



Marite Rand

Destination image of Estonia among Finns

Business Economics and Tourism

2014

UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Degree Program of Hospitality Management

ABSTRACT

Author Marite Rand
Title Destination image of Estonia among Finns
Year 2014
Language English
Pages 41+2 appendices
Supervisor Mikko Peltola

The aim of the thesis was to study the destination image development process and the components of it. In addition, the author wanted to examine Finns' image process concerning Estonia as a destination. The purpose of the research was to find out the actual image of Estonia and how it has been formed.

The theoretical framework based on the definition of destination, image and its development. Furthermore, the theory on destination image formation process by Baloglu and McCleary, and Pearce, led to a better understanding of the whole process. Echtner and Ritchie's figure on the destination image components improved the knowledge about how to determine the way individuals structure their understanding of destinations.

The survey was conducted in order to collect empirical data. The questionnaire was designed first in English then translated into Finnish; it included demographical information about the respondents, standard attribute-based scales and two open-ended questions. Surveys were given personally to the respondents and collected afterwards. The selection of the respondents was done mainly based on the age and educational background in order to get more realistic picture of the actual image of Estonia.

The results of the survey indicated that the overall image of Estonia as a destination is surprisingly positive in the minds of Finns. The author expected a more negative outcome from the respondents due to the negative coverage by Finnish media. It was found that the images held were different because of the fact that all individuals are influenced by various dissimilar personal and external factors. Moreover, those factors did impact the formation process of Finns image and as a result an overall image was developed.

VAASAN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU

Degree Program of Hospitality Management

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tekijä	Marite Rand
Opinnäytetyön nimi	Viron imago matkailukohteena suomalaisten keskuudessa
Vuosi	2014
Kieli	Englanti
Sivumäärä	41+2 sivua liitteitä
Ohjaaja	Mikko Peltola

Tämän opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli tutkia matkailukohteen imagon kehitymisprosessia ja sen osatekijöitä. Lisäksi haluttiin tutkia, miten suomalaiset kehittävät mielikuvansa Virosta matkakohteena. Tarkoituksena oli selvittää Viron todellinen imago suomalaisten keskuudessa, ja miten se on kehittynyt.

Teoreettinen viitekehys koostuu matkailukohteen määritelmästä, sen imagosta ja kehitymisestä. Myös, Baloglun, Mclearyn ja Pearcen teoria matkailukohteen imagon kehitymisprosessista johti parempaan ymmärryksen kyseisestä prosessista. Echtnerin ja Ritchien kaavio matkakohteen imagon osatekijöistä paransi tietämystä siitä, kuinka yksilöt kehittävät mielikuvansa matkakohteista.

Tutkimus suoritettiin, jotta saataisiin kerättyä empiiristä tietoa. Kysely suunniteltiin englanniksi ja käännettiin sen jälkeen suomeksi. Se sisälsi muun muassa kysymyksiä vastaajien demografisista tiedoista, moinvalintakysymyksiä sekä kaksi avointa kysymystä. Vastaajat valittiin pääosin iän ja koulutuksen perusteella, jotta saataisiin realistisempia tuloksia Viron imagosta matkakohteena.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat että Viron imago matkailukohteena on yllättävän positiivinen suomalaisten keskuudessa. Suomalaisen median antamasta negatiivisesta kuvasta johtuen tutkimuksen tekijää odotti kielteisempää tulosta. Todettiin, että mielikuvat ovat erilaisia, koska jokainen yksilö saa erilaisia vaikutteita sekä henkilökohtaisilta että ulkoisilta tekijöiltä. Lisäksi todettiin, että nämä tekijät vaikuttavat myös suomalaisten mielikuvanmuodostamisprosessiin ja sen seurauksena syntyy yleismielikuva.

LIST OF APPENDICES**APPENDIX 1** Questionnaire in Finnish**APPENDIX 2** Questionnaire in English

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

TIIVISTELMÄ

1	INTRODUCTION	7
1.1	Background of the study.....	7
1.2	Aim of the study	7
1.3	The structure of the thesis	8
2	DESTINATION AND ITS IMAGE.....	9
2.1	Definition of Destination.....	9
2.2	Definition of Destination Image.....	9
2.3	The components of destination image.....	11
3	DESTINATION IMAGE FORMATION.....	13
3.1	A general framework of image formation.....	13
3.2	The typology of eight image formation agents	14
3.3	Perception.....	16
3.4	Stereotypes	16
4	ESTONIA AS A TOURIST DESTINATION.....	18
4.1	Estonia as a destination	18
4.2	Media coverage	19
5	METHODOLOGY	21
5.1	Destination image measurment techniques	21
5.2	Questionnaire design	22
5.3	Sample	24
6	RESULTS	25
6.1	The demographic profile	25

6.2	Destination attributes.....	29
6.3	Holistic and unique components of Estonian image	34
7	CONCLUSIONS	37
7.1	Validity and Reliability	38
7.2	Suggestions for future studies	39
	REFERENCES.....	40
	APPENDICES	

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Estonia has been a popular destination among Finns for a long time. There are a couple of clear reasons for that; Estonia is near and it is relatively cheap. The image of Estonia in the minds of Finns seems to be not very positive. The media coverage of the country is mostly full of negative content. It looks like Finns only travel to Estonia for the cheap alcohol beverages and then they get robbed. Yet, there are so many positive tourist experiences and sightseeing which do not get much attention due to the stereotyping of Estonia and Estonians.

The main reason for conducting this kind of research is to investigate how the image of Estonia as a tourist destination has developed and what are the reasons behind it. Furthermore, I am interested in finding out the actual image Finns hold about Estonia which in turn can help marketing managers to make better decisions in the future.

1.2 Aim of the study

The main purpose of this study is to find out the image of Estonia as a tourist destination among Finns. The author aims to research the destination image forming process and to understand the factors influencing individuals' image. The secondary aim is to explore the reasons behind the actual destination image Finnish people hold.

To clarify the aim of this research, the author highlights following research questions:

What is the image of Estonia as a tourist destination in the minds of Finns?

How has the image been formed?

What factors in the individuals' environment have influenced the formation of image?

Why do Finns have the image they hold of Estonia as a destination?

1.3 The structure of the thesis

The thesis starts with an introduction to the study, the aim of it and the research questions in order to clarify the purpose of the research. The next chapter focuses on the theory about destination and its image. Moreover, the components of image are investigated based on previous literature. The third chapter, as being the most important part of the theory, deals with the formation of destination image. In this chapter the author examined the two most used formation figures and also the influence of stereotypes and perceptions on the development of the image. The fourth chapter analyses Estonia as a destination based on the existing publications and latest news in order to get a picture of how Finns see Estonia. The fifth chapter deals with the methodology used for this research and the measurement techniques of destination image are explained. Moreover, the method chosen is clarified in conjunction with the questionnaire design and sample of the population. The sixth chapter analyses the results of the survey and the seventh chapter is a conclusion of the whole research; in addition, it makes suggestions for further studies.

2 DESTINATION AND ITS IMAGE

2.1 Definition of Destination

Defining a destination can be a very difficult practice since it depends on wide selection of factors. Wang and Pizam (2011:24) explain that generally tourists will define a destination quite differently from industry or from government agencies. The authors suggests that “visitors have no particular interest in the administrative boundaries that shape the flow of money and other resources to support destination region planning, marketing and management activities. They are more likely to define a destination in terms of the attractions visited, travel time, the services needed and consumed, and the entry and exit points that define their travel. Industry is likely to define tourism destinations in a more fluid manner, based on the clusters and linkages between operators and businesses that have formed over time.”

Wang and Pizam (2011) refer to the original study of Cartier and Lew (2005) where it is explained that “destinations vary widely in their scale and in the historical nature of their development, spatial size and organization, demography, topography, climate and weather, culture, infrastructure, available attractions, governance, politics and management, and human resources and finances.” Worldwide, the tourism industry has become increasingly competitive and there are about 200 nations and 2 million destinations from which one can choose.

In order to make the decision where to travel, the visitors are assisted with a phenomenon called image. In the next paragraph of the study the definition of destination image will be described.

2.2 Definition of Destination Image

John Hunt (1975) was the first man to demonstrate the importance of the destination image in increasing the number of travelers visiting destinations. Since the pioneering work, destination image has become one of the most prevalent topics in the tourism literature. Pike states that there has been 142 destination image re-

searches conducted and published in the literature between 1973 and 2000 (Pike 2008:200).

For numerous social scientists image “is one of those terms which will not go away. A term with vague and shifting meanings, it has been variously linked to advertising and consumerism, attitudes, memories, cognitive maps and expectations.” (Pearce, 2005:92)

As mentioned earlier, the amount of destination image theories and definitions is wide. Therefore, this research is going to focus on the most relevant and popular definitions.

Kotler explains a place’s image as “the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that people have of a place. Images represent a simplification of a large number of associations and pieces of information connected with the place. They are a product of the mind trying to process and “essentialize” huge amounts of data about a place.”(Kotler, 1993:141)

Wang and Pizam (2011:131) used Gallarza *et al.* (2002) research to explain four main characteristics that represent the nature of Destination Image:

1. Complex- Destination image has no universally agreed-upon definition and it has remained as a controversial concept.
2. Multiple- Destination image consists of multiple factors that symbolize its identity; further, there is various interconnected information agents involved with the formulation of DI.
3. Relativistic- Destination image is extremely subjective and it tends to differ from individual to individual; moreover, it is measured usually in comparison to other destination rather than assessed in itself.
4. Dynamic- Destination image is not stable, more likely it changes over time and space.

The authors of the study argue that it is strategically more important to investigate what people think about the destination; rather than, what a marketer knows about the place.

Reisinger and Turner (2003), after reviewing tourism literature, notes that image determines “destination choice, successful tourism development, tourism marketing strategies, and travel decision-making. Further, image plays, an important role in evaluating tourist behavior and satisfaction. Therefore, image is a useful concept in analyzing social interaction between tourist and hosts, and satisfaction with this interaction.” (Reisinger & Turner, 2003:168)

2.3 The components of destination image

It is important to describe the components of destination image in order to determine how people structure their understanding of destinations. Echtner and Ritchie (1991) presented a model of three dimensions: attribute/holistic, functional/psychological and common/unique.

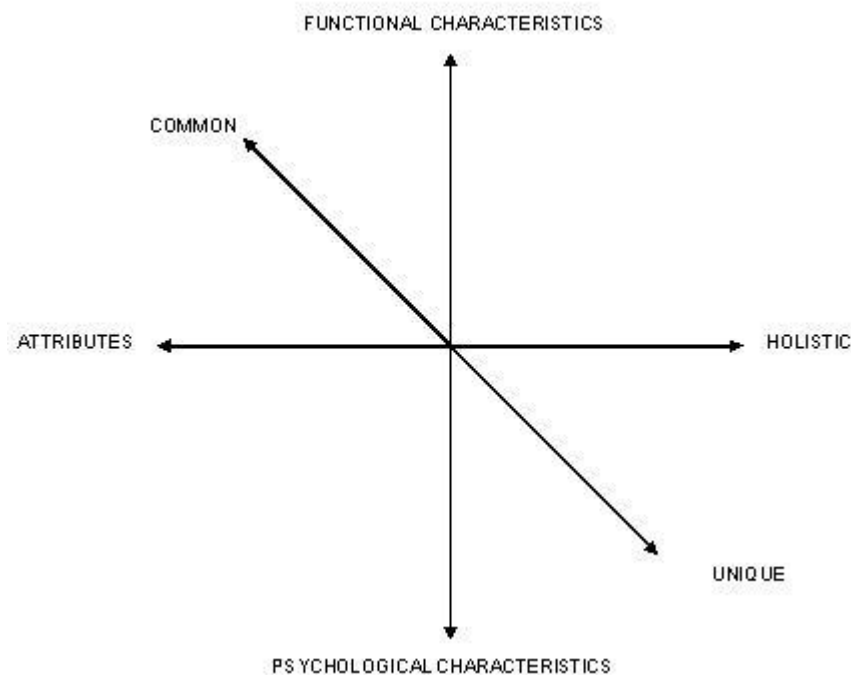


Figure 1. The components of destination image

Echtner and Ritchie explain Figure 1 as follows:

Common functional attributes contains features by which most destinations can be compared; for example, climate and price. Unique functional attributes include some particular special traits or events which form part of a destination image.

Common psychological attributes consist of the beauty of the landscape or friendliness of the locals, while unique psychological attributes involve feelings associated with places connected with some historic event.

Destination images are holistic representations of places and in order to measure them, researchers have to investigate attributes singularly. However, some aspects of image, such as atmosphere, are not able to be broken down. To overcome this basic problem, Echtner and Ritchie proposed a model that includes attribute-holistic as one of three dimensions. In this manner, those features of destination image that can be broken down into attributes, as are the total, holistic impressions. At one end of the dimension are functional and psychological holistic images such as the atmosphere or overall impression, and at the other end are the functional and psychological attributes.

Now that the destination image is defined thoroughly and its components are discussed; the actual process of image development needs to be investigated. Moreover, in order to continue with the study, the author has to examine how the destination image forms in the minds of people and what factors influence it from the environment.

3 DESTINATION IMAGE FORMATION

3.1 A general framework of image formation

A framework of image formation process was created based on the literature from several fields to identify the aspects, which influence the image development (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999:869).

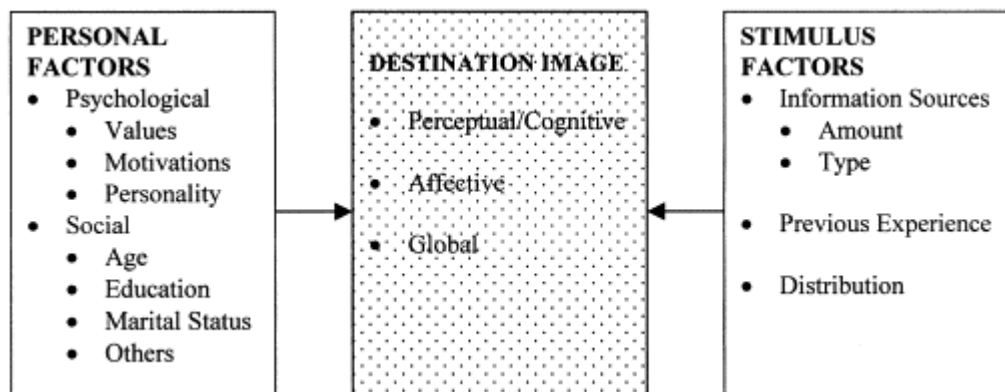


Figure 2. A General Framework of Destination Image Formation

Figure 2 presents a general framework of destination image formation developed from previous literature. The stimulus factors are considered as the previous experience and external information sources. Personal factors, on the other hand, are the social and psychological characteristics of the tourist. Numerous researchers agree that image is mainly formed by three major elements in the absence of previous experience: information sources, motivations and sociodemographics (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999:870).

The sociodemographic characteristics of the tourists such as age, education, gender, marital status and income have all been suggested as influencing images and perceptions. However, age and education are believed to be the most significant determinants of image. The authors claim that those two factors are having powerful influence on the perceptual/cognitive and affective evaluations of destinations.

Motivations, proposed as one of the most important concepts in understanding the tourism behavior, are formed in relation to the image in a conscious or unconscious way. The affective image of an individual toward a destination is greatly

influenced by his/her benefits sought (motivations) from the touristic experience (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999:875).

Stimulus factors, in the table above, are various information sources such as promotional advertising through media, friends and familys' recommendation and word-of-mouth. It is explained that those external factors are forming the perceptual/cognitive evaluation of beliefs. The type and amount of the information sources only influences the cognitive dimension of image but not he affective one. Different scholars in the field have come to a common agreement that type, quantity and quality of information would determine what kind of image is likely to develop (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999:874)

Researchers in several fields find that the image construct has both affective and perceptual/cognitive evaluations. “The perceptual/cognitive evaluations refer to the beliefs or knowledge about a destination's attributes whereas affective evaluation refers to feelings toward, or attachment to it.” Although differentiation is made between two dimensions, they are also interrelated. Affective evaluation depends on cognitive assessment of products and the affective responses are formed as a function of the cognitive ones. It is suggested that the overall image of a place is formed as a result of those evaluations (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999:872-873)

3.2 The typology of eight image formation agents

Philip Pearce is describing the process of image formation using different approach, developed by Gartner (1993), initially labelled by Gunn (1972). The typology contains eight image formation agents:

- 1) The first agent is labelled *Overt Induced I*, where the image is based on non-commercial and non-touristic information sources. Such could be media, books, movies, school courses etc.
- 2) *Overt Induced II*, a second category of destination information transfer, where more commercial sources are used. In this case, the agent can be

guidebooks, travel agents or tourism brochures, and they might modify the image formed in the first stage.

- 3) *Covert Induced I* refers to a source of information when the destination is recommended and supported by celebrities and their spontaneous behavior.
- 4) *Cover Induced II* is termed as the impartial sources (unsponsored travel writing).
- 5) *Autonomous image formation* agents consist of news, movies and documentaries. The effect of autonomous agents can be very powerful and immediate, especially when dramatic large-scale news events are published.
- 6) Information received from the individuals, who have previously visited the destination or who claim to have knowledge about it, are referred as the *unsolicited organic image formation agent*. It is mentioned that such information might be not required, yet still offered in everyday conversations.
- 7) Word-of-mouth advertising, known as an important information source since the early days of tourism, is termed as *solicited organic image formation agent*. In this case, the material is sought from family and friends.
- 8) Actually visiting the destination and having a personal experience refers to *Organic formation agent*. (Pearce, Philip L.2005:91)

The model above suggests that tourists develop organic images from different non-tourism information sources. When comes the desire to travel, they may start active information search from the available sources. As a result, they develop induced images which can be the same or different from the organic images (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999:874).

Wang and Shani recognized Gartners' (1993) work as one of the most detailed and cited typologies. According to the authors, Gartner stated that the eight formation agents are distinguished by their credibility, market penetrations and destination costs. One of the examples is advertising, which can be relatively expensive and is known for its low credibility, yet it has the ability to reach wide segments of customers. Conversely, an organic source such as word-of-mouth pos-

sess higher credibility and does not imply any direct expenses on the destination, but the market penetration is lower. (Wang & Pizam, 2011:139).

Destination image is not static as mentioned earlier above; more likely it changes over time. For instance, individuals do not form a whole new DI, but rather they evaluate the information received from image agents based on existing perceptions. (Wang & Pizam, 2011:141)

3.3 Perception

Destination image is also influenced by perceptions and stereotypes which the tourist may hold on a destination. Perception is defined by Reisinger and Turner (2003) as process by which meaning is attributed to an object, event or person. Perception can form without the actual experience and knowledge of the destination. Perceptions are shaped by the environment people live in and they differ from each other due to the different values and view of the world. Perceptions may be negative or positive and vary in intensity.

Perception can be divided into subjective and objective perception. When it comes to subjective perception, the tourist evaluates the destination without the first-hand experience and assesses the place by knowledge gained from the environment. Objective perception is formed by the actual experience (Reisinger & Turner, 2003:148-151).

Perceptions develop from factors which necessarily are not true. For example stereotypes; most of the countries are stereotyped in a certain way, which as an outcome will affect the destinations visitation in a positive or a negative way.

3.4 Stereotypes

Stereotyping can be defined as attribution of certain traits, labelling, and perceptions of people on the basis of common characteristics. Individuals tend to use stereotypes in a new situation where deeper knowledge is lacking. MacCannell (1984, cited by Reisinger & Turner 2003:169) stated that the hosts and tourists are both vulnerable to stereotypes which influence perceptions tourists and hosts hold

of each other. There are several sources of information which shapes the stereotypes of guests and hosts, including tourism literature, media, pre-travel experience and educational sources. Most of the times stereotypes are inaccurate and long lasting. However, it is argued that stereotyping serves a purpose, in that they identify the characteristics of a culture and they help to create indicators of people's attitudes and feelings that are strongly positive or negative (Reisinger & Turner, 2003:169).

Stereotypes and perceptions form emotions, which play the role of push factors for visiting the destination. What people know about a place, or in some cases what they do not know, shapes the perceptions that they have of that place. Positive stereotypes help to form positive emotion, which in turn creates the image people have and affects their attitudes and travel behavior (Burns & Novelli, 2008: 90).

There are two important points, which highlights from the literature and studies conducted on destination image formation process. Firstly, it is possible to have an image of a place even if one has never visited it or been exposed to commercial forms of information. Secondly, it is desirable to differentiate the images from those who have visited and those who have not, since the image tends to change during the process. (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003:39)

Before the actual data collection, the author finds it important to analyze the existing information on Estonia as a tourist destination, in the hope to detect the key points that need attention.

4 ESTONIA AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

In this section, the author of the study is going to describe Estonia as a destination. The aim is to analyze variety of different articles and WebPages, both from Estonia and Finnish, to get somewhat picture of how Finns might see Estonia.

4.1 Estonia as a destination

Estonia belongs to the Baltic States and it is bordered by Latvia and Russia. Finland is the “overseas” neighbor and the distance between the two capitals is only 85 kilometers. Estonia has an interesting history, including the battles of nights in Middle Ages and the Hanseatic merchants during the World War II. The country has been ruled by Denmark, Germany, Sweden, Poland and Russia. It was only in 1991, when Estonia became independent due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The most affordable and convenient way to travel from Finland to Estonia is by ship, which travels several times per day during all seasons. There is a variety of travel agents organizing compounded bus and ship trips to Estonia and the selection of the packages is wide. It is also possible to travel by plane to Estonia; the airport is just few kilometers from Tallinn center.

Estonia is best known as a city and a spa destination. Furthermore, Tallinn is the most visited city followed by Tartu, Narva, Pärnu and Haapsalu. The two biggest islands in Estonia, Saaremaa and Hiiumaa, are also very popular among Finns due to the untouched forests and culture, which has been preserved since the old days. The Old Town is the most popular sightseeing area in Estonia; in fact, it is one of the Europe’s best-preserved medieval cities.

Compared to Finland, Estonia has still remained a quite cheap destination to visit, even though the prices have increased after joining the European Union. Naturally, Tallinn being the capital city means it is more expensive than other cities, yet it manages to offer Finns low-cost accommodation and restaurants. The most remarkable price difference between the two countries can be seen in the service area.

Finns get special treatment compared to other tourists due to the similarity of the two languages. Especially in Tallinn, Finns are quite often served in Finnish and they are treated as valued buying customers.

(Source: <http://www.rantapallo.fi/viro/>)

Estonians suggest for tourists a variety of characteristics which are regarded as something unique to the country; these include, the Old Town, empty beaches, forests, country houses, ice roads, old traditions, the Estonian Song Festival, five seasons and short distances between the cities and sightseeing's.

(Source: <http://www.visitestonia.com/fi/virosta/mika-tekee-virosta-niin-erityislaatuisen>)

4.2 Media coverage

During the past year, Finnish media has focused mainly on the alcohol tourism to Estonia. There is a variety of articles and news regarding the phenomenon; furthermore, the disadvantages and advantages are discussed publicly and the Finnish government seems to be worried about the influence to their economy.

Recently, a popular Finnish newspaper Helsingin Sanomat claimed that since 2007 trips to Estonia by Finns has increased by 60 %. They suggested that the reason can be found in the lower prices and short distance to the destination. Moreover, the article pointed out the impact it has on domestic tourism, as many hotels feel they lose customers to Estonia.

(Source: <http://www.hs.fi/kotimaa/Kotimaan+matkailu+k%C3%A4rsii+Viroinnosta/a1392878243697>)

Estonian media, on the other hand, has also acknowledged the alcohol tourism phenomena, but they believe that the situation has changed now. The stereotype of a Finnish tourist as an alcoholic is not that common anymore. Mikko Savikko, tourism specialist, suggests based on various researches that the average Finnish tourist is over 45-years old educated women from Helsinki or nearby. While people might get another opinion visiting the harbor and bars in Tallinn, Savikko ex-

plains that alcohol tourists simply are louder and tend to get more attention. Mister Savikko finds it important to do a thorough investigation and analysis of the current situation, in order to actually understand who the Finnish tourist in Estonia is.

(Source: <http://uudised.err.ee/v/arvamus/43a279c7-f16f-4d0b-a45f-abeeaa464308>)

5 METHODOLOGY

5.1 Destination image measurement techniques

The aim of the research is to answer questions and gain new knowledge; it is researchers attempt to decrease the complexity of problems, find out the relationship between phenomena and eventually improve the way of life.

Two basic approaches have revealed to be the most used methods when measuring destination image in the past studies; structured and unstructured.

“In a structured methodology, various common image attributes are specified and incorporated into a standardized instrument, usually a set of semantic differential or Likert type scales.” The respondent rates each of the image attribute and, according to Echtner and Ritchie (2003), the result of such ratings is the image profile. Structured methodology is easy to apply; they are simple to administer and the result of the scales can be analyzed using professional statistical techniques.

Structured methodology can be criticized due to its main focus on the destination image attributes. Moreover, it forces the respondents to rate the attributes given in the scale, while the unique characteristics of the destination are left unnoticed.

The second measurement technique, unstructured method, uses free form descriptions to measure image. This approach allows the respondent to describe more freely his/her impressions of a destination and the attributes of image are not determined by the research. Data is collected from a sample of respondents through such methods as open-ended survey questions or focus groups. It is suggested that unstructured methodology is more conducive for measuring the holistic components of image and unique features of the destination. However, the criticism of unstructured method has pointed out that the level of feedback is highly influenced upon the verbal or writing skills of respondents, their willingness to respond and their knowledge base of the destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003:44).

Echtner and Ritchie suggest “the most complete measure of destination image should include both types of methodologies; for example, standardised scales to

measure perceptions of functional and psychological attributes, in conjunction with open-ended questions to determine the holistic impressions and to capture unique features and auras.”(Echtner & Ritchie, 2003:46)

Taking into consideration the nature of this study, the author has decided to use structured and unstructured methodology in a questionnaire form. The decision was made based on the strong recommendation from previous literatures and the research problem.

5.2 Questionnaire design

Questionnaires, being one of the most popular methods of collecting data, are very efficient in systematically collecting information of respondents in order to produce summaries and quantitative descriptions. With this method it is possible to collect different types of data; such as, opinions, behaviors, attitudes and attributes (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008:120-121). Therefore, the author of this study finds questionnaire as the most suitable method to implement.

The questionnaire of this research consists of three sections. The first section is covering the questions needed in order to gather the demographic information about the respondents. Five factors are chosen taking into consideration the research problem and literature review, as follows; age, gender, education, information sources and number of visits. Based on the theory, age and education are the most important factors determining the image. Therefore, the author of this thesis is going to be particularly interested in studying whether that is compatible for Finns. Gender is chosen in order to determine whether it has any influence on image of Estonia and are there any differences to pay attention to. Information sources; the type, amount and quality of them, are important to measure in order to analyze how it has developed the cognitive evaluations of image of Estonia as a destination. Finally, the number of visits needs to be asked, so that it would be possible to detect those who have never visited and those who visit frequently. That is important based on the theory; the ones never travelled to Estonia are relying only on knowledge and beliefs about the place whereas, a travelling experience gives one previous experience which forms objective perceptions.

The second section consists of 13 image attributes. The destination attributes were selected from a list developed by Echtner and Ritchie (1991) for researches measuring destination image. The most common attributes were scenery/ natural attractions, friendliness/ hospitality/ receptiveness, costs/ price levels, climate, tourist sites/ activities, night life/ entertainment and sport activities and facilities. For this study, the author has chosen 13 image attributes according to the characteristics of the destination and literature review. The scale is used twice in the questionnaire in order to estimate how respondents generally feel about the attributes and how do they feel about them while thinking about Estonia as a destination; moreover, it gives the author an opportunity to compare those rankings and make conclusions on the image formation process. The attributes are displayed on the standardized scale in order to measure the attribute based and common components of the destination image. The respondents are asked to rate attributes below while thinking about Estonia as a destination. All attributes (13) are then ranked on a scale between 1 (very bad) and 4 (very good). The second scale lists the same attributes, but the question is how important they find those factors generally while choosing a destination. The options were as follows; 1 (not important), 2 (important to some extent and 3 (very important).

The third section of the questionnaire uses open-ended questions in order to measure the holistic and unique components of Estonian image. The first question was formed in order to detect the unique and distinctive attributes of the destination. The second question was designed for measuring the functional-holistic components which lets the respondents to think about the destination freely and express their feelings towards it.

The questionnaire was first designed in English, but due to the fact that the respondents are all native Finnish speakers it was translated into Finnish. By doing that the author wishes to limit the errors which might occur by the language barrier.

5.3 Sample

Sampling is a process by which researchers pick part of the total population that can be studied for their topic in order to draw conclusions regarding the whole population. The obvious advantage of such method is that it makes the research more time-efficient and manageable, less costly, and possibly more accurate since it is easier to preserve control over a smaller number of elements. Sampling should start with defining the target population and the specific characteristics of the accessible population. The researcher should consider the time and geographic limitations (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008:89-91).

For this research the population is Finnish people, but for obvious reasons it is not possible to study the entire population. Therefore, the author has chosen a subset of about 100 Finns to examine for this thesis. The sampling procedure chosen, stratification of the population, will provide that the selected sample will be representative and reflects the true proportion of the population of individuals with certain characteristics. This study is going to examine Finns aged between 18-65, both female and males with different educational background. The selection was made based on the theory and taking into consideration the accessible population.

6 RESULTS

The questionnaire of this research was handed out in Pirkanmaan region between 4th and 9th of April. The number of responses was 54 responses out of 100 printed questionnaires. The author of this thesis looked through the responses and decided that there was suitable amount and quality of answers in terms of the research problem; therefore, only those given responses are going to be analyzed. The response rate of the open-ended questions is surprisingly higher than expected.

The result section starts with a basic analysis of the demographic profile in order to get a picture of the people who responded. Afterwards, the connectedness between the theory provided in the study and the responses is going to be investigated.

6.1 The demographic profile

The demographic profile of the respondents indicates that 39% were male and 61% were female and the age gap was between 18-64 years. While there can be seen a difference in the gender respondent rate, it is not so great that it would influence further analyses.

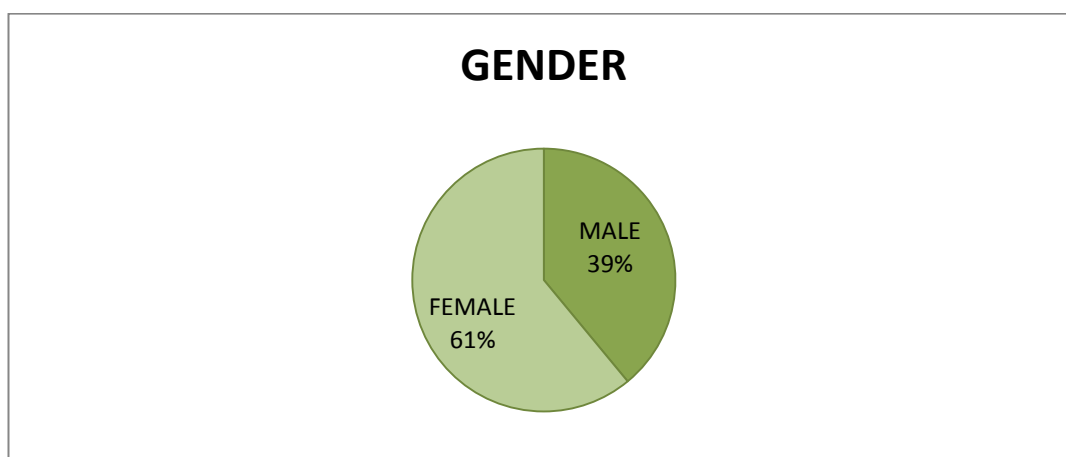


Table 1. The gender division of the respondents

As mentioned, the age gap of the respondents was quite wide ranging from 18 to 64 years. Since the author of this study has already looked through the surveys, the age division is being divided into two categories; younger generation and old-

er generation. This is done because of the theory provided earlier suggested that age is one of the main determinants of image and it powerfully influences the perceptual/cognitive and affective evaluation of a destination. The division of the age of the respondents is shown in the Table 2.

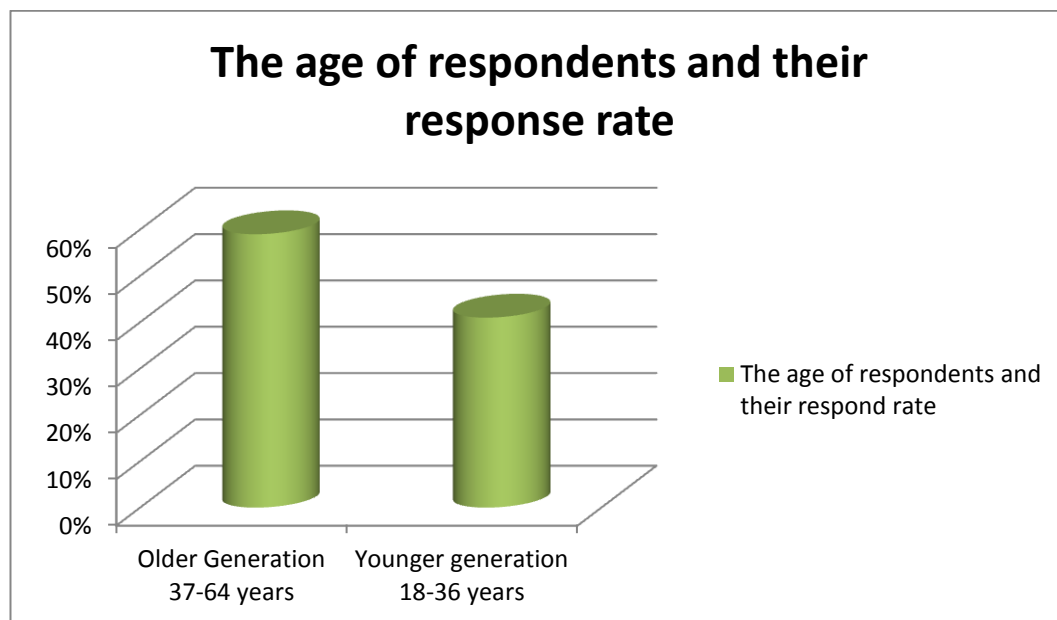


Table 2. The age of respondents and their response rate

As can be seen from the figure above, the younger generation (18-36 years) response rate was 41% whereas older generation (37-64 years) response rate was somewhat higher, at 59%. This kind of division was also done in order to be able to later in the result section analyze the connection between the age and the image formation.

The education level of the respondents was examined and the results show that the respondents were mainly educated in the university and vocational institution. The table below illustrates the division of the education level of the respondents.

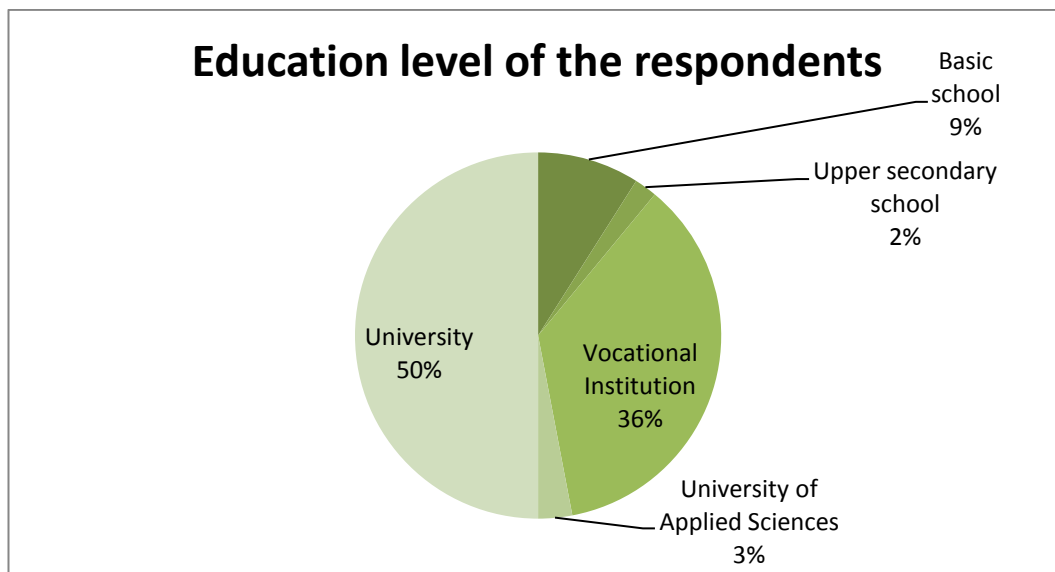


Table 3. Education level of the respondents

Then the author asked the respondents about the number of visits they have made to Estonia. The options given were none, one visit, 2-5 visits or at least six visits. The answers to the question show that big part of the respondents has been to Estonia several times; moreover, most of them stated being there 2-5 times or at least 6 times. The table below illustrated the division of visitation to Estonia by the respondents.

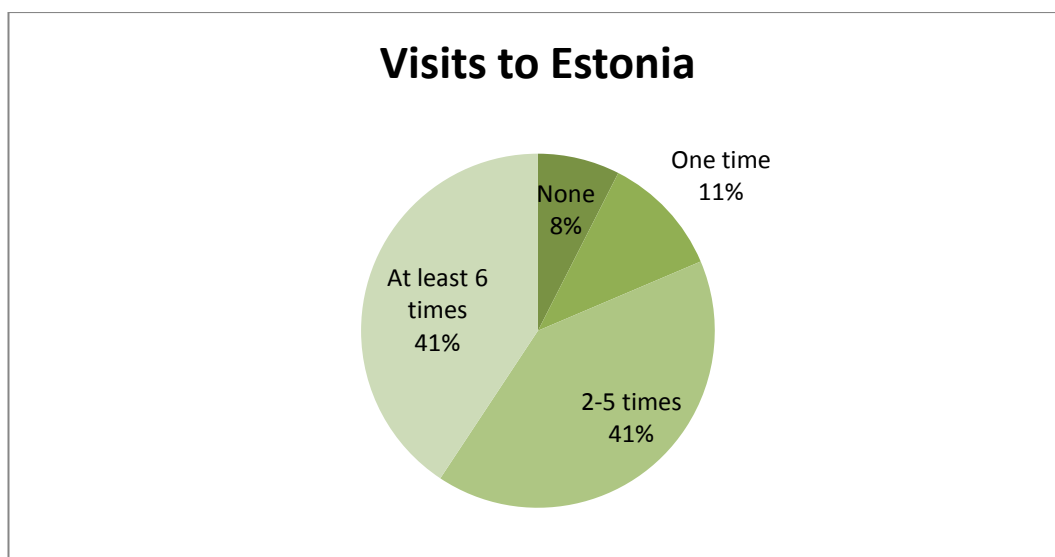


Table 4. Visits to Estonia by the respondents

The last question in the demographic profile section was considering the information sources. The respondents were given a scale with five different information sources and their task was to rank them in terms of to what extent they have received knowledge from those if at all (1-3). Three options given were; not at all, to some extent or a lot of information.

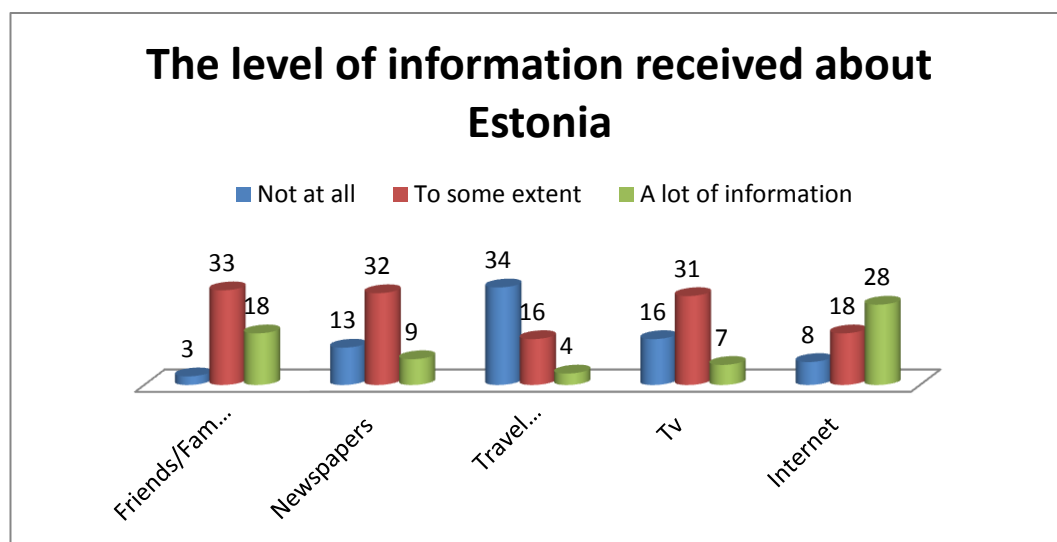


Table 5. The division of the information sources and the extent of the information received from those by the respondents

The table above shows to what extent different information sources have been influencing the respondents. Friends and family have been quite important source since only three respondents out of 54 stated that they have not got any information from them. Rest of the respondents has received knowledge to some extent (33) and 18 of them have received a lot of information.

Newspapers and television seem to be on the same level, as the numbers indicate that mostly the information is gained to some extent. There were only few people who claimed that they have received information from those sources to great extent.

Travel agencies got the highest score in the “not at all” option (34) and only 4 respondents stated receiving a lot of information from them. Internet, on the other

hand, was ranked as a great information source by over half of the respondents, which makes it one of the most used information source.

Overall it can be said that friends/family and Internet are the most popular information sources from where the respondents have received information about Estonia. Newspapers and TV have provided information to some extent and travel agencies were considered as the source least received the information from.

6.2 Destination attributes

In the second section of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to rate 13 image attributes on a three and four point Likert scale. The first scale asked to rate listed attributes on the basis of how important they find those factors while choosing a destination in general. The points ranged from 1 (not important) to 3 (very important). The second scale asked to rate those same attributes, but the questions was to rate them based on how do they feel about those attributes while thinking about Estonia as a destination and the points ranged from 1 (very bad) to 4 (very good). As the theory suggested the age being one of the most important determinants in the development of the image, the same division of the younger and older generation was used in next analyses as well. Younger generation, total of 22 respondents out of all and aged 18-36, rated the following attributes as shown in the table 6.

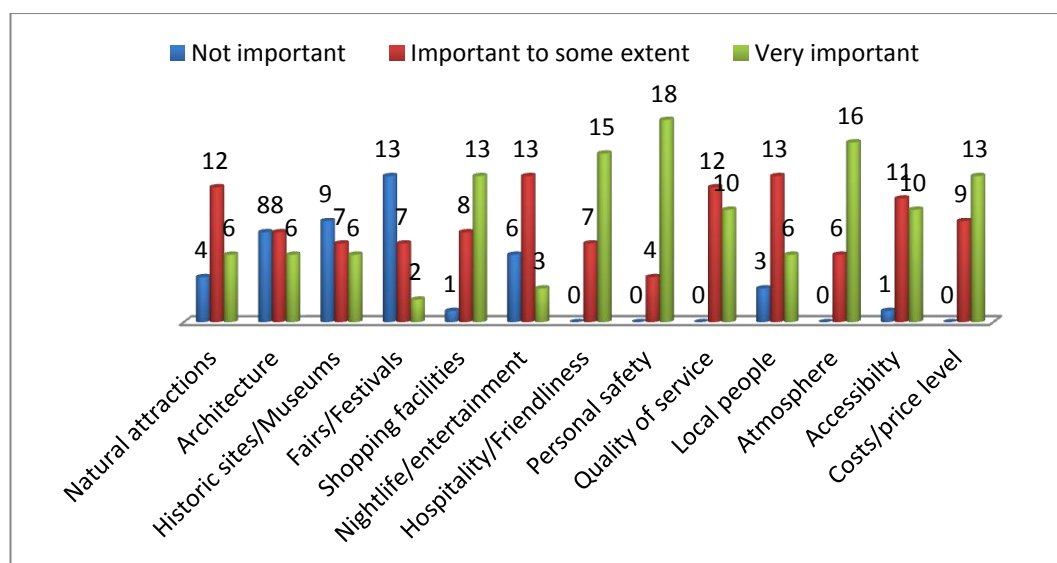


Table 6. The results of how important the listed attributes are for the younger generation in general when choosing a destination

As can be seen from the table above, younger generation stated the following attributes as very important when choosing a destination; shopping facilities, hospitality/friendliness, personal safety, quality of service, atmosphere, accessibility and cost/price level. Not important for the younger generation based on the result are; fairs/festivals, historic sites and architecture.

Now the author is going to analyze the answers received about the same attributes, but the ratings have been done by asking the respondents to think about Estonia as a destination and the points were given from 1 (really bad) to 4 (really good).

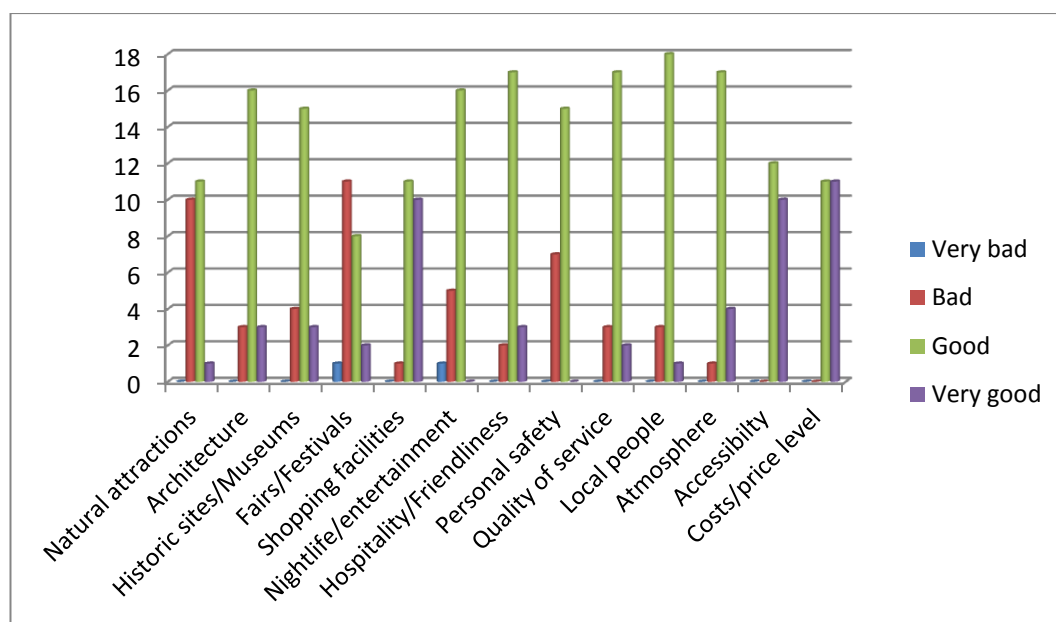


Table 7. The attributes rated by the respondents while thinking about Estonia as destination

The table above indicates that generally the younger generation did not rate any of the attributes as being very bad in Estonia; however they used the word “bad” when thinking about the natural attractions, fairs/festivals and personal safety in Estonia. Natural attractions and festivals were not important for the respondents in general while choosing a destination as we saw in the table 6; therefore it might be the case of lacking knowledge and interest about the existence and quality of

those attributes. Some of the respondents stated that personal safety is “bad” in Estonia and that is an issue since it was really important to them while choosing a destination in general. Such situation, where the tourist is expecting and seeking for personal safety and the destination failed to provide it, might develop a negative image for that country.

Despite the fact that some of the attributes obtained somewhat negative evaluations, all of them gained moderate number of responses rated as “good”. There was three attributes which received rating “very good” and they are as follows; shopping facilities, accessibility and cost/price level. Those three attributes were also very important for the respondents in the destination selection process. In this case, where the tourist gets what s/he seeks or expects from the destination, it is believed to have a positive effect on the image formation.

Now that the analyses of the attributes have been discussed concerning younger generation, the author intends to explore the answers given by the older generation with the purpose to understand also their knowledge, beliefs and feelings towards Estonia. The analysis is done in the same manner; after which, the comparison of two groups will be made.

The older generation, 32 respondents out of all, rated the attributes as shown in the table 8.

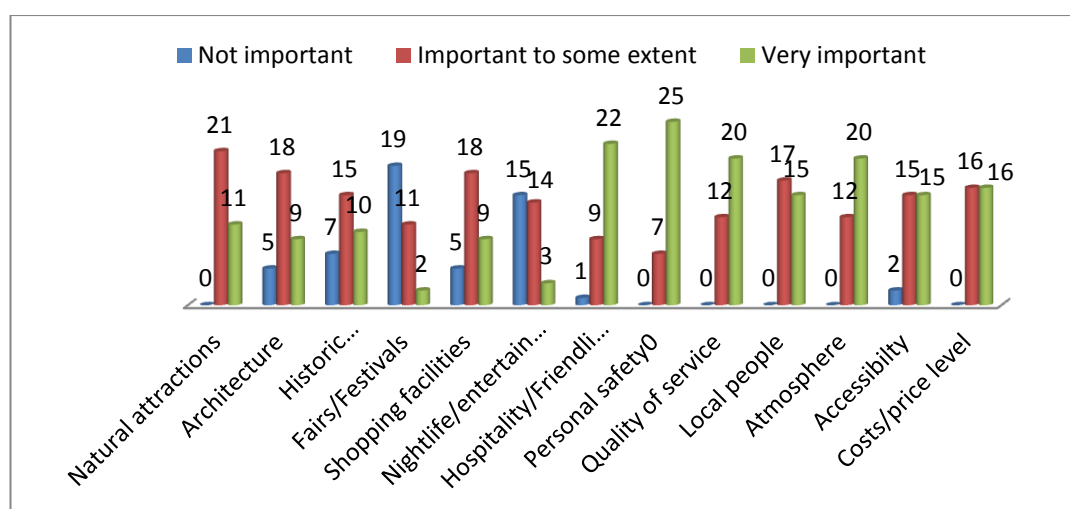


Table 8. The result on how important is listed attributes for older generation when choosing a destination in general

As can be seen in Table 8, the older generation finds fairs/festivals and night-life/entertainment as not important factors while choosing a destination. The respondents ranked four of the listed attributes as being very important in destination selection as follows; hospitality, personal safety, quality of service and the atmosphere.

In order to see a comparison of what the respondents seek from a destination and what they think they receive from Estonia, the same attributes are analyzed based on the respondents' feelings and knowledge towards Estonia. The results of the older generation rankings on how they evaluate Estonia as destination based on the same 13 attributes can be seen in table 9.

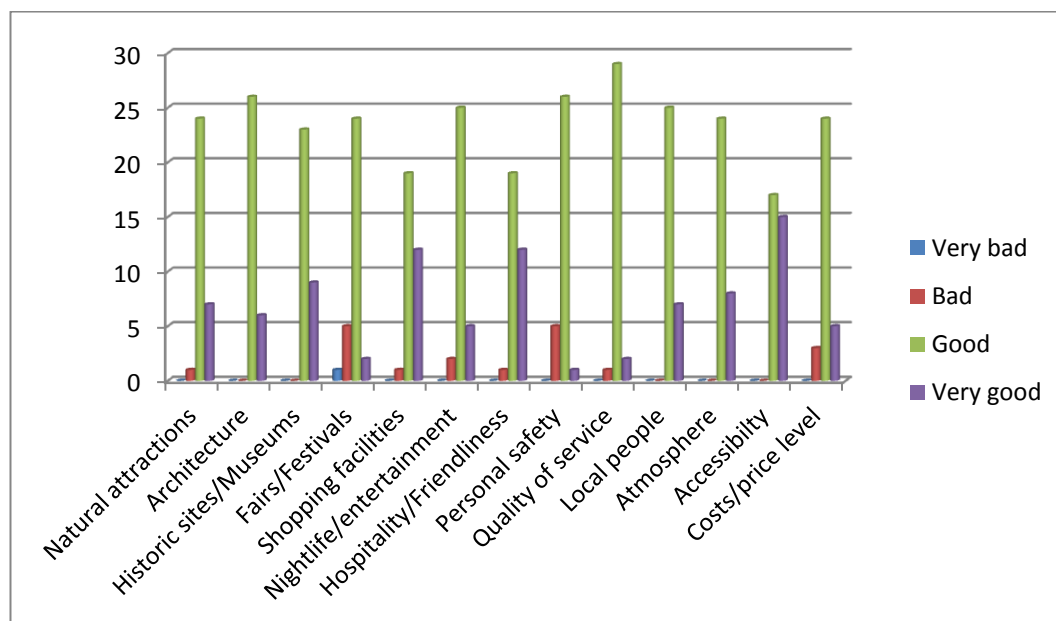


Table 9. The attributes rated by respondents while thinking about Estonia as a destination

As the table above indicates, we can suggest that the older generation evaluates Estonia as being good in the given attributes. There was only small number of responses which rated some of the listed attributes as being bad; yet the number was so low that the author finds it not important to make general analyses based

on those. In general, the older generation holds a positive overall image of Estonia.

Now that the general analysis has been done, the author will examine and compare more thoroughly the selected two generations and try to find the reasons behind the differences on an individual level.

There was a difference in the attribute rates based on the age division. Younger respondents did not find fairs, historic sites and architecture as important while choosing a selection; whereas older respondents wrote that nightlife and fairs are not important. The author of this study suggests that this can be explained by the individual interests, attitudes and the current stage of life.

The other scale measured the individuals' perceived image of Estonia as a destination based on the same attributes. Comparison of the two generations indicates that there is slight difference in the image; moreover, older generation seems to have more positive image of Estonia than the younger respondents. The author of this thesis was first struggling with the understanding why there is such difference occurring between the age groups. But, after looking through the theory part and then again the questionnaires, the author noticed that younger generation group had a much higher number of respondents who have never been to Estonia or only once. The theory of this thesis presents that it is possible to have an image of a destination even without the actual experience. The author found out after examining the ones never visited that they evaluated the personal safety in Estonia to be bad and the greatest information source was noted to be family/friends. As the theory suggests that such information source has a great value on the tourists, it can be seen that the respondents of this survey have relied on it as well.

Another thing the author noticed while analyzing the questionnaires and finds noticeable to point out; if a respondent rated the attribute in general to be not important then s/he also rated it as being bad in Estonia. The image formation theory suggested that tourists' motivations, values and life style are a part of the image development process. Therefore; the author of this study suggests that this kind of

connection between the rates in the scales can be explained by the respondents' general feelings and beliefs towards the attributes.

6.3 Holistic and unique components of Estonian image

The third section of the questionnaire included two open-ended questions in order to measure the holistic and unique components of Estonian image. The first question asked was the reason why the respondent usually travels to Estonia; moreover, if the respondent has not visited, why would s/he like to go to Estonia.

The results are first analyzed based on the number of visitation. Those who have never visited gave following reasons why would they like to visit Estonia: "I am very interested in the historical sites and I would like to practice my Estonian language", "there are cheap clothes", it is an interesting country with a rich cultural history", "maybe I would like to go because of the nature" and "I would like to go with my friends because it is easy and cheap". The ones who had never visited are mainly referring to the historical sites and the price level as being the reason why they would like to travel. Since those respondents are lacking actual experience, the author of this thesis can assume that such image is developed only based on the information sources, personal factors and the environment one is living in. There were also a few respondents who have visited Estonia once and their comments were mainly about the price level as well; yet one of them said that s/he would like to go back to walk by the sea there.

Now the author intends to analyze the ones who have visited Estonia 2-5 times and those visited at least six times. Respondents, as such, have gained a great amount of actual experience and therefore the author is interested how they see Estonia. Below is displayed a list of the common comments of the reasons why respondents usually travel to Estonia.

"To sense and feel the Old Town"

"I usually travel in order to get familiar with the culture and history in Estonia"

"There is beautiful natural scenery and a lot of great old houses"

“Just to enjoy my free time”

“To visit my friends”

“Meeting and vacation trips mainly”

“It is close and there is nice people and affordable price”

“Golf trips and affordable spas”

“To relax for the weekend”

“Shopping”

“It is close, but still abroad”

“To buy alcohol”

“For the good food”

“The beaches and parks in there can be compared to the southern alternatives”

Those were the most used answers by the respondents when asked why they travel to Estonia usually. It can be seen that there is a variety of purposes for the travel. The author noticed that highly educated older people answered mostly using longer descriptions and the content was usually related to history, culture and nature; whereas, younger people with lower education referred to the cheap prices and alcohol. Based on such response the author claims that Finns travel to Estonia because it is good alternative for short vacation for variety of purposes. Moreover, the purposes are ranging since the things people are seeking from the destination and what they imagine to get are highly individual.

In order to get a picture of the image of Estonia as a destination the author asked the respondents to describe it freely with three words. There were several words which were repeated by many respondents and they are as follows; cheap, small, beautiful, shopping, near, history, culture, interesting, beautiful nature and beauty treatments. Some of the words refer to the characteristics of a destination, which

are acknowledged by all; whereas others seem to describe Estonia in a more personal level.

Few of the respondents used more unique words not mentioned by the author in the questionnaire; therefore, it can be assumed to be real emotions or knowledge and not forced. They were as follows; attractive, diversity, antique versus modern, cognate language, alcohol, bad roads, Central European, handicrafts and historical connection. Those answers to the open-ended questions gave the author an idea of some unique features imaged by Finns about Estonia. Such unique features might be important to notice for the marketers in the future; they do not get attention in standard researches where people opinions in free form are not asked. The theory earlier suggested as well that it is more important to investigate what people think about the place rather than what marketer knows about it.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The main purpose of this study was to find out the image of Estonia as a tourist destination among Finns. Furthermore, the intension was to explore how and why such image has been developed and what factors in the individuals' environment might have influenced it. The theory about destination image components and the development process was explained in the theoretical part.

The author of this research found Baloglu and McClearys' theory of the destination image formation as the most useful and ideal tool to use while conducting the survey. Their general framework was also most helpful with the analyzing of the questionnaires.

The theory suggested that age, education, times of visit and information sources have a great impact on the development of image. The author found based on the results that it matches the case in this study. There were significant differences in the answers of the respondents based on their age and education. Older generation seemed to seek different benefits from the touristic experience than younger generation. Moreover, highly educated respondents were willing to describe their feelings towards the destination more broadly than those with lower education. The theory suggested that the affective image of an individual is greatly influenced by his/her benefits sought form the touristic experience. This phenomenon was witnessed in the results of the attribute based scales. Respondents, who were not interested in some of the attribute in general, marked it as being bad in Estonia. The visitation number to Estonia affected the respondents in a way that those never visited had a more limited image than those with great experience. Information sources mainly used by Finns were family/friends and Internet. Such result from the survey gives the author a quite clear picture of how the image has been formed in the mind of Finns. Age, values, motivations, education, visitation, information sources- all mentioned have influenced Finns in their image formation process towards Estonia.

The other aim of this research was to find out why the image of Estonia has developed to be what it is. Kotler suggested in his theory that image is “a sum of

beliefs, ideas, and impressions that people have of a place. Images represent a simplification of a large number of associations and pieces of information connected with the place. They are a product of the mind trying to process and “essentialize” huge amounts of data about a place.” (Kotler, 1993:141) Therefore, the writer of this thesis proposes that Finns have certain image of Estonia because of their own personal traits and environment, as well the external environment and the previous experience. Moreover, based on the theory image is extremely subjective and it tends to differ from individual to individual. It can be pointed out that every Finn has developed in his/her mind the image of Estonia based on numerous factors and the outcome is influenced by the manner of how they process the data.

All of the respondents of the survey knew Estonia and they had a strong image of it which was mainly positive, yet some highlighted the negative aspects of the destination as well. Estonia was described by the respondents as beautiful, historical, cheap and nearby destination, but they acknowledged the personal safety to be lacking. Overall, the image of Estonia based on the results was very positive, which was not expected by the author. The outcome of this research was successful and the main aim of it was reached.

7.1 Validity and Reliability

The results of the questionnaires would enjoy higher reliability if the respondent rate had been more near to the goal. In this study; the author aimed at 100 responses; yet, the amount received was only 54. The goal could be reached by giving the respondents longer time to answer, but due to the tight schedule it was not possible in this case.

The validity of the questionnaire results was on medium level. The author aimed to examine people mainly based on the age and education; and that was successfully accomplished. There was a variety of respondents with different backgrounds. Some issues that can be pointed out; there was really low percentage of respondents who have never been to Estonia and the measurement of information sources influencing the image was lacking as well. Those issues were the main

problems affecting the validity and reliability in this research. The research results are still considered valid due to the fact that all respondents were Finns with different educational background and providing a variety of ages.

7.2 Suggestions for future studies

The author of this study has couple of suggestions for future researches based on this thesis. First of all, the information sources are having a great value on the image development process; yet, in this survey they got only a small amount of attention. Therefore, the recommendation is to make a survey and mainly concentrate on those sources and influence on image development on more individual level. This kind of study can be very beneficial for the marketers since it helps them to understand more clearly where their work is lacking, what needs improving and what segment is relying on what source.

Secondly, while doing a study about the destination image, the author suggests making some qualitative interviews with the respondents. It could be done in smaller groups since it usually develops into a conversation between the respondents and it might give beneficial information which is not written on the paper. This is suggests based on the author experience while giving the questionnaires to the Finns.

Last, the theory recommended separating people with travel experience from those with no actual experience. In this thesis the number of respondents who have never been to Estonia was really low and the actual comparison was hard to manage. Therefore, the author proposes to conduct a study where moderate number of both segments is selected previously and then research the differences in their images.

REFERENCES

Altinay L., and A.Paraskevas (2008)

Planning research in hospitality and tourism

Baloglu, S., and Ken W.McCleary (1999)

A Model of Destination Image Formation

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S01607383990003>

[04%20accessed%20on%2010.03.2012%2018:27](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S01607383990003)

Accessed

13.11.2013

Burns, P., and M.Novelli (2008)

Tourism Development: Growths, Myths and Inequalities

<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/tamperepoly/docDetail.action?docID=1025>

[5051&p00=tourism%20development](http://site.ebrary.com/lib/tamperepoly/docDetail.action?docID=1025) Accessed 09.01.2014

Echtner,M.C., and Ritchie (2003)

<http://www.jcu.com.au/business/public/groups/everyone/documents/>

[journal_article/jcudev_012855.pdf](http://www.jcu.com.au/business/public/groups/everyone/documents/) Accessed 13.11.2013

Kotimaan matkailu kärsii Viro-innosta (2014)

<http://www.hs.fi/kotimaa/Kotimaan+matkailu+k%C3%A4rsii+Viro->

[innosta/a1392878243697](http://www.hs.fi/kotimaa/Kotimaan+matkailu+k%C3%A4rsii+Viro-) Accessed: 28.2.2014

Kotler, P. (1993)

Marketing places: attracting investment, industry, and tourism cities, states, and nations

Mikko Savikko: keskmine soome turist pole joodik, vaid jõukas kõrgharitud naine (2013)

<http://uudised.err.ee/v/arvamus/43a279c7-f16f-4d0b-a45f-abeeaa464308> Accessed: 28.2.2014

Pearce, Philip L. (2005)

Tourist Behavior: Themes and Conceptual Schemes

Pike, S. (2008)

Destination Marketing: An Integrated Marketing Communication Approach

Reisinger, Y., and W. Turner (2003)

Cross-Cultural Behaviour in Tourism

Viro on mukava matkailumaa naapurissa (2013)

<http://www.rantapallo.fi/viro/> Accessed: 25.2.2014

Wang, Y., and A. Pizam (2011)

Destination Marketing and Management: Theories and Applications

What is so special about Estonia?

<http://www.visitestonia.com/fi/virosta/mika-tekee-virosta-niin-erityislaatuisen> Accessed: 11.3.2014

APPENDIX 1

Kysely Virosta matkakohteena

Tämä kysely on osa Vaasan ammattikorkeakoulun opinnäytetyötä. Kyselyn täyttämiseen menee noin 5-10 minuuttia ja se käsitellään luottamuksellisesti.

Ikä: vuotta

Rastita vastauksesi alla oleviin ruutuihin!

- Sukupuoli :** Mies
 Nainen
- Koulutus:** Peruskoulu
 Lukio
 Ammatillinen koulutus
 Ammattikorkeakoulu
 Yliopisto
- Virossa käyntien määrä:** ei koskaan
 kerran
 2-5 kertaa
 vähintään 6 kertaa

Kuinka tärkeitä ovat alla listatut tekijät matkakohteesi valinnassa?

	Ei tärkeää	Jossain määrin tärkeää	Todella tärkeää
Maisemat/luonnonnähtävyydet	1	2	3
Arkkitehtuuri	1	2	3
Historialliset kohteet/museot	1	2	3
Messut/festivaalit	1	2	3
Ostosmahdollisuudet	1	2	3
Yöelämä/viihde	1	2	3

Vieraanvaraisuus/ystävällisyys	1	2	3
Henkilökohtainen turvallisuus	1	2	3
Palvelun laatu	1	2	3
Paikalliset ihmiset	1	2	3
Ilmapiiri	1	2	3
Saavutettavuus	1	2	3
Kustannukset/hintataso	1	2	3

Missä määrin olet saanut tietoa Virosta seuraavista lähteistä?

	Ei lainkaan	Jonkin verran	Runsaasti tietoa
Ystävät/sukulaiset	1	2	3
Lehdet	1	2	3
Matkatoimisto	1	2	3
TV	1	2	3
Internet	1	2	3

Miten arvioisit Viroa matkakohteena seuraavien tekijöiden osalta:

	Erittäin huono	Huono	Hyvä	Erittäin hyvä
Maisemat/luonnonnähtävyydet	1	2	3	4
Arkkitehtuuri	1	2	3	4
Historialliset kohteet/museot	1	2	3	4
Messut/festivaalit	1	2	3	4
Ostosmahdollisuudet	1	2	3	4
Yöelämä/viihde	1	2	3	4

Vieraanvaraisuus/ystävällisyys	1	2	3	4
Henkilökohtainen turvallisuus	1	2	3	4
Palvelun laatu	1	2	3	4
Paikalliset ihmiset	1	2	3	4
Ilmapiiri	1	2	3	4
Saavutettavuus	1	2	3	4
Kustannukset/hintataso	1	2	3	4

1. Miksi matkustat yleensä Viroon?

TAI

Jos et ole käynyt Virossa, miksi haluaisit käydä siellä?

2. Mitkä kolme sana kuvailevat mielestäsi parhaiten Viroa matkakohteena?

KIITOS!

APPENDIX 2

Estonia as a Tourist Destination Questionnaire

This questionnaire is a part of a bachelor thesis for Vaasa University of Applied Science. It will take approximately 5-10 minutes to fill in and is conducted anonymously.

Age: years

Tick the box/boxes below!

- Gender :** Male
- Female
- Education:** Basic education
- Upper secondary school
- Vocational institution
- University of Applied Science
- University
- Number of visits** None
- to Estonia:** 1
- 2 or more

How important are below listed attributes for You when choosing a destination?

	Not important	Important to some extent	Really important
Scenary/Natural attractions	1	2	3

Architecture	1	2	3
Historic sites/Museums	1	2	3
Fairs/Festivals	1	2	3
Shopping facilities	1	2	3
Nightlife/Entertainment	1	2	3
Hospitality/ Friendliness	1	2	3
Personal safety	1	2	3
Quality of service	1	2	3
Local people	1	2	3
Atmosphere	1	2	3
Accessibility	1	2	3
Costs/price levels	1	2	3

To what degree have you received knowledge about Estonia from following sources?

	Not at all	To some extent	A lot of information
Friends/relatives	1	2	3
Newspaper/Magazine	1	2	3
Travel agency	1	2	3
TV	1	2	3

Internet	1	2	3
-----------------	---	---	---

How would You rate Estonia as a destination based on the attributes given below:

	Very bad	Bad	Good	Very good
Scenary/Natural attractions	1	2	3	4
Architecture	1	2	3	4
Historic sites/Museums	1	2	3	4
Fairs/Festivals	1	2	3	4
Shopping facilities	1	2	3	4
Nightlife/Entertainment	1	2	3	4
Hospitality/ Friendliness	1	2	3	4
Personal safety	1	2	3	4
Quality of service	1	2	3	4
Local people	1	2	3	4
Atmosphere	1	2	3	4
Accessibility	1	2	3	4
Costs/price levels	1	2	3	4

1. Why do You usually travel to Estonia?

OR

In case You haven't visited, why would You like to travel to Estonia?

2. Which three words best describe Estonia as a destination for You?
