



# **Organized and functioning communication channel to develop tourism in Jyväskylä region in co-operation with the locals**

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### **Organized and functioning communication channel to develop tourism in Jyväskylä region in co-operation with the locals**

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### **Abstract**

Local communities are in key part when it comes to destination development as the locals of a place are the ones getting to experience all tourism impacts firsthand. They are the ones noticing if a place is too crowded or tourists are impacting negatively to something and can have solutions to fix the matter before it gets out of hand. When wanting to develop a destination, involving the locals to the development process has proven to be beneficial. The purpose of the research was to create a communication channel that would allow the local residents of Jyväskylä region to communicate their feedback and possible concerns to the Visit-organization that would result to the end goal of developing the region in co-operation with the locals. For the Visit-organization to create the communication channel was a part of mandatory measurements that are required as the region is a part of Sustainable Travel Finland-program that was created by Visit Finland. The end goal of the program is for the region to gain Sustainable Travel Finland-label and get provided with a business model for continuous sustainable development. The used research methods were an online survey as well as a semi-structured interview. There were overall four target audiences that were researched to make sure the results were as beneficial as possible. The research results clearly pointed out that the best communication tool was a survey and the best channel where to share it was social media, meaning Instagram and Facebook in this context, as well as in the company's website. Majority of the respondents were unsure whether they found it important to get to say their feedback to the Visit-organization but still had several comments when asked positive and negative impacts caused by tourism in their area. The research results gave valuable information of the locals wishes for the communication channel and helped to achieve the end goal and to create the communication channel. The channel is proposed to be shared twice a year in the organizations social media and be constantly open in their website to make sure that the audience's demands on wanting to give feedback as often as possible are met. Responsibility is not just a trend in Jyväskylä Region, but it truly determines the tourism activities of the region currently as well as in the future. Responsible tourism means creating better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit and it is extremely important to make it happen in that specific order. To achieve responsible tourism, it is needed from all parties to take responsibility, to act to get to the end goal, to make tourism towards more sustainable.

### **Keywords/tags (subjects)**

tourism, sustainable tourism, responsible tourism, co-creation, destination development, local community  
For example, the confidentiality marking of the thesis appendix, see Project Reporting Instructions, section 4.1.2

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# 1 Introduction

In 2019, the mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau, promised to decrease the amount of tourists arriving to the city by terminating cruise ships in addition to restricting the expansion of Barcelona's airport. These actions were a component in a continuous fight against overtourism in the city as well as maintaining the local communities financially vivid without completely ruining it. In sixteen years, from 1990 to 2016, the overnight stays in Barcelona enhanced from 1.7 million to over 8 million and when considering the size of the city, that is such a significant rise in tourists. Before Covid-19, the city didn't really have any more capacity to expand, and the tourists just kept on coming which led to overtourism being the biggest problem in Barcelona and that is a problem that could not be solved with just simple solutions such as adding more bus routes. Overtourism had resulted to the shortage of affordable housing for the locals due to a huge amount of Airbnb properties being put into the market, properties that could have been long-term housing for the local residents. Among other things, overtourism in the city had also led to environmental problems and during the same year, 2019, the city was declared as the most polluted port in whole Europe (Ledsom, 2019.) Barcelona has experienced anti-tourist vandalism and as an example, in 2017, a tourist bus was invaded by masked strikers, and they wrote a slogan "tourism is killing neighborhood's" on the bus in addition to breaking one of the bus tyres. However, none of the tourists on the bus were not injured. The attack was made by a leftist youth movement Arran Jovent that is connected to an anti-capitalist party that is known to have been campaigning for Catalan independence. A spokesperson from the Arran said to BBC how tourism nowadays repels the locals from their neighborhood's and does bad for the environment and that they have witnessed it happening and for the locals to have to come away from their support system and neighborhoods due to tourism, is violence (Laurence, 2017.)

However, Covid-19 completely changed the situation when Spain had to close their borders for tourists. A local that had lived in Barcelona his whole life, commented that as the borders closed, the locals get to experience views that they had not got to see in a long time, places that were usually filled with tourists (Nugent, 2021, para 2.) He felt like tourism had taken all the public places from the locals and forced them to be extra in their own city (ibid, para 1). He mentioned that during 2021 as the world started to open again, the locals were afraid of losing that to tourism again (ibid, para 2). As the world has started to open, the city of Barcelona has created a strategy that would change post-pandemic tourism to be beneficial for both parties, locals, and

tourists. In January 2021 the city declared a plan that would help the city's housing situation. The plan would stop homeowners to rent rooms for tourists in accommodation forums such as Airbnb. In addition to this plan, the city stated in 2021 that they were going to purchase empty commercial places to transform them to businesses that would be targeted for the locals needs. The pandemic has given the city time to adjust their strategy what to do with the tourists (ibid, para 5.) Before Covid-19, the coexistence in Barcelona among the tourists and local community was rather conflictive (ibid, para 10).

Goodwin argues that "responsible tourism is about using tourism to make better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit, in that order." (Goodwin, n.d, para 3). Therefore, tourism should never be the cause of the local community having to suffer and sacrifice their home for the sake of tourists. As can be noticed from the pre-pandemic overtourism situation in Barcelona, the locals are the ones experiencing the impacts, positive and negative, of tourism firsthand. That being said, they are the ones having involved when developing a destination and considering solutions for problems that tourism might be causing in the area. The importance of local community in destination development is one of the phenomena behind the thesis and in this case the local community refers to Jyväskylä region and the importance of involving them to the process of destination development.

The thesis in question focuses on developing tourism in Jyväskylä region in co-operation with the locals and the key focus is on developing the city as a sustainable travel destination, which is the end goal that is achieved when people take responsibility of their actions (Goodwin; Responsible tourism, n.d). The goal of the thesis is to create an organized and well-functioning communication channel that will allow locals of Jyväskylä region to communicate their ideas and concerns regarding their place of residence to the destination marketing organization of the area, Visit Jyväskylä Region.

The author has herself been working in multiple travel destinations overseas and through her own work experience, has grown to be a passionate advocate for responsible and sustainable tourism. Therefore, she was interested of a subject concerning sustainable and responsible tourism.

## 2 Theoretical background

The phenomenon behind the thesis are sustainable tourism and local community in destination development. The subject of the thesis came from Visit Jyväskylä Region and their need to have a communication channel between them and the locals. Local communities are extremely crucial when developing a sustainable destination since they are the ones being able to give solutions to arising issues as they are living in the middle of it all.

The research question was how to develop tourism in Jyväskylä Region in co-operation with the locals. The goal was to create an organized and well-functioning concept to include the locals to destination development by having a channel through which their opinions, concerns, and development of their area of residence can be gathered from. Including the local community to the destination development is a part of Visit Jyväskylä Region's strategy 2021-2025 and a part of being in Sustainable Travel Finland program that will lead to gaining the Sustainable Travel Finland label.

As the numerous studies that have been made of the subject indicate, sustainable tourism as a phenomenon is not a new thing. Visit Jyväskylä Region emphasizes that "responsibility is not just a trend in Jyväskylä – it also defines the tourism activities of the region both now and in the future" (Sustainable tourism in Jyväskylä region, n.d, para. 4). The chapter discusses the importance of local community in destination development as well as the other main phenomenon, sustainable tourism and goes through the main terms used in this research, which are: responsibility, responsible tourism, co-creation, and local community.

### 2.1 Local communities and locals in destination development

In the past, dream destinations were possible to access only for some people but as the worlds and people prosperity has been growing, it has made almost any destination accessible for much more people. This has resulted to too many tourists visiting same places worldwide at the same time and the unique destinations have become must-see places. Having too many tourists visiting a place at the same time, leads to disappointment as the once dream destinations turns in to melancholy mass. (Linderova et al., para 30, 2021.) Overtourism is one of the negative impacts of tourism for local community as for example in Barcelona. To mention some positive impacts caused by

tourism, economic development, increased work opportunities and taking care of the cultural monuments can be mentioned (Ibid, para 30).

Travelers are seeking profound connections and unique experiences while traveling and being able to experience a destination through the local people eyes can truly make the travel experience unique and meaningful. However, it tends to be the locals that experience the influence of tourism, such as over tourism, at first hand. They are the ones who live in places that tourists only stay a short period of time so they notice the impacts first-hand and might be able to create practical resources to solve the possible arising issues, such as over tourism. Providing the right type of communication tools, the locals can inform local authorities of the issues that they experience in their area before the issue gets out of hand and it can perhaps be solved. Sustainable travel, that Visit Jyväskylä Region also wants to emphasize, focuses on handling the resources that are available, managing water, waste or even people, when talking about over tourism (World Travel & Tourism Council ,2018.)

Managing a balance between the impacts of tourism and the wellbeing of local communities can be demanding but there are practices that can help local authorities to maintain the equilibrium assuring meaningful livelihoods for the residents and genuine experiences for the visitors. As an example, destinations like Portugal and Bulgaria use the income that they get from ploughing and taxing tourists to developments that profits the locals such as making the roads better, investing into waste management and internet access. Having a platform for feedback and discussion is also a pivotal tool to ensure the wellbeing of the local community in regards of tourism impacts. This type of platform should make sure that the ideas and worries of the residents are heard and acted upon (Ibid, para 8.)

One of the key matters when talking about tourism development is in fact to urge local communities to participate and be active since it is the key in the sustainability of tourism industry (Muganda, et al., 2017). It can be argued that the participation of local community is one of the key factors of tourism development as it acts as the innermost when it comes to sustainability of tourism industry. There are multiple parties that are a part of tourism development, such as private sectors, different organizations, government, and private people. When considering those parties, local community stands out merely as legitimate and moral stakeholders when it comes to tourism

development (Dolma-Eco Tourism, para 3, 2018.) When local community is part of tourism experiences, it brings significant value for them, for their lifestyle as well as environmental, traditional, and cultural elements; that truly are the key appeals in tourism. However, it is important to take care of the locals demands and desires. The summary of tourism development together with local community being a part of it, will be sustainable development in addition to environmental, cultural, and economic advantages and it enhances the whole experience for the tourists as well. To conclude, tourism development gives the locals time to get used to recent social, economic, and environmental conditions in addition to helping to inhibit any negative outcomes or fast uncontrolled development. The attendance of local community secures retention of culture and environment of the local community, and it is crucial to achieve sustainability goals (Ibid, para 4, 9, 2018.)

Sustainable tourism development highlights specifically the significance of respecting and taking into consideration the desires and demands of the local people of the tourism destination in question. When considering the whole tourism sector, it involves a big range of products and services that have an impact to the local economy in addition to the local culture and living conditions of the community. Therefore, the whole local community and the people in it, service providers, hoteliers, locals etc, are impacted by tourism development (UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, p. 15, 2005.) A destination needs to consider the opinions of the locals as they are the ones being highly impacted by the tourists and experiencing it in their everyday lives.

In 2019, the city of Rovaniemi launched a questionnaire online that was targeted to the locals of the area and the point was to collect their feedback regarding tourism and its impacts on their area of residence. The questionnaire was first tested in Rovaniemi and then launched in whole Lapland. Lapland took example of Copenhagen where they had included the locals to be a part of destination development through a questionnaire. One of the main themes in tourism is responsibility and part of responsibility and one part of succeeding in tourism is following up the locals' opinions. In the online questionnaire they also wanted to know how the locals think tourism is developing in their area (Holopainen, 2019.) The official tourism organization of Copenhagen, Wonderful Copenhagen, mentioned in their 2020 tourism strategy that the locals are not a small side incident of Copenhagen but rather the heart of the destination that provide authentic experiences and are a big part of the charm of the destination. The locals support for tourism is contingent and depends on the tourism organization's power to assure compatible interaction between the locals

and tourists (The End of Tourism As We Know It, p. 5, n.d.) When speaking of sustainable tourism and destination development, the importance of including local community to the process and following up their opinions is a mandatory since they are the heart and soul of a destination, and they are the ones providing services and experiences for the visitors.

## **2.2 Co-operation & Co-creation**

Next it is necessary to explain how tourism experiences are co-created and who are the parties creating them and how do people nowadays want to be heard.

One perspective of co-creation is to create through interactions (Ramaswamy et al., 2017). First people thought that the sun rotated around the earth since the sun set and rose every day. However, a paradigm shift happened when people realized that it was the other way around and the earth rotated around the sun. This can be compared to how before individuals were thought to revolve around companies and to be the sources demand and rising but now individuals are actually the key to value creation. According to traditional and old school way of business thinking, the consumers are the ones that set the demand for a company's offerings and the business is the one that independently decides value through the company's selection of services and products. Customers do not participate into the designing process of the product or service since they are only provided the design that has been made by a company already. They do not take part to the planning of the marketing strategy or process, and they only see the marketing campaign targeted for them. However, this has changed due to digitalization and nowadays individuals are not passive, but they are active participants in the value creation as co-creators. People, individuals nowadays are very connected with each other and share their experiences with different services and products and they also are seeking to be a part of designing value of services and products that they use. They want to be heard by companies and to have conversations with who they are in business with. Nowadays there are so many ways of interactions such as videos, blogs and podcasts and the list go on as technology keeps on developing. The world has experienced a paradigm shift in value creation shifting away from a firm-centric approach towards creating and developing together with all stakeholder parties (Ramaswamy et al., 2014.) Therefore, Central-Finland can only benefit of getting the locals development ideas and being able to develop the region in co-operation with the local communities.

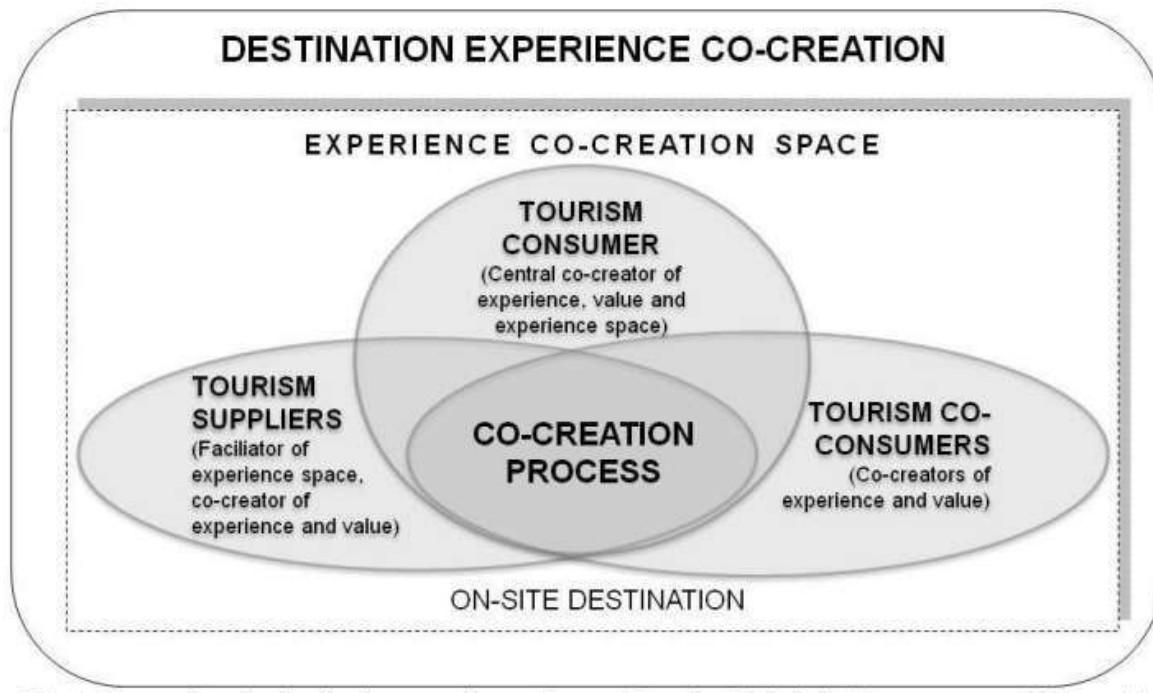


Figure 1 Destination experience co-creation (Prahalad, Ramaswamy, p.11, 2004)

Tourists have taken the part of being co-producers when creating tourism experiences and value. They do not only build their own experiences but also, they are in key part in building the overall destinations they are in. Tourists prefer to co-create experiences not alone but by linking and interacting with family, friends as well as tourism suppliers. The co-creation and co-construction of a destination happens when tourists get to co-create together collectively via events, activities, tourist practices in addition to learning experience that they are joining together. As an example of these types of activities are events in a destination that provide the tourist a possibility to be actively involved with the event and in creating the whole event. Therefore, DMO's should offer the type of destinations that give the possibility for tourists to be a part of building their unforgettable experiences. Figure 1 is a framework of this type of co-creation process where the consumer, the other consumers as well as the tourism suppliers all are a part of creating the experiences (Neuhofer et. al., p. 7, 2012.) This was an example of all the parties that are involved when creating memorable tourism experiences, it is not only the local community or the tourism supplies or the tourist but rather all of them are a part of creating tourism experiences.

## 2.3 Sustainability & sustainable tourism

Sustainability and sustainable tourism are goals that Jyväskylä region is aiming for being part of the Sustainable Travel Finland-program and it is necessary to explain how does being sustainable and creating sustainable tourism destinations go hand in hand and how the end goal of being responsible is sustainability.

The World Tourism Organization, UNWTO states that “tourism is a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes” (Glossary of tourism terms, n.d, para. 1). Tourism is an economic and social phenomenon that has during the decades went through continuous growth in addition with deepening diversification to evolve into one of the most rapid growing economic sectors in the whole world. Today’s modern tourism is deeply attached to development and comprises an increasing number of new destinations and these dynamics result tourism being and becoming a main driving force for socio-economic progress (Why tourism? n.d.)

The term sustainability is primarily associated with environmentalism, but it is also related to economic, social, and political areas. The terminology of sustainability has a very wide and diverse application. However, it is mostly used in regard to corporate responsibilities, especially corporate environmental responsibility in addition with corporate social responsibility, corporate business responsibility as well as corporate governance. Sustainability typifies together with science-based environmentalism, collective prudence, and a degree of commitment to social justice that has resulted as a factor to be respectable with democratic politics and influence on the perceived obligations of governments, corporations, and individual citizens. Sustainability refers to the property of being capable to continuous existence or be maintained in being or at a certain level over a prolonged period of time. However, sustainability as a term is incomplete due to it not having a specific content or limitations and restrictions as to what kind of matters can be regarded sustainable. The term also does not identify as to how long period of time something must be capable to continue in existence to be determined as sustainable. The term has no prescriptive implications because it leaves the question open of is it or not desirable to maintain the specific matters in question (Cambell et al., 2009, p.2.) The term discussed does not only apply to some specific institution, relationship or practice making it long-term, but it refers to an expanded scope that goes much further than just being concerned of those that are immediately involved in the



relationship, institution, or practice. It goes to being worried of farther stakeholders that are influenced by the happening actions, it goes to the wellbeing of individuals in addition to other breeds distant in time or space. The term already is and keeps developing towards an interdependent place and in one way or another, everyone is impacted by everything that others do. The results of people's actions and inactions are going over borders and generations all over the world creating long nets into the future. To live in a sustainable way requires applying wide temporal and geographic awareness to all areas of action (Thiele, para 2, 2016.) It can be concluded that all human actions have long-term causes and in this connected world, everything impacts everything. Tourism as a phenomenon can have a huge impact on the development of sustainability.

According to UNWTO sustainable tourism is "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (UNWTO, para 1, n.d). Before Covid-19 when the world was open, the tourism industry had around 900 million arrivals per year all around the world and due to it being connected specifically to natural areas, it can be said to be one of the biggest threats to natural resources and biodiversity all around the world. Therefore, it is inevitable to take actions to generate tourism in all levels to be more sustainable. The subpoena in sustainable tourism development is to take advantage of all tourism's positive effects, improving and channeling the advantages into correct ways and to prevent, avoid or mitigate the negative effects as long as it is possible (UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, 2005, p.8.)

Firstly, environmental re-sources are the main unit when talking about tourism development and sustainable tourism should use them on the best way possible while preserve integral ecological processes and assist in saving natural heritage and biodiversity. The phenomenon should also respect the socio-cultural authenticity of the local communities, protect their cultural heritage in addition with traditional values and understand and contribute to understanding and tolerance between different cultures. Lastly, UNWTO lists that sustainable tourism should make sure there are long-term economic operations that provides socio-economic benefits to all participants that are fairly represented, benefits such as employment and salary earning possibilities and social services for local communities in addition to helping with poverty alleviation (Sustainable development, n.d.) Figure 2 shows the multifacetedness of sustainable tourism and all the areas it influences. Sustainability is a goal that can be achieved by being responsible and the next phenomenon is

firstly responsibility and secondly responsible tourism which goes hand in hand with sustainable tourism.

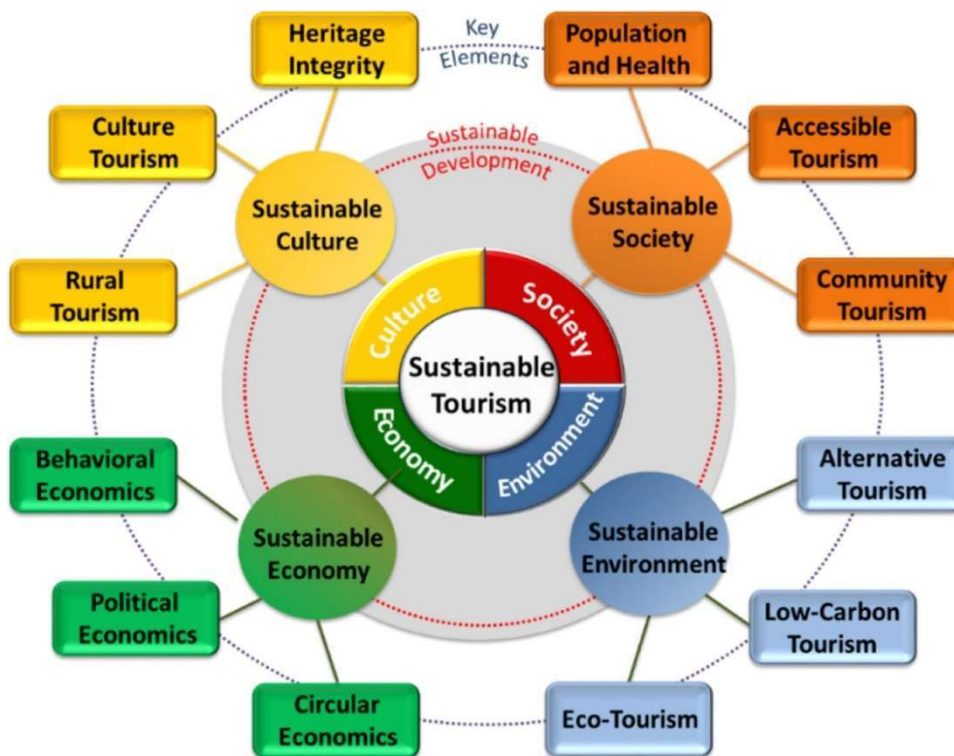


Figure 2 Sustainable Tourism (Pan et al., 2018)

## 2.4 Responsibility & responsible tourism

Sustainability is reached by being responsible and now it is crucial to go through the meaning of responsible tourism and how all parties involved in tourism need to act and take responsibility to create a sustainable future.

When discussing of responsibility as a term, there are two ways of thinking that are worth mentioning. Accountability and responsibility. Accountability means keeping people to account and aiming to make sure they are behaving good when responsibility refers to the will to correspond and to truly take responsibility for making our world a better place. Consequences as well as activities can be caused by individual or legal entities, and they are legally liable and can be held accountable. To raise awareness and get a response, exposing the consequence of either actions or inactions can be very useful. Responsibility is something that can be expected and strengthened by social norms. When talking about responsibility in legal sense, it can usually be provided with

limitations, and it can be determined by legal setting or professional codes. Moving on to responsibility, organizations as well as individuals in this world are expected to correspond and to make an impact, a difference. To be able to achieve this, it means having partnerships, several relationships, gaining knowledge and learning, praxis as well as critical reflection. It can be said that people that practice responsibility are emphatic, and they have a powerful sense of the other (Goodwin; Responsibility, n.d.)

In 2002, responsible tourism was defined in Cape Town Declarations and the definition is still today widely accepted. “Responsible tourism is about making better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit” (Goodwin, n.d, para 2). To achieve responsible tourism, it is needed from hoteliers, travel operators, governments, local people as well as tourists to take responsibility, to act to get to the end goal, to make tourism towards more sustainable. As stated in the quotation above, responsible tourism is about making better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit and it is extremely important to make it happen in that specific order. Responsible tourism differs from sustainable tourism because its key focus is on maximizing the positive economic, social, and environmental effects of tourism. The phenomenon is about recognizing the crucial matters locally and addressing them, about openly reporting progress to the way of using it for sustainable development. The behaviour of people can be responsible or irresponsible, however, what is responsible, totally depends on the place and culture. (Goodwin; Responsible tourism, n.d.)

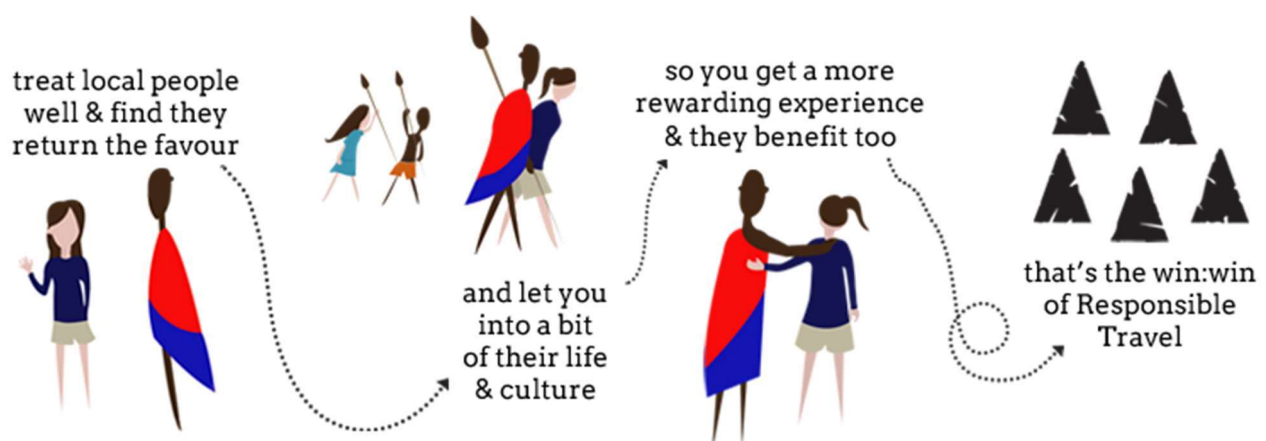


Figure 3 Responsible tourism (Responsible Tourism, n.d)

Figure 3 describes the outcome of the mutual respect between local community and tourists and how responsible and sustainable tourism in the end is beneficial for both parties, the locals as well as the tourists. To clarify the difference between sustainable and responsible tourism, sustainable tourism is a vague pursuit that we can be sustainable when responsible tourism refers to the positive functions that are taken to carrying out and making tourism better and more sustainable. Responsible tourism is the act of what is done when sustainable tourism refers to the vague pursuit. When considering what could for example hoteliers and tour operators do in regards of responsible tourism, is to determine of issue that is going at the destination where they run business and think what they could do about it, how could they solve it. There is no one correct answer what to do since it might be many of several things and these things and solutions are divided across the environmental, economic, and social agendas. As an example, the problem can be that the local community is not benefitting from tourism and there are multiple solutions to that problem, such as, hiring local people as guides, buying food and other products locally, inspiring the locals to open a furniture shop and then use those furniture's in a business that the person is about open to the destination and the list goes on. There are countless of examples what can people do to create bigger positive impacts on peoples, for examples locals, lives (Responsible Tourism Partnership, 2020.)

The next chapter will highlight why the local community is so important in destination development.

## **2.5 Tourism & local community**

Tourism as an industry in several countries have a very important role in contributing and developing the country's economy and the phenomenon acts as main tool for several communities to gain their social, ecological, and economic advantages that foster development and poverty reduction in the community. As the industry keeps developing on a rapid phase, the part of the community in developing of tourism has enhanced and to be able to counterpoise the state of communities in addition to other stakeholders in tourism development, it becomes major to enhance local community resident's attendance and participation in tourism development (Akbar et al. 2020, p. 36.) It can be stated that communities are in the focus of why people travel, as they people travel to get to know the way of life and to experience the local products. Communities are also a big part of forming the inherent landscapes that tourists then use, and they also act as the resource of

tourists since the travellers are from specific places and social contexts that will then be a part of shaping the tourists experience in the local community (Richards et al., 2000, p. 1.)

The thesis in question will focus on including the municipality's residents in tourism development in the area. Residing as a term refers to living in a place for a period of time. (Merriam-Webster, n.d, para 1). Residents of a place refers to individuals that's focus of ruling economic preoccupation is in their residing country's economic territory and then again non-residents of a country mean persons that's focus of ruling economic is outside the country's economic territory. The ones being part of co-creation as well are tourists and tourist can also be referred to as an overnight visitor. An inbound, outbound, and domestic visitor can be categorized as a tourist and overnight visitor if their journey contains an overnight stay. The term traveller then again means a person that transfers between various geographic locations for any period of time and purpose and travel means the activities of travellers (Glossary of Tourism Terms, n.d.)

## **2.6 Visit Jyväskylä Region & current situation with the locals**

The commissioner is the local destination marketing organization Visit Jyväskylä Region. Visit Jyväskylä is part of the City of Jyväskylä and the organization operates as the official local destination marketing organization, DMO in Jyväskylä region, Lakeland Finland (Visit Jyväskylä Region about, n.d). Jyväskylä Region as an area covers the municipalities of Joutsa, Hankasalmi, Laukaa, Petäjävesi, Muurame, Uurainen, Toivakka and Äänekoski. (Municipalities of the Jyväskylä Region, n.d). The whole region is a part of Sustainable Travel Finland-program that focuses on spreading sustainable tourism all over Finland (Kestävän matkailun Jyväskylän seutu, n.d). Sustainable Travel Finland-program was created by Visit Finland, and it is meant for all tourism companies and tourism destinations in Finland. The end goal of the program is to achieve the Sustainable Travel Finland label and all those companies and areas that achieve this label, are provided with a business model for continuous sustainable development, the newest information and news regarding the development of sustainable tourism in addition with marketing support and visibility in Visit Finland's channels. The program offers a seven-step sustainable travel path for companies and travel destinations, and it is completed in Sustainable Travel Finland online platform that includes an e-guide to the basics of sustainable travel development and the content of this program (Business Finland, n.d.) Having a communication channel between the locals and the Visit-organization is

one step of Sustainable Travel Finland program to ensure that the destination is developed in co-operation with the locals.

The organization does not have official communication channel where they would ask for the local's development ideas, concerns, and feedback of their place of residence. In the beginning of the pandemic, they once had a survey on their Facebook page where they asked their followers Corona-related things but other than that, they do not have any annual way to collect feedback from the locals in Central-Finland.

The Visit-organization has Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, and LinkedIn social media pages where they can be followed and where they share marketing content of Jyväskylä region. People who are following the organization in these social media sites have the possibility to like and comment to their posts and stories. However, the sites do not have an official place or a post that would specifically ask for the locals to give feedback and development ideas to the organization. Therefore, the organization needs a communication channel that would make it possible for the locals to express their development ideas, concerns, and feedback to them. The Visit-organization also has a newsletter that can be subscribed from their website. The website also has clearly sectioned specific content for locals and specific content for professionals as well as a chat window that allows its users to leave messages or their email for a contact request. However, the chat does not specially ask for any feedback, it is just a common communication tool that the company offers.

### **3 Research methodology**

Pacione argues that "Applied research involves the formulation of goals and strategies and the testing of existing institutional policies within the context of ethical standards as criteria" (Pacione, para 1). When speaking of applied research, it applies to scientific research and study that finds solution to practical issues. The type of research in question is crucial when finding solutions to everyday issues that usually have an impact on people's life, health, work, and general well-being. When comparing basic and applied research, basic refers more towards a bigger picture when applied refers to finding a solution to some specific issue that have an impact on people's lives currently (Cherry, 2020.) The thesis in question focuses creating a channel that would allow the locals and the Visit-organization to communicate and develop the region in co-operation with the local

community. The research was done to solve the issue of how tourism in Jyväskylä region could be developed in co-operation with the locals and as it focused on solving this specific research question, it can be referred to as applied research.

The target audience of the thesis consisted of four profiles:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SURVEY A: remigrants living in Jyväskylä region that are a part of Paluumuuttajat Facebook group</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SURVEY A: representatives from Central-Finnish villages that participated to the village-evening on the 4th of November 2021 regarding volunteer tourism in Central-Finland</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SURVEY B: Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences students from all degree programs, no tourism professionals</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• INTERVIEW C: A 70-year-old male that does not use social media at all but is using internet</li> </ul>

It was determined with the commissioner that it would be beneficial for the research to have at least two very different target groups in order to gain valuable data of how would, not only the locals in Jyväskylä but also the locals in Central-Finland, like to have their concerns and ideas heard and communicated to the local tourism organization. Opinions of more than one target group will ensure that the created operating model reaches as many locals as possible instead of only focusing on some specific group of locals. During the data collection process survey A did not gain enough answers and therefore the author created survey B that would give valuable and bias opinions for the research. In the very end of the result analysis, the author noticed the need for interview C due to the communication channel being available also for locals that do not use social media.

The main goal of the research was to know:

- Were the locals interested in giving their feedback to the Visit-organization?
- What communication channel would they prefer?
- Had they been experiencing any mild phenomenon's due to tourism in the area of residency?

Survey is one of the most common primary data collection methods and can be classified into two main groups: manual and electronic surveys. When considering electronic data collection methods, as were used in the thesis in question, they can be divided into three main areas: computer-administered surveys, electronic mail surveys in addition to web surveys (Nayak et al., 2019, p. 31.) The main data collection method for the thesis was a web survey that was conducted with Webropol survey and reporting tool. With an online survey, creation of the whole questionnaire, contacting the participants, saving the replies as well as seeing the visual survey results, are all done online that really makes this data collection tool quick to use, cost-effective and possible to be done in a short time. It is also possible to start the collection of data whenever and stop it or have a pause if needed. However, challenges with an online survey include the sampling of the results, upkeep of confidentiality as well as response rate (Ibid, 31.) Today's online survey tools, such as Webropol, contains three main sections that are the design, distribution as well as reporting the results (Ibid, 33). Webropol also allowed the author to create a complex questionnaire with multiple choice, open-ended and structured questions. One big problem with online surveys is found to be the participation rate and it tends to be so that online survey's response rate is poorer when compared to for example offline survey methods (Ibid, 35.) The same issue occurred in the research of the thesis in question and that can be seen soon in data analysis. However, the collected data and its content were enough to solve the research problem.

The main data collection tool for the research was Webropol. Overall, there were two different surveys that were used in the research. Survey A was for remigrants in Central-Finland as well as for Central-Finland's village representatives and survey B was for the students of Jyväskylä university of applied sciences. Interview C was done over the phone.

Central-Finnish villages in co-operation with Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences are running a project called "Value-hanke" that has an end goal of bringing volunteer tourism to Central-Finland to introduce the region to a new way of tourism and supporting internationalization of the rural areas in Central-Finland. (Keski-Suomesta vapaaehtoismatkailun kärkimaakunta (Value), n.d). One point of the project was to host village evenings where the ones interested from different villages in Central-Finland got to participate to the meetings and listen to information regarding volunteer tourism. The author of the thesis participated on to a remote village night which was held through Zoom on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2021 to collect data from the participants. The village evening had



only few participants outside the visiting speakers of the event but a link to the Webropol survey was shared in the chat during the meeting and it got five replies from that target group. The same survey link, survey A, was also shared in “Paluumuuttajat” Facebook group that the author belongs to in social media and was targeted to remigrants living in Central-Finland and it got 10 replies from that target group.

Webropol survey B was shared to students at University of Applied Sciences through the authors own student email and it was sent to all several different degree programs, but not to third year Tourism Management students. Later on, the research result analysis, it will be pointed out that majority of the received replies were from other degree programs than Tourism Management and this ensures that the replies were not from tourism professionals. The survey collected 35 valuable replies.

### **3.1 Research problem**

As a part of Sustainable Travel Finland-program, Visit Jyväskylä Region has a list of specific measures that needs to be completed to achieve the Sustainable Travel Finland label. One of those measures is to have organized and well-functioning operating model to develop tourism in Jyväskylä in co-operation with the locals and this specific part is what will be the result of the thesis. Therefore, the main research problem was developing tourism in the region highlighting co-operating with the locals. When considering the steps what it takes for the organization to be able to develop the region accordingly, they need to know the locals’ opinions and possible ideas and concerns to be able to take those into consideration when going forward with their operations. Therefore, creating a communication channel between the locals and Visit Jyväskylä Region was the main goal of this research. Without a communication channel, the locals don’t have the possibility to share their valuable opinions and the organization is unaware of how the ones who live in the destination, experience tourism’s impacts.

## 4 Implementation of the research

### 4.1 Research methods

In the beginning of the thesis project, the plan was to collect primary data through semi-deep interviews in Teams. However, as the thesis process went forward and the author had determined the target audience, it became apparent that the selection of research method was going to be online survey. By conducting the research through online survey and having more than one target group, the author made sure to gain data from as many people as possible in the time frame planned, to get opinions from people with complex backgrounds and to make sure to include not only people from Jyväskylä but from whole Central-Finland. The communication channel will help the locals to communicate with the Visit-organization so it was important to know from as many locals as possible, what would work best for them. Therefore, the author decided to use online survey as a data collection method that had a web link that easy to share for multiple people at the same time. Webropol survey tool was chosen based on its wide selection of question types as well as the reporting features. The survey tool provides clear statistics of the results and helps to analyze them.

Primary data for the thesis was conducted by two online surveys that were made by using Webropol survey tool. The two surveys are called survey A which was conducted in Finnish and survey B which was conducted in English due to the different target audiences. As mentioned earlier, the surveys included a mix of structured, multi-selection and open questions.

As the author was analyzing the collected data from the online surveys, it became apparent that due to social media being the main communication tool mentioned between the respondents which majority of were 20-30 years old, there was a need to do research for another type of target group, for people that do not have access or desire to use social media but that could have valuable feedback to give for the organization. Therefore, the second primary data collection method was in-depth interview that included quantitative and qualitative questions, and the interview will be referred in the thesis as interview C.

The interview was conducted by using in-depth interview data collection method which refers to a method that collects information of the participants behavior, attitude, and perception of a matter

and during the interview the participant and researcher are free to go through points that they come across during the discussion and the direction of the interview can change according to the need. These types of interviews are flexible in their structure, interactive and deep in a way that the researcher is allowed to ask follow-up questions in order to gain a deep understanding of the interviewee's opinion and experiences (In-depth Interviews: Definition and how to conduct them, n.d).

## **4.2 Data analysis**

Survey A was shared to the respondents through Facebook and Zoom by using an online link and survey B was shared through the author's student emails emailing list. 117 possible respondents opened survey A but only 15 of these, 17, 5 %, started and completed the survey. 53 possible respondents opened survey B but 35 of these, 66, 04 %, started and completed it.

## **4.3 Background information**

The first three questions were focused on the respondent's background, how old they are, their sex in addition to their place of residence and in survey B, also their degree program. Majority of the respondents, 66, 67 % were 20-30 years old, 9, 80 % were 30-40 years old, 7, 84 % were 40-50 years old, 5, 88 % were under 20-years old, 3, 92 % 50-70 years old. Overall, the majority, 68 % were female and 47 % were male and the rest preferred not to say their sex.

The majority, 78, 43 % were living in Jyväskylä, 7, 84 % were from Helsinki and rest were from Toivakka, Konnevesi, Turku, Laukaa, Russia and Canada. The author specifically wanted replies from people who are residing in Jyväskylä region, however, the replies from Helsinki and Canada are probably people that are from Central-Finland but now located somewhere else. 55, 88 % of survey B respondents were International Business students, 20, 59 % were Logistics students, 17, 65 % were Tourism Management students and 2, 94 % from Finance and Corporate Governance.

## **4.4 Tourism impacts**

Out of all the respondents, majority, 76 % replied to the question that was not marked as mandatory that asked if they had noticed some negative and or positive impacts that tourism has created

in their area. 54 % had not noticed any impacts on their area, 16 % had mentioned negative impacts as following: the annual Rally event, there is not enough tourism in the area and it is not marketed in the right an appealing way and that there is quite many white geese in the area, in the summertime restaurants, cafes and parks are very crowded, during the Rally streets are blocked and the treatment from locals can be very rude, also from organizations, lack of tourists so there is not great connection to the national parks around Central-Finland and for example for a student who doesn't have a car, it is very hard to get to those places with public transport, Jyväskylä is not putting enough effort for tourists and that domestic craftsmanship's and unique small businesses that have been operating for a long time, are being left behind because of bigger mass companies. The rest 2 % said that they had not seen any tourists in their area for now as well as that most impacts are positive but big events can cause negative impacts.

#### **4.5 Social media following & giving feedback**

33, 33 % felt that it would be important to have a chance to express their feedback to the Visit-organization, 50, 98 % were not sure and 15, 69 % did not find it important. The question gave examples of the subject that the feedback could be given, such as proposing an area to get more parking places or tipping the organization that some area has too many tourists and should not be marketed anymore. The next question was asking whether the respondents follow Visit Jyväskylä Region in Facebook, in Instagram, in Facebook and Instagram or that they do not follow the organization in social media. The majority, 74 % replied that they do not follow the organization in social media, 14 % followed them on Instagram, 8 % on Facebook and 4 % in both, Facebook and Instagram.

#### **4.6 Communication channels**

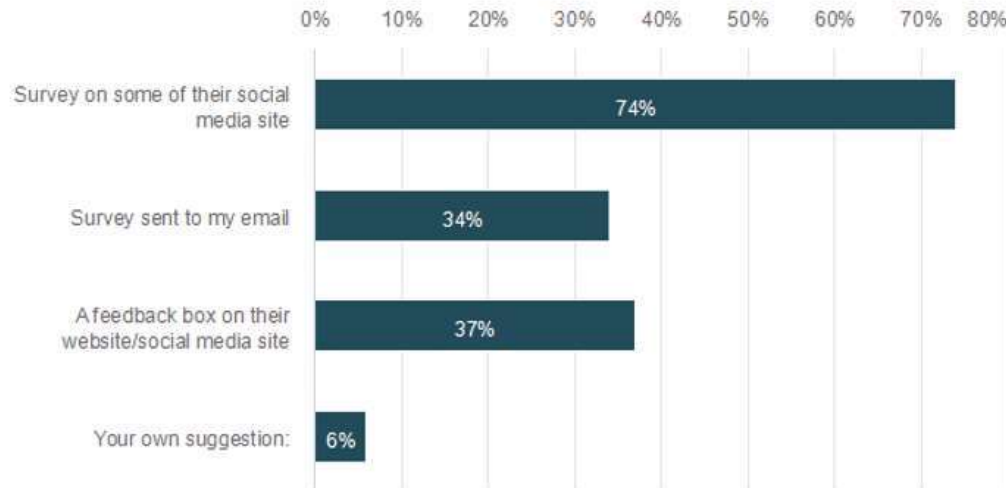
Majority, 68, 63 % replied social media which in this context includes the company's website, Instagram, and Facebook in addition to LinkedIn would be the easiest channel for them to communicate their development ideas and possible concerns to the Visit-organization. 15, 69 % of the respondents mentioned email to be the best channel, 1, 96 % mentioned over the phone, interview, and an anonymous form. Please see figures 4 and 5 for communication channel replies.

Social media was mentioned as the most popular channel and 74 % chose the best tool to communicate their feedback to the Visit-organization would be survey on some of Visit-organization's social media sites, such as Facebook or Instagram, 37 % voted for a survey box on the commissioner's social media sites and 34 % wished a survey sent to their email and when asked for open suggestions regarding the question, there was a wish to have a survey in both English and Finnish.

Majority so 80 % wished to give feedback any time they wanted, 13 % chose once a year-option and 7 % chose two times a year. 60 % percent replied that they didn't care whether the communication channel replies were anonymous and 40 % wished to do it anonymously. Figure 10 shows the best communication tool question's replies.

### 8. What would be the best communication tool to express your feedback to visit Jyväskylä?

Number of respondents: 35, selected answers: 53



	n	Percent
Survey on some of their social media site	26	74.3%
Survey sent to my email	12	34.3%
A feedback box on their website/social media site	13	37.1%
Your own suggestion:	2	5.7%

Answers given into textfield

Option names	Text
Your own suggestion:	Questionnaire on social media
Your own suggestion:	wherever the survey is, both Finnish and English should be kept as languages

Figure 4 communication tool

## 5 Results

The research results answer to the three main goals of the research, and they were beneficial in creating the communication channel and figuring out what do the locals think about giving feedback and what channel would they prefer to use. There was no clear need for the locals to give feedback to the Visit-organization as half replied that they were not interested in this and the rest either wanted to give feedback or were not sure if they wanted or not. This shows that since the communication channel does not exist yet, the locals had difficulty picturing their real need for it

and it is something that must be tested in real life by launching the communication channel. The result clearly state that the best communication channel is social media, meaning Facebook or Instagram and the next best is the company's own website. The best tool is an online survey that would be accessible all the time, rather than only once or twice a year. Being able to give feedback anonymously was clearly important for almost half of the respondents and therefore the survey should be anonymous. Majority had not noticed any major tourism impacts, and this is inevitable considering the current Covid-19 situation and the lack of tourists caused by it in the whole country. Even though the results clearly stated that the channel is social media, the region must consider different target groups and those that are not using social media. Therefore, interview C replies were beneficial in considering a target group that does not have social media but is familiar with using internet and could give valuable feedback to the Visit-organization. The result is an anonymous online survey that will be created with Webropol and shared to the locals through Visit Jyväskylä Regions's Instagram and Facebook sites as well as their website. The next chapter will introduce the created communication channel in figures and explain it more in detailed.

## 6 Discussion

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the domestic tourism arrivals in Jyväskylä Region in June 2021 were 74 % bigger than same time last year, 2020. However, even though the pandemic has increased the domestic tourists in Central-Finland, it has impacted negatively to international tourist arrivals (Nurmi, 2021.) In 2021 Central-Finland had 26, 3 % less foreign tourist hotel over nights than in 2020 and the whole Finland had 33, 1 % less foreign tourist overnights (Kotilainen, 2021). Lack of international arrivals must be taken into account when considering the whole picture of the research results. As an example, due to the area not having many tourists currently, will clearly have an impact on whether the locals experience some negative or positive impacts due to tourism in their area. Majority had not noticed any major tourism impacts in their area but there were also accurate points of impacts that the tourism organization can consider in their operations in the future, such as the annual Rally event and its impact to the locals' lives.

To conclude, the best communication channel is a survey that will be shared on Visit Jyväskylä Region's Instagram, Facebook, and website. However, according to the results, over 70 % of the participants did not follow Visit Jyväskylä Region in social media, meaning in Facebook or in Instagram and when considering that the best communication channel is social media, there is a gap

between these two matters. Tourism in Jyväskylä region can be developed in co-operation with the locals by creating an online survey to the company's social media as well as website that the locals can use to communicate their feedback to the organization. The created communication channel can be seen in figures 7 and 8. It is an online survey created with Webropol that consist of two main questions and has an explanation in the beginning of why the feedback is collected. Figure 9 is a representation of the company's Instagram post that invites locals to fill in the survey and it also includes link to the survey.

The research results show that locals have a clear need accessing the survey whenever it is needed, rather than only once or twice a year. Therefore, as the survey is meant to be shared in social media and website, it could be shared in social media twice a year but be constantly accessible on the company's website. This way the ones who truly find the need to give feedback often, would make the effort and go to the company's website to fill it and then twice a year through social media the survey would get as many locals as possible that would just happen to see the survey link in social media.



## Feedback for Visit Jyväskylä Region



We need your help in developing Jyväskylä Region to be a great place to live and visit, now and in the future. Therefore, we kindly ask you to fill in this survey and let us know any feedback, concerns or development ideas regarding your place of residence. We appreciate your opinions!

The development focuses on ensuring that tourism would bring positive impacts to Central-Finland and your place of residence instead of negative ones.

All replies will be handled anonymously and they will be a great help in developing the region together with the locals, meaning you, that know best what could be done better in your area.

### 1. Your current place of residence?

Figure 5 Online survey page 1

**2. Please type here any feedback, concerns or development ideas regarding tourism in your area of residence that comes in mind?**



Submit

Figure 6 Online survey page 2



Figure 7 Survey link shared in social media

The research results show that locals have a clear need accessing the survey when ever it is needed, rather than only or twice a year. Therefore, as the survey is meant to be shared in social media and website, it could be shared in social media twice a year but be constantly accessible on the company's website. This way the ones who truly find the need to give feedback often, would make the effort and go to the company's website to fill it and then twice a year through social media the survey would get as many locals as possible that would just happen to see the survey link in social media.

Tourism development in co-operation with the locals helps to inhibit any negative outcomes or fast uncontrolled development. The attendance of local community secures retention of culture and environment of the local community, and it is crucial to achieve sustainability goals (Dolma-Eco Tourism, para 4, 9, 2018.) Locals are the ones experiencing firsthand issues and development points regarding their place of residence and therefore they are the ones worth asking opinions from when wanting to develop a place as a good place to live as well as great place to visit.

By developing the region in co-operation with the locals, the Visit-organization will make sure that they are using all the available resources to their capacity and take care of all the stakeholders needs that will then lead to a sustainable place to live in and to visit. When the goal is tourism development, the key to that truly is the active participation of the local communities (Muganda et al., 2017.)

## **6.1 Conclusions and development proposals**

The Covid-19 pandemic is still very much going on and it has a huge impact on tourism all over the world, also in Jyväskylä region. Therefore, the results of whether the respondents had noticed some positive or negative tourism impacts on their area, are only accurate in this Covid-19 situation but not in a normal tourism situation. The current situation might also have an impact of the respondent's vision of giving feedback to the Visit-organization if they feel like there is not much tourism in their area right now.

Based on the research results a communication channel was created, and it was an online survey. When launching the communication channel, it is important to make sure that the wanted target customers will be reached through the chosen channels, social media, and website and a crucial

part of the participation rate of the feedback will be whether the locals realize that now is their chance to impact on things in their place of residence and that now they get to be a part of developing Jyväskylä region to be a sustainable place to live and to visit. On the journey of becoming a sustainable travel destination, local community can only benefit the Visit-organization and as the locals are the ones having a huge impact to the tourist's experiences and visions of the place, they might also be the ones to come up with sustainable solutions to the occurring issues.

It may be useful to investigate further how big participation rate does the survey get when shared on Facebook and Instagram as majority of the respondents did not follow the Visit-organization on social media. Majority of the participants were in Jyväskylä instead of the smaller places in the region so it is recommended for the region to communicate with also the other communities as well as rural communities in the region that might have totally different development ideas, feedback and needs to give and expect than a local resident from Jyväskylä city. It may also be useful to consider whether the tourism entrepreneurs and local residents should have a similar type of survey, or would there be a need for the entrepreneurs for example to contact the organization through some common events where they could share their ideas for the region, from another point of view than the locals themselves. Since the world is still living in the middle of a global pandemic, the participants feedback and overall interest to fill in the survey might be totally different during the pandemic and after the pandemic. Therefore, it might be beneficial for the Visit-organization to compare the survey results they get now during 2022 to for example 2023, if the pandemic is over by then and collect data of how the replies are different during and after-pandemic to help them understand the locals needs, demands, and wishes from the official destination marketing organization of their area.

## **6.2 Ethicality & reliability**

The used data collection tool was Webropol survey tool, and all the survey replies were anonymous, and they were also handled anonymously. Before the surveys were conducted, the author had a Teams meeting with the presentative from the commissioner, Johanna Maasola and during the meeting it was determined what information is wanted to be collected from the made research. The Visit-organization wanted firstly to know have the locals been experiencing some negative or positive impacts caused by tourism in their area, secondly if the locals would even be interested of giving feedback to them and lastly what would be the best communication channel for

them. Based on that meeting and those goals, the author designed the survey questions. Survey A was conducted first and based on those results, survey B was created, and the questions were edited to make sure that the results would meet with the Visit-organization's goals.

In the beginning of both surveys, there was a description of the thesis and for what will the data be used for. There was also mentioned that the data is collected anonymously, and all the results were handled anonymously.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Survey A questions in Finnish and translated in English

Minkä ikäinen olet? / How old are you?

Sukupuoli? / Sex?

Tämän hetkinen asuinpaikkakuntasi?/Current place of residence?

Koetko joitain matkailun lieveilmiöitä nykyisellä asuinalueellasi? (Matkailun lieveilmiöllä tarkoitetaan matkailuun liittyvää tai sen aiheuttamaa kielteistä ilmiötä, esimerkiksi liikaturismia "overtourism") / Are you experiencing some negative or positive impacts on your living area caused by tourism?

Koetko tärkeäksi että sinulla olisi mahdollisuus ilmaista mielipiteesi kotiseutusi kehitysideoista ja mahdollisista haasteista Keski-Suomen matkailuorganisaatio Visit Jyväskylä Regionille? (Ideat voivat olla esimerkiksi seuraavanlaisia: lisää parkkipaikkoja johonkin tai aluetta x ei saisi markkinoida liikaa yliturismin vuoksi) / Do you feel it would be important for you to have the possibility to say your opinion regarding development ideas and possible challenges for the Visit-organization?

Seuraatko Visit Jyväskylä Regionia sosiaalisessa mediassa? (Facebookissa/Instagramissa) /Do you follow Visit Jyväskylä Region in social media? (In Facebook/Instagram)

Mikä olisi sinulle helpoin kanava kommunikoida kehitysideasi ja mahdolliset huolesi Visit Jyväskylä Regionille? /What would be the easiest communication channel for you to communicate development ideas and possible concerns to Visit Jyväskylä Region?

Miten usein toivoisit saavasi ilmaista mielipiteesi Visit Jyväskylä Regionille? /How often do you wish to have the possibility to give feedback to Visit Jyväskylä Region?

Toivoisitko saavasi ilmaista mielipiteesi anonymisti vai omalla nimelläsi? /Do you wish to give feedback anonymously or with your own name?

Vapaita ehdotuksia miten haluaisit esittää kehitysideoita Visit Jyväskylä Regionille? /Free ideas  
how you would like to communicate your development ideas to Visit Jyväskylä Region?

## **Appendix 2. Survey B questions**

How old are you?

To which gender do you identify?

What field do you study?

Where do you live? (Which city)

Do you follow Visit Jyväskylä Region in social media?

Would you give feedback/development ideas for Visit Jyväskylä Region regarding suggestions of your own living area and possible concerns if you had the chance?

What would be the best communication channel for you to express your feedback to Visit Jyväskylä Region?

What would be the best communication tool to express your feedback to visit Jyväskylä?

Have you noticed some negative/positive impacts that tourism has created in your area?