

Saimaa University of Applied Sciences  
Imatra  
Degree Programme in Tourism

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# **How to Attract International Students to SaiPa's Games**

Bachelor's Thesis 2013

## ABSTRACT

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The subject of the thesis is how SaiPa, local ice hockey team from Lappeenranta, could attract international students to its home games. Target group consist of all international students studying in Saimaa University of Applied Sciences and Lappeenranta University of Technology. This thesis was done in co-operation and for the ice hockey team SaiPa as they wish to attract potential customers from this new segment. SaiPa had the need for this kind of research and work to be done as they wish to develop their product and gain more revenue.

Main aim was to develop communication channels and design marketing materials for SaiPa's use. As a part of my thesis I created an international site for SaiPa on Facebook. I also sketched model posters and flyers which SaiPa can continue to develop and I created an international character, Sputnik, for SaiPa. This character can be used as a marketing material and as a part of SaiPa's brand. The information used in this thesis is gathered from literature, internet sources and discussions with international students. In student discussions it was brought up that students are interested in attending a home game. Some of the students lack knowledge about ice hockey and how to get to a home game which has been an obstacle for their participation. Ice hockey game is not seen as preferable place to spend leisure time but with proper communication and marketing SaiPa can promote the games as exotic and exciting experience.

The result of the study shows that with proper tools and sharing of information SaiPa has the potential to attract international students to its home games. Based on these findings SaiPa should pay attention to gender, cultural and linguistic differences and fluent use of social media channels. The results of this thesis can be used by SaiPa for future marketing campaigns and actions.

Key words: sport tourism, marketing, consumer behaviour

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## **Terminology**

SM-liiga is the highest ice hockey league in Finland.

NHL stands for National Hockey League, which is a league played in North America. Players in this league are the best and come from different countries, which makes NHL most watched ice hockey league in the world.

NASCAR, National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing, is motor sport in United States. Distinguishable feature in NASCAR is that the cars are not modified from their factory configuration and most of the races are driven in oval shaped tracks.

NFL, National Football League, is played in United States and it is the highest league of American Football.

## **1 Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction of the idea**

The subject of the thesis is how SaiPa, an ice hockey team from Lappeenranta, could attract international students from the South Karelia region to its home games. The idea was born in the beginning of 2012 when I saw a large group of French students attending a home game of Oulun Kärpät, another Finnish ice hockey team playing in SM-liiga, Finnish Championship League. The idea began to grow as I thought how people, who have never seen an actual live ice hockey game, could enjoy one so much. Reason for the excitement and enjoyment could be the fact that they experienced something very Finnish. Ice hockey is a part of Finnish culture and letting international students experience it by themselves can teach them something about Finland. It has been stated that sport is a part of national identity (Boyle & Haynes 2009, p. 144). In this case there would be two benefiter: SaiPa, who will gain additional revenue from increased ticket and merchandise sales and international students, who will have a possibility to experience something new.

During the process the subject was limited to how to attract international students to home games. SaiPa was selected as client as it is local ice hockey team from South Karelia and it is playing in Finland's highest ice hockey league, SM-liiga. SaiPa has the need for this kind of thesis and research to be done as they wish to diversify their fanbase. SaiPa's executives gave the freedom to select the best suitable process for this thesis.

This thesis is done as a functional thesis, meaning that it is based on a process and actions. Functional thesis includes the description of the actions and development of the subject but it is focused on the result of the work. It is important to explain the subject and actions in detail as the final product will be a guidebook for SaiPa. This guidebook will introduce the future steps SaiPa needs to take in order to successfully build marketing and co-operation with students in Saimaa University of Applied Sciences and Lappeenranta University of Technology. (Airaksinen & Vilkkä 2003.)

During the research it was found that sport tourism is growing fast. This creates the need for this kind of research to be done as the subject should be addressed sooner than later. As this research is done as a bachelor's thesis for university of applied sciences it was necessary to narrow the customer segment to be small enough. Segment for this thesis was limited to international students studying in Saimaa University of Applied Sciences in Imatra and Lappeenranta University of Technology. The main reason for this segmentation was that these students are easy to contact and they represent the potential future customers.

The main aim of the research is to find ways to attract international students to SaiPa's games. This aim includes such features as building communication channels, creating marketing ideas and possibly marketing materials and to give students preliminary information about SaiPa. Second aim is to give SaiPa the tools and knowledge how to proceed in the future. There are materials and examples that could benefit SaiPa and justify the final ideas and suggestions. As a part of this work an international site for SaiPa on Facebook was made. Model posters have also been sketched which SaiPa could use at schools to gain visibility and market the social network sites.

## **1.2 Introduction of the target group**

As it was mentioned in previous chapter the target group consists of all international students from different nationalities who are studying in Imatra and Lappeenranta. These segments of students will be narrow enough so they are easy to reach from SaiPa's point of view. Student unions of Saimaa University of Applied Sciences and Lappeenranta University of Technology organise several events throughout the school year. This gives SaiPa a good opportunity to work as a partner and take part in some of these events.

Finnish students can also take part as they might have useful ideas or they could have a different approach to ice hockey. Another reason for Finnish students to be part of the segment is that they form the majority in student unions. In the future it is also important to have these Finnish students to participate the games with international students as they work as guides to ice hockey culture.

## **2 Finnish ice hockey and SaiPa**

Modern ice hockey has been played since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. There has been a lot of debate about the birth place of ice hockey but in 2007 International Ice Hockey Federation, IIHF, declared Montreal to be the capital of ice hockey. Ice hockey is following similar rules as any other team sport in the world. In ice hockey there can be minor differences between countries and the leagues but the basic rules are the same. Differences may occur in the length of intermission, size of the ice hockey rink and penalties. Each team has six players, including goal keeper, on the ice. In every game there are 60 minutes of active playtime, which is divided into three 20 minute rounds. Team which has scored the most goals wins.

### **2.1 Finnish ice hockey**

Ice hockey is Finland's most popular sport. It is an active hobby for around 195,000 Finns and has over 67,000 registered players. In Finland there are 428 clubs and in total 2,976 teams ranging from hobby groups to professional ice hockey teams. All together these teams play approximately 40,000 games a

year which means that there are a lot of possibilities to see and experience ice hockey in Finland. In Finland there are top leagues, women's league, lower divisions and junior divisions for players from 20 to 7 years old. The highest three leagues are: SM-liiga, Mestis and Suomi-sarja. The most watched league from the top three is SM-liiga as it is the highest. (Suomen Jääkiekkoliitto 2013.)

In 1975 SM-liiga was created to replace the old SM-sarja which was played from the late 1920s. The reason for this renovation was to separate SM-liiga from other ice hockey activities and to create professional hockey series. After this renovation, Suomen Jääkiekkoliitto, Finnish Ice Hockey Association, was separated from SM-liiga's activities. In the beginning there were 10 teams playing in SM-liiga but nowadays the total number of the teams has grown to 14. The teams, which are playing in SM-liiga, come from some of the biggest cities in Finland. (Suomen Jääkiekkoliitto 2013.)

Rules of the league are simple: each team plays all together 60 games: two games at home and two away. Teams are given a pair which they will meet two more times. Teams are ranked by points they get from the wins and losses. The best six teams go to the play-offs as the teams from places seven to ten are playing for the last two play-off slots. After series of eliminations there will be four teams: the best two will play for gold and silver as the third and fourth will play for bronze. (Suomen Jääkiekkoliitto 2013.)

SaiPa's home arena, Kisapuisto, has room for more than 4,800 people and has a section for the most devoted fans. SaiPa does have a quite active fanbase: official is the SaiPa Fan Club which was registered in 2005 and changed to SaiPaFanit ry. This is a non-profitable organisation and anyone can join. SaiPaFanit organises events and trips and shares information of SaiPa. There are two unofficial fan organisations: Punaviivakerho and Willimiehet. Fans belonging to these groups, especially Willimiehet, wants to be heard and seen at the games. (SaiPa 2013.)

## **2.2 SaiPa's history**

On their website, SaiPa has listed important years from its history. SaiPa was established in 1948 when its main sports were football and bandy. SaiPa did not



have ice hockey among its sports until the year 1953 when it replaced bandy. During the season 1957-1958 SaiPa managed to rise to Suomen sarja, which was the second highest division at a time. During the next season SaiPa succeeded and was able to rise to SM-sarja, which is nowadays known as SM-liiga. During the next decade SaiPa's ice rink got its permanent location to Kisapuisto. SaiPa was able to place third and won bronze in the season 1965-1966. This medal has, so far, remained as the only one from the highest league. During the season 1968-1969 SaiPa was celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary but did not manage to succeed in games and was placed last in SM-sarja. This meant that SaiPa did not qualify and was dropped to Suomen sarja. (SaiPa 2013.)

Next two decades were rollercoaster for SaiPa as they managed to rise again to SM-sarja and then they dropped again to Suomen sarja and all the way to 1<sup>st</sup> division, which was the third highest league. The team managed to rise again and spend most of the 1980s in SM-liiga. In the season 1989-1990 SaiPa did not manage to succeed despite good players and the team was dropped again to the 1<sup>st</sup> division. The beginning of 1990s was not good for SaiPa even economically as the team was nearly bankrupt. (SaiPa 2013.)

Despite of the bad seasons and economical losses SaiPa managed to survive. The team has played in SM-liiga, the highest Finnish league, continuously since the season 1996-1997. In SM-liiga, SaiPa has been a steady performer ranging from places 6 to 14. Latest success came during this season, 2012-2013, as they reached preliminary round of the play-offs for the first time in seven years. (SaiPa 2013.)

Liiga-SaiPa Ltd was founded in 2000 and it is the organisation behind SaiPa. Their offices are located next to SaiPa's home arena, Kisapuisto. This organisation is responsible for all team activities such as hiring new skills, marketing, creating merchandises, sponsoring deals and all other official activities. They also organise events to their partners and team's sponsors where people have the possibility to meet the players.

### **3 Sport tourism and media's effect on sport**

There are different types of tourism and as the most popular ones have remained the city and beach holidays. Tourism always creates an image of relaxation, sightseeing and museum tours but it is experiencing gradual shift. Sport tourism is becoming more and more popular which forces tourism organisers to develop their services. Sport tourists are like any other tourist except their main purpose of the trip is to attend a sporting event as a participant or spectator.

#### **3.1 Sport tourism in general**

Sport tourism is growing and during the research were found articles about this tourism sector and its effects. So far people, who could benefit from sport tourism, do not fully understand the full potential of sport tourists as a customer segment. Sport tourism does not only benefit sport itself but it has a positive effect on tourism industry. Sport tourists need all the basic tourism products like accommodation and transportation services, but they demand additional products related to their interests. Any tourist wants to see Olympic Parks and venues of other large sport events. Sport tourists are interested to see any home arena no matter how big or small the team is. Chelsea's home arena, Stamford Bridge, in London gets hundreds of visitors even during days when there is no home game being played.

Sport tourism does not only concern larger annual sport events, or events that are organised once in every four years, but it is up-to-date subject for leagues that have regular seasons. Most active are the ice hockey fans that travel to North America to see an NHL game and football fans that travel to Europe. Sport tourism is growing in Europe, not only because of the Premier League football or other larger sport leagues, but because of the easiness to travel from one country to another.

Interesting is that what makes people support different sports and teams. For some, the reason might be pure interest towards the sport, skilful players and teams or individual has had some history concerning the sport. In many countries children are encouraged to have sportive hobbies such as football, ice

hockey or other team sports. Still for many the reason for interest is the team's locality and the feel of obligation to support your home team. Media also has an effect on how people see sport and which sports are the most popular. On Finnish TV ice hockey gets the most attention from autumn to spring when Finnish ice hockey leagues are playing and world championships take place. Another example about media's effect on sports popularity can be seen from women's sport. Women are active in watching sport and doing sport themselves but women's sport gets less media coverage than men's sport. Reason might be that women athletes are seen less interesting than their male counterparts. (Boyle & Haynes 2009, p. 122-125.)

Some individuals are more likely to follow the masses and they choose their teams by the success and popularity. Fans that support the team just because of its success, are known as glory hunters among the diehard fans. It is considered to be easy to cheer for a team that is likely to succeed year after year but cheering for a team despite their tendency to lose is considered to be loyalty. Some might not support the team as whole but just one skilled individual in the team. It is certain that women see sport differently compared to men (Talalay 2003, Davis 2009).

### **3.2 Sport as a business**

United Nations World Tourism Organisation, UNWTO, has defined tourists as individuals who travel or stay in places that are outside their usual environment for no longer than one consecutive year for business, leisure or other purposes. This means that many international students fall into this category as Finland is outside their usual environment and they rarely stay a whole year in Imatra or Lappeenranta. As these students can be seen as tourists it is important to understand the business and communication in tourism and sport. (UNWTO 2013.)

Sport tourism is now the fastest growing tourism sector. Good examples about sport tourism are the Olympic Games and other major sport events. Brazil will host Olympics in 2016 and it is reported that the games will boost Brazil's economy by 24 billion dollars from 2010 until 2027. This means that Brazil will benefit from the Olympic Games for 17 years, starting 6 years before the games

and continuing 11 years after. If sport teams that play regular seasons could see the full potential of this tourism sector, they could gain more sustainable revenue. It is not only the teams that will benefit from it: all the local economies will get more potential customers and buyers, plus growing inflow of tourists creates a need for additional workforce. In the article Sport Tourism Expo was stated that sport tourists tend to stay longer, spend more and boost other tourism sectors. In addition sport tourists travel during off-season as many major leagues are played between autumn and spring (Sport Tourism Expo 2013).

In the end of the article, Sport Tourism Expo had a chart by WTO, World Tourism Organisation, named Growth in Sport Tourism Forecast.



Figure 3.2 Growth in Sport Tourism Forecast (Sport Tourism Expo 2013)

The chart indicates the revenue created by sport tourism and how it is divided between continents. As you can see from the chart, Europe holds the biggest share of sport tourism. One reason for this can be the fact that in Europe there are a lot of famous sport leagues and sport teams, for example Bundesliga, which is a German league, and Manchester United from Great Britain.

United Kingdom is well known for its football clubs and Premier League. Organisations are starting to see sport as a product and its positive effect on tourism industry. In 2011, around 900,000 football fans visited Great Britain and in total 1.3 million tourists attended a live sport event. Visit Britain has stated that sport tourism and especially football is a highly effective tool in attracting people to the country during quieter times. As it was mentioned by Sport

Tourism Expo, sport tourists can bring important revenue during off-seasons and so smoothen the differences between travel seasons. (Daily Mail 2012.)

Daily Mail's article signs that sport tourism has been noticed in Europe but is still taking its baby steps. This is also a good example of how organisers and travel organisations have now realised how good and efficient tool sport is in tourism. Many travel organisations now have wide range of sport tourism packages from European football to North American ice hockey. Even in Finland there is sport tourism organiser Björk & Boström which offers packages to National Hockey League, all major European football leagues, Formula 1, tennis, golf and many more.

### **3.3 Sport in popular culture**

Popular culture influences greatly on people's interests. Latest fashions, best selling products and brands influence consumer behaviour. The rise of Facebook, YouTube and Twitter in popular culture has changed the way people communicate. It has also had an influence on how companies can reach their existing or potential customers. Demand for highly developed and efficient technology has brought people more close to these social media channels. The rise of these social media has also shown how efficient word of mouth is in marketing. In Facebook you can see the sites, products and brands your friends have liked.

As sport is one of the greatest passions of the 21st century it still has central position in popular culture. Reason for this is that, as mentioned before, sport is a part of national identity. As it can be seen in mainstream media, TV, newspapers, radio and internet, sport has story value. Newspapers have a section of its own for sport and even on TV news broadcasts have their own section for sport. Many larger sport teams and leagues have their own radio broadcasts which are entirely dedicated for sport. (Boyle & Haynes 2009, p. 144, 216-218.)

Throughout the history of movies sport has been an inspiration for hundreds of films ranging from documentaries to horror and comedy. In the past it was common to attend live sport event as there were no technology which we now

use in our everyday lives. In modern world people have limitless opportunities to follow different sports through different media channels.

First sport related movie was made during the era of silent films in 1894 and it was a documentary featuring an actual boxing match. It is no wonder that some of the most popular sports in movies have been American football, auto racing, boxing, basketball and baseball. Some of the sport related movies range even to classics like Rocky and The Longest Yard.

On television there have been several sport related TV shows that are either based on real life or fiction. In the late 1980s and mid 1990s American Gladiators was one of the most popular game shows on TV and it had international series which were filmed around the world.

## **4 Fan and media culture in sport**

As stated in previous chapter, sport has remained as one of the greatest passions of the 21st century. Sport is highly visible in modern world but fan and media culture in sport varies from country to another and between different leagues. In this chapter there are examples of some of the world's most popular sports and the fan culture behind them.

### **4.1 Motor sport**

It is possible to find different varieties of motor sport around the world. These can vary from aircrafts and boats to motorcycles and large trucks. Most exotic motor racings, which are still recognised as real motor sport, are hovercraft and lawn mower competitions. Also the venue for these sports can vary greatly from large modern paved tracks to rural roads and wastelands. Most followed motor sport is the Formula 1 which has grown into a global event over the years. Formula 1 is developing more towards being a team sport as the drivers are bound to team strategies and rules.

A good example about motor sport is NASCAR. This stock car racing from United States still has the old fashion charm. The concept of NASCAR has changed only a little over the years. NASCAR is popular especially in the southern parts of the United States. Nowadays it is not only followed in the

United States as it is expanding globally as foreign sponsors have entered the sport. (Davis 2009.)

Some researchers have focused on how popular NASCAR is among women. In 2003 around 40% of NASCAR's fanbase was women but nowadays there is close to same amount of male and female supporters. NASCAR's popularity, especially among women, can be explained by the fact that the sport relates more closely to everyday life. NASCAR also has female drivers and there is no separation between male and female drivers. This brings more equality to the sport. Another reason for NASCAR's popularity among female population could be explained by successful promotion of the drivers as charismatic athletes. (Talalay 2003.)

NASCAR's closeness to everyday life can be explained by the fact that, because nearly everyone in westernised world can drive, it is easier to relate to the sport. NASCAR also creates family friendly atmosphere as there are rarely any severe car crashes and the advertisements are targeted equally to both genders. In NASCAR there are old traditions which still take the fans to good old times. One-day event can turn into a nearly week long celebration as NASCAR enthusiasts set up camps to the racing sites. (Davis 2009.)

## **4.2 Ice hockey**

In northern countries, where snow and ice are annual, ice hockey tends to be national sport. In Finnish schools ice hockey is a popular sport during winter times and it is played by students of all ages. For us ice hockey is something we are used to since our childhood and it is something we know. International students, who study in Finland, could learn new things about Finnish culture when they get to know ice hockey. This could also increase communication between international and Finnish students as it would be the Finns who will educate about ice hockey.

Ice hockey culture is a wide concept and has many aspects as hockey is played in several nations. NHL, is seen to be the father of all hockey leagues but there are other big leagues and big nations in ice hockey. When we talk about the best nations in this sport, you cannot avoid pumping into term "The Big Seven".

The Big Seven basically means nations that are the most potential to succeed in international hockey games and could beat any other nation. The Big Seven nations are Canada, United States, Finland, Sweden, Russia, Czech Republic and Slovakia. In these countries the fan culture is also the strongest. In these nations hockey is one of the most popular sports and is widely visible in media. In this chapter I want to focus on how these nations and their leagues have used social media in order to gain publicity. (Ice Hockey Wiki 2013.)

The best example from Finnish hockey comes from Lahti Pelicans, another SM-liiga team, as they have published advertisements on YouTube. These advertisements were made by a Finnish marketing company Mainostoimisto Ilme. Videos have been made with humour and the purpose of the ads is to picture the players as Superman-typed men of steel. Some of the videos have English subtitles and when the ads were published, they gained visibility in North America. By the mid of April 2013 their video "Taklaus", freely translated "Tackle", had gained over one million views. (Mainostoimisto Ilme 2013.)

In United States and Canada, many of the National Hockey League's teams have their own channels on YouTube. When you go through these channels you find videos with interviews and game clips. Many of the teams have more humoristic videos as the purpose is to attract viewers who are not interested about ice hockey for its technical aspect. Anaheim Ducks started their 2011 season in Finland and before the beginning of the season they published a video where the players try to speak Finnish. The goal of the video was to grow Finns' interest towards the team and to attract more audience to the game. (Anaheim Ducks 2011.)

### **4.3 Baseball**

As mentioned in the chapter Finnish ice hockey and SaiPa, sport can have variations in different countries. Noticeable difference in same sport is between American and Japanese baseball and culture behind it. In Japan fans and players are more loyal towards their teams and baseball is seen as work instead of just a hobby. Japanese players practice several hours a day which is meant to build character, loyalty and devotion. In the United States practices do not last that long and players are seen more as individuals and as current, or



potential, stars. In the United States players are seen as skilled individuals teams are competing of the well named stars. This leads to behaviour where some players might change their teams several times during their careers. In Japan changing a team as a player or as a fan is more uncommon. (University of Michigan 2013.)

As the sport is seen differently in these cultures, also fan behaviour has significant differences. In Japan cheering for your team is an important part of the game as in the United States this kind of fan activity and loyalty is not seen in baseball. Another feature in Japan is the use of fan clubs in making new business partnerships as in the United States baseball is only free time entertainment. (University of Michigan 2013.)

#### **4.4 Football**

One of the world's most popular sports is football. Football is played globally and has hundreds of millions of fans around the world. The best known league of football is the Premier League in the United Kingdom. This league is seen as the elite of football and it has one of the largest fan bases. In Premier League there is one team above others, which is the most valuable sport team in the world, Manchester United.

Manchester United has been able to brand themselves so well that about ten percent of the world's population, 659 million people globally, are Manchester United fans. This information is based on surveys which were conducted in 2011 when Manchester United won the Premier League and succeeded globally. (Dempsey 2012.)

To understand this type of success it is necessary to look inside Manchester United's machine. Premier League was created in 1992, English football gained wider broadcasts contracts, meaning that it was now seen globally. One reason for Manchester United's success is the fact that when Premier League was created, their team managed to succeed in games. In 2005 Tampa Bay Buccaneers' owner, Malcolm Glazer, bought Manchester United and renewed its marketing strategies. Before this renovation, only two people have been working on selling Manchester United's brand. (Panja 2011.)

These changes in Premier League's broadcasts and creating Manchester United's brand has grown this football team into worldwide success as it is the most valuable sport team in the world. Manchester United has also managed to attract several large global companies, for example Nike, to sponsor them which will give the team additional attention and attract more fans. In 2009 Manchester United sent a leather football in silk lined ornate box to Chilean wine maker Concha y Toro. Book was also included with the gift as the purpose was to explain the positive aspects of partnering with the football team. This kind of gift awakens the interest of possible future business and enables Manchester United to gain unlikely business partners. (Panja 2011.)

#### **4.5 American football and National Football League**

A good example of success in the world of sport is the NFL. NFL has existed since 1920s but it did not get its current form until the year 1966 when National Football League and American Football League were decided to merge together.

Actual shift from modest sport event to multimillion media extravaganza happened in the 1970s when memorable advertisements first aired. American football experienced steady growth throughout the 1970s. In the 1980s started the shift towards pop culture extravaganza as the first celebrities were seen performing at the game. It is not only the performers that give American football the visibility it needs. Some of the fans put an effort on the way they dress for their team's games. This can give the teams more visibility and build up team spirit. Some fan groups have grown to be famous by themselves, for example Oakland Raiders' fans and their Black Hole. (Shmoop 2013.)

American football is gaining popularity outside the United States. On the internet there is a site, nfluk.com, which works as a platform for National Football League's European fans. From the site beginners can find information about the sport, and fans can find the latest news of their favourite teams. There are also discussion forums where fans can connect with other football enthusiasts.

When you read articles from nfluk.com you can see the change in National Football League's popularity. The change is not in the success of the game itself but in all that comes before it: tickets to the game are being sold out faster than before and there are now plenty of pre-game programs. In 2010 Tailgate Party, a traditional celebration before the kickoff, became the biggest pre-game event in the UK. National Football League's International Series has succeeded so well that NFL owners have decided to extend the games until 2016. It is interesting to follow the situation of NFL and American football in Europe as there is unofficial information that the games could also be played in continental Europe. (NFL UK 2011.)

American football is gaining foothold in Europe and many European countries even have their own leagues. Europe also has their own Super Bowl: Euro Bowl, where the best two teams of Europe meet annually. Even Finland has, in total, four leagues of American football plus as a new addition: a league for university teams.

What comes to the success, there is also other side on the coin. While American football is gaining popularity, NFL still struggles to attract female fans. As it was mentioned before, NASCAR has larger percentage of female fans because the drivers are seen charismatic and the organisers provide family friendly atmosphere. It is important to acknowledge the fact that women see sport differently: they pay more attention to the appearance of the athletes. National Football League's key problem could be the lack of female league. All major sports like soccer, basketball and ice hockey have their own female leagues which might work as an attractive factor for female audience. Another factor could be loyalty: in college football the audience is less male dominant as the interest might not be in the sport itself but in loyalty to the school. (Goldberg 2006.)

If National Football League, NFL, can create this kind of extravaganza for sport which is not even that popular in Europe, it could be possible for other sports to create similar kind of fan activity too. Highest Finnish hockey league, SM-liiga, is said to be among the best in the world and Finnish players have succeeded in National Hockey League, NHL, which is North American hockey league. Ice

hockey teams in Finland should study about the ongoing shift in tourism and they could take influences from NFL's success in Europe and United States. Knowing the history behind these kind of success stories can give valuable tools to others.

## **5 SaiPa's participation in marketing**

In the beginning of 2012 SaiPa took part in InnoCity competition where their assignment for participating students was to increase SaiPa's attractiveness. All together, four reports were made and two of them have mentioned students as highly potential customer segment.

InnoCity is a competition which is organised in the Lappeenranta area and the participants are students from Saimaa University of Applied Sciences and Lappeenranta University of Technology. The purpose of this competition is to build communication between students and organisations of the area.

As SaiPa took part in this competition, it tells of their need for this kind of research to be done. This thesis will provide more professional view and examples regarding this subject. As discussed with Riku Kallioniemi, SaiPa's chief executive, he stated that they would be very interested to have more international fanbase.

### **5.1 Increasing the visibility and attractiveness of SaiPa ice hockey team**

This first report was made by team Future Managers, who eventually won the InnoCity competition with their assignment. In their report Laatikainen, Mlinar, Pöllänen and Zakri (2012) mention international and Finnish students to be a potential customer segment for SaiPa. Students are more likely searching new experiences and ways to pass free time, especially when they are in a foreign country. Important is that SaiPa would have noticeable posters at campus area and at student dormitories. As another possibility Laatikainen et al. mentioned student evenings where international students could get information about ice hockey and SaiPa. They also suggested that in these evenings students would have the possibility to meet actual players which would make ice hockey more interesting.

The best suggestion in their research paper, regarding getting people's attention, was to organise competitions where participants could win prizes. This kind of activity definitely gains attention and boosts social media channels.

One good idea Laatikainen et al. pointed out was to include SaiPa's flyer or small brochure in the welcoming packages students receive when they arrive in Finland. As SaiPa plays in Finland's highest hockey league, it is worth mentioning when students are informed of the town's services and leisure activities.

## **5.2 SaiPa assignment**

Second InnoCity report focuses more on students as a target group and is made by Kostritsa, Niemelä, Nyysönen and Petrova (2012). In their research paper, Niemelä et al. stated that students are a desirable target group for SaiPa as they are small enough to be easily reached. Students stay in Lappeenranta region for at least three years and so could potentially visit home game more than once.

Niemelä et al. did do some promotional work at Lappeenranta University of Technology as they advertised SaiPa and its home games. In their promotional work they made posters, flyers, handed out candy and played SaiPa's theme song at the lobby. Niemelä et al. were very creative and did fairly aggressive and loud marketing. The success of this work did not come up as the writers did not mention anything about how many tickets they were able to sell during their project.

In their report paper Niemelä et al. had good ideas such as pre-game and post-game events for students and player meetings where international students could learn more about ice hockey. This kind of marketing activity Niemelä et al. conducted during their research process which is highly efficient but it also requires planning and co-operation between SaiPa and students.

## **6 Thesis process**

During this thesis process the aim has been to build and find suitable communication channels for SaiPa. Social media is in key role in SaiPa's case

as it can represent the fastest and easiest communication between SaiPa and its customer segments. Knowing what other teams and organisations are using and how they are using them gives SaiPa all necessary tools for future actions. Also other marketing materials, such as posters, flyers, character and slogan have been created.

Posters and flyers have been used in branding and marketing since the beginning and they are one of the oldest marketing methods. Well planned poster and flyer can efficiently wake consumers' interest towards the product or service.

Reason for Facebook's usage is that in modern society it is important to be represented in social media as people expect to find information they need from these channels. Social media does not only benefit consumers as it is an efficient marketing tool for companies and organisations. The reason for this is the frequent use of technology which enables quick and easy customer and fan relations. In social media people can share their experiences and so positively influence others' decision to see a game.

### **6.1 SaiPa's Facebook page**

As an important part of the thesis process an international Facebook page for SaiPa was created. Creating a site on Facebook was simple as the button for creating a group can be found from the home site. As you click the "Create Group" you get a pop-up which asks you to enter the name of the group and set preliminary privacy settings. As the purpose of SaiPa's site is to attract students, the privacy setting was set "Open" so it can be found and seen by anyone. As the page was created the pictures and basic information was added. As in Facebook it is possible to build network some sites were added as "Likes" on SaiPa International's page. This way the site becomes more visible in the students' network.

An important feature of the site is the logo and colours: black and yellow. SaiPa uses these same colours on its other marketing materials and on the team's outfits. The key, in branding SaiPa to international students, is to use these

distinguishable features in social media. Another key element is to give a positive image of SaiPa by photos, information and active communication.

This site will be used to reach international students and possible future international fans. SaiPa's Facebook site will work as a discussion forum where people get latest news and can share their own experiences. The site will be transferred for SaiPa when the thesis process ends.

## 6.2 Posters and flyers

During this thesis process posters have been sketched that will work as model for the actual posters and flyers. In these posters the aim is to show possible layouts and information which should be included. As key information every poster and flyer should include links to SaiPa's social media sites. Posters should also in a way or another include the slogan "Meijän juttu", which is written in Karelian dialect and can be freely translated as "our thing". This slogan could represent SaiPa as something the students share despite their cultural backgrounds. As one sketch there is a poster which is inspired by popular culture. This means that the poster can have noticeable features, layouts and colours which have been used in popular culture phenomena. It is important to remember to check that the popular culture reference will not be offensive to anyone as we are dealing with different cultures.

When we are dealing with segment which has individuals from various countries and cultural backgrounds, it is important to recognise cultural and linguistic differences. Especially differences in language are crucial as words can have different meanings in other language.



Figure 6.2 Nutricia advertisement in the Netherlands

This picture of Nutricia advertisement was found through Google on lunaholland.blogspot.com and it is a good example of language differences. For a person, who does not speak Dutch or any other West Germanic language, the advertisement can seem weird. In the advertisement the child actually says “Mom, this one, this one, this one... Please”. As these linguistic differences and misunderstanding play a great role in marketing it was important to check that any slogan or word in SaiPa’s case would not be offensive in other language. Neither SaiPa nor the slogan “Meijän juttu” showed up any results towards meaning anything offensive in another language.

### 6.3 Sputnik

As an additional idea, there was created an international character for SaiPa. This character is Sputnik and comes from one of SaiPa’s nicknames. It is possible that, as a mascot, Sputnik could attract Russian students and work as a marketing material. The inspiration for Sputnik came from similar named satellite from former Soviet Union.



Figure 6.3 Sputnik character

As can be seen from the image, Sputnik has cartoonlike features. Sputnik is a fairly round figure with short arms and legs. Big eyes and wide smile can make the character appear more youthful. Cartoonish mascots and logos are widely used in various sports such as NHL and NFL. This kind of mascot and logo give the team less aggressive image and can work as an attraction.



As a future view SaiPa could organise competitions like “Where is the Sputnik” where students would take and post pictures of this mascot in various places. These pictures would be seen in social media and could grow interest in student while the winners would get a free ticket to a game or a piece of merchandise.

#### **6.4 Student discussions**

During this process social media and Facebook have been used to reach international students from Saimaa University of Applied Sciences and Lappeenranta University of Technology. The reason for this is to show how quickly it is possible to reach active Facebook users as first answers were received within five minutes from the first message. Social media might still feel a bit unprofessional but the fact is that companies and organisations are now actively on Facebook. Social media is nowadays the quickest media channel to reach audience and it allows companies to have more personal contact to their customers.

These student discussions are not the key element of the thesis but more a justification for some of the conclusions. Before executing this discussion there was a preliminary assumption that Russians are most likely to have some sort of knowledge about ice hockey. This assumption comes from the fact that Kontinental Hockey League, KHL, which is a Russian equivalent for NHL, is known around ice hockey nations. Russian players are also widely represented in the NHL. This was proven correct as only one Russian student stated that hockey is not that familiar. This is important as Russians are the second largest student segment after Finns in Saimaa University of Applied Sciences and Lappeenranta University of Technology. Students from southern nations, where ice hockey is not a popular sport, stated that they have seen ice hockey from TV or internet.

It has been widely studied that women are more active users of internet. This factor can be seen from the student discussions: questions were sent to ten women and eleven men. From the females eight answered while the number of received answers from men was only two. Women respond better when they are contacted by individual person, real or invented. These student discussion

questions were sent from a personal account belonging to an actual person. (MarketingSherpa 2009, p. 7.)

While this discussion was conducted, a noticeable feature was that the students who said ice hockey to be non-familiar would still go to a game with their friends. These students were all from collectivist countries. People who have this collectivist cultural background share the same need and interest to belong to a group. Students, especially international ones, should be seen as a group instead of individuals. Attracting students as a group is more efficient than trying to get individual students to the games.

During these discussions it was also shown that students who had been in Finland for a few years did not necessarily have any knowledge about ice hockey. This feature was seen especially in students who are or had been studying in Imatra. Students in Imatra might not seem a potential segment, because of the distance, but they are as important as students in Lappeenranta. There is a bus going from Imatra to Lappeenranta during game days, so transportation will not be an issue.

As the discussion continued on, students stated that having more time before and after the game would make going to an ice hockey game more interesting. In NFL it is a custom that before each game there is a several-hour-lasting event named Tailgate Party which provides fans tons of activities and venue to get together. In British football culture it is common to go to a pub after a game to have a drink with friends and socialise. Learning from these sport cultures and giving the students time to engage in social activities adds value to the service and the game ticket. Making a game into more social event does not only attract international students but it can also grow the number of Finnish attendees.

One of the students pointed out that he is not interested to go to an ice hockey game because he does not know the rules. He said that he would be more interested if the rules were explained to him by another student or an actual ice hockey player. Many students were excited about the idea of meeting an actual player as it would give them more professional point of view about ice hockey.

Another student stated that meeting a player can grow respect towards the sport, team and athlete.

## **7 Analysis of the research and subject**

Sport tourism is the fastest growing tourism sector and is a sign of people's growing interest towards the sport. International students can be considered as tourists as Finland is outside their usual environment and they rarely stay here for the whole year.

### **7.1 Findings**

Some sports have been able to grow into large brands and events that attract audiences even from abroad. Olympic Games are the best examples of highly valued sport event as tens of thousands of people arrive to the venue and billions of more watch the games on TV. Sports with regular seasons cannot reach these kinds of numbers but the best example of widely followed, supported and played sport is football. Annually many tourists flock Europe, and especially Great Britain, as people want to attend a live football game. Finnish ice hockey can be considered to be in NHL's shadow but it does have the potential to attract tourists from Europe.

In many other sports the events before and after the game play important role in attracting audience. In NFL before each game there is a Tailgate party which offers hours of fun and socialising for the audience. In NASCAR many people stay at the venues after the event which can turn one race into a week-long celebration. In Finland it is common that the doors of the ice hockey stadiums open one hour before the game and close soon after so this is something SaiPa should consider to change. International students would prefer to have more time to socialise before and after the game. If the doors were open longer it could also attract Finnish audience members to come to enjoy their time and spend time at the venue. This would increase sales and benefit several parties.

International students are a great customer segment for SaiPa, as it was brought up during the discussions. Many of the students would be interested to know more about the sport and take part in the games. As the international

students would become more active, SaiPa would gain steady revenue and build co-operation. Additional future view for SaiPa is that, as Russians are the largest segment of international students, SaiPa could try to attract these students to bring their families to the games and so enter Russian markets.

## **7.2 SWOT analysis**

SWOT analysis is looking the subject through four aspects: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The purpose of this kind of approach is to list and pin point potential risks and weaknesses but to also see the strength and future opportunities.

SWOT analysis is usually used in evaluating products and services. In this case SaiPa's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are evaluated from brand point of view. This helps to see SaiPa as a product or service which we are trying to market for potential customers.

### **7.2.1 Strengths**

SaiPa's strength, as a brand, is the fact that it is the smallest team in SM-liiga and it can be considered as a local team. This makes it easily approachable and can be seen as our thing. As SaiPa plays in SM-liiga adds value as people have the opportunity to experience quality ice hockey. For many international students SaiPa, as a brand, can represent something exotic as they are not familiar with ice hockey.

SaiPa can promote this positive vision of the team and ice hockey by creating an image that attending the games is a good way to spend leisure time and games are filled with excitement and thrill. Brand that falls close to consumer's interests is more likely to survive for long periods. (Chunawalla 2009, p. 166.)

### **7.2.2 Weaknesses**

As a brand SaiPa is small, meaning that it might have to struggle in order to attract potential customers. The fact that SaiPa is small leads to the conclusion that it does not have recognisable reputation as an ice hockey team. When we compare SaiPa to Oulun Kärpät the difference can be easily seen. Oulun

Kärpät has much larger budget than SaiPa and the team has managed to succeed in games as well. Oulun Kärpät has participated in various international competitions where it has gained different audiences and international fanbase.

Brands that closely match consumer's need and wants are more likely to gain popularity. This comes from the fact that when brand is close to the interest of the customer, he can see himself in the brand. In SaiPa's case this is a weakness as among international students ice hockey is a non-familiar thing that does not match their interests. As mentioned in previous paragraph, this weakness can be turned into strength by proper marketing and creating an image of fun to which students can relate to (Chunawalla 2009, p. 166).

Building functional and successful brand takes years and can test the patience of the organisation. Brand building demands a lot of input and resources in order to achieve the goal of gaining a new customer segment. As the process is long, it is necessary to remember to update the brand and image to match the current customer interests. (Chunawalla 2009, p. 241.)

### **7.2.3 Opportunities**

Opportunity for SaiPa, as a brand, is that as it is still quite small, it has various possibilities and opportunities to grow. With proper marketing, SaiPa can efficiently promote itself and build emotional bond with international students. Building this kind of connection can take years but when it has been accomplished, SaiPa has loyal supporters.

There has been growing co-operation between Finnish and Russian junior ice hockey teams. This kind of co-operation with professional ice hockey teams can grow fanbase of both teams and increase sponsorships deals. In SaiPa's case this kind of increase would free more money into building its brand which can continue to increase the number of supporters.

### **7.2.4 Threats**

Main threat for SaiPa's brand comes from the local Finnish audience. Even though SaiPa is a steady performer ranging in the middle, the audiences can

still abandon the team when it is not performing well. This kind of behaviour from Finnish supporters can devalue SaiPa's brand in the eyes of the international students. Hearing Finns disrespecting SaiPa can create a negative image among international students which can be difficult to break later on.

In Finland there has been a lot of debate about ice hockey's aggressiveness and violence. This can be a threat for SaiPa as in many cultures violence can still be considered as taboo and might scare some of the international students.

From ice hockey SaiPa does not have competitors in South Karelia region but threats can come from teams, who represent other sports, and play in their highest leagues. In Lappeenranta these teams are, for example, NST which is a floorball team and Lappeenranta NMKY which is a basketball team. These teams have the potential to compete of the same customer segment which can threaten SaiPa's brand.

## **8 Summary and discussion**

The idea and purpose of this thesis was to find ways to attract international students to SaiPa's home games. International students are also easy group to start with as they are small enough and can be easily contacted by SaiPa. As ice hockey is part of Finnish culture it makes the sport appeal exotic and interesting. Knowing about ice hockey can also benefit international students as they would learn new features about Finnish culture and they would have more possibilities to communicate with Finnish students.

### **8.1 Conclusions**

For SaiPa it is important to focus on this topic now as sport tourism is still growing. When sport tourism has grown large enough to be among the main reasons for leisure travel, SaiPa would have the tools to attract this customer segment. United Kingdom has realised the potential of sport tourism and is now starting to focus on ways to attract sport tourists to the country. As discussed earlier, Visit Britain has stated that football is one of the most efficient tools in attracting this customer segment. In the future, when regular leisure travellers become more active as sport tourists, it would be wise to start co-operation with

local travel organisers. Attracting sport tourists does not only benefit sport teams but it also brings revenue for local economies and for this reason wider co-operation benefits all parties (Daily Mail 2011).

In this thesis have been listed different sports as they could work as an efficient example and inspiration for SaiPa. NFL and Manchester United are too large for Finnish scale but knowing what they have done for their success can be imitated in smaller scale. Marketing is a risky business as it is hard to predict the precise outcome but in many cases marketing has paid back. NFL started to gain popularity when it gained more visibility in the media. Social media is cheap and in many cases it is free which makes it a cost efficient marketing tool. In Finnish SM-liiga there is a good example of successful use of social media. Lahti Pelicans, in co-operation with Mainostoimisto Ilme, published humorous advertisements on YouTube. These advertisements have been watched globally as they were also noticed in North America. SaiPa should be more actively represented in such social media channels as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

In their articles Talalay (2003), Davis (2009) and Goldberg (2006) brought up the difference between male and female spectators. Female spectators focus more on the atmosphere at sport events as male spectators focus solely on the sport itself. Knowing this difference between genders helps to modify marketing materials to match the interests. Tailored posters, flyers and social media posts and sites are more efficient than materials targeted to both genders. In the chapter 6 Thesis process, posters were mentioned as marketing material. Posters with general information or game schedule are informative and work as such, but if you really want to catch people's attention, you should have posters with references to popular culture. As it has been mentioned, there are differences between genders. For female audience a poster with reference to, for example Twilight, could work efficiently. For male audience reference to, for example Terminator or a video game would be more appealing.

As the new customer segment for SaiPa is international students, it would be wise to consider the potential cultural differences. As it was discussed previously, linguistic differences can change the meaning of the message as

words can have different meanings in other languages. In SaiPa's case these differences were not found and as the language for communication is English, major problems or interpretations should not occur.

The information in this thesis was mainly based on research and the aim was to find cases which could be used as an example. In this method the theory can be wider and examples are seen from very different aspects. Weakness is that this kind of research might lack depth and can easily go around the subject instead of focusing on the main issues.

As mentioned in the chapter 1.1 Introduction of the idea, this is a functional thesis, meaning that the outcome of the work will be a guidebook for SaiPa which will give them tools to attract international students to their games. This kind of approach was the most suitable as SaiPa's wish was that this thesis could give them new ideas and behaviour models. During the thesis process, an international site for SaiPa was created on Facebook and additional poster layouts were sketched to give some guidelines. Facebook is the largest social media channel and being represented in this channel is crucial. Strength of Facebook is the fact that it is fast and widely used by younger generation. Posters are also an efficient marketing tool and easy to distribute but the weakness is that these posters should be renewed at least once a year. As the posters are mainly sketched models, it can be hard to picture the finalised product.

In the beginning of the thesis the students were divided into two segments: individuals who know ice hockey and individuals who do not know ice hockey. Assumption was that students who come from northern nations do have some kind of preliminary knowledge about hockey. This assumption was proven right in the student discussions as nearly all of the Russians taking part in the discussions stated that they are familiar with ice hockey. It was expected that students who come from nations, which do not have similar kind of seasonality as Finland, might not know anything about ice hockey. A surprising finding was not the fact that this assumption was also correct, but these students did not have any knowledge about ice hockey even after a few years of living in Finland. This means that these students have missed the sport culture in



Finland and in marketing they would require more attention. These student discussion results might have been a little more different if there would had been more active promotional work.

For future actions it is suggested that SaiPa should be more visible in social media: post videos on YouTube, get likes on Facebook and followers on Twitter. Organising student evenings are also efficient in order to provide information about ice hockey and upcoming games. Important in successful communication with students would be word of mouth from other students or volunteers who could execute promotional work for SaiPa at local schools.

## **8.2 Future views**

In the United States many schools have their own sport teams which compete on national levels. Many students attend these games not just to show loyalty towards the team but to show loyalty towards the school. SaiPa does not really fall into this category but could gain similar kind of audience of students studying in the area. In order to attract international students SaiPa should pay attention to how to market their home games to these students and be active in social media. Students who are already familiar with the sport do not need as active marketing and persuasion as students who do not know ice hockey. As we are widely dealing with the lastly mentioned group, it is important to market ice hockey by emotions. This means that posters, flyers and social media messages should include features such as “come to have fun”, “see an exciting ice hockey game” and “enjoy with your friends”. Emphasising that ice hockey provides emotionally exciting and positive experience grows people’s interest.

When co-operation between SaiPa and students starts to grow, SaiPa could try to attract volunteers from the students to take part in organisational activities. These activities could include such features as maintaining a sales desk at the campuses of Lappeenranta and Imatra, doing promotional work and organising student events. Students could also have a sales desk or a kiosk of their own at SaiPa’s home arena. Some of the female students could be interested to participate in cheerleading so promoting this possibility can attract people who would not otherwise be interested.

SaiPa does have the potential to get supporters from students and so gain more international fanbase. It is certain that as students would become a more active fan group they would bring extra revenue for the team and organisation. Widening the customer segment could also attract new sponsors for SaiPa and increase revenue. As junior ice hockey teams are starting to do co-operation with Russian teams it would be possible also in higher leagues and grow interest on both sides of the border.

## **Figures**

Figure 3.2 Growth in Sport Tourism Forecast, p. 8

Figure 6.2 Nutricia advertisement in Netherlands, p. 20

Figure 6.3 Sputnik character, p. 20

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## **List of Appendices**

Appendix 1 Model poster 1

Appendix 2 Model poster 2

Appendix 3 Model flyer

Appendix 4 SaiPa's Facebook page



Logo should be one of the main elements on the posters

**SaiPa warmly welcomes you to Lappeenranta / Imatra and its home games for season 20XX – 20XX**



Posters saying "Lappeenranta" will be in Skinnarila campus and "Imatra" posters will be in Linnala campus.

**"Meijän juttu!"**

Slogan →



These are the most important parts on the posters! These are the main tools for communication and should be actively promoted

**Like us on Facebook: SaiPa International**

**Follow us on Twitter**





### SaiPa on tour 20XX – 20XX

List of season's games

Home games could be highlighted, example:

**Lappeenranta**

**Helsinki**

**Turku**

**Oulu**

**Lappeenranta**

**Kuopio**

**Check SaiPa International on Facebook for further information**



**SaiPa would like to warmly welcome you to Lappeenranta / Imatra and hope you enjoy your stay in Finland.**

**We would like to see you in our home games in Kisapuisto, Lappeenranta.**

**Check SaiPa International on Facebook for further information.**




**Kisapuisto is situated in Kisakatu 9, Lappeenranta**

**If you come from the city center: go down to Valtakatu leaving the water tower on your right side and continue straight. As you go pass Sanomatalo and Valtakatu changes to Lauritsalantie you can see Kisapuisto-signs. Follow these signs – they guide you to the location.**

facebook  SaiPa International Home

SaiPa International Timeline Now Status Photo / Video Event, Milestone + Adverts Manager



**SaiPa** 1948

**SaiPa International**  
Be the first person to like this.

Professional Sports Team  
This is an international site for Finnish hockey team SaiPa.  
The purpose of this site is to give information about SaiPa for people outside Finland and to provide a platform

About Photos Map

Highlights

See Your Ad Here  
**SaiPa International**  
This is an international site for Finnish hockey team SaiPa. The purpose of this site is to give in...  
Like · SaiPa International likes this.  
Get More Likes

Now  
2013  
Founded