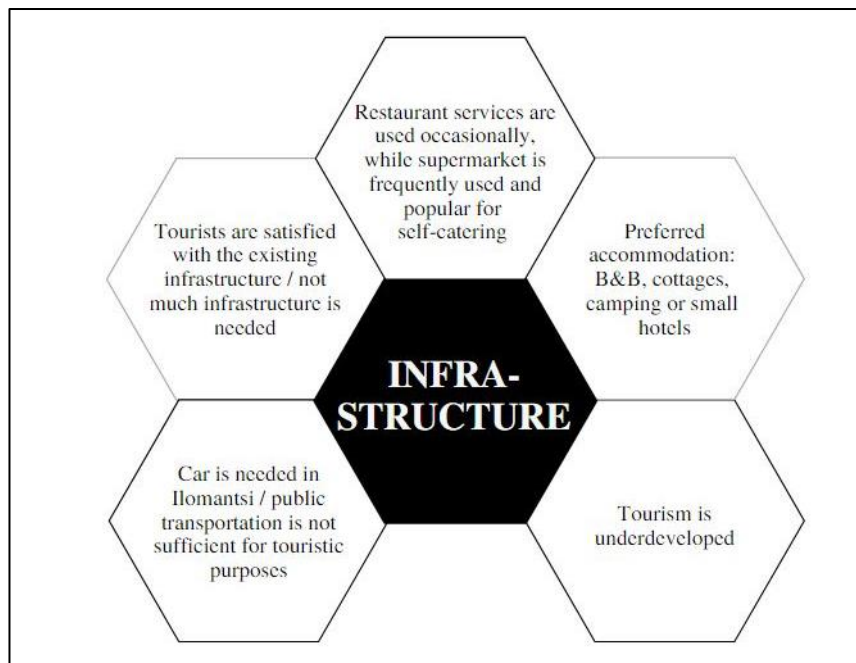


Figure 12. Interview finding – Theme: Infrastructure (Lampert 2021)

Interviewees thought that those tourists who come to Ilomantsi require in general relatively little infrastructure. Thus, it was said that everything is there for nature lovers. However, it also stood out that tourism is underdeveloped and that there would be room to improve the existing infrastructure.

In this context, accommodation was mentioned since according to the interviewees, there is not much choice available. Further, some respondents stated that there was little offering on good accommodation possibilities considering the price-quality ratio. The accommodation was considered as an important element for some respondents since it is for most of them the only thing that they book in advance. Their preferred accommodation forms were bed and breakfasts and cottages, followed by camping or small hotels. Needing a car in Ilomantsi to get to different places did not appear to be an issue for the respondents since most of them use the ferry and car as a mode of transportation. It was also mentioned that there is only a very limited choice of restaurants and possibilities to dine out. Yet again, this did not seem to be a big problem since most of them considered themselves as self-caterer.

The last concept that emerged from the collected data of the interviews was the offering in Ilomantsi. All respondents stated there is something to see for almost everyone. Natural and cultural offerings were mentioned as can be seen in Figure 13.



Figure 13. Interview finding – Theme: Offering (Lampert 2021)

The nature offering was considered as broad by the respondents and popular nature activities of the German speakers were canoeing, kayaking, hiking, fishing, boat, swimming, sauna, berry and mushroom picking and cycling. Besides the many existing possibilities, as mentioned in the nature concept earlier, some respondents wished for more attractive activities that involve them actively in nature.

The cultural offering was appreciated and attractive as well for the interviewees. One respondent told that Finnish and Karelian culture is interesting and fascinating because it is so closely connected with nature and therefore, somehow different from Central Europe. Overall, Karelian culture and traditions were mentioned by all interviewees and Parppeinvaara village, Runen singer, Kantele and the bear festival were named the most attractive cultural offerings. Further, the war history was perceived as an important element of the Karelian culture. Some respondents stated that they love to get in contact with locals to learn from them and hear stories, whilst others preferred to be alone amongst themselves enjoying nature.

Concluding this topic, the data from the interviews showed that the interviewed German-speaking tourists do not spend much money on tourism products and services. When asked about their spending, no specific amount was mentioned. However, it was mentioned that transportation, accommodation and food are the main expenses of their holiday.

8.3 Discussion and suggestions

The findings of the research left room for discussion and suggestions. Within this chapter elements that occurred in the result and theory part, will be discussed and compared to each other.

To begin with, the identified nature theme can give an indication for the types of German-speaking tourists that Ilomantsi attracts, namely couples and individuals, but also families, which love nature and like to do activities outdoors. Reflecting this on the theory shows that the possible target segments mentioned in Chapter 6.2 would fit with the data coming from the interviews. The target segments of nature explorers and authentic lifestyle seekers fit very well with the narrations of the respondents. Further, activity enthusiasts could be another possible target group for Ilomantsi since some respondents stated that they would like more active offerings. In this context, the North Karelian Biosphere Reserve should be promoted and highlighted more to attract potential new tourists. The theory about target marketing in Chapter 4 with the steps of segmenting, targeting and positioning would be an important step for Ilomantsi Tourism Association, to build the base for their marketing strategy. Geographic segmentation is certainly one of their segmentation methods since they aim to attract more German-speaking tourists. Another method could also be the motivation and nature factor. Thus, using some of Visit Finland's visitor profiles could help to build their marketing around it. Targeting certain target groups through niche marketing could be important since it would allow them to target the segments that fit their resources best.

Theory in Chapter 6.1 has shown that the most popular holidays for DACH countries are beach and bathing holidays as well as recreational holidays. The demand for nature

and sports holidays, however, has been growing steadily and this matches with the collected data from the interviewees. The data showed that the respondents are looking for nature as the main element in their holiday, where they can enjoy peace, quiet and escape their everyday life. Further, some of the respondents mentioned that they want to get to know the country and its people, this again would confirm that German-speaking travelers are interested in culture. The interviewee's values are closely connected to their motivation to go on holiday and thus, are strongly connected with the decision-making process.

Another element that was discussed within the theory was the mode of transportation and the type of accommodation that German-speaking travelers use in Chapter 6.1. According to the theory, German-speaking tourists prefer to travel by car or airplane. Even though four out of five respondents use their own car to get to Helsinki by ferry and one respondent uses the airplane when going to Finland, it needs to be considered that these findings cannot be generalized for all German-speaking tourists since only a small sample size of a selected group of people was used to collect the data. In this case, however, it can be said that these transportation modes were the most popular. Concerning the accommodation, the theory suggests that German-speaking travelers primarily stay in hotels, holiday apartments, cottages or houses. Yet, the interview data indicated that the German-speaking travelers prefer to stay in cottages, bed and breakfasts, small hotels or camping grounds. There are slight differences between the theory and the collected data but overall the findings of this specific tourist group do not vary significantly. Again, in this case, no generalizations can be made due to the small sample size. Further, it needs to be noted that different types of travelers exist such as individuals, groups, couples, families or package travelers, which have different preferences.

Interview data showed that the interviewed German-speaking tourists do not spend much money on tourism products and services. Even though some chargeable activities such as canoeing, kayaking or visiting one of Ilomantsi's museums were mentioned, most respondents' favorite activities were free of cost. For example, hiking in national parks, swimming, berry and mushroom picking. This faces Ilomantsi with the challenge of creating and designing profitable offerings. The main activities mentioned by the interviewees, together with the fact that they consider themselves as

self-caterer would explain the research in Chapter 6.1 that Germans spend less in Scandinavia on average per day than in other European countries. The costs for the journey to Finland were another important factor that has been mentioned by some of the respondents when asked about the prices in Finland. Costs for accommodation and food were not considered as much higher in their home countries, however, the costs for flight or ferry tickets have drawn attention. Respondents said that it is rather expensive to get to Finland compared to other countries. Thus, this could be an explanation why many DACH travelers do not stay in one place in Finland but rather undertake a round trip in Finland to explore more places during one visit. This results in tourists that mostly stay only one or two nights in one destination. Considering the expensive journey together with the accommodation costs and additional expenses for activities and services suggest that these German-speaking travelers have the financial resources and relatively high spending power. However, for budget travelers or tourists that do not want to spend much money or have the financial means, camping services offer a cheaper alternative.

A theme that has emerged from the collected data is communication, which also influences the destination choice. Besides the motivation and preference for certain holidays, communication and information are other big factors that influence German-speaking tourists' destination and buying decisions, as mentioned in Chapter 5. The German respondents said that information about Sweden and Norway is plentiful and easily available, but information and news about Finland are not. Further, the available information about Finland is mostly about Helsinki, Southern Finland and Lapland but usually does not cover Karelia.

The increased demand for nature, active and adventure holidays mentioned in Chapter 6.2, would offer the possibility for Ilomantsi and North Karelia as a destination for German-speaking tourists. The proximity of Germany to Finland makes Germany a more attractive market than Austria and Switzerland. Again, with the location factor, Finland has strong competition from Norway and Sweden since they are faster, easier and less expensive to reach.

Ilomantsi seems to under-position itself since people do not know much about the destination and what it has to offer according to one interview respondent. Looking at

this statement together with the theory in Chapter 4.3, indicates that Ilomantsi does not position itself well enough. Thus, considering the information from the interviews, the following suggestions were made by the researcher.

Firstly, a central theme could be developed for Ilomantsi that tells a story and creates an image of the destination. Karelian culture is something special and unique and highlighting it could help Ilomantsi to differentiate themselves. Further, it creates opportunities to design services and products, educate visitors about the culture and traditions, create storytelling and authenticity. The fact that Ilomantsi has the most eastern point of the European Union could be another differentiating factor that can be used for marketing purposes.

The findings further showed that nature is a main factor and motivator for the respondents to come to Ilomantsi. Thus, the primary focus should be put on nature. Ilomantsi is part of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve North Karelia and this fact should be highlighted, communicated and promoted towards the German-speaking tourism market. People do not know about it and this offers a great marketing opportunity. According to the interviewees, the biosphere reserve could be a pull factor for other German-speaking people because the demand for nature destinations with sustainable practices is growing.

Yet, the nature factor also brings the challenge in creating products and services that bring money to the destination and profit tourism businesses. Therefore, more active tourism products need to be designed, which entertain tourists and at the same time involve and allow them to participate actively. For instance, reforestation projects that educate tourists about the Finnish forest or forest education trails and themed hiking trails could be one suggestion. Other products could involve wildlife or Karelian traditions. Lastly, Ilomantsi offers also potential for winter tourism activities such as cross-country skiing, ice fishing, snowshoe walking or snowmobiles for example. German-speaking tourists do not go to Finland for downhill skiing, thus Ilomantsi should focus on activities that fit their skillset and involve activities that locals do, which cannot be done well in Central Europe. Therefore, winter activities do not have to include a long list, a few well-done products with good quality service and infrastructure can make a big difference and attract new potential tourists.

9 CONCLUSION

This work aimed to study the motivations, values and main factors for the destination choice of German-speaking tourists. Therefore, five thematic interviews were conducted with selected German-speaking people. First, it was important to look at what kind of products and services this customer group wants. The findings showed that the respondents participate in activities that are done in nature and which require active involvement such as canoeing, hiking or fishing. Cultural activities that involve learning about the culture and getting in contact with locals were other activities that this German-speaking tourist segment found interesting.

The findings further showed that getting away from everyday life and relaxing in nature were the main reasons why the respondents choose a destination. In this context, it was also mentioned that silence and unspoiled nature are very important. Furthermore, the available activities are another essential reason for the destination choice of this German-speaking tourist segment. Overall, nature played a central role in all holiday areas of German-speaking tourists. Nature was valued enormously and together with peace, quietness and freedom. Further, opportunities to get to know the country and culture through locals were something that they valued. The reasons to go on holiday were closely connected with the values, which in turn were strongly linked to the motivation.

Hence, the findings presented that nature, wilderness and little civilization were the motivations and pull factors for German-speaking tourists to travel to Ilomantsi. The destination of Ilomantsi offers the opportunity to escape the hectic and stressful lives in Central Europe. Ilomantsi impressed with its simplicity but at the same time also with its richness in nature, culture and traditions.

To conclude, it needs to be noted that motivations, values, products and services differ from person to person. Therefore, it needs to be looked at more than just the geographic area of a tourist group. Niche marketing, which involves segmenting and targeting a more specific tourist group of the German-speaking market is vital to make marketing efforts more effective and efficient and further, to make a destination more attractive.

10 SUMMARY

Ilomantsi faces difficulties with increasing the number of repeat visitors and tourists that stay longer than one or two nights. Germany is the second largest tourism market for Finland and also for North Karelia and considering that Switzerland and Austria have many similarities with Germany, makes the German-speaking market an attractive market for Ilomantsi. Thus, this thesis aimed to look at Ilomantsi as a tourism destination for German-speaking tourists and to identify their motivations, values and desires. Further, it sought to identify the reasons for coming to Ilomantsi and why they keep coming.

Therefore, three theoretical concepts were used for the literary research. First, it was looked at target marketing with the steps of segmentation, targeting and positioning. Using this concept helps to identify market segments and select the right ones, to design services and products tailored to a specific tourist group. Further, it can help to focus on customers who have a high interest in the values that Ilomantsi creates best and thus, can assist in increasing the destination's competitiveness.

Secondly, consumer behavior in tourism was studied with a focus on characteristics that influence buyer behavior, tourist motivation, tourist decision-making and buying process. It was important to look at this concept because tourism destinations need to understand their customers' needs and wants and the marketplace in which they operate. This can assist in understanding why German-speaking people decide on Ilomantsi and what attracts them to Ilomantsi.

The last concept in the literary research gave an overview of the German-speaking tourism market. Within that chapter, it was looked at Germany, Austria and Switzerland and what kind of parallels occur in their travel behavior. Further, it was looked at possible tourist profiles for Ilomantsi. Therefore, Visit Finland's visitor profiles were used as inspiration.

The empirical part of this thesis used a qualitative research approach by using semi-structured theme interviews. Therefore, five German-speaking repeat visitors and

cottage owners of Ilomantsi were interviewed. These participants were hand-selected by the researcher and commissioner. All five interviews were recorded and transcriptions were made, which gave the base for the data analysis process. The gathered data was analyzed through content analysis, which used a data-driven approach. As a result, five new themes emerged from the collected data, which were nature, location, infrastructure, communication and offering. These themes are described in detail in Chapter 8.2 Interpretation of the results.

The author concluded that the researched tourist group desired activities, services and products that involve nature, learning about the culture and contact with locals. Overall, nature played a central role in all areas of the respondent's holiday and the main reasons for the destination choice were getting away from everyday life and relaxing in nature, the available activities and learning something new. Opportunities to get to know the country and culture through locals were what was valued together with nature, peace, quietness and freedom. The reasons to go on holiday were closely connected with the values, which in turn were strongly linked to the motivation. Thus it can be said that for this specific tourist group, nature, wilderness and little civilization were the motivations and pull factors of Ilomantsi.

Based on the research outcome, it can be recommended that the destination determines its niche tourism market and profiles and focuses the marketing activities on them. This can benefit the improvement of products and services, make the destination more attractive and help to build a marketing strategy.

11 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Reliability and validity are important factors in research that help judge the quality and accuracy of a study (Klenke, Martin & Wallace 2016, 38). In quantitative research, reliability refers to the degree to which the data collection methods and analytical procedures would replicate the same or similar findings when repeated by another researcher at a different time. In this regard, the validity points out the appropriateness of the used measures and how accurate the analysis of the results is. Further, it refers to the generalizability of the findings. (Saunders et al. 2019, 213.) In qualitative research, however, these criteria about quality and accuracy are not as clear and ambiguous to answer. Thus, the reliability and validity criteria, which were created originally for quantitative research may be misleading in qualitative research and therefore, have been redefined by different academics. (Klenke et al. 2016, 39.)

There are different quality approaches for qualitative research and according to Klenke et al. (2016, 39) credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are the four most essential criteria. Firstly, the **credibility** parallels with internal validity and describes the extent to which the findings are believable from the participant's point of view. Next, a criterion that correlates to external validity is **transferability**. It refers to the degree to which the results can be transferred to other settings or contexts. Thirdly, **dependability** shows the degree to which similar results can be achieved by different researchers and thus, relates to the reliability. Lastly, **confirmability** corresponds to objectivity and describes the extent to which the findings can be confirmed by others. These criteria help to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative research.

This thesis used a qualitative research approach by using semi-structured interviews. Interviews are by nature more subjective since they aim to discover the respondent's narrations and views and therefore raise the concern of bias and errors (Saunders et al. 449). Therefore, a minimalist approach to intervention was used, which allowed the interviewees to talk freely with as little influence from the interviewer as possible. Each interview was conducted online and allowed the respondents to be in the comfort of their own homes. The five interviews were conducted during the summer months

of 2021, all approximately at the same time of the day. Cultural differences between interviewer and interviewee can also cause bias or threat to the reliability and confirmability (Saunders et al. 450). The researcher in this case came from a German-speaking country, which helped to overcome this concern. All these factors contributed to similar interview conditions for all subjects.

Further, in context with reliability, this means that there are certain concerns about the standardization and dependability of semi-structured interviews. The concerns are about whether a different researcher would achieve similar information and results or not. It is not fully realistic to achieve repeatable findings from this research method since it reflects on the reality at the time that the information was collected and therefore, might change over time. (Saunders et al. 449.)

This study aimed to identify the tourist motivators and pull factors of Ilomantsi for German-speaking tourists. It was anticipated to result in each interview being different and a story in its own way. Yet, to present a more structured aspect, a thematic approach was chosen, which led to the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee being similar for all subjects. Further, this method allowed to compare the different responses to each topic to identify and analyze the findings.

For the data collection of this thesis, an interview guide was created which included five themes with supporting questions, to make the interview process as similar as possible for all five interviews. The themes for the interview were established based on the existing theory of this subject matter. Asking about the same themes and using the same supporting questions, helped to make the semi-structured interviews, which are flexible by nature, more standardized. Further, reliability was enhanced by taking notes, audio and voice recording of all interviews and making full transcriptions of each interview.

Semi-structured interviews can achieve a high level of credibility according to Saunders et al. (2019, 451) when conducted carefully with good preparation and execution. In this research, clarifying questions were used to check and confirm the collected data, which was rich and sufficient and gave a big scope to explore and draw relations to the pre-existing theory.

Findings from qualitative research often raise the concern of generalizability due to the small number of interviews or cases. The study's interviewees were hand-selected by the research commissioner and the researcher. Although the sample size with five interviews is relatively small, interviewing these people allowed collecting rich data from a representative sample who know Ilomantsi very well and what it has to offer. Further, the research findings were able to relate to the existing theory. Through an accurate description of the research design, context and methods (Saunders et al. 2019, 216) as was done within this research, similar studies can be replicated and the transferability can be enhanced. Yet it needs to be mentioned that this study cannot be used to make statistical generalizations about all German-speaking tourists since motivations, values and desires differ from person to person and change over time. Therefore, it needs to be considered that the gathered data comes from niche tourists of the DACH market, which was specifically collected for the Ilomantsi region.

Research about motivations and travel behavior of German-speaking tourists brings some issues despite the sufficient availability of information, research articles and material. Most of the conducted research on the motivations and travel behavior of German-speaking tourists focuses only or mainly on Germany. Out of the 100 million inhabitants of the DACH market, Germany has the biggest population with 83,2 million inhabitants, whereas Austria (8,9 million) and Switzerland (8,6 million) share a similar population size (Website of Statista 2021). This fact makes Germany a bigger and more attractive market, which receives bigger research attention compared to Austria and Switzerland. However, research suggested that the DACH countries share many similarities and thus gave reason and assumption that these countries can be treated similarly.

12 LEARNING REFLECTION AND FEEDBACK

The whole thesis process was a good learning experience that taught the importance of understanding theoretical concepts and how to apply them in real-life situations. Further, creating a thesis in cooperation with a commissioner was another valuable experience since it required the researcher to also consider other opinions and wishes. Fortunately, in this case, the cooperation with the commissioner was very pleasant and made the decision processes happen naturally. During this thesis, important lessons were learned about tourist motivations and decision-making. Further, it showed the importance of marketing for destinations and tourism overall.

During the thesis, the German-speaking tourism market was studied. However, most information about tourist behavior within the DACH (Germany, Austria and Switzerland) market was about Germany. This thesis took Germany as the main indicator for all German-speaking countries based on the fact that the DACH countries share many similarities as discussed in the theory. For future research, however, it could be interesting to look in more detail at the different countries, to make more reliable conclusions. As for the thesis process, the chosen method of semi-structured interviews showed to be very time-consuming and required much effort from the researcher. Yet, for this research, this method is still perceived as the right one by the author because it allowed to collect rich and valuable information, which probably could not have been collected through quantitative research methods such as surveys or questionnaires.

The thesis helped the author to prepare for the professional work life that follows after graduation. It showed that in tourism many things are interconnected and rely on each other to work. The outcome of the thesis emphasized the importance of marketing destinations attractively in today's competitive tourism market and the findings gave the commissioner possibilities and suggestions for improvement. All in all, the author became curious to learn more about nature and sustainable practices in tourism that will be useful for the professional career.

Ilomantsi Tourism Association Feedback (Eero Tuomisto):

The qualitative value of Annika Lampert's study comes out of the character of respondents. All of them have visited Ilomantsi several times, have more or less established contact with local people and some of them have even invested in a local summer home. The respondents are well aware what Ilomantsi does offer, how the offering is marketed and what it could be. Therefore the findings are of great relevance.

The way Lampert presents the results of the study is illustrative. Findings, divided in five themes, give a solid ground to further development among local actors. An eye opener is the communications theme. The lack of proactive marketing, as well as emotional messages and stories, is definitely an issue which must be taken care of. The study points out that more emphasis should be put on information and storytelling. The belief that Ilomantsi markets itself with outdated attractions, is also worth of further consideration.

Sustainability becomes also apparent in the study and was mentioned by all respondents. The North Karelian Biosphere Reserve, in which Ilomantsi is part of, could be a pull factor and should be included in the Ilomantsi communication theme. The study points out that the interviewed German-speaking tourists do not spend much money on tourism products and services. Although no generalizations can be made due to the small sample size, this is a good reminder that emphasis on creating and designing profitable offerings is essential.

As a conclusion, Lampert presents several valuable remarks which could be used to promote Ilomantsi as a destination. The key factor is niche marketing. Segmenting and targeting a more specific tourist group of the German-speaking market is an issue, which must be taken into account. Lampert proposes even new type of products. As an example, proposed reforestation projects that educate tourists about the Finnish forest, or forest education trails and themed hiking trails, is an interesting brand-new idea.

On behalf of the commissioner, Ilomantsi Tourism Association, I would like to thank Annika Lampert for the job well done.

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Interview Guide for theme interviews

Introduction and general information:

The topic of my thesis is to look at Ilomantsi as a tourism destination for German-speaking people. The objective therefore is to identify pull factors, motivators and reasons that draw German-speaking tourists to Ilomantsi. Within my research I will interview German-speaking repeat visitors and cottage owners of Ilomantsi with the aim to identify reasons why this customer group keeps coming. This will hopefully give Ilomantsi Tourism Association a better idea about the motivations, values and desires of the German-speaking market. The findings of the research can help Ilomantsi Tourism Association to improve the existing products and services or even to create new ones that attract German-speaking tourists. Further, it could give them a base for developing a marketing strategy towards the German-speaking market.

- Can you please tell me a little bit about yourself? (Name, age, occupation, ...)
- Where are you from?
- How many times have you been to Ilomantsi? / Since when do you keep coming to Ilomantsi?
- How did you find out about Ilomantsi?
- Do you own a summer cottage/property in Ilomantsi?

Theme 1: Tourist motivation – Motivation to go on holiday

- 1) What is the purpose of your holiday?
- 2) What were/are the main motivations for visiting Ilomantsi?

Theme 2: Values and reasons for destination choice

- 3) What do you find important about a destination / on your holiday in Finland?
- 4) What do you value about Ilomantsi? What attracts you to return to Ilomantsi?
- 5) Have you been to other places in Finland? How does Ilomantsi compare/differentiate to those places?

Theme 3: Products and services in Ilomantsi

- 6) What are the important products and services that you expect as a guest from your holiday destination?
- 7) What do you think about the infrastructure of Ilomantsi? How do you perceive it? Is there something missing?

Theme 4: Travel preferences for visiting Ilomantsi

- 8) How does your typical stay in Ilomantsi look like?
- 9) What kind of services/products do you use and how much money do you spend?

Theme 5: Experiences and activities in Ilomantsi

- 10) What types of activities do you do during your holiday in Ilomantsi?
- 11) Are there some experiences or activities that you would like to have in your holiday that are not presented at all in Ilomantsi? (Ask here about nature-based activities.)

Closing the interview:

- 12) Are there any suggestions that you have for the future tourism development of Ilomantsi? / What could tourism businesses do to improve their products and services for the German-speaking market?