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**CUSTOMERS' EXPECTATIONS
TOWARDS ACCESSIBLE TOURISM
SERVICES: iCanTrip Oy**

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>The main objective of this thesis was to find out the expectations of potential accessible tourism users towards such service as well as to chart the attitudes towards possible accessible trip to Russia. A research was done for the company iCanTrip Oy, which has plans to operate in that niche.</p> <p>In order to achieve the goal, semi-structured interviews were chosen as a data collecting tool. A research was divided into two separate parts: interviews with the potential customers and with industry experts. The preparation stage gave only one customer respondent, leaving an extremely low rate of responses. On the other side, four travel companies' representatives were interviewed on the subject of accessible tourism issues.</p> <p>A research gave number of valuable insights that allowed giving recommendations both for the commissioning company and for the future researchers. It showed a positive attitude to accessible trip to Russia. The expectations towards accessible tourism service itself include reasonable price, skilled personnel, accessibility of information, unusual attractions and thorough audit of destination.</p>		
Keywords accessible travel, customer expectations, disability, accessible tourism, ageing		

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 A commissioning company

iCanTrip Oy is a company which was founded in 2011 in Kotka, Finland by entrepreneurs who are passionate about tourism and having an extensive accumulated working experience in this field. By creating this venture, founders were actualizing the idea to open the world of unique and enriching leisure experience for those who are, for now, in less favorable circumstances in terms of personal health, as well as are influenced by barriers caused by unpleasant business, social and urban environments.

Thus, business mission of the company was clear from the very beginning: creation and promotion of exceptional accessible tourism solutions and services for customers with special needs. Finland as a place for start was chosen due to the several factors. These factors, implementing to the process of business, might be roughly divided into two groups: external and internal ones.

External factors contain, on the one hand, the stable political and economic situations in the country, excellent infrastructure with an attitude to constant maintenance and gradual development both on the governmental level and in the society, generally; not to mention the simplicity of establishing a new venture and clear, working rules for running the business. On the other hand, Finland as a member of European Union and a part of Schengen Area represents itself as a gateway to Europe, allowing its business entities to obtain preferences from the free flow of capital, goods, services and people throughout this number one tourism destination in the world.

Internal factors, in turn, are tightly connected to the industry itself: number of people with disabilities in Finland, calculated in percentage from total population is the highest in EU, assuming that number of potential customers is significant as well, while relatively rarefied competitive environment gives additional points in the region's favor.

1.2 Research objectives and research questions

There are several objectives of this study. First of all, it has practical interest for the commissioner company by showing its potential customers' multidimensional, motional portrait: providing valuable insight on their background, thoughts and expectations towards provided service in the sphere of accessible tourism. That may help the commissioner to organize its activity more effectively as well as to provide a superior service.

The second goal is to keep the issue of accessibility and accessible tourism on top of the public discussion. The author is absolutely confident that in favor of industry's sustainable development it is absolutely vital to involve researchers in order to seek for solutions on the basis of scientific approaches as well as to enrich an overall massif of academic knowledge. Serving this purpose, the present study makes another small step, not first, not last and not the least.

Finally, the third goal comes naturally from the first two – study would be interesting for the future researchers as well as for the companies planning or already working in accessible tourism.

The research questions thus are:

- Is there a potential for accessible tourism provider in Finland?
- What expectations do disabled customers have towards accessible travel services?
- Would they consider taking an accessible trip to Russia?

1.3 Research Methodology

To achieve objectives of the study and to answer the research questions, a qualitative research was chosen and five semi-structured interviews have been conducted. All data gathered from the interviews were recorded, partly by tape-recording with a permission of interviewees, partly by taking notes immediately after the session.

Later on, the transcription coupled with an analysis of data was made. A qualitative approach was chosen because from the author's point of view it is the best option, implementing to the research objectives.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis starts with an introduction part which consists of sub-chapters that give brief knowledge of the commissioning company, research objectives and research questions, structure of the thesis, as well as the research methodology that was chosen to achieve the initial goals. The following chapter explains the significance of tourism and travel by observing a theoretical approach of its multidimensional influence on the modern economy coupled with its crucial roles, identified by the United Nations.

Next chapters give an idea of tourism's contribution to world's economy by showing statistical data both globally and on the regional levels. This is followed by a brief statistics on the global population and the total number of people living in Finland, which, in its turn continued with an observation and explanation of an aging phenomenon which gives an idea of what is an average age of the world's population nowadays and what it is projected to be in the nearest future.

Taking up the baton, next chapter provides a brief explanation of disability concept, which, following the logical order will be developed into a chapter, telling about the concept of accessible tourism coupled with nowadays estimation and future projections for this market. The next chapters discuss the research itself, starting with a methodology part and followed by the detailed narrative about the actions that have been conducted to get the respondents, which is followed by an interviews with the only one potential customer and four industry experts. Finally, in the end of the thesis, all the gathered data is analyzed and the conclusion is done, as well as some advice is given to the commissioner.

2 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TOURISM AND TRAVEL

Economy is getting influenced by tourism in numerous numbers of ways. However, according to Stynes (1997), the total impact of the tourism is combined out of three compounds: direct, indirect, and induced effects.

Direct effects arise in the economy during the first round of spending when customers support businesses occupied in tourism industry, by purchasing goods and services. It covers quite obvious beneficiaries of tourist activities like hotels or restaurants (by making margin), its employees (by getting salary) and government (by collecting taxes).

Indirect and induced or, in other words, secondary effects become observed when money spent by the tourist, gone through the initial beneficiaries returns to the economy. Indirect effect appear in the increasing or decreasing in sales, income or employment levels in those industries which supply businesses affected on the previous stage. Such industries can be represented, for example, by a local fishing company, supplying restaurants, a laundry, serving the hotel needs or a workshop, maintaining car rental's fleet of motor vehicles.

Induced effects, in turn, are caused by the region's households spending, which starts after earned money from tourism and supporting industries begin to exchange for goods and services that are not directly connected to the tourism itself, leading to the change in the economic situation of the region. (Stynes 1997). Besides being a trigger for increase or a decline in economy, tourism has number of important social functions. United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) underlines three crucial roles of travel and tourism which makes world a better place and therefore should be thoroughly supported by the governments.

First of all, tourism generates jobs for millions of people, letting them achieve their personal goals in a stable and secured way. This improves the situation in their societies in terms of gender and social equality, because it is rather easy to enter tourism labor market for young people and women, which, in other circumstances might found themselves in much less favorable position.

Secondly, UNWTO underlines that travel and tourism plays a huge positive role in many developing countries by reallocation of the resources in favor of environmental protection and cultural heritage. In addition, it tends to build the cultural bridges between the nations.

Finally, as a result of all the undermentioned functions and by establishing sustainable infrastructure, this industry supports the green economy, making our world stronger in anticipation of ecological challenges. (United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) & World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). 2011 2011).

3 TOURISM IN NUMBERS

3.1 Tourism's contribution to world's trade

The role played by Tourism and Travel industry is hard to underestimate. According to World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), tourism currently accounts about 3% to 5% of global GDP. World's GDP for the year 2014 is 77.960.607 million of US dollars (World Bank, 2016). Thus, it can be estimated that tourism and travel industry differs up to slightly more than 1.5 trillion US dollars. Such a huge gap in valuations on the same issue might origin from the different approaches to gathering statistics, due to the vast variety of industries that are affected and mutually physically and financially infiltrated with Tourism and Travel sector. To get valuable data all the components need to be measured, which is not always a trivial task.

Moreover, statistics might be a controversial thing depending on who, in which way and on what purpose plays with it. Although, to illustrate the significance of chosen area we will inevitably use a numeric data keeping reliability of the sources as a guiding star. The United Nations Development Policy and Analysis Division (UNDESA) reports that international tourism (travel and passenger transport) accounts for 6 percent of the world's total exports and up to 30 per cent of exports of services, mentioning that figures are slightly the same both in developed and emerging economies. (The United Nations, 2015).

In terms of export earnings in emerging economies, tourism generated US \$ 485 billion in the year 2013. That places this industry on the fourth place in export categories rank after fuels, food, and clothing. While in developed economies tourism took fourth place after fuels, chemicals and food with overall US \$ 924 billion of export earnings. (United Nations World Tourism Organisations. 2015 2014).

In a global scale, international tourism ranks the same, fourth place among all export categories with more than US \$ 1. 4 trillion in earnings (see Figure 1).

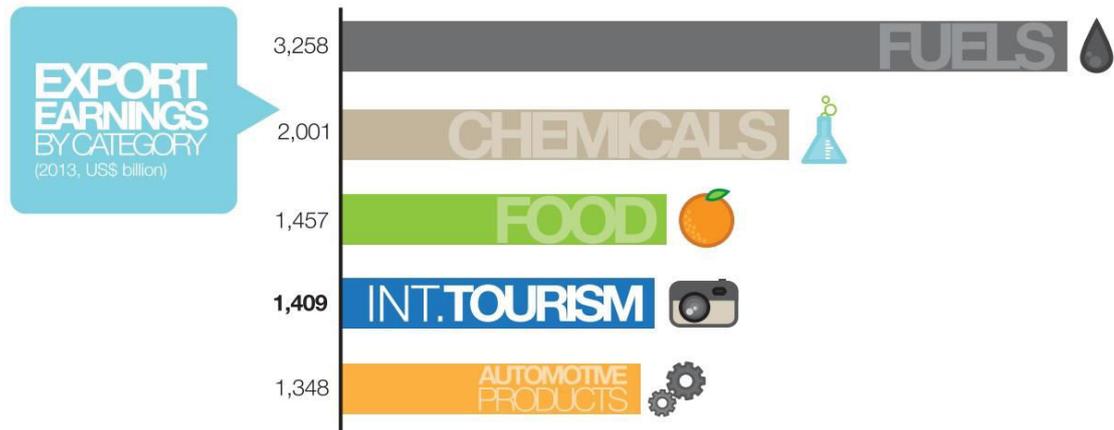


Figure 1. Tourism's contribution to world's trade (UNWTO Annual Report 2014)

As to the employment market, UNWTO gives a figure of 7 to 8 per cent as a contribution of travel and tourism to all jobs in total, counting also those workplaces which are indirectly supported by these industries. (The United Nations 2011).

These figures make Travel and Tourism industry a crucial contributor of world's economic and social prosperity.

3.2 Statistics on tourism 2013-2014

Tourism is a vulnerable industry because market players depend on a touristic flow. It tends to grow and squeeze in correlation with political and economic situation, weather conditions, exchange rate fluctuations, health issues, ecological factors, activity of market players itself or even rumors growing all across the mentioned areas.

Despite the news that have been shaking the world in 2014, number of internationally travelled passengers has been growing steadily for already 5 years in a row since a latest slowdown in 2009. Year 2014 brought an increase of 4.4 per cent in number of international tourists with an additional 48 million more overnight visitors than a year ago, making a new record of total international tourist arrivals of 1135 million. (see Figure 2).

World: Inbound Tourism
International Tourist Arrivals

(million)

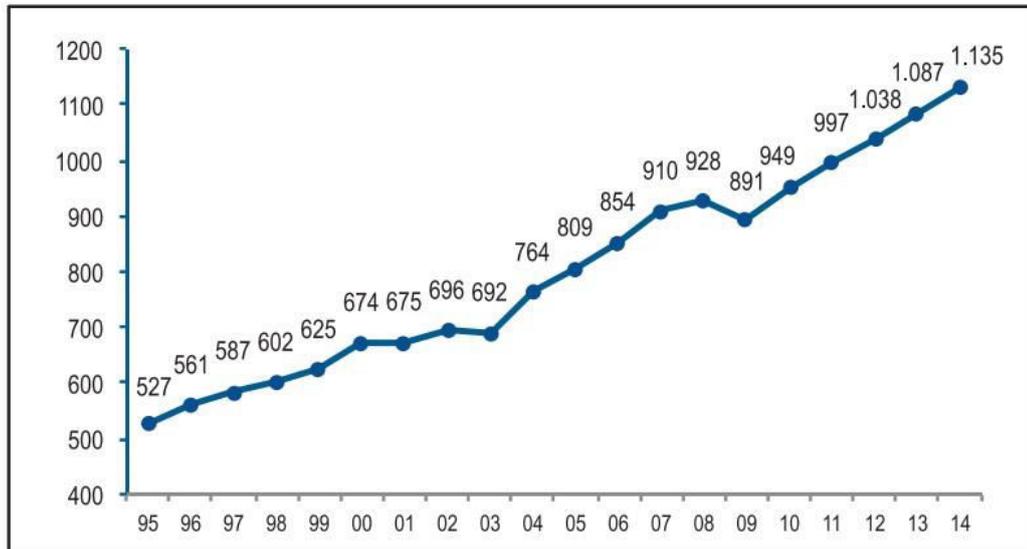


Figure 2. Growth in International tourist arrivals from the year 1995 to 2014 (UNWTO Annual Report 2014).

This number beats not only UNWTO's long-term forecast of 3.8 per cent but also exceeds overall number of global GDP growth in 2014 (3.9 per cent by statista.com) while international tourism receipts (earned by destinations) increased to US \$ 1245 billion (US \$ 1195 billion in 2013). (The United Nations World Tourism Organization 2014).

3.3 Regional performance in 2014

3.3.1 Europe

Nowadays, Europe is a number one tourist destination in the world both in terms of arrivals and tourism earnings. Despite uneven results among the region members, overall growth of international tourists to Europe has been registered at a level of 3 per cent with 17 million arrivals more to year 2013 and a total of 584 million.

There was an increase up to US \$ 509 billion in tourism earnings in terms of receipt during the year 2014 in Europe, which gives a share of 41 per cent of worldwide international tourist receipts. Best results were achieved in Northern, Southern and Mediterranean Europe (+7 per cent respectively), while number of visitors in Central and Eastern Europe declined by 4 per cent. (The United Nations World Tourism Organization 2014).

3.3.2 Asia and Pacific region

Asia and Pacific region showed 5 per cent increase in arrivals reaching 263 million with 16 US \$ billion plus, comparing with the year 2013. Total amount of tourism earnings for the year 2014 is around US \$ 377 billion. (The United Nations World Tourism Organization 2014).

3.3.3 Americas and Caribbean region

The best on the globe in terms of arrivals were Americas with an average growth of 8 per cent or 14 million visitors, making a total of 182 million international tourists. Best performers are North America (+9 per cent) and the Caribbean (+7 per cent), although all the sub regions have shown a very good pace. On the other hand, growth in receipts was not so remarkable (+3 per cent) giving a total of US \$ 274 billion.

3.3.4 Middle East

Good above average growth of 5 per cent in arrivals (total of 50 million) and a positive tendency in tourism receipts (+6 per cent) to an estimated US \$ 49 billion witnesses for the attractiveness of the region.

3.3.5 Africa

Relatively modest growth on international tourists in Africa (+2 per cent with total of 56 million arrivals) followed by 3 per cent increase in receipts (total US

\$ 36 billion) stands for a great potential of the region as it accounts only 3 per cent share of worldwide international tourism receipts.

On the sub-regional level, the lowest growth in receipts was captured in North Africa (+1 per cent) while Sub-Saharan Africa's tourist numbers increased by 3% despite the Ebola Virus epidemic. (The United Nations World Tourism Organization 2014).

4 GLOBAL POPULATION

World's population is constantly growing; nowadays, there are already more than 7.319 million human beings living on the planet Earth (census.gov). The commissioner company is situated in Finland and planning actively operate on the European market, so it is important to uncover also local statistics on population as well as number of inhabitants in Europe. According to Eurostat data - up to 508. 2 people have been living in EU28 on 1 January 2015. (Gereöffy 2015).

At the same time, population of Finland was 5.480.840 people on August 2015. (Statistics Finland 2015).

5 AGING TREND

In parallel with the constant growth, global population is influenced by the aging trend, meaning that it is getting older in a mass. It is observed in changes of population's structure, where the oldest part of population increases while the youngest declines. (European Commission 2015).

This is not very noticeable yet. For example, it was calculated that during fifty years from 1950 to 2000, the median age of world's population has grown only by 3.34 per cent, reaching a level of average 24.7 years. However, it is projected that by the year 2050 it will rise to 38.1 year. (Uhlenberg 2009).

Although the pace of aging is not equal among the countries, it is well observed and documented by the researchers, both on the global scale and the European Union. Among all EU member states, elderly population is growing with a fastest pace in Cyprus (2.7 per cent per year). While, globally, number one in terms of elderly population growing is Brazil with a growth rate of 3.6 per cent per year. According to some estimations, there will be 104 million of people aged over 65 years, living in EU27 area or, in other words, roughly every fifth person. (European Commission 2014).

5.1 Reasons behind the aging trend. Demographic Transition Model

Basically, aging of the population is a natural phenomenon that could be explained as a consequence of a few combined factors, the most important among which are a decreased mortality as well as a decreased fertility.

As it is mentioned in the previous chapter, aging process develops with a different pace among the globe. In fact, there is a certain mechanism, explaining that process, which described in so-called Demographic Transition Model. (see Figure 3)

The Classic Phases of the Demographic Transition

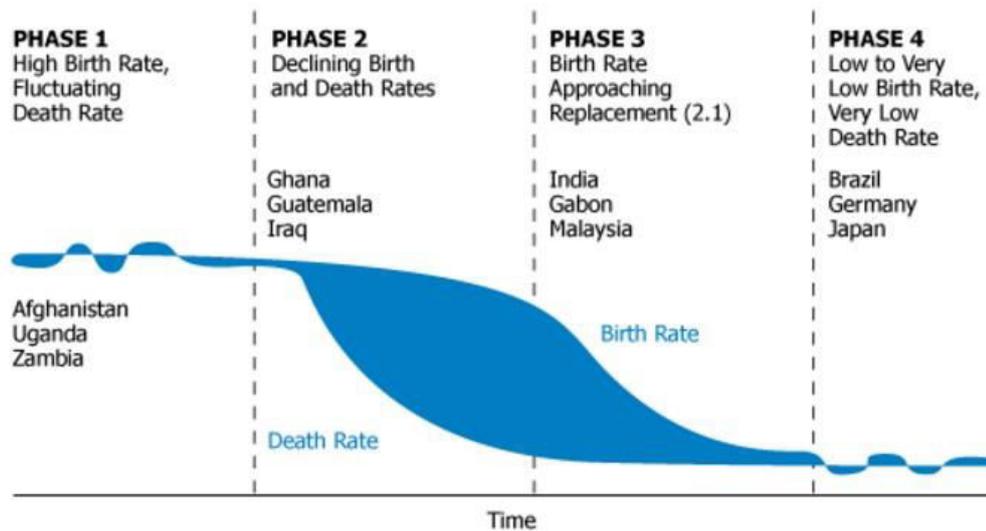


Figure 3. Illustration of Classic Demographic Transition Model (Haub & Gribble 2011)

It is commonly supposed that Demographic Transition Theory (DTT) originates from W. S. Thompson's "Population" published in 1929, where author offers to classify populations into different groups based on birth and death rates' level.

Later on, similar ideas were independently formulated by other authors, although, DTT itself was developed in Princeton by the Office of Population Research as an extension of "The Future Population of Europe and the Soviet Union" - previous work published in 1944. (Kirk 1996).

The theory states that each country on its path from pre-modernity to maturity phase passes through a number of evolutionary stages, influenced by changes in fertility and mortality rates, causing widespread effects as a result. Initially, authors have been operated with three stages:

- Primitive regime (Landry 1909, 1934) vs High growth potential (Notestein 1945)
- Intermediate regime (Landry 1909, 1934) vs Transitional growth (Notestein 1945)
- Contemporary regime (Landry 1909 1934) vs Potential decline (Notestein 1945)

In 1949 Blacker expanded theory into five stages:

- **High stationary stage**

In this stage, birth and death rates both in infancy and in adulthood remains roughly on the same, very high level, keeping the overall population number almost changeless. Mortality rate influenced by such factors like wars, diseases, bad yields, etc. This stage is common for agricultural, pre-industrialized societies like Western Europe before the 18-th century. (Ruggles 2009).

- **Early expanding stage**

This stage is characterized by a serious decrease in death rates while the number of births remains high. The greatest decrease in death rates can be observed in a childhood. Such disproportion rapidly pushes the population numbers up. There is an assumption that reasons for a declined death rate are improved health and living conditions, including more sophisticated agricultural practices, invention of sewage system and vaccination that helped to control spread of diseases on a radically new level.

- **Late expanding stage**

The process of industrializing that has started on the previous stage caused massive migration from rural to urban areas. One of the consequences was that the traditional multiple children family pattern was changed. With the increased prevention of infant mortality, narrowed living space in a new area and following the improvement in economy, families tend to become smaller – birth rates start slightly decline. Other proposed reasons for that are access to contraceptives as well as improved women's status, enabling to involve into education and a carrier, postponing a child birth. As a consequence, population's growth starts to slow down. Countries that are currently on the late expanding stage are: Botswana, Colombia, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Mexico, South Africa, and the United Arab Emirates. (Grover 2014a).

- **Low stationary stage**

During low stationary stage country experiences relatively low levels both in fertility and mortality with a tendency of fertility rate to decrease even further, down to a replacement level, which is 2.1 births per woman on average, which

is a minimum fertility rate to keep population on the same level during the natural process of generations' interchangeability.

- **Declining stage**

Common indication for declining stage is low death rate and yet very low fertility rate that cumulatively lead to a population aging effect and finally a decline in a size of population. However, it does not happen on a sudden but because of a certain lag between birth rates start to decline and the population growth rate goes down, it takes generation or two to see the decline.

(Grover 2014b).

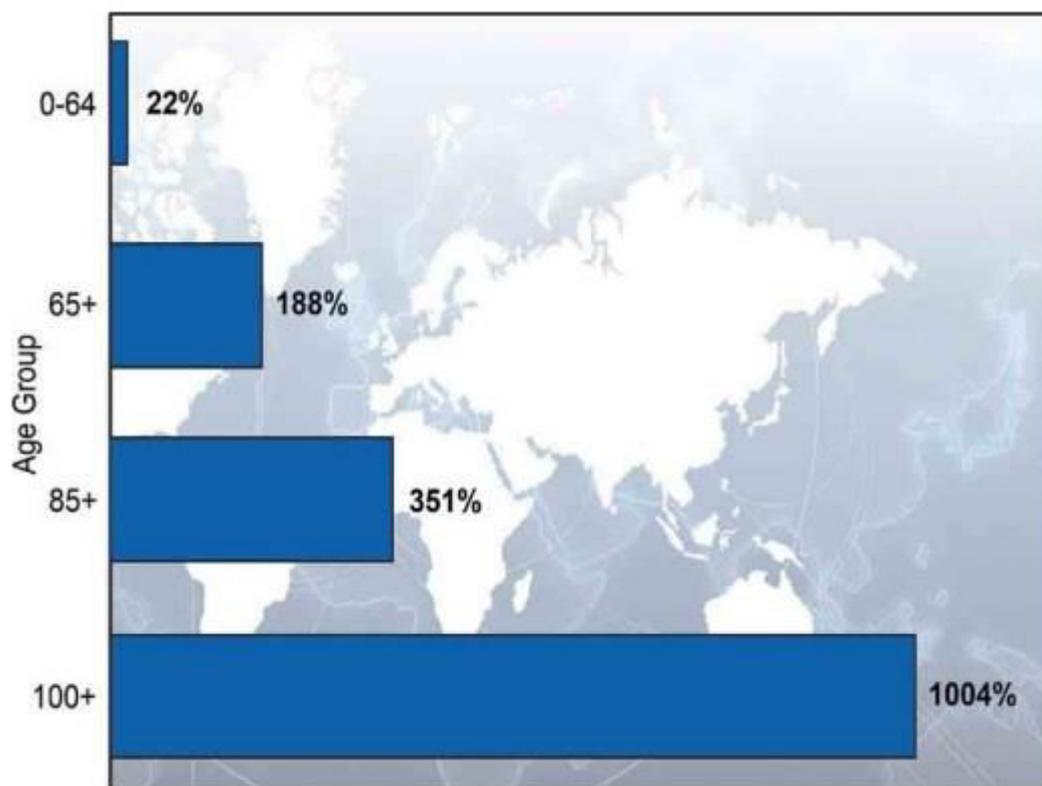


Figure 4. Percentage Change in the World's Population by Age 2010-2050 (World Health Organization 2011)

According to United Nations' estimations, globally, around 46 per cent of population lives in societies with a fertility levels lower than a 2. 1 which is considered as sub-replacement fertility in most developed countries, meaning that upon such circumstances each generation becomes less populous than the previous one. At the moment, a group of countries with low levels of fertility contains all European and North American countries as well as 20 Asian, plus 17 Latin American and the Caribbean, 3 countries in Oceania and

1 in Africa. While in absolute figures, largest countries from the group are China, the United States, Russian Federation, Japan and Viet Nam. (The United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division 2015).

As a consequence of population's aging, the number of the "oldest old", or people aged 85 or older, grows as well. Obviously, the percentage of this group is not equal among the countries, occupying 8 per cent of the 65 and older population globally, with a tendency to take bigger share in more developed countries. As to the nearest future, it is projected that altogether the oldest old group will grow around 351 per cent from 2010 to 2050, multiplying the number of centenarians by 10. (See figure 4). In some sense, it will be a unique situation. During the history of humanity there was a slim chance of 1 in 20 million on average to celebrate 100th birthday. Today, in countries with low mortality rates likes Sweden or Japan, for females who tend to live longer than males, a chance to become a centenarian has been reduced to 1 in 50. (World Health Organization 2011)

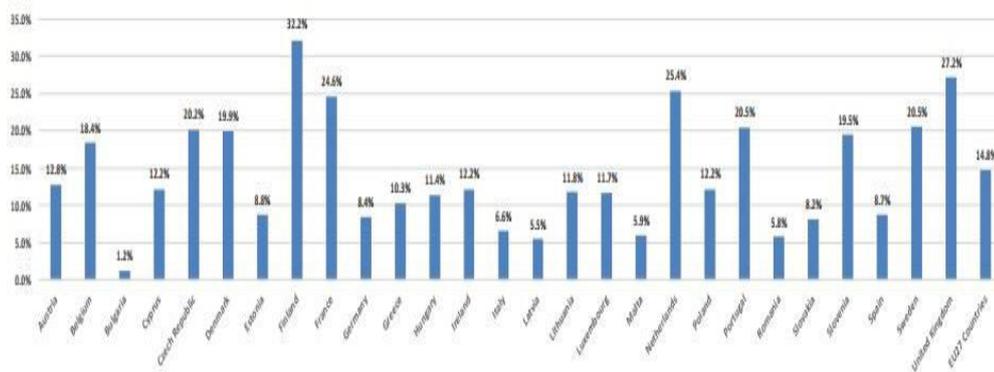


Figure 6. Prevalence rate of disabilities in EU27 countries (European Commission 2014).

6 AGING AND DISABILITY

As people are getting older, they tend to experience a gradual decline in a health status. Figure 5 illustrates this statement by showing comparable change in health status score over a time among both males and females in China, Russia, South Africa, Mexico, Ghana and India. (World Health Organization 2011).

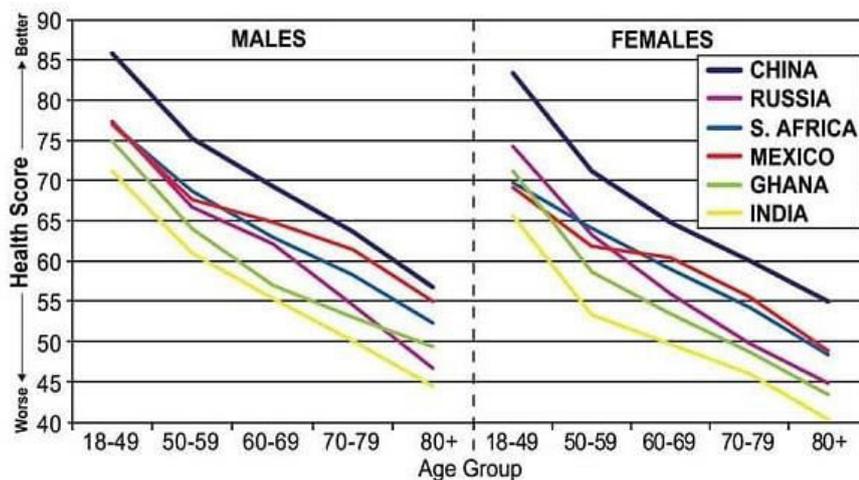


Figure 5. Changing health status score in six countries. (World Health Organization 2011).

Major causes for such health decline are increasing in time chances to suffer from chronic conditions that are associated with disability, like, diabetes, heart diseases or mobility impairment. There is a common estimation that about 15 per cent of world's population have some sort of disability which is 5 per cent higher than World Health Organization suggested in 1970s. (World Health Organization, The World Bank 2011).

The European Union follows the global median disability prevalence rate with 14.8 per cent of working aged citizens, suffering of disability. It is important to note that this is an average figure, influenced by extreme values produced by Finland, with its highest among European countries disability rate of 32.2 per cent and Bulgaria, having the lowest 1.2 per cent. (See figure 6).

It has to be noted that according to World Health Organization, disability is a broad, double layered, and frequently called an umbrella term, meaning that it reflects not only a poor health conditions but also the interaction of person

with a disease burden and the surrounding complex environment like negative attitudes, lack of accessibility or social support. (World Health Organization 2011).

7 ACCESSIBLE TOURISM

Previous chapters gave a brief knowledge concerning nowadays tourism and disability. This chapter is dedicated to the topic which arises in the crossroads of these two issues.

According to Darcy et al (year), accessible tourism is a form of tourism that enables people with access needs to act independently using universally designed tourism products, services and environments. Moreover, it important to notice that it does not cover only people with disabilities, but also elderly people, families with infants or passengers with heavy luggage. (Darcy & Dickson 2009, in Buhalis & Darcy 2011).

Crucial attention in accessible tourism is paid to the issue of accessibility, which, according to the Final Report of European Commission, is such quality of an environment, product or service, which enables it to be used by everyone regardless of his or her abilities. (European Commission 2014).

7.1 Market potential

Figure 7 shows current and future demand for EU's accessible tourism by EU27 countries from 2012-2020. (1 unit equals 1000 trips.).



Figure 7. Current and future demand for EU's accessible tourism. (European Commission 2014).

It is easily observed that market growth will be pushed by the growth of elderly population as according to the projections, the number of people with disabilities will remain slightly unchangeable.

8 METHODOLOGY

To reach the aims that were identified in the beginning of the research, a qualitative approach has been chosen. Because there was an intention to understand the respondents' background and point of view towards the topic, a number of semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions were conducted with industry experts as well as with a person, suffering of a long-lasting disability with a relevant travel experience in a background.

Some of the interviews were tape recorded and later on analysed after decoding, while other conversations were analysed by memory and using notes that were taken right after the meeting.

Harrell and Bradley (2009) in their Training Manual on Data Collection Methods, describe an interview as a tool to gather information from a previous background or an expert knowledge of a person. Moreover authors mention that it is commonly used to uncover individuals experience and personal opinion. Speaking of the semi-structured interviews, Harrell & Bradley underline that during these interviews it is common to use a guide where topics that should be covered are mentioned. Although, the process flows smoothly, in a conversational manner.

The following chapters will introduce the research process.

9 SEARCHING FOR POTENTIAL RESPONDENTS

The initial idea was to conduct theme interviews with 5 to 15 people that might be considered as the potential consumers of an accessible travel service. Thus, from the very beginning a short list of criteria has been identified for the future respondents.

- age of 18 and over
- disability burden, preferably a wheelchair or a rollator usage in a daily life
- previous feature should not be an obstacle to make an interview

After a brain-storm which took into account all the features mentioned above, the decision to start active work on finding respondents on several directions was made. These directions are: searching on social network Facebook and co-operation with public organizations supporting people with disabilities.

9.1 Facebook

The largest and probably the most popular social network on the web, Facebook gives great opportunities for the research purposes. Inevitably, my choice was obvious. Analysing the scope for activity I assumed, that there should be a number of groups that unites people with disabilities. Quick research showed absolute fairness of the previous assumption - there were a significant number of groups in Finland with the philosophies matching the research topic. After analysing the content I stopped on three of them:

- “Rajoitteet ovat vain omassa päässä” - popular community with total 23699 page likes (1.4.16), posting motivational pictures and videos, promoting the philosophy that barriers exist only in the head.
- ”Yhteisesti vammaisten ihmisten asioista” - a public group with 1251 members (1.4.16), sharing publicistic materials on the disability issues, being at the same time a ground for discussions.
- “Esteetön matkailu” - a public group with 1249 members (1.4.16), where people share their experience towards accessibility of certain touristic destinations as well as ask advices on the subject of accessible travel.

The process of choosing the potential respondents was based on an opened source of information and has followed a simple logic: I assumed that those users who have posted photos of themselves in a wheelchair would be more open towards the discussion on the topic of disability and accessibility during the travel. Thus, I choose 12 adult people who have added photos of themselves in a wheelchair in their profiles (6 males and 6 females). Each one of the potential respondents received following personal message from my own Facebook profile:

"Hello, (recipient's name)!

I'm doing a research as a part of my thesis in AMK, my topic is accessible travel and right now I'm looking for the wheelchair users to make short interviews, about - 10-15 minutes on Skype, strictly confidential. Would you be so kind to share some of your views and ideas on the topic? :)

The idea is to have a feedback from the potential customers of the accessible tours. Is it something that people really need? And if yes/no - why? What is the previous customer's experience and expectations?

Each opinion is very important!

Thank you!"

This above message needs an explanation. Some readers might feel that the scope of information there is not enough and that there might be more details about my personal background and the research topic itself.

Confirming possible justified notices, yet, it has to be said that the idea of sending initial message was to start a conversation, taking into account an informal image of communication happening on social networks, at the same time being open to all the possible questions and explanations during the further correspondence.

The majority of people did not answer the message at all, in spite of the fact that all sent messages were marked as "seen", meaning that all the recipients actually did receive the invitation.

Only two people have answered the initial message (respondents "A" and "B", both females). As far as I can conclude, both of the respondents had rather positive attitude towards the future interview in the beginning.

Yet, a respondent "A" was afraid to give Skype login or a telephone number, motivating it with a misgiving feeling that: "...it could be misused in any possible ways". To ensure a respondent "A" that I'm a true student, we decided that I will send a message from my student post to a respondent's e-mail address that she was going to give me on the next day. Neither the next day nor a few months later didn't I receive any other messages from respondent "A".

A respondent "B", in its turn, was eager to participate in interview via Skype and arranged the suitable time by herself, which was five days later from the initial message. Yet, on the interview day, something went wrong and a respondent "B" in short and dry phrases gave to understand that there will not be a Skype session, at the same time, expressing a desire to receive possible interview questions by an e-mail to answer them in a written way. Later on, after questions were sent, respondent reported that she did not receive them. A reply, offering to check spam box remained without a reply.

- Questions addressed to respondent "B":
 - Did you hear about the tour operators in Finland who specializes on providing accessible travel tours?
 - If yes, what destinations do they work with?
 - Can you name few of them without asking Google?
 - Do you think that some destinations are missing? Which ones?
 - Did you have a personal experience with such companies? Please, tell something about it - how was it?
 - If no, please, tell your opinion such service itself. Is it that something what people need? Or, maybe it is much more easier to book everything by yourself, while planning the trip?

Respecting the feelings of respondents "A" and "B" I made a conclusion that such behavior was a sort of a mild way to say no and didn't insist on the further communication, at least, until I decided to change a tactic.

Later on I came with an idea to motivate my respondents with a valuable remuneration. Thus, all twelve addressees, including respondents "A" and "B" received following message:

"Dear (recipient's name), how are you? I hope you are fine! Would you please be so kind to consider answering a few questions about travelling? Your answers will help to improve the level of the awareness of the accessible travelling issue as well as will bring you a small present - memory stick, to keep good memories forever=)"

A response pattern has repeated itself almost changelessly: twelve "seen" messages with a zero number of replies.

9.2 Organizations supporting people with disabilities

In parallel with disappointing searching results on Facebook, I have been attempting to get respondents by contacting various public organizations which interests are somehow lay in the sphere of disability and interrelated issues, assuming that there is a constant two-side communication between the members and the core organizations that might help me to interest participants for the future interview.

Each organization has received similar message via e-mail:

"Dear (*recipient's name*)

I'm studying in Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences, the topic of my thesis is "Customers' expectations in accessible tourism". I moved to capital area because of work in 2013 and now I don't have any lectures, just doing the final project.

To cover the topic I decided to make theme interviews with 5 to 15 people with disabilities, preferably a wheelchair users. Aim of the interviews is to uncover peoples' previous experience in this field as well as to understand common trends in the expectations towards the service.

Maybe some of (*organisation's name*) members may help me with the research? I'm thinking about 15 to 20 minutes open question and anonymous interviews.

Please, find my thesis agreement enclosed.

My initial supervisor was (*initial supervisor's name*), but as she changed her workplace, now it is (*current supervisor's name and contact e-mail*)."

The most significant results were achieved after co-operation with two organizations: Kynnys ry and Espin ry.

- **Kynnys ry**

Kynnys ry is a non-commercial association registered in 1981 that originates from the union of disabled students back in 1973. Nowadays, it has grown into an expert in the field of disability with five subsidiaries: Jyväskylä, Kuopio, Oulu, Tampere, Turku and a head office in Helsinki.

Kynnys ry mainly implements and supports development projects, both in Finland and on the international arena, that improve the situation with disabled people's rights. For example, they support five different associations of disabled people in Ethiopia, in some Balkan countries, as well as unions of disabled women in Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

After my call, I was invited to have a meeting in a head office of Kynnys ry. Very friendly and warm atmosphere of the place became a nice bonus to an interested and truly motivated attitude towards the research topic. Our conversation has proved that rank of experts was well-worn. In the end I received an unexpected gift – a book and assurances to support the research however possible.

Unfortunately, nobody from the staff or partners of Kynnys ry did actually involve into making a theme interview, which does not, yet, run down a perfect impression from the visit.

- **Espin ry**

Espin ry or Espoon Invaliidit ry is also a non commercial organization with it's history started in 1977. Unlike the previous association which is focused in it's activity both inwards and outwards, Espin ry plays only on a domestic market, yet, the significance of the organization's role is hard to underestimate.

Association supports opportunities for disabled people in regions of Espoo and Kauniainen to live independent and happy life. Uniting around 300 people it organizes different kind of events like cultural, recreational, sport and educational sessions as well as regular meetings for their members. The timetable for the various activities is so dense that there is something to do literally every day in a week. (See Figure 8).

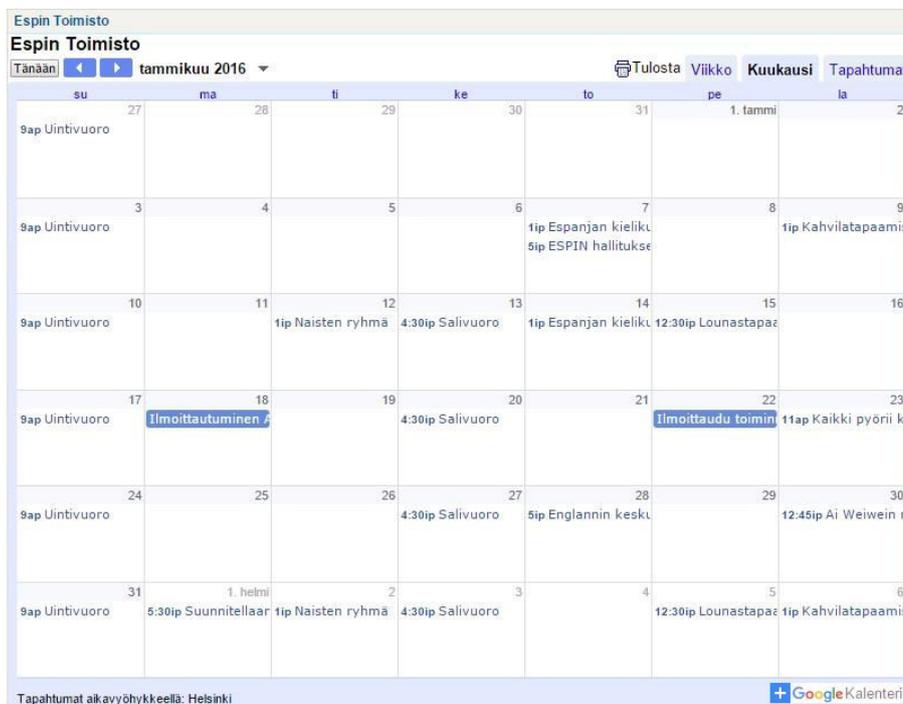


Figure 8. A timetable for Espin Ry activities for January 2016 (Espinry.fi)

Although, the influence of Espin ry does not stop at this point, they also work closely with the local municipality to ensure that it's decisions take into account disabled people's rights and interests.

Espin ry communicates with it's members using different channels. Besides their website they also share their news in a blog and through the Facebook

page. Additionally, around 25-pages bulletin is prepared four times a year and sent to all the members who have expressed willingness to get it.

I have contacted one of the board members of Espin ry and luckily got a space for my advertisement/interview offer in a bulletin published in March. Figure 9 shows an announcement that was mentioned in the table of contents and put on the sixth page of a 24 paged leaflet.

Haluatko osallistua haastatteluun?

Kymenlaakson ammattikorkeakoulun opiskelija tekee tutkielmaa esteettömästä matkailusta. Haastattelut kestävät n. 20 minuuttia ja voidaan toteuttaa kasvokkain, puhelimitse tai skypeillä, englanniksi tai suomeksi. Tiedot raportoidaan anonyymisti.

Opiskelijan yhteystiedot:

Vladimir Kourakevitch, Puh: [REDACTED]

Skype: [REDACTED] sp [REDACTED]

Jos kiinnostuit, ota yhteyttä suoraan opiskelijaan!

Figure 9. An announcement offering to take part in the research. (Espin Ry leaflet March 2016)

An announcement offering to take part into the research in English:

"Do you want to take part in an interview?"

A student of Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences makes a research about accessible travel. Interviews last for about 20 minutes and can be done face-to-face, by phone, or by Skype, in English or in Finnish. Gathered data will be reported anonymously.

Student's contact details:

Vladimir Kourakevitch, Tel. (*my mobile number*)

Skype: (*my skype account*), e-mail (*my e-mail address*).

If you are interested, contact directly to the student!"

A bulletin was published on Espin's webpage on 14th of March 2016, as well as it has been sent to 280 association's members in a pdf format via e-mail. Unfortunately, despite the promising beginning I have got a zero response rate within two weeks from the publishing till present writing.

10 A RESPONDENT IS FOUND. FINALLY!

The one and the only potential customer of accessible travel service who showed her interest into the interview participation and actually took part in it was found during browsing through the list of different voluntarily organized activities in Uusimaa region.

My initial idea was to contact this person in order to tell her about my research and, as she was an organizer and a lead facilitator of one of these activities, mentioned above, to ask her to announce my interview offer during the upcoming session. Turned out that she has been suffering of a long-lasting disability herself, forcing her to use a rollator in a daily life. At the same time she showed strong interest to the research and eagerness to make an interview, appointing time and place for the meeting.

Thus, a meeting took place in one of the shopping malls' café in Espoo. An interview lasted for about 1 hour and 40 minutes. With a permission of a respondent, it was tape recorded using a suitable mobile application. During the conversation I also have been taking notes to mark the moments that have driven my interest the most.

I tried to use open-ended questions in order to uncover respondent's travel experience both in Finland and abroad and to understand the expectations towards accessible travel services as well as a must have features that should be taken into account while organizing such trips on a basis of a business venture. Following sub chapters will briefly introduce readers with the interview's output flavored with an author's comments.

10.1 Travelling in Finland. Metropolitan area and the Lapland trip

My respondent is a very active person involved in various voluntary events and activities, meaning that her travelling schedule across the capital area is very tight. That is why I could not miss the opportunity to ask her about her ideas on how well does public transport in Metropolitan area perform in terms of accessibility.

Turn out that different transport modes got unequal assessment. According to my respondent, the most comfortable commuter trains in a capital area have green and white painting (Sm4 and Sm5/Flirt trains) (See Figures 10 and 11). Wide doorways which are situated on the same level with the platform, coupled with a convenient and spacious WC makes it one of the best local barrier-free travel options.

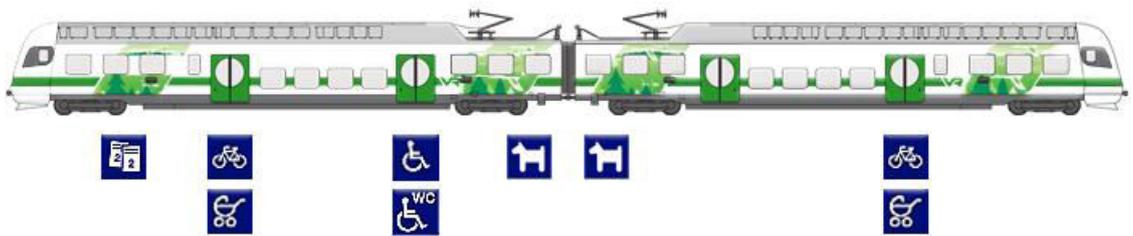


Figure 10. A commuter train type Sm4 (VR webpage)



Figure 11. A commuter train type Sm5/Flirt (VR webpage)

In contrast to Sm4 and Sm5 models, previous generations - red and white Sm1, Sm2 and locomotive powered "Eil" (See Figure 12) trains have a significant accessibility problems for the less mobile passengers – wagons and platform are separated with a few steps while assistant service is not possible, as well as lifting mechanism is not installed. Moreover, doorways itself are more than twice narrower than in the modern trains: 75 cm in Sm1 and 66 cm in Sm2 versus 160 cm in Sm4.



Figure 12. A commuter train type Sm2 (Commuter Trains in the Helsinki Region)

Keeping in mind that among 167 existing suburban electric trains, 60 still belong to Sm1 or Sm2 type, it becomes obvious that local commuter train fleet has a clear space for the further improvement.

My respondent's opinion concerning local bus connections was controversial. She appreciated the service provided by "Kutsuplus" line – a pilot project of Helsinki Regional Transport Authority, which was on the run from the year 2013 till the end of 2015 and has been offering a very convenient way to travel across the capital region at relatively low charge. They have been using small blue buses (See Figure 13), occupying a niche between taxicab and a usual city bus. A customer could order the vehicle on their webpage, using special application or simply by sending SMS. In this scheme, driver takes and lands passengers on the bus stops but usually was very responsive and could make it till the very entrance of the building. (Pietiläinen 2015).

On the other hand, this respondent was very dissatisfied with the regular city buses. That is because she repeatedly has been facing impatient attitude and even rudeness from the bus drivers when she could not get in the bus quickly.



Figure 13. “Kutsuplus” bus on the bus stop (photo by Juhani Niirani, Helsingin Sanomat)

Although, sometimes it is simply impossible to get in due to the possible wide distance between the bus stop and the bus itself.

During our conversation we also discussed a taxi cabs as one of the travel options for the disabled people in Metropolitan region. According to my collocutor, government compensate the majority of the taxi charges so that the total price per trip is the same like for the local bus or a commuter train.

Yet, disappointment comes from the fact that there is a limit for the trips. Each participant of the program can use 18 one-way or respectively 9 round trips per month, which is not enough for a low mobile. Yet an active person, who has to in these circumstances face a constant dilemma on where to use those trips. Visiting a doctor or a bank or public authorities, going to a gym, socializing, taking a chance to see the latest exposition, doing voluntary work or simply shopping in a grocery store – all of these and many other options are carefully analyzed, ranked in a priority and crystallized in a tight timetable with an unavoidable elimination of more or less indispensable items.

Speaking of the Lapland trip we touched on two types of transportation which were involved in the process: domestic airplane and a long-distance train. My respondent was absolutely delighted about how the trip was organized by an airline company. Their representatives followed her till the entrance door of the plane, passing to the cabin crew and taking away her rollator which, later, after a flight, was waiting her already at the exit of the plane in the destination

airport. Moreover, both in the departure and the arrival airports there was an option to use a wheelchair in case if a distance to or from the plane might feel too long and tiresome.

In contrast to airplane trip, long-distance train travel left controversial feelings. There were the special cabins for the disabled people in the train, suitable for the people, travelling with an assistant. Although, according to my respondent, bathroom was not as much comfortable as it should be.

Another disappointing experience was connected with the train crew attitude. When the train arrived at 5 AM to Oulu, my vis-a-vis repeatedly asked a conductors for a help her with the landing, getting: "That is not our job" in response.

Summarising this sub-chapter, I have to admit that based on her own experience, my respondent, does not put a great score on the situation with accessible travel in Finland. Her main disappointments are: ill-considered solutions for the disabled people coupled with an overall slow pace of the environment improvement and intolerant and sometimes even aggressive attitude towards less mobile people.

10.2 Travelling abroad. Trips to London and Bilbao

During our discussion I was especially interested to get to know about international travel experiences of my respondent. It turned out that she took part in two trips in a recent times, that have left quit dissimilar memoirs.

Trip to London was planned independently, without a travel agency. A hotel in the centre was chosen with the help of the interviewed person's daughter after thorough check and double check through the e-mail of all the details that might spoil the trip. As a result, a hotel stay exceeds all the expectations, yet, this would be unjustified to say about the city of London itself, which, according to my respondent, still have much way to move towards accessibility.

Trip to Bilbao was bought from a famous and trustful Finnish travel company. The decision to choose this place among many others destinations was dictated by a few considerations; from which the most significant was that

Bilbao's centre is relatively small – all the local sights are situated within a short walking distance from each other – not the least factor to take into account for a less mobile person.

Another plus was that in spite of its rich history - springing from the medieval ages, Bilbao has a very modern infrastructure, in terms of accessibility as well – thanks to the municipal government and foreign investors attracted to Bilbao since inauguration of Guggenheim Museum in 1997.

The company that organised the trip does not specialise in the accessible travels, although when my respondent called them before taking a tour and explained the special needs that originated from her health condition, they adjusted the package following the customer's needs.

As a result, my respondent got a very good experience from this trip. Everything was organised in a very convenient manner. Starting from the travel company's webpage browsing, where all the needed details, e.g. insurance issues were mentioned and explained and followed by a flight where a group of tourists was joined with a specially sent guide. Moreover, even the flight had a connection, everything was organised according to the same scheme as in the domestic flight of the respondent. A vacation itself left only good memoirs, they visited museums, opera and other sights, accompanied by two Finnish guides always ready to help.

10.3 Preferable travel destinations

In order to have an idea of what destinations might be in demand from the potential accessible travel users, I asked my respondent to tell me about her own preferences. Thus figured out that she prefers old cities with a cultural heritage bias in the vacation variety's spectrum. Although, as she added later, there are many people with disabilities who prefer seaside leisure or on the contrary proactive holiday.

I also tried to specify the attitude of my respondent to the organized package tours to Russia and got a response that showed me a clear interest towards

the destination itself and yet a concern on how accessible it might actually be, for instance a State Hermitage Museum entrance or a train journey itself.

11 INTERVIEWS WITH AN INDUSTRY EXPERTS

In order to present a selection of views from the travel companies concerning the accessible travel market, I decided to conduct several interviews with their representatives.

Four interviews were conducted with four travel companies based in Helsinki, respectively. None of the companies were informed about the interview in advance, as my idea was to take them unaware, so, that they could not prepare for the interview. Performing such sort of a stress test had an aim to somehow imitate a sudden visit of a person with disability who wants to have an advice about accessible trips.

Needless to say that I have not been pretending to be a customer, all of my respondents were told about the research and my goals, as well as all of them agreed to share their ideas and knowledge about the topic.

The questions that I was mostly interested in were:

- Do you provide accessible travel services?
- What destinations are the most popular among the customers with special needs?
- What is your estimation of handicapped customers' share among all the other orders?
- Does the price for the accessible travel package tour differ from the similar regular tour?
- What is your projections towards accessible travel demand in the future?

The following is a brief outline of the interviews accompanied with the companies' profiles and my own impression from the meetings.

11.1 Company "A"

This is a well-known company, one of the major market players in Finland with a turnover of 100+ millions euro in year 2015. Helsinki subsidiary is located in the centre and has an accessible entrance. I came to their office and briefly presented my research topic and goals. A front desk manager called his colleague and, after a while, we were having a conversation in a meeting room with one of the top managers of Helsinki subsidiary. Our meeting last for about 20 minutes and was tape recorded with a respondent's permission.

I did some preparations before the visit, browsing the company's webpage where they have a special section with a list of hotels which claimed to be completely accessible and suitable for all low mobile visitors.

In reality, these hotels are accessible only to a greater or lesser degree as it could be easily observed from the hotels' description. For example, some of the swimming pools are not be suitable for the wheelchair or a rollator users or a territory of the hotel has steps and a distinction in a ground levels.

There are 16 hotels in total, not much as the manager admitted but the company provides only those services with which it is 100 percent sure, understanding that tourists with special needs demand special level of accuracy. As if proving such attitude 8 of the hotels from the list are owned by the company itself and were planned and build to be accessible from the very beginning. Although, according to the company's manager, there is only one hotel that is dedicated for disabled people only, with all the special equipment in stock, different treating programs and a medical staff, while other hotels have regular personnel without special education.

As to destinations, them are limited to Spanish and Greece islands, Turkey and Cyprus. That corresponds identically with the disabled customers' preferable locations, yet, of course, if a tourist would want to visit some other places, company will meet customer's desire.

Not unimportant that price per trip for a disabled customer would be the same as for the similar trip for the customer without special needs, yet, there is always ways for an extra spend during the holiday.

According to the company's representative there is a clear vision that number of less mobile tourists is continuously growing following the aging trend with inevitable increase in future demand as a result. Although, it was hard for my respondent to estimate the share of disabled customers.

11.2 Company "B"

This company was founded in year 2000 and since that date has grown into four subsidiaries in Helsinki, Porvoo, Turku and Joensuu with a total of 16 employees and a net turnover of about 5 million euro in year 2014.

It organizes and sells great variety of travel packages and tours – there is a travel calendar on their webpage, showing more than 150 ready planned and scheduled tours for the next 1.5 years. Travel portfolio of Company "B" widely differs in terms of destinations, content and customer segmentation. It includes the traditional city or seaside tours, special sport activity trips with the aim to play golf abroad or ride through a well prepared bicycle or bike routes or even visit a Formula one event, theme traveling to operas, festivals or different fairs. From short trips to long ones, from individual tours to group, family and business trips – variety of options impresses from the first sight. The majority of travel destinations are situated in Europe (including domestic trips to Lapland and major ski resorts), but there are plenty of others as well, covering all the continents, excepting Antarctica.

A Helsinki subsidiary that I visited to make an interview is located in the modern office building with a reception in the lobby on the first floor. An actual working space of Company "B" has two entrances, one of which is accessible for the visitors using a wheelchair. As I was told later on, this fact was one of the major key issues in decision to rent the place.

Our interview lasted about 15 minutes and, with a permission of respondent, was tape recorded using a certain application. My respondent is one of two managers (out of six staff members in total) whose job is mainly related with serving the customers who seek for accessible travel tours. Nowadays about 70 percent of her work is dedicated to the accessible travel.

According to the manager, the company started to provide accessible travel services around 10 years ago. At the moment, company offers 37 ready packed travel tours, containing city and seaside holiday destinations mainly in Europe and Spanish islands with one offer to Thailand as well as two cruise routes: the Mediterranean and the Caribbean.

All of the travel packages were designed specially for clients with health problems and disabilities, taking into account all the possible issues and using trustful partners at the destination points. Moreover, some of the tours were built in the co-operation with the public organisations like, Muscle Disease Union, Parkinson Union, Disability Sport and Exercise union and others. There is an obvious mutual benefit from such kind of collaboration: public organisation provides for its members an extra opportunity for recreation and socializing, while a travel company gets a reliable partner with a high level of expertise and an effective way to reach target audience.

It is not unimportant that detailed information about hotels and travel packages is found on the company's webpage in a thorough and convenient manner, enabling potential customers to choose travel package according to their needs.

At the same time, prices for regular and accessible travel tours do not distinguish; the only evidence towards the cost increase might be observed due to the fact that hotels with accessible options tend to stand higher in a star rating than non-accessible places.

According to the company's manager, Canary Islands is the most popular destination among the customers with special needs. Speaking of the city tours to Russia, my respondent noticed that there are very few disabled customers asking for that particular destination, probably because of a very simple booking procedure of cross-border Allegro train as well as Saint Peters Line's ferries, cruising on the Saint-Petersburg – Helsinki route.

In all fairness it has to be added that Company "B" does not offer ready accessible package tours to Russia but do provide e.g. travel packages to Formula One Russian Grand Prix in Sochi, which although do not marked as accessible, neither do mentioned in accessible travel section of company's webpage.

Speaking of the future trends, my respondent showed a strong conviction that there will be a growth in the number of disabled travellers and, from the other hand, a growth in supply, expressing in wider availability of special equipment, trained personnel and nurses in the hotels. Moreover, she added that their own accessible travel offer has doubled in a past few years and have a

tendency to grow further, while the company is looking for new destinations all the time, to correspond with the demand and to provide better and more diversified service.

11.3 Company "C"

Company "C", as well as the following company "D" was chosen in a random way simply by spotting a "travel agency" signs during the walk in the centre of Helsinki. Both visits were unplanned, yet, were having a certain aim – to make the voice of industry experts sound louder and in a more balanced way - supplementing the valuable output from the interviews in companies "A" and "B".

Our conversation lasted for about 5 minutes, during which a company's manager shared her experience towards organising an accessible travel tour as well as her views on the future of the phenomena. It was not tape recorded, although key points were entered into a notepad immediately after a conversation.

Company "C" was founded in 1986 and, as it mentioned on their website, specializes on selling high class travel tours to Australia, New Zealand, South Pacific Ocean and Oceania. They also organize round-the-world trips and have a good variety of tours to Americas, Africa, Asia and to the islands of Indian Ocean.

Curiously, company does not operate on European travel destinations neither provides travel package tours specially designed for disabled travelers. According to my respondent, such service demands from the travel agency a very high level of expertise and especially thorough work on the preparation stage. With a limited resources and lack of experience coupled with relatively low demand, it becomes economically unattractively to get involved in such service and, in case if homework is done poorly – even image loss potential.

Although, surely, if a customer with a special needs will knock on the door in order to get a holiday abroad, company will assist to do the best.

After knocking on the door a low mobile customer will probably have problems in getting in – office is located on the first floor of an old building with no ramps, lift or button for door opening installed.

To illustrate on how things might get wrong my respondent remembered a case of a couple who took a safari tour to Tanzania. One of the travelers was a wheelchair user and therefore company checked and re-checked all the accessible issues in the destination point once again beforehand. On the arrival found out that everything was done perfectly except one thing – a hotel restaurant was not accessible for a wheelchair, neither ramp nor elevator system has been installed, threatening to spoil the holiday. Fortunately, this story has a happy end, as a hotel personnel was so helpful that has been lifting the guest in and out the restaurant with their bare hands, leaving her very satisfied with the hotel service and a trip on the whole. Yet, that story shows how easily a mistake can be made, even by an experienced company.

Speaking of the future trend, company's manager showed an assurance that number of disabled travelers will grow, pushing up a demand for accessible travel services, as a result.

11.4 Company "D"

This company in its turn was founded in year 2008, offering at the moment great variety of tours with a special focus on sport events, exotic beach holidays and cruises, covering few European rivers, Mediterranean and Caribbean seas as well as few transoceanic options.

Similarly to the company discussed in a previous sub-chapter, its office is situated in the centre of Helsinki, on the first floor of an old building with no accessible entrance.

Our interview circumstances followed the previous pattern as well – lasted for about 5 minutes, was not tape recorded, yet certain marks were left in a notepad afterwards.

According to my respondent in company "D", they provide accessible travel services only on demand, there are no packages designed especially for disabled travellers, like there is no mentioned accessible options for the services available on their webpage. Company's manager also noted that cruises are the most preferred travel option by customers with special needs. From the other side, he evaluated this segment as negligibly small comparing with the other customers' mass, showing no enthusiasm in working towards this direction. My respondent also added that according to his opinion, accessible travel market will remain the same size in the future.

12 RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

12.1 Methodology

A qualitative approach was chosen to achieve the goals of the research. A semi-structured interview was conducted with a disabled person living in Espoo who has an experience of travelling both in Finland and abroad, independently and with the help of travel company. Moreover, the interviewee has a broad connection to the social network of other disabled people on a daily basis, making her insight even more valuable. Interview was made during the meeting in the shopping mall's café. It was tape-recorded as well as certain marks in a notepad have been added. Later on, tape was decoded and analyzed coupled with the notepad marks.

Additionally, four semi-structured interviews were conducted with the representatives of travel companies based in Helsinki. All of the interviews took places in the offices of the companies. Half of them were tape recorded and analyzed upon the decoded output data, while another half were analyzed based on the marks that have been added right after the meeting.

12.2 Results

The research resulted in valuable insights both from the potential customer of the accessible tourism service and the travel industry experts, which have shared their knowledge as well as their view on the future of accessible tourism. According to the potential customer, in terms of accessible trip, she expects that the accessibility will start already on a preliminary level - during the searching process on the web, meaning that information should be detailed, easy reachable and properly provided. The respondent especially underlined that information about the destination point should match the ongoing reality during the holiday.

Moreover, the interviewee showed willingness to interact with medically trained personnel in the destination point, who has an experience of serving the disabled customers. The respondent also expects that accessible trip will

not demand a lot of expenditures, as she claims that disabled people tend to have lower income on average. Additionally, a potential customer showed an interest in taking an accessible trip to Russia and a concern on whether it will be fully accessible, while the most desirable type of trip was described as a city tour, exploring a cultural heritage.

As to the travel industry experts, those interviews showed that three out of four companies' representatives believe that accessible tourism market will grow in the nearest future, while two of them already actively promote accessible trips and the other two do that only occasionally, on demand. It is also a correlation between the share of the disabled customers evaluated by the company's representative and the predictions towards the market's future. Thus, market players who serve relatively low amount of disabled customers, tend to have lower expectations towards the growth of accessible tourism trend, and vice versa.

Speaking of the favorite destinations among the disabled customers, my respondents have noticed that Spanish and Greece Islands as well as Turkey and Cyprus are the most popular. It has to be added, though, that these are the destinations that these travel companies' portfolios consist of and it probably cannot adequately represent the initial dream destination of the customers, but more likely is just a popular choice among the available options.

Price for the accessible travel packages is the same as for the rest ones, according to my respondents. Although, factors that might increase the price of the trip are additional special services or rented equipment in the destination point as well as that accessible hotels tend to have more stars and are might be more expensive as a consequence. None of the travel companies involved in the research provides accessible trips to Russia; one of the respondents explained it by a suggestion that the simplicity of such trip organizing process does not leave space for a travel company.

13 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE COMMISSIONING COMPANY

Based on the research output I prepared a list of recommendations for the commissioner.

Double check

The company should check everything very thoroughly before selling the package tours. It is better if there is a possibility that a person in a wheelchair check all the routes and places itself. Accessibility does not limit itself with the availability of ramps and elevators, many unobvious issues might occur if the homework has not been done properly. For example, beds should not be very low, otherwise a disabled person might have a significant problem to get up from it.

Price

According to my respondent, many disabled people cannot afford costly vacation. Thus, a price policy should be formed up taking into an account an income level of the potential customers.

Accessibility of information

It is very important to provide comprehensive data on the webpage in a suitable way as well as to be always able to give advice by phone, e-mail and social medias.

Personnel

Due to the health issues disabled people demand constant supervision by a medical personnel, thus it would be preferable that a hotel at destination has a nurse or at least a well-trained staff.

New attractions

New attractions should be taken into account that clients might want to experience something different from the traditional routes. Night clubs, modern art galleries, unusual excursions – at least several options should be ready for such case.

Summarizing all the data, I can suggest a direction for the commissioning company to pay attention to - a medical tourism from Finland to Russia. This path uniquely combines a few issues from the research output.

First of all, it covers the demand for skilled personnel that was mentioned by an interviewed potential customer. Secondly, due to the depreciation of Russian rouble since 2014, it might be attractive to cure or to maintain the health condition at a lower cost. Thirdly, this type of activity might be easily combined with the cultural programme, shopping or any other attractions and activities. Finally, medical tourism might be interesting not only for people with accessibility needs but for the rest of population as well, making this market even more attractive.

14 CONCLUSION

A theoretical part of the thesis allows to conclude that accessible travel market is a perspective niche as it is probably going to grow in the nearest future. In this connection, a commissioner's intention to organize travel services for people with disabilities seems to be logical and well-timed.

Not all the aims that were set up in the beginning of the research were achieved. Partly due to a small sampling group the portrait of potential customer turned out to be not as complex and clear-cut as it could be.

Low response rate that has been demonstrated during this research might be of interest for the future researchers and could exemplify on how not to do the research in order to get more complex result.

As a recommendation for the future researchers I would advise to work on such project in collaboration with healthcare scholars – to be sure that some important issues interconnected with the disability condition will not be missed out. This might also help to increase level of trust between the researcher and the respondent. It might be also promising to investigate the potentiality of medical tourism from Europe Union to Russian Federation.

On the whole, I'm satisfied with the work that has been done; results will be presented to the commissioning company and used in their further actions. This research has also enriched my personal experience, allowing me to operate in challenging and yet exciting environment and turned my understanding of society on a radically new level.

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