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# RESEARCH OF SERVICE QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL TOURISM

Travel of underaged from Russia to Finland

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| <b>Author (authors)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>Degree</b>                       | <b>Time</b>                       |
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| Anna Bulaeva                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Bachelor of Business Administration | May 2018                          |
| <b>Thesis title</b><br>Research of service quality of educational tourism<br>Travel of underaged from Russia to Finland                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                     | 62 pages<br>4 pages of appendices |
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| <b>Supervisor</b><br>Jagat Kunwar                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                     |                                   |
| <p data-bbox="138 651 1445 693"><b>Abstract</b></p> <p data-bbox="138 693 1445 798">The goal of this research was to analyse the service quality of educational trips to Finland by multiple service providers. The scope was restricted to the travel of people aged under 18 years. The sampling strategy used was convenience sampling.</p> <p data-bbox="138 829 1445 1060">Quantitative research method was used in the study due to the under-researched nature of the educational tourism topic. Firstly, an experiential trip to Finland with a group of children and a pilot survey were organised. After the pilot survey, the design and contents of a questionnaire were significantly changed. Secondly, a broader main survey was conducted. Quantitative methods were used for designing the survey and analysing the responses. The SERVPERF model was employed for the design of the questionnaire.</p> <p data-bbox="138 1092 1445 1344">The study showed that current educational trips to Finland are perceived as high quality service. Physical environment, responsiveness of organisers and quality-price ratio still require improvements. The following practical recommendations were proposed: introducing communication with foreign peers, enhancing organised social media activity, proposing programmes with multiple trips included. The goals of the research were achieved, and its practical relevance is seen in distribution of the figures to service providers and implication of achieved results.</p> |                                     |                                   |
| <b>Keywords</b><br>Educational tourism, service quality, tourism to Finland, SERVPERF                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                     |                                   |

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

To begin with, the topic of my thesis paper has been chosen in order to have high relevance for my further studies and work possibilities, personal entrepreneurial interest. I have been a client of Kinno Oy, Kouvola Innovation office, exploring the tourism opportunities in the Kymenlaakso and Southern Karelia regions of Finland. After one of the meetings a contact of an entrepreneur who manages a guest house Ugrin Paikka situated in the village of Sippola in the Kymenlaakso region was given. From my point of view, he has developed an interesting way of doing business as he combines both the accommodation and cultural aspects of tourism. On a daily basis, the guest house provides accommodation for tourists. Mainly, the booking is available through booking.com website or through personal contacting.

Later, my family has cooperated with the owner and organised trips for Russian primary school students to Finland. The trips are referred to as “educational” as they included getting to know Finland; its culture; excursions to museums and the towns of Kouvola and Kotka; visiting Finnish schools and discussions with the teachers to compare the educational system and principles in public schools of Finland and Russia; showing plays in English for Finnish pupils; sports activities and etc. Accommodation and meals were provided in Ugrin Paikka. In addition, some trips included a quest around Sippola village and tasting of the local products e.g. cheese. Students were excited about the educational trips to Finland and many of them have gone for several times (each time the program varies).

The researcher has taken part in most of the trips and gained a lot of practical knowledge from this experience. Generally, the organised cross-border educational trips and holiday camps, the perceptions of such trips’ service quality from the students’ point of view are examined in the paper. The aims and goals of the paper are discussed in detail in the next section.

## 1.2 Statement of purpose

The topic of my thesis is researching service quality of educational tourism to Finland. The scope of the research is restricted to school trips, school breaks travel experiences, seminars, school exchange and cooperation activities, so that university level and long-term exchange opportunities are not included into consideration. Such limitation is connected to the nature of accommodation and supervision provided for the children and teenagers, collective groups of them, while older students and adults are quite independent and are likely to engage in educational tourism on their own.

The goal of the research is to analyse the service quality of educational trips to Finland organized by different providers and define possible development opportunities. The following aims for the research are defined: to analyse existing theoretical base of educational tourism and obtain practical experience of youth travel organisation; to assess the service quality of Finnish educational tourism for Russian children; to define possible opportunities for improvement and extension of youth educational tourism in Finland.

The objectives defined in order to reach the research aims are the following: firstly, to organise an educational trip to Finland for a group of schoolchildren in order to learn through doing and get practical insight. Secondly, to develop a pilot questionnaire and conduct a survey for the trip's participants. Thirdly, to develop the main questionnaire and conduct a survey with participation of more than one hundred respondents. Fourthly, to develop practical implications from the received results.

## **2 CONCEPTUAL BASIS**

### **2.1 Educational tourism**

According to Barrows and Powers (2009, 118), “the tourism industry is the collection of productive businesses and governmental organisations that serve the traveller away from home”. Educational trips are called “familiarisation” ones in the North America (Holloway et al. 2009). The author claims that the aim of educational trips abroad has switched from being an incentive to students or workers to being one of the effective method of training and employees’ development. This result has been achieved by introducing a more careful selection process and more balanced trips’ programs.

According to McGladderly and Lubbe (2017, 319), "educational tourism is under-researched in the literature". This happens not due to the phenomenon of educational tourism not being widely introduced but due to a lack of common agreement on the theoretical basis of educational tourism. In general, the academic part of industry is underdeveloped, researches have not agreed on the scope and interpretations of the concept. Industry and economic supply of educational traveling services have been developing faster than theoretical base.

Educational tourism brings significant benefits to the participants of the formal learning process, as it: improves learning in class; enriches the classical school program; facilitates meeting with possible employers; expands the study and career perspectives seen by students (McGladderly & Lubbe 2017).

However, the topic of educational tourism has been theoretically developing throughout the last fifteen years. The two fundamental reasons for the growth of the educational tourism industry are the expansion of life-long learning trend and growing number of active, well-off retired travellers. Educational tourism is seen as having wide product development and extension opportunities, as it suits customers of all age groups, while offerings for each group are to be customized (McGladderly & Lubbe 2017, 319).

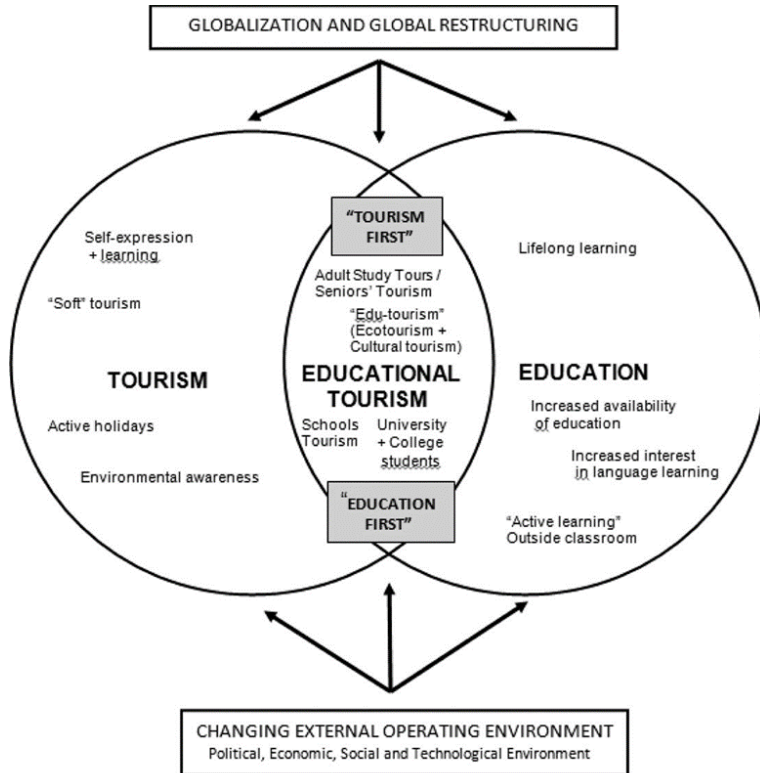
Some of the distinctive characteristics of the educational tourism compared to its other forms are the prerequisite requirements for the tourist in order to be prepared to gain adequate experience from traveling and the inductions of pre-existing and post-occurred experiences to the overall process. As a result of the last, feedback and learning outcomes analysed by the visitors are increasingly important for the effective flow of learning process while traveling (McGladderly & Lubbe 2017).

Educational tourism and international education are related subjects and a broader research of one of them results in finding some new theoretical implications for another. However, educational tourism has a very broad target group encompassing, in fact, people of all ages or occupation while international education tends to be focus around post-secondary students. Moreover, educational tourism does not only familiarise participants with intercultural atmosphere but also may potentially influence behavioural patterns of the learners (McGladderly & Lubbe 2017).

To be more concrete, three existing approaches to define educational tourism will be described. Firstly, Ritchie (2003, 22) invented a segmentation concept of educational tourism that has been the one mostly popular with the specialists. The model is shown on Figure 1. An accurate definition of educational tourism from such perspective is given by McGladderly and Lubbe (2017, 319): “travel away from one’s home, with either the primary or secondary purpose being to learn in a unique environment”.

Ritchie’s model defined the overlap between the educational and touristic aspects of educational tourism and segmented the industry into four main sectors: “edu-tourism”, retired people’s tourism, university students’ tourism and exchange programs, school tourism (McGladdery 2016). The division is based on the motivational factors to learn: first two sectors are described by the “tourism first” approach, while the following two are addressed as “education first”. Nevertheless, the model has not proved to be universal in use, as it excludes many emerging educational tourism sectors e.g. agri-tourism from consideration.

Moreover, the concept is based on more external, formal motivational factors prescribed to different age groups, while travellers may have varying individual driving forces (McGladdery 2016).

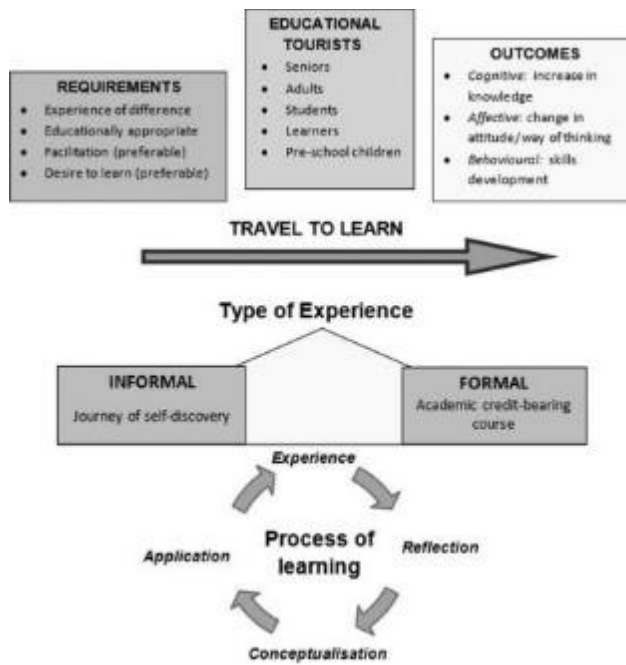


**Source:** Adapted from Ritchie (2003, p. 13)

Figure 1. "Ritchie's segmentation model of educational tourism" (McGladdery & Lubbe 2017).

Secondly, process approach to educational tourism might result in avoiding several restrictions of the segmentation approach. Pitman et al. (2010) uses the expression "non-formal" learning to define the type of learning happening within the educational travel process. According to the author, educational tourism is characterised by the travel process, which should be aimed at empirical learning and focused on a certain program of studies. If consider educational tourism from this perspective, other types of tourism e.g. creative tourism will be classified as being subdivisions of educational one. This approach is closely connected to the "Experience Economy" concept, which explains the reason for educational tourists to be exposed to original practices, not standardised ones (McGladdery & Lubbe 2017).





Source: McGladdery (2016, p. 84)

Figure 2. A process approach to educational tourism (McGladdery & Lubbe 2017).

A necessary requirement for implementation of educational travel program is tourist's willingness to learn. In case of lower self-identification as with some school children, reinforcement from the supervisors' side enhance the learning process. As shown in Figure 2, educational tourism may include either informal or formal experiences, depending on characteristics of the process. The process of learning consists of four stages: experience, application, reflection and conceptualization that constantly follow each other and create a continuous learning process during traveling.

The third approach views educational tourism as “a transformative experience”, experience with “clearly defined and measurable outcomes” (McGladdery & Lubbe 2017). The most effective experience of educational tourism is acquired through leaving the personal comfort zone (frame of reference) by means of living and functioning in a new and different from usual environment. The distinctive feature of the model proposed by the author is the requirement for an effective educational tourism practice to have well-defined goals (“outcomes”) to achieve. The aforementioned outcomes are classified in three types: knowledge-, attitude- and skill-based. Defining concrete outcomes significantly improves the results of the educational trips by creating a framework of evaluating and adjusting them.

Such a brand-new approach to defining educational tourism is useful from the methodological point of view as it provides with a core for future empirical and theoretical developments of the subject (McGladderly & Lubbe 2017).

Thus, when three approaches to the definition of educational tourism were described, for the purpose of this paper, the process approach is considered as the most relevant one. The trips discussed in the paper include both formal and informal learning types introduce certain requirements for the participants and lead to outcomes in a form of getting new knowledge and changing attitudes. However, the transformational approach would be demanding to apply for the research, as educational trips at this level does not introduce clear measurable goals and objectives, does not systematically measure the learning outcomes for each student.

Stone and Petrick (2013) claimed that research of the tourism sector often does not consider children due to various limitations e.g. legal restrictions. For instance, an interviewer or a survey organizer has to obtain a parental consent of underage students for any questioning. This research aims at fulfilling this theoretical gap and studying the preferences of underage tourists.

As far as educational tourism is yet under-researched in the literature but is highly relevant to the current educational and travel trends, international research and cooperation may be a more effective method. For instance, EUMillennialsTOUR project is an initiative of EU nations to develop “a transnational tourism product mixing together culture, education, knowledge capitalization and entrepreneurship up-skilling” (EUMillennialsTOUR 2018). Such products, educational trips, are to be intended for extending curriculum-connected learning for teenagers interested in cultural and art industries. There have already been short pilot trips to Germany, Belgium, Italy and UK developed within the project (EUMillennialsTOUR 2018).

Recently happened a shift from mass tourism with a focus on cultural sights to a creative type that aims at developing the creative skills through participation in

the processes. Today tourists prefer to be actively engaged in the process rather than passively receive information. All in all, modern tourists require their experience to be more unique and customised than before. Group tours are gaining less popularity than individual ones (de Bruin & Jelinčić 2016). Experience is a key word in highly competitive tourism industry and in line with a “creative turn” the creation of experience is now comprised by a co-creation from the customer’s side in addition to traditional business-created impressions. This is the main differentiating feature of the creative tourism compared to the traditional mass traveling according to Binkhorst (2007, 125).

Another recent concept, participatory tourism is described by extra value created exactly by active participation and impression’s co-creation from the tourist’s side. Mostly, knowledge and skills in participatory tourism are acquired through learning-by-doing and creative type of exercises. Participation in activities can be either more individual-oriented or combined with other members e.g. service providers and such is called a “shared value experience” (de Bruin & Jelinčić 2016).

The high-perceived service quality results in better satisfaction of tourists, which, in turn, affects the intention to purchase in a positive way. This statement is depicted in Figure 3. It is critical to understand the routes of customer’s intention to visit a destination for success in tourism activities (Rahman et al. 2017).



Figure 3. From service quality to intention to purchase.

Today’s popular destinations of educational tourism are Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, China and Australia. Global internationalization of university education serves as a platform for “knowledge transfer” around the world (Rahman et al. 2017).

No precise definition of the “edu-tourism” concept due to its novelty. The connection between and overlap of tourism and education is still to be researched more, especially by empirical research (Rahman et al. 2017). Existing researches have been narrowed to discussing only the adult, not youth variations of educational tourism. In addition, they limited the overview to tours, which are, in fact, extended versions of mass cultural tourism. In addition, the researches approached the development of tourism taking the perspective of host countries, not from the point of view of the customers (Ojo & Yusofu 2013).

## **2.2 Tourism in Finland**

The financial crisis of 2008 had a significant negative impact on the Finnish tourism, which resulted in a remarkable decline in the industry. However, the situation has started to improve, and the stable growth is expected in the future for the following five years due to the actors of economic growth and governmental support programs. At the same time, overall economic decline and a lower purchasing power of Finnish citizens have resulted in the rates of outbound Finnish tourism still being on a low level. The majority of tourists coming to Finland are citizens of either former Soviet Union republics or Scandinavian countries (Jakosuo 2011).

According to a research, the major factor of accommodation choice is the location rather than the facilities available at a hotel. As a result, the top hotels and tourism companies in Finland are located in the urban and developed cities, mainly, Helsinki, Espoo, Tampere, Vantaa and Turku. Recently, the number of hotels in Helsinki has significantly increased (Jakosuo 2011).

In 2009, Russia tourists formed the biggest group arriving to Finland, so that the number of overnight stays bought by them accounted up to 51 percent out of all over-night stays, while the income raised by Russian tourists contributed 31 percent to the overall income (Statistics Finland 2018). There has been no data found specifically on educational tourism to Finland.

### 2.3 Service quality

The empirical research is based on the SERVQUAL model. The concept was firstly introduced by A. Parasuraman, Valarie A. Zeithaml and Leonard L. Berry in their work called SERVQUAL: A Multiple-Item Scale for Measuring Consumer Perceptions of Service Quality. While the research was made quite long ago, either that or other works of the authors are cited in various current papers concerning the service quality, so the initial paper was studied with an assumption of it being a classic source.

The service quality is defined as the difference between consumers' perceptions of and expectations about a service. Customer expectations from the service quality perspective are defined as desires (what a firm should offer) rather than predictions (what a firm will offer), a formulation mostly used in relation to customer satisfaction (Parasuraman et al. 1988).

SERVQUAL model measures the perceived service quality, not the objective one. "Perceived quality is the consumer's judgment about an entity's overall excellence or superiority", as describes Zeithaml (1987). Therefore, it is a subjective point of view of the consumer, not an objectively assessed grade. As a result, opinions of different consumers about the same service may differ significantly (Parasuraman et al. 1988).

The perceived service quality is a form of attitude that, compared to customer satisfaction, is more generic and less restricted to one situation. While a customer may have bad attitude towards a service provider in general, they could be highly satisfied with the service of it once. As a result, two concepts are connected: several occasions of being satisfied or unsatisfied with a service over time define the general attitude towards the enterprise (Parasuraman et al. 1988).

Initially, the dimensions for the service quality measurement numbered ten but were overlapping each other. As a result of a two-staged extensive data collection

and analysis, the tool was refined, so that it includes only five well-defined dimensions now (Parasuraman et al. 1988).

The SERVQUAL is said to be the most effective tool when used in combination with some other tool for measuring service quality. For example, assessing customers' attitudes towards a retailer several times a year and combining the process with employee surveys in order to learn about the quality issues from various points of view (Parasuraman et al. 1988).

The initial application of the SERVQUAL is deriving the difference between the expectations and the perceptions of the customers in a form of average scores. The model can also provide an average score for a service taking all five dimensions together. The assumption of the customer's familiarity with the service or the company for giving adequate scores to the perceptions part is essential. Considering this, only past or current customers can take part in the survey (Parasuraman et al. 1988).

In tourism as in one of the "pure" service industries, service quality becomes a critical factor determining customer evaluations. The researches of the service quality have revealed that customers do not perceive the service in an "unidimensional", general way but rather assess "the technical outcome, the quality of interaction and the physical surroundings". The Nordic model of service quality introduced by Grönroos in 1984 classifies the quality factors into technical (outcome) and functional (process), while Rust and Oliver add to those two, called in their works as service product and service delivery, the service environment dimension (Wilson 2016).

The abovementioned research by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry introduced the five dimensions of service quality that are quite universal for different kinds of services. Therefore, the exact definitions of the dimensions from the book were included (Wilson 2016).

The first dimension, reliability, refers to "the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately". Reliability has proved to be the most significant factor among others in majority of the customer minds. Consumers want to be sure that the company delivers on its promises. In case of services for children the factor assumes to be a crucial one, as parents expect a service provider to be reliable and be good at providing the core service when dealing with their under aged children (Wilson 2016).

Secondly, responsiveness is the "willingness to help customers and provide prompt service". Customers define how responsive the service provider is by the waiting times, possibility to ask questions and are answered or assisted, service customization options, taking one's wishes and requests into consideration. Responsive firms take a customer's point of view instead of their own when facing a request (Wilson 2016).

The third dimension, assurance, may be defined as "employees' knowledge, courtesy, and the ability of the firm and its employees to inspire trust and confidence". Assurance is a more influential factor for services whose quality customers do not evaluate easily e.g. insurance. Then it would be possible to suggest that the factor is less applicable in educational tourism, as tourists tend to evaluate extensively their experience with the service providers while traveling. At the same time, assurance is about creating trust and loyalty of the customers towards the company, which is a very important factor in tourism due to intensive personal communication with the guides, teachers and organisers during the trip. The dimension is especially important if dealing with children. During my research, it was noticed that students that go regularly on trips with a certain service provider are very loyal to it and tend to take an active participative approach in, for example, answering the questionnaire concerning their summer camps (Wilson 2016).

The fourth factor, empathy, is "the caring, individualized attention that the firm provides its customers". The underlying roots of empathy are in understanding the needs of the customers even if not formulated clearly, careful listening to the

articulated requests and wishes and showing that those become important considerations for the company. If being empathic enough, small firms will get a considerable competitive advantage and create stronger customer relationships compared to the bigger market players. This helps to oppose the broader resources base available to big businesses by a more customized and personal service offering even in a B2B context. A comparison in the practical part of the research concerning the issue by comparing the perceived empathy of the bigger service provider with the smaller ones is made (Wilson 2016).

The last dimension, tangibles represents "the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, websites, mobile phone apps and communication materials". Tangibles are especially important factor for the new customers, providing them with the "first impression" of the firm or service. The dimension is known to be important in hospitality services (Wilson 2016).

According to the research, the reliability of measuring service quality using SERVQUAL is high concerning all five dimensions and numbers up to 90 percent for most of them. Only tangibles got a little lower score. The authors of the model claim that the SERVQUAL is suitable for comparing firms across the industry but might need adaptation for assessing one service, as in case of my research (Parasuraman et al. 1988).

While the SERVQUAL instrument has been widely used in different service industries for measuring service quality, it has been criticized a lot by various academic sources. The tool provides with a good starting point, a baseline, however, it should be customized for an industry or a specific service for effective assessments. The main critics are concerned with the "disconfirmation paradigm". The aforementioned Grönroos formulated three main problematic issues related to it (Wilson 2016):

Both expectations and perceptions cannot be measured at the same time, after experiencing the service, as the expectations are then influenced by the "service experience". At the same time, measuring expectations before the service



experience is neither effective, as the customer may take into consideration factors different from those he will assess afterwards in service perceptions part. For example, the comfort of traveling in a bus might not be considered by children before the trip, while it could impact their experience during and answers after the trip (Wilson 2016).

Perceptions of a service cannot be fully separated from the expectations. The customer assesses the service experience based on their prior experiences and on the assumptions about the service quality. Then, the expectations are somewhat measured twice, both in the expectations and the perceptions part, so that the gap between two is not that realistic (Wilson 2016).

The criticism of the SERVQUAL tool has led to further researches and inventing of other service quality measuring tools. Today the SERVPERF instrument, introduced by Cronin and Taylor, is one of the alternative variants used to measure customer experience without asking of their expectations. The tool is less complicated to use for a research, as well as the data from it is easily analysed. However, the instrument is yet less popular for the academic researchers compared to the well-known SERVQUAL (Wilson 2016).

Customers' expectations and perceptions of the service are influenced by the cultural dimensions of both the tourist and the destination. To be more concrete, the tourism culture is comprised out of four elements: the aforementioned national culture of the tourist and the host; the organizational culture of the tourism service provider and the tourist's subculture (Weiermair 2000).

International tourism provides a broad cross-national experience for the both sides: a customer and a service supplier. The impact of culture on the customer perceptions of tourism services has been extensively studied in different researches. The main five types of such researches are:

- Managing culture in service environment especially concerning organisational issues in globalisation conditions e.g. advertising variations.

- International marketing approach studying culture as a customer behaviour determinant.
- The corporate culture studies involving other disciplines e.g. change management.
- The structure of national culture e.g. Hofstede dimensions. However, the approach may be limited in practical implications (Weiermair 2000).

Tourism is a type of service that is perceived by a consumer as a continuous travel experience, so the components should be united into a "tourism value chain" for better analysis. That is why the overall experience of a trip is significantly important even while customer perceptions are considered using separate metrics for different aspects (Weiermair 2000).

Service quality represents the success of a company in delivering customer service by measuring customers' evaluations of the service. Companies aim at delivering better than expected service, while it is a challenging goal due to the ever-changing nature of service (Erasmus 2017).

Grönroos criticised the SERVQUAL model for disregarding technical quality of a service and measuring only the service delivery (Erasmus 2017). GAP model proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1985) investigated five gaps between the perceptions, expectations, specifications and offerings from the point of view of various participants of the service delivery process (Erasmus 2017).

According to Buttle (1996), questions in a SERVQUAL survey should be customized according to the type of a service and a target market (Erasmus 2017). Researches have shown that consumers in less developed countries are less demanding to service quality than those in developed and wealthy ones. Therefore, customer perceptions measurements made in different countries, especially in highly differentiated in economic and social development sense, are not to be generalized (Erasmus 2017).

The attribute service quality model proposed by Haywood-Farmer (1988) considers three dimensions of service quality: facilities, behaviour and professional judgement and claims that focusing only on one dimension declines quality of a service in general (Erasmus 2017). Various service quality measurement scales have been customised for e.g. food and beverage industry, retail services, but not for tourism industry yet so this is the place for further research (Erasmus 2017).

National culture affects not only the tourist traveling experience, but also the initial choice of the destinations. Destination choice is usually explained by the individual preferences and the cultural issues are ignored (Erasmus 2017).

A significant part of tourists tends to reduce risks and cultural shock by visiting only countries being similar by cultural norms to their home country (Erasmus 2017). Tourism culture is formed by two types of factors: influence from the demand (tourist's) and the supply side (Erasmus 2017).

Tourists' national and subcultures, depending on how strong their impact is, may result in evolvement of such cultures in the destinations e.g. Finnish culture in Canary Islands, snowboarders' subculture in skiing resorts (Erasmus 2017). From the supply side, the experience is influenced by the national and organisational culture of the tourism providers (Erasmus 2017).

According to the research by Weiermair and Fuchs (1999), some local products and services such as dishes, sports, landscapes, people's behaviour tend to be viewed by tourists as "authentic" and their expectations of quality, criticism of it is lower (Erasmus 2017).

While more universal dimensions such as waiting time, transport, affordability of services meet more demanding requirements of customers (Erasmus 2017). A study by Mok and Armstrong (1998) investigated whether tourists with different cultural backgrounds have similar expectations towards all SERVQUAL dimensions. The results have revealed that most of the tourists, no matter what

country they come from, are strict concerning the reliability, responsiveness and assurance service quality dimensions. The perceived importance of other two dimensions, tangibles and empathy, is dependent on the cultural background. For example, tourists from Taiwan and Japan showed the lowest rates, which was explained by national traveling habits and common character traits (Erasmus 2017).

### **3 METHODS**

#### **3.1 The method of data collection**

As was described in the conceptual basis, the topic of educational tourism has not yet been widely researched in the literature. Therefore, a short analysis of the existing theoretical findings was done, while the practical research is of high importance for this paper. Thus, the data collected, and its analysis will be a base for making practical implications concerning improvements of service quality of educational tourism in Finland.

Quantitative research method was chosen for the analysis. According to Aliaga and Gunderson (2002, cited in Muijs 2004, 1), quantitative research is “explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods”. Quantitative type of research allows to collect shorter answer variants from multiple respondents. The responses tend to be more concise and general compared to qualitative research methods.

Compared to qualitative research, the quantitative research tends to be more objective, detaching an observer from the process. At the same time, especially in social sciences, a researcher cannot be fully objective and external to the process all the time. The debate between the qualitative and quantitative methods supporters is still ongoing.

A possible option is to choose the research method based on the research questions instead of own preferences. Following types of research require

quantitative methods to be employed. Firstly, when research questions require a concrete numerical answer. In case of my research, the goal is to measure the service quality, so that both a concrete rating of it and service quality provided by each institution are going to be calculated. Secondly, alternations that are to be measures numerically are discussed in quantitative researches. If the SERVQUAL model was used for measuring service quality, quantitative study would help to measure the difference between the expectations and perceptions of customers. Thirdly, when a correlation between two or more factors is explored. Then variables help to find a connection and measure the influence numerically. Moreover, quantitative research is suitable for testing a hypothesis, situation found mostly in deductive research (Muijs 2004).

The aim of conducting the pilot and the main surveys was to collect information about customers' perceptions rather than general recommendations from the organisers e.g. teachers, educational camp workers. There has not yet been a specific SERVPERF or SERVQUAL questionnaire designed for measuring the service quality in hospitality or education connected service providers. Therefore, own interpretation of the method and a new methodological input has been used.

SERVQUAL and SERVPERF models were previously analysed and compared. The SERVPERF model has been chosen for measuring the service quality of educational trips to Finland. This instrument does not have request for expectations of customers to be well formulated before the service encounter. It is supposed that students who went on a pilot trip had different traveling experience and level of familiarity with educational tourism services. In addition, a questionnaire of SERVPERF type is supposed to be approximately two times shorter than the SERVQUAL one, which is better adapted for children's understanding.

Further, thorough attention is paid to the practical research process, as the methodological process is found to be an important part of this research together with the results and analysis of the surveys. All the questions that were included in the main SERVPERF questionnaire will be described further in detail, as well.

### 3.2 Sampling

The sampling method used in the survey requires detailed consideration. Sampling methods are distinguished into probability and non-probability (non-random) ones. Random sampling is a type of probability sampling that allows equal chance for any unit from a population to be selected (Thompson 2012). Perfectly random samples are hardly possible, especially in social sciences. Mostly, other probability sampling types e.g. cluster sampling are employed.

Non-random sampling does not allow calculating the probability of choosing a unit from a population. This type of sampling suits when only specific cases from population interest a researcher, they are “interested in the existence of a phenomenon that is not generalizable to a larger population” (Kalof & Dan 2008), so that questioning all the population would be too costly and time-consuming.

The chosen research sampling method should reflect the population of interest. In this research, the considered population is underage children, living in Russia, who have, at least, once visited Finland for travel and learning purposes with a school class, educational centre group, holiday camp organiser or a teacher, possibly on their own.

In addition, contacting the population that responds these requirements is quite demanding. Firstly, there is a legal issue: service providers contact students’ parents or guardians concerning educational trips, as they cannot officially contact underage children for promoting and selling services.

Secondly, most of the schools or educational centres do not have systemized customer base. They register tourists, provide services and afterwards do not maintain customer relationship. Sometimes, different managers are responsible for various destinations and do not coordinate customer relationship management or systemized records and marketing efforts.

Thirdly, as children should not be contacted directly by the service providers through phone or email, a way to maintain relationship and customer interest is through social media. There students may follow the public pages of schools and keep in contact with new friends from the camp on their own behalf. When researching this aspect, it was noticed that most of the educational centres have public pages, or more or less popular accounts, only on the Russian social media web-site Vkontakte. Most of the researched educational centres have groups with many participants, but inner activity and amount of feedback are not on a high level. Nordic School is an exception throughout other online pages, as it has created quite an active and loyal community online. When collecting responses for my work, their public page in Vkontakte helped me in finding many participants.

In conclusion, after considering the difficulties with finding suitable respondents, convenience sampling method was chosen for the research. Convenience sampling uses already available units. At the same time, by choosing conveniently reachable respondents, the sampling may be seen as not representing all population. For instance, opinions of students, who have been on educational trips to Finland but were not contacted by the researcher, could differ. However, at the stage of the topic being under-researched and the customer base not systemised, convenience sampling is seen as a good starting point.

### **3.3 The pilot survey**

For conducting the research, theoretical base was lacking or, at least, all the possible resources could not be found. Therefore, a better understanding of providing an educational tourism service from the practical point of view was required. Organising such a service encounter independently and receiving an immediate feedback afterwards would provide me with such an opportunity. In December 2017 a trip to Finland with seven school students was organised by the researcher. All of them were from the same School 533 situated in Saint Petersburg, Russia. We were also accompanied by two adults - mothers of some students and a five-year-old girl - one of the student's sister.

Before the trip contacting student's parents, preparing the documents and buying tickets had to be made. It was noticed that the preparatory work required significant amount of time, even when the group was quite small. The size of the group was made small intentionally, as this was my first trip as of an organiser. Usually there are up to fifteen children participating in the same kind of trips. Therefore, preparatory work should be systemized and well-organised. Supposing, it is better organised in bigger educational centres, while working with public school students individually is yet time-consuming and documents may require several alternations.

The program lasted for three days and the stay was organized at Ugrin Paikka. The schedule included visiting Finnish library in Kouvola, Maritime Centre Vellamo in Kotka, walks around the towns, visiting aqua park in Imatra, everyday English practice through group discussions, games and watching films. The topics discussed concerned Christmas and Christmas tradition in Finland, winter, personal introduction. The owner of the guesthouse was mostly following the group and working as a guide by providing historical information and more entertainment to children. Controlling the group and children's behaviour, managing the schedule and communication, organizing English classes and events was done by the researcher.

The question number seven (Appendix 1) includes a description of the theatre performance activity that students were engaged in during previous trips. Before the trip, multiple sessions were organised with children in order to prepare a theatre performance in English language of one of the English popular plays, for instance, Cinderella. Then a cooperation with local Finnish public schools, usually in Sippola and in Kouvola, was conducted, so that the play was shown to Finnish students. In addition, Russian students could attend lessons and sports breaks together with Finns during their school day, speak English with each other.

Children were motivated by and enthusiastic about spending days at Finnish schools. In the evenings, they had an organised discussion guided by the teacher



about the insights they learnt from Finnish students and differences of Russian and Finnish school educational style. For instance, they noticed the communication style, more directive in Russian schools and more student initiative based one in Finnish. Children favoured the breaks spent outside with sports games instead of their usual indoors breaks and proposed to try it when back to school in Russia. The feedback and discussion were active and engaged students in developing their analytical skills and intercultural competences.

In the analysed December trip the English performance was not included, as the researcher herself was not competent enough in preparing theatre plays and due to the Finnish Christmas break. The trip took place during the school break in Finland, so that it was not possible to perform in a Finnish school and study with locals. Instead, the program was changed to include more English lessons at the guesthouse and walks outside in the towns.

On the train back to Russia the printed pilot questionnaires were distributed to all the participants. The first questionnaire was not mostly based on a theoretical model and was made as a customer feedback form. The content and structure of the form did not have a conceptual framework but was independently made by me for the initial insights. The students were filling in the form with my guidance concerning the questions' meaning and answering possibilities. The form included various types of questions: open-ended questions, rating scale questions, Likert scale questions. While part of students were giving short written answers, others were ready to give additional feedback and were emotional telling about the trip. Then the format of feedback tended to be more in a form of structured interview. The pilot questionnaire was more effective than expected in terms of my understanding improvement concerning underage customer's perceptions of educational tourism service.

By conducting the pilot survey, several insights and methodological issues that needed a change for the main survey were learnt. Firstly, the questionnaire form should be facilitated for better understanding of questions and answer variants for children.

In the pilot version (Appendix 1), various types of questions were used and children asked me many times whether they needed to choose an option, write their own phrase or give a numerical answer. Some questions were left unanswered or were answered in a different from the purposed way. For the main survey, a systemised approach, SERVPERF, with statements formulated in a concise manner was employed.

Concerning the answers form, SERVPERF model requires a Likert scale. At the same time, scale did not prove to be the easiest answer form for children's understanding. To facilitate understanding, smiley faces were introduced, so that the answer variants are encoded in a pictured rather than wording form. The smiley faces taken are commonly used in social media. That enhanced recognition of the picture and its meaning. On the other hand, when younger students were filling in the questionnaire, they sometimes tended to choose a picture they like more. That could be one of the objectivity issues when surveying children.

Another objectivity issue was children's loyalty to the organisers and teachers. It was explained to the participants that they assess the service in general, not my only my work, in the questionnaire and that objective assessment enhances future service improvements. Nevertheless, children were willing to give better scores concerning the trip and they would be even more loyal in case of their school teacher would provide the service.

Thirdly, an objectivity should be questioned in case a survey is organised some time after the service encounter. As the questionnaire was delivered in the evening of the third day of the trip, children giving feedback have omitted some issues that they encountered during the first day, for instance. Still, conducting a survey when traveling seems to be much more effective. Afterwards, children were telling about the trip to their families, discussing with their friends and after some weeks they have remembered only good things and from a positive perspective. The pilot questionnaire was conducted during the trip, the main one

was definitely based on post-experience perceptions. Now there is no organised feedback system organised by the service providers in the end of educational trips. Mostly, responses might be collected later online through social media and not even directly from children, but from their legal representatives. As is shown by the experiential trip, the feedback should be collected right in the end of the trip or after it.

### **3.4 The main survey**

After conducting a post-travel feedback survey, a broader survey based on a thorough theoretical concept was developed. With a help of the survey, the quality of educational tourism services provided in Finland was measured. The survey was supposed to provide a more technical and measurable overview of the customer perceptions. In the first survey students were quite confused by the scales formulated by words e.g. “rather, not” phrases. In order to facilitate understanding, smiley faces usually used in social media were taken to accompany the wordings in the questionnaire. Feedback from respondents has shown that pictures were easy to understand and encouraged children to fill in the form. An issue with the new form concerned the children’s desire to choose happier smiles due to their preference without direct connection to the form statements.

The initial process of information collection started from contacting various service providers and asking them whether systemised surveys had been previously conducted concerning the students’ feedback after the educational trips or holidays in Finland. The companies were asked whether they would like to give their customers an opportunity to take part in the survey, afterwards the results to be given to them for internal analysis. Several educational trips operators were in favour, while others did not reply to the request online or did not want to participate.

Ugrin Paikka has been collecting feedback from their customers through hotel booking websites systematically, but no surveys were connected specifically to

the students' trips from School 533 and their learning experience. Paper versions of the questionnaire were handed to those students at school 533 who had previously participated in trips to Finland staying at Ugrin Paikka. In addition to them, several students who claimed that they have been to Finnish educational camps or trips were with other service providers have been surveyed.

Afterwards, Nordic School, located in Saint Petersburg, one of the main providers of Finnish holiday camps organised for school students with a focus on learning English was contacted. The school has a wide network of customers, also active online, that have been giving feedback and communicating with each other after traveling to Finland during school holidays. Communication with the students makes an impression that customers tend to be rather loyal and supportive towards the School and go on several trips every year.

The survey was conducted in Russian, and later the questions and results were translated to English. While constructing the survey, a rating scale that "is represented by a set of ordered-category statements that express attitude, satisfaction, or perception about something" was employed (Dimitrov 2014). Statements in a survey are called "scale items" and a respondent is to evaluate each one by selecting a category label corresponding their level of e.g. expectations or perceptions. Every category label corresponds a numeric value. The questionnaire translated to English is attached in Appendix 2.

The first dimension measured in the survey was tangibles. Tangibles include the physical environment of service provision, design, furniture, personnel etc. The five following questions were formulated in order to measure the perceptions of students:

1. I liked the accommodation conditions.
2. It was convenient and comfortable to travel by bus.
3. Meals were delicious and varied.
4. Trips (e.g. to museums and the waterpark) were entertaining and informative.
5. I think that the price of the trip was justified.

It was intended to measure the perceptions of accommodation, meals, transport and entertainment in general. In addition, the price-performance ration question was included. Surprisingly, many students have payed attention to the price issue in general and wanted a more affordable option.

The second dimension, “Reliability”, measures if service providers could deliver the promised service to a full extent and on time. The questions formulated for this section were:

1. Events during the trip began on time, according to the timetable.
2. I was always looked after, I was not allowed to walk on my own outside and in towns.
3. I was not worried during the trip, I could rely on the organizers.
4. I lost my belongings or bags while traveling (reverse scale).
5. I was accidentally left by the group in a public place (reverse scale).

The fourth and the fifth questions were with the reverse ordering of the items, meaning that the answer “Not at all!” brought five points, when the option “Exactly” acquired only one point. Questions of this section concerned following the timetable, control of the group members and their belongings, feeling of trust and reliability by the customers.

The third dimension, responsiveness, was introduced to assess the willingness of the organisers to respond to customer inquiries and needs, how quickly and efficiently they addressed those requests.

1. I quickly got help if I had difficulties.
2. When I asked for, the organizers could promptly get in touch with my parents or relatives.
3. I could always ask the English teacher a question.
4. The guide (or the organizer) answered the questions concerning the plan of the trip and information about the visited sites.
5. The organizers took into consideration my adequate wishes during the trip when possible (e.g. to visit a shop, to organize a quiz).

I was aiming to know whether children always had a possibility to ask, during trips and lessons; whether students were helped and could contact their family when

they faced difficulties. The latter question concerned attention of the organisers paid to the proposals and wishes of students as to events and activities.

The fourth dimension, assurance, included statements to measure customers' confidence about the organisers and their skills, knowledge.

1. The English teachers were fluent in English language.
2. The guide knew various facts about the visited sites.
3. English language classes were effective and interesting.
4. The organizers oriented well in the towns, public transport timetables.
5. The organizers confidently helped during the border and customs checks, knew the documents issues and rules well.

Language learning was an important part of the educational trips, therefore two questions corresponded English learning: perceived lecturer's knowledge and the English classes. As travel is connected with following various routes and timetables, children were asked whether they were confident about the organiser's ability to orient and follow the planned time frames.

The fifth dimension, empathy, deals with perceived support and concern provided to the students.

1. If having conflicts with my peers, I was not unreasonably scolded by the organizers, instead, they listened to me and helped to solve the dispute.
2. The organizers amused me or talked with me when I was bored.
3. I was promptly helped and cared about if I felt bad.
4. I was not unreasonably scolded or criticized, but was calmly reproached or praised depending on my behaviour.
5. The organizers treated me with friendliness and empathy.

Statement in this section were about the feelings of customers concerning their relationship with organisers, attitude and behaviour in conflict situations.

The following two applications of the SERVQUAL model were used for the results analysis. Firstly, separate scores for every service quality dimension and all of them together were analysed. The second application of the model will be the comparison of the service providers. In my case, it is comparison mostly of the

trips organised by the School № 533 and the Nordic school, elaborating on the factors that influenced the difference in scores. As a result of these two applications, it is expected to acquire knowledge about the aspects of educational tourism to Finland that need attention and assume the ways to improve those issues.

## 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Empirical research and the pilot questionnaire

To begin with, the results of the pilot survey in this section will be discussed and explained, starting from general facts about the respondents who took part in the pilot questionnaire. Participants of the trip included seven children and two of their parents, one child aged five, who has not participated in the survey as she does not read or write. Therefore, there were nine respondents, seven of them female and two male (Table 1). Majority of students were ten years old and one of them – nine (Table 2).

Table 1. Gender of respondents (pilot survey).

| Gender        |           |         |
|---------------|-----------|---------|
|               | Frequency | Percent |
| <b>Male</b>   | 2         | 22,2    |
| <b>Female</b> | 7         | 77,8    |
| <b>Total</b>  | 9         | 100,0   |

Table 2. Age of respondents (pilot survey).

| <b>Age</b>            |  | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|-----------------------|--|------------------|----------------|
| <b>9</b>              |  | 1                | 11,1           |
| <b>10</b>             |  | 6                | 66,7           |
| <b>40</b>             |  | 1                | 11,1           |
| <b>Total</b>          |  | 8                | 88,9           |
| <b>Missing System</b> |  | 1                | 11,1           |
| <b>Total</b>          |  | 9                | 100,0          |

In addition, the participants were asked about their previous experience of going abroad and traveling alone with a camp or a school group independently of their parents. Most of students had been abroad before (Table 3) and all of them had gone on a trip independently of their parents (Table 4). My assumption was that children with previous traveling experience would be more confident and require less support from the organisers during the trip. Concerning the English learning experience, respondents have studied it for different amount of years ranging from two to five years (Table 5).

Table 3. Respondents' experience of traveling abroad.

**Abroad for the first time**

|              | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|--------------|------------------|----------------|
| <b>Yes</b>   | 2                | 22,2           |
| <b>No</b>    | 7                | 77,8           |
| <b>Total</b> | 9                | 100,0          |

Table 4. Respondents' experience of traveling without parents.

**Have you been to a trip or a camp without your parents before?**

|            | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|------------|------------------|----------------|
| <b>Yes</b> | 9                | 100,0          |



Table 5. Amount of years respondents have studied English.

**Years of studying English**

|              | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|-----------|---------|
| <b>2</b>     | 2         | 22,2    |
| <b>3</b>     | 4         | 44,4    |
| <b>5</b>     | 3         | 33,3    |
| <b>Total</b> | 9         | 100,0   |

After mentioning general information about the respondents, analyse the responses to the questions of the main part of the survey will be analysed. Most of the students liked the trip a lot or quite a lot, as shown by the scores of five or four out of five maximum (Figure 4). This question was included mostly for a general assessment of my organisational work and provided facilities.

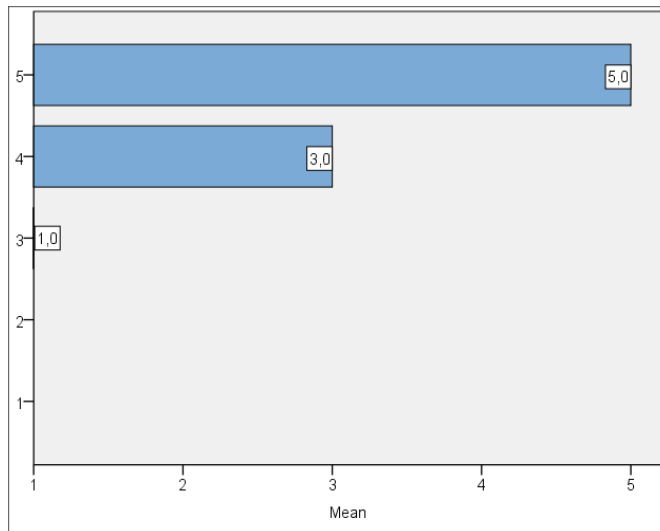


Figure 4. Answers to Question 1: "Did you like the trip? Rate from 1 to 5". From SPSS.

Regarding the reasons of going on a trip, majority have chosen communication as the main motivator. Experiential learning and traveling to Finland were popular reasons, as well. Almost half of respondents wished to have rest while engaging in educational travel (Table 6).

Table 6. Answers to Question 2: "Choose the main reasons why you wanted to go" From SPSS.

|                                                                            | Responses | Percent of  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
|                                                                            | N         | Cases (n=9) |
| <b>Communication</b>                                                       | 8         | 88,9%       |
| <b>Learning new things:<br/>English language,<br/>museums, sightseeing</b> | 7         | 77,8%       |
| <b>Visiting Finland</b>                                                    | 6         | 66,7%       |
| <b>Rest and entertainment</b>                                              | 4         | 44,4%       |
| <b>Other</b>                                                               | 1         | 11,1%       |
| <b>Total</b>                                                               | 26        | 288,9%      |

Respondents mentioned different issues that were most favourable for them during the trip. They were varying much and the more frequent preferences were communication, food, different kinds of entertaining activities (Table 7).

Table 7. Answers to Question 3: "What you liked most about the trip?" From SPSS.

**What did you like most about the trip?**

|                                    | Frequency | Percent |
|------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
|                                    | 1         | 11,1    |
| <b>Aquapark, friends</b>           | 1         | 11,1    |
| <b>Communication</b>               | 1         | 11,1    |
| <b>Communication, food</b>         | 1         | 11,1    |
| <b>Entertainment</b>               | 1         | 11,1    |
| <b>Food</b>                        | 1         | 11,1    |
| <b>Many things</b>                 | 1         | 11,1    |
| <b>The organiser</b>               | 1         | 11,1    |
| <b>Walks, excursions,<br/>food</b> | 1         | 11,1    |
| <b>Total</b>                       | 9         | 100,0   |

At the same time, about one third of respondents mentioned communication as a difficulty faced during the trip, meaning that communication was both motivating and demanding for the students. Another third of participants claimed there were no significant challenges faced while traveling. In addition, some children were feeling either sick or bored at some point during the trip (Table 8).

Table 8. Answers to Question 4: "Did you have to overcome difficulties?" From SPSS.

|                                                           | Responses | Percent of Cases (n=9) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------------------|
|                                                           | N         |                        |
| <b>No. I did not face challenges during the trip</b>      | 3         | 33,3%                  |
| <b>Difficulties in communication with other students</b>  | 3         | 33,3%                  |
| <b>Feeling sick</b>                                       | 2         | 22,2%                  |
| <b>Boredom</b>                                            | 2         | 22,2%                  |
| <b>Getting up early, following the timetable</b>          | 1         | 11,1%                  |
| <b>Necessity to clean after myself and maintain order</b> | 1         | 11,1%                  |
| <b>Food and accomodation</b>                              | 1         | 11,1%                  |
| <b>Total</b>                                              | 13        | 144,4%                 |

As stated in the answers to the fifth question, in order to improve the trip and compensate the challenges faced, participants required more affordable transport, more communication with foreigners. Two out of nine respondents did not see any improvements to be made in the trip (Table 9).

Table 9. Answers to Question 5: "What would you like to improve in the trip?" From SPSS.

**What would you like to improve in the trip?**

|                                                               | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
|                                                               | 1         | 11,1    |
| <b>Compulsory to meet with Finns</b>                          | 1         | 11,1    |
| <b>I liked everything</b>                                     | 1         | 11,1    |
| <b>More communication with peers from the foreign country</b> | 1         | 11,1    |
| <b>More tasty food, more free time, sleep time from 1 am</b>  | 1         | 11,1    |
| <b>Nothing</b>                                                | 1         | 11,1    |
| <b>The bus was expensive</b>                                  | 2         | 22,2    |
| <b>To be outside, go for walks more</b>                       | 1         | 11,1    |
| <b>Total</b>                                                  | 9         | 100,0   |

The sixth question was repeating the wording of the third question; however, multiple choice variants were available instead of an open-ended version. The question was repeated in order to verify that respondents answered thoughtfully, so that answers are quite similar ones for both questions. All the respondents enjoyed walks outside and six out of nine – the waterpark visit. Communication and spending time independently, English lessons were favourable to around a half of respondents (Table 10). Generally, the responses were quite similar to the third question's responses, as travellers mentioned communication and entertainment. However, they did not specify in the open-ended question what kind of activities they preferred most. This could happen due to children's psychological patterns of perceiving an experience as a whole rather than in parts.

Table 10. Answers to Question 6: "What you liked most about the trip?" From SPSS.

|                                             | Responses | Percent of Cases (n=9) |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------|------------------------|
|                                             | N         |                        |
| <b>Visiting the water park</b>              | 6         | 66,7%                  |
| <b>Walks outside</b>                        | 6         | 66,7%                  |
| <b>Communicating with peers</b>             | 4         | 44,4%                  |
| <b>Free time</b>                            | 4         | 44,4%                  |
| <b>Group exercises and games in English</b> | 3         | 33,3%                  |
| <b>Walks outside</b>                        | 3         | 33,3%                  |
| <b>Visiting towns</b>                       | 1         | 11,1%                  |
| <b>Visiting the museum</b>                  | 1         | 11,1%                  |
| <b>Total</b>                                | 28        | 311,1%                 |

Table 11 represents the attitude of students towards possible participation in an English theatre performance and further meeting with Finnish students. All of the respondents would like to participate in this educational activity. More respondents marked interest in communication with Finns as a prevailing one, rather than interest in acting in a performance (Table 11).

Table 11. Answers to Question 7: "During the previous trips children took part in staging a performance in English and performed it in front of the Finnish students at local schools, spent time with them. Would you like to take part in such activities?" From SPSS.

|                                                                                        | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| <b>Yes, great!</b>                                                                     | 5         | 55,6    |
| <b>Yes, I would like to perform and take part in theatre performances</b>              | 1         | 11,1    |
| <b>Yes, I am very interested in meeting Finnish students and visiting their school</b> | 3         | 33,3    |
| <b>Total</b>                                                                           | 9         | 100,0   |

Majority of trip participants would go on the same trip one more time (Table 12). One of the respondents, who was an adult, claimed otherwise and named the reason to be a high price of the trip.

Table 12. Answers to Question 8: "Would you go on a similar trip one more time?" From SPSS.

**Would you go on a similar trip one more time?**

|              | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|-----------|---------|
| <b>Yes</b>   | 8         | 88,9    |
| <b>No</b>    | 1         | 11,1    |
| <b>Total</b> | 9         | 100,0   |

The question about learning new things while traveling included a possibility to choose multiple answers, so nine respondents have chosen sixteen variants from the list. One respondent did not feel as if they learnt anything new. All others claimed they have acquired new knowledge, mostly, information about new places. English words and being self-organised were named as other important outcomes (Table 13).

Table 13. Answers to Question 9: "Have you learnt new things during the trip?" From SPSS.

|                                                                                        | Respon<br>ses | Percent<br>of<br>Cases<br>(n=9) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------|
|                                                                                        | N             |                                 |
| Yes, I saw new places and followed the guided tours                                    | 7             | 77,8%                           |
| Yes, I learnt new English words and actively participated in exercises                 | 4             | 44,4%                           |
| Yes, I learnt to be more independent and organised                                     | 3             | 33,3%                           |
| No, I have not learnt anything new and have not seen anything interesting              | 1             | 11,1%                           |
| Yes, I learnt new things about traditions of celebrating Christmas and New Year abroad | 1             | 11,1%                           |
| <b>Total</b>                                                                           | 16            | 177,8%                          |

A more detailed assessment of the perceptions of acquired English language skills showed that four out of nine respondents claimed that they had learnt much and three of them – sufficiently. One student who was not very engaged in discussions and English activities described her new acquired knowledge as very little (Table 14).

Table 14. Answers to Question 10: "Have you learnt new things during the trip?" From SPSS.

**Have you gained new knowledge of English language, practised your skills?**

|                       | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------------|-----------|---------|
| <b>Very little</b>    | 1         | 11,1    |
| <b>Sufficiently</b>   | 3         | 33,3    |
| <b>Much</b>           | 4         | 44,4    |
| <b>Total</b>          | 8         | 88,9    |
| <b>Missing System</b> | 1         | 11,1    |
| <b>Total</b>          | 9         | 100,0   |

The next two questions dealt with general motivation and interest in learning English language. Three out of nine students have missed the twelfth question. Supposedly, they did it unintentionally but due to the unclear structure in that part of the questionnaire. The structure and the type of questions for the main survey were changed. Most of the students assessed their interest towards learning English as four out of five points (Table 15). The numbers in the table represent

the score given by students towards their interest in learning English with five points as a maximum. Popularity of various English learning methods was distributed almost equally between all of them (Table 16).

Table 15. Answers to Question 12, part 1: "Are you interested in learning English language?" Rate from 1 to 5. From SPSS.

**Are you interested in learning English language?**

|                       | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------------|-----------|---------|
| 3                     | 1         | 11,1    |
| 4                     | 4         | 44,4    |
| 5                     | 1         | 11,1    |
| <b>Total</b>          | 6         | 66,7    |
| <b>Missing System</b> | 3         | 33,3    |
| <b>Total</b>          | 9         | 100,0   |

Table 16. Answers to Question 12, part 2: "Underline the methods that you prefer mostly". From SPSS.

**Underline the methods of learning English that you prefer mostly.**

|                                  | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| <b>Courses</b>                   | 2         | 22,2    |
| <b>Individually with a tutor</b> | 1         | 11,1    |
| <b>With parents</b>              | 2         | 22,2    |
| <b>Through group games</b>       | 2         | 22,2    |
| <b>While traveling</b>           | 2         | 22,2    |
| <b>Total</b>                     | 9         | 100,0   |

The last question concerned the motivational factors for the respondents' English learning. All the respondents have admitted their need to learn the language and the most frequent factor they chose to explain it was future ability to communicate with foreigners, understand foreign art and literature. Otherwise, future studies and work, willingness to cope with the foreign language during travel were frequently mentioned reasons (Table 17).

Table 17. Answers to Question 13: "Do you think that learning English is important for you?" From SPSS.

|                                                                                            | Responses | Percent of  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
|                                                                                            | N         | Cases (n=9) |
| <b>Yes. I want to communicate with foreigners and/or understand foreign films, books</b>   | 5         | 55,6%       |
| <b>Yes. I will need it in further studies and future job</b>                               | 4         | 44,4%       |
| <b>Yes. I often travel/want to travel in the future and need to communicate in English</b> | 4         | 44,4%       |
| <b>Total</b>                                                                               | 13        | 144,4%      |

#### 4.2 The main survey

The main survey was created based on the SERVPERF model and implications after conducting the pilot survey. The changes were described previously. After collecting 62 responses through Google Forms and 42 through paper copies - 104 responses in total, the data was analysed using SPSS. SPSS is the most common software for statistical analysis, widely used in universities and does not limit the analytical instruments as e.g. Excel (Muijs 2004).

As shown in the Table 19, 64,42 percent of respondents, 67 people, were female and 35,58 percent, 37 people, were male (Table 18). The distribution of respondents by gender was quite unequal. Girls were more active and willing to participate rather than boys. When males were asked to respond to the questionnaire in order to balance the number of respondents by gender, more boys were ignoring the messages compared with girls.



Table 18. Respondents by gender (percentage). From SPSS.

|               | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------|-----------|---------|
| <b>Male</b>   | 37        | 35,6    |
| <b>Female</b> | 67        | 64,4    |
| <b>Total</b>  | 104       | 100,0   |

The age of respondents was varying from eight to seventeen years old (Table 19). The survey mostly included children of school age, as writing and English skills are usually not well developed before the school age of seven years old. In most of Russian schools English is now taught from the second grade, when students are aged eights. Therefore, no seven-years-olds were participating in the survey. While conducting the research, it was noticed that there were many respondents aged eighteen, but, in fact, they were already adults according to the Russian law. All responses of students above the age of seventeen were removed from the sample, as those tourists do not require legal consent of their parents for traveling abroad and service providers do not organise camps for adults. Educational trips may be organised for adults and university students, but those services differ from the ones provided to underage and form a different segment of educational trips to Finland.

Table 19. Respondents by age. From SPSS.

|              | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|-----------|---------|
| <b>8</b>     | 2         | 1,9     |
| <b>9</b>     | 12        | 11,5    |
| <b>10</b>    | 28        | 26,9    |
| <b>11</b>    | 7         | 6,7     |
| <b>12</b>    | 1         | 1,0     |
| <b>13</b>    | 5         | 4,8     |
| <b>14</b>    | 14        | 13,5    |
| <b>15</b>    | 12        | 11,5    |
| <b>16</b>    | 13        | 12,5    |
| <b>17</b>    | 10        | 9,6     |
| <b>Total</b> | 104       | 100,0   |

About 90 percent of respondents had been abroad before they went on the educational trip (Table 20) and more than 75 percent had gone to holiday camps or trips without their parents (Table 21). Therefore, the respondents mostly had

experience of traveling abroad and independently and could compare their experiences better.

Table 20. Answers to the question "Are you abroad for the first time?" From SPSS.

|              | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|-----------|---------|
| <b>Yes</b>   | 10        | 9,6     |
| <b>No</b>    | 94        | 90,4    |
| <b>Total</b> | 104       | 100,0   |

Table 21. Answers to the question "Have you been to a trip or a camp without your parents before?" From SPSS.

**Have you been to a trip or a  
camp without your parents  
before?**

|              | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|-----------|---------|
| <b>Yes</b>   | 79        | 76,0    |
| <b>No</b>    | 25        | 24,0    |
| <b>Total</b> | 104       | 100,0   |

Students had different experience with English language studies ranging from one to fourteen years (Table 22). Therefore, it is assumed that the level of English skills was different for each student. In educational camps there usually are groups for different level of language skills command.

Table 22. Answers to the question “How many years have you been studying English?” From SPSS.

**Years of studying English**

|              | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|--------------|------------------|----------------|
| <b>1</b>     | 1                | 1,0            |
| <b>2</b>     | 10               | 9,6            |
| <b>3</b>     | 23               | 22,1           |
| <b>4</b>     | 13               | 12,5           |
| <b>5</b>     | 7                | 6,7            |
| <b>6</b>     | 7                | 6,7            |
| <b>7</b>     | 8                | 7,7            |
| <b>8</b>     | 6                | 5,8            |
| <b>9</b>     | 6                | 5,8            |
| <b>10</b>    | 12               | 11,5           |
| <b>11</b>    | 7                | 6,7            |
| <b>12</b>    | 2                | 1,9            |
| <b>13</b>    | 1                | 1,0            |
| <b>14</b>    | 1                | 1,0            |
| <b>Total</b> | 104              | 100,0          |

The following question regarding the school or educational centre that has organised the trip in question enabled to sort the results later on according to that institution and compare the scores. The main service providers whose service was assessed by the participants were School 533 and Nordic School, as thirty or more respondents out of 104 were on a trip with each of those providers (Table 23). Other schools' services were not assessed by many students, so the result for those service providers is not generalizable when comprised only on one or a couple of responses.

Table 23. Answers to the question “What school/educational centre was the trip's organizer?” From SPSS.

## School or educational center

|                                                    | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| <b>Total</b>                                       | 104       | 100,0   |
| <b>School 533</b>                                  | 34        | 32,7    |
| <b>Nordic School</b>                               | 30        | 28,8    |
| <b>On their own</b>                                | 13        | 12,5    |
| <b>School 152</b>                                  | 4         | 3,8     |
| <b>Aurinko Camp</b>                                | 3         | 2,9     |
| <b>School</b>                                      | 2         | 1,9     |
| <b>School 168</b>                                  | 2         | 1,9     |
| <b>British English studio of foreign languages</b> | 1         | 1,0     |
| <b>Educational camp 12</b>                         | 1         | 1,0     |
| <b>ISE Yakutsk</b>                                 | 1         | 1,0     |
| <b>MAOU "Gymnasium" (Reutov)</b>                   | 1         | 1,0     |
| <b>School 1571</b>                                 | 1         | 1,0     |
| <b>School 454 (Kolpino)</b>                        | 1         | 1,0     |
| <b>School 470</b>                                  | 1         | 1,0     |
| <b>School 492</b>                                  | 1         | 1,0     |
| <b>School 518</b>                                  | 1         | 1,0     |
| <b>School 567</b>                                  | 1         | 1,0     |
| <b>School 639</b>                                  | 1         | 1,0     |
| <b>School 652</b>                                  | 1         | 1,0     |
| <b>School 677</b>                                  | 1         | 1,0     |
| <b>Sports camp</b>                                 | 1         | 1,0     |
| <b>Sports school</b>                               | 1         | 1,0     |
| <b>With an English tutor</b>                       | 1         | 1,0     |

The mean calculation was employed to derive an average score for each statement referring to all of five dimensions. The results for the first dimension are shown in Figure 5. Level of entertainment and information gained received the highest score 4,6. Children enjoyed visiting museums, waterparks and entertainment destinations. The result may be seen as predictable, as underage students were giving positive feedback about the trip when meeting their parents and mostly mentioned various trips.

The ratings for accommodation and nutrition were high, as well, 4,5 and 4,3 respectively. In comparison with other factors, transportation and the price-quality ratio were given comparatively lower scores.

The service providers were asked about the means of transport provided during the trips before conducting the survey. Every provider plans a trip with different means of transport employed. Even if a provider transports customers by e.g. bus, mostly, different transport companies provide services, so that the timetables and transportation conditions differ. In the questionnaire, the word “bus” was used, as it was the most popular mean of transport used. Only some educational centres and schools travelled by Allegro train due to price and location flexibility matters.

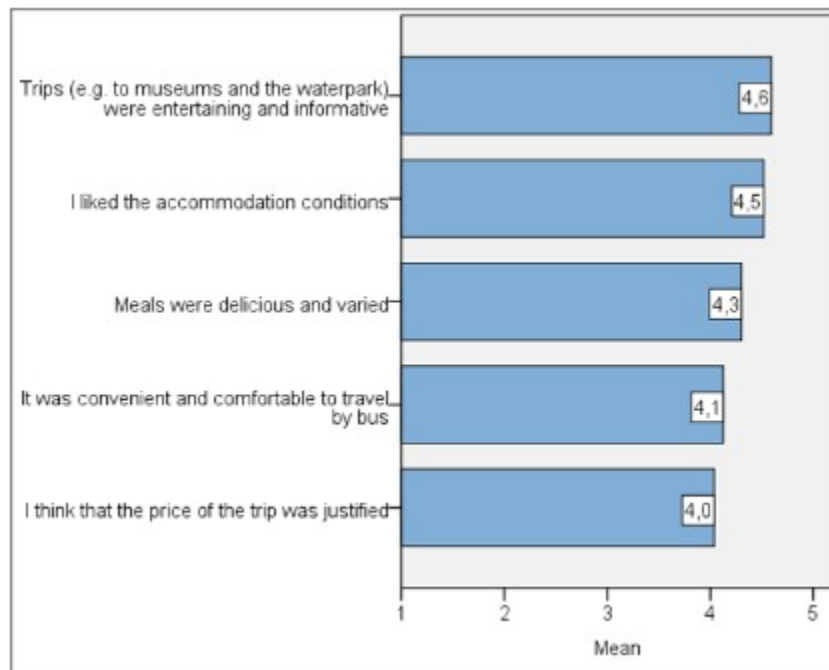


Figure 5. Tangibles. From SPSS.

Figure 6 depicts the score for the second SERVPERF dimension, reliability. Questions concerning being left by a group or loss of belongings had reverse scales, meaning that the high scores for those statements reveal students traveling without getting lost or losing belongings.

Mostly, the respondents have never been left aside the group outside accommodation – score is 4,8. In addition, personal belongings were not usually left during travel, which is shown by the score of 4,6. The dimensions are seen as being of high importance, as underage children do not have legal right and often

skills to follow the group on their own, without any external control. Travel abroad for underage children without parents requires Russian citizens to sign an agreement that makes the group guide legally responsible for children's life and wellbeing. Therefore, leaving children alone in public places is inappropriate and has to be eliminated.

Reliability of the organizer and following timetables received lower scores than other statements. Following timetables in trips may be challenging from time to time due to behaviour of students, queuing, transport etc. The statement with the lowest scored compared to other ones concerned students being alone for walks outside. The age of participants should be taken into consideration, as part of them were teenagers, aged 13-17, who could spend some time walking on their own. Still, students should always be accessible through mobile, walk mostly in groups and follow the agreed timetables, especially due to legal reasons. However, younger children cannot be left alone outside, as they might lose their way or get distracted easily, which was noticed a lot during trips with students aged 9-10 years old.

Figure 7 shows the diagram for the third dimension, responsiveness. According to the students' perceptions, the organisers did not take enough into consideration their proposals regarding time spending and events organisation (score of 3,9). The score regarding this statement was lower than for any other in the questionnaire. Other statements gained quite similar scores of 4,4 or 4,5. Still, organisers need to be more responsive towards the customers' needs and be quick in helping children with arising difficulties.

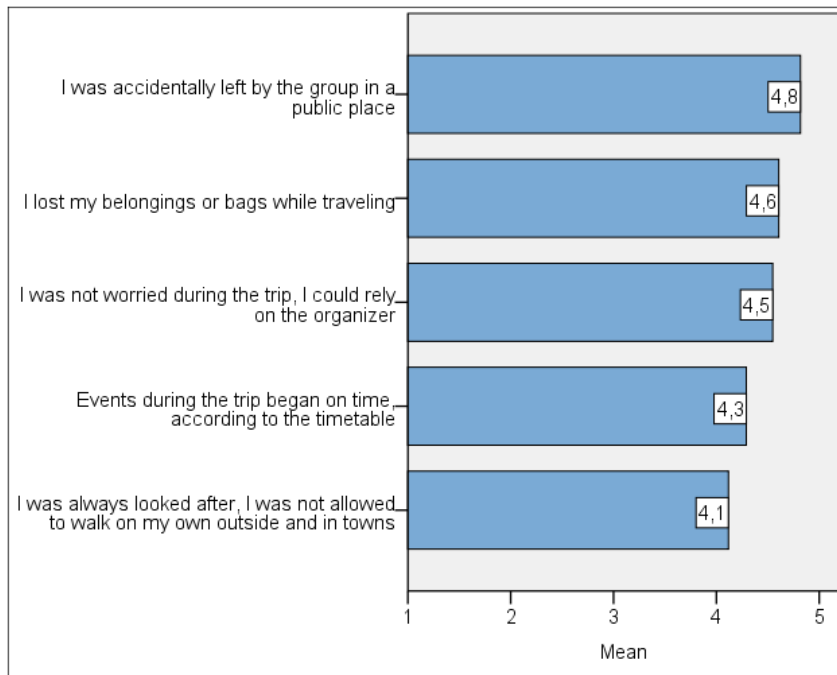


Figure 6. Reliability. From SPSS.

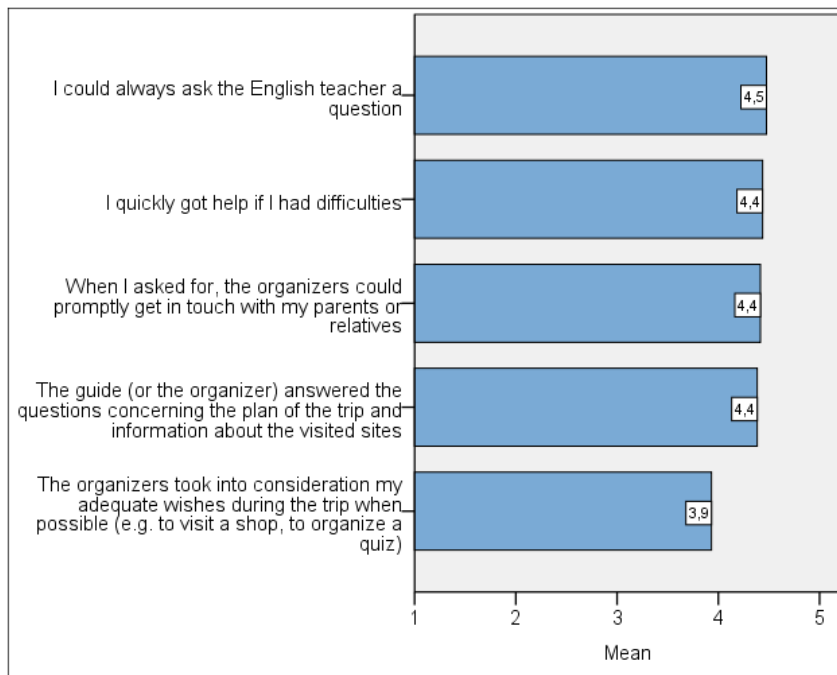


Figure 7. Responsiveness. From SPSS.

The analysis of the fourth dimension, assurance, depicts that travellers were relatively sure in the teachers' language skills and ability to guide through border checks and customs procedures (Figure 8). While students were sure in the teachers' knowledge, they were not always satisfied by the effective and

interesting flow of the English classes, as shown by 4,3 score of the respective statement.

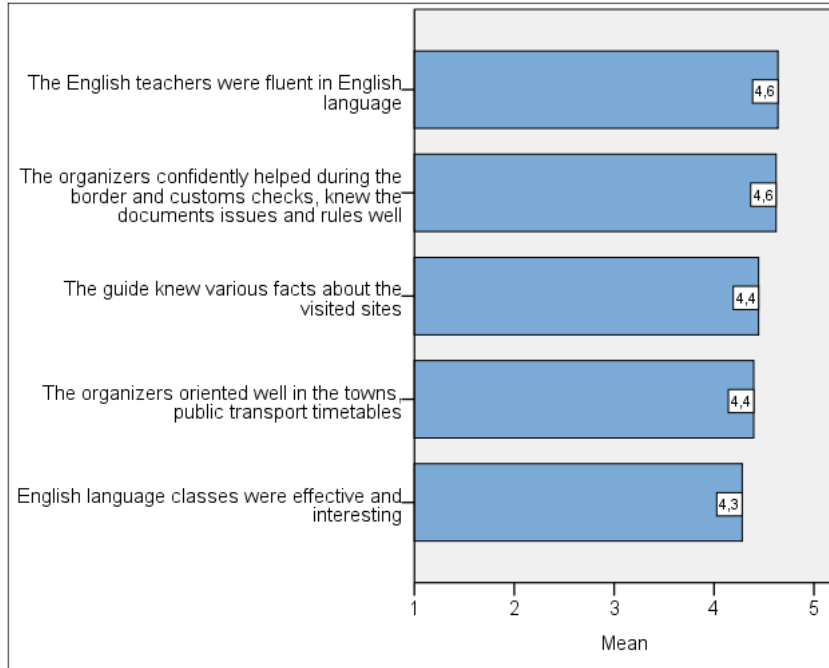


Figure 8. Assurance. From SPSS.

Figure 9 depicts the result for the fifth dimension, empathy. Friendly attitude of the organisers gained a high score of 4,7, meaning that people engaged in the organisational process were involved in the communication with students and had the right approach to their work. Mostly, the ability of the organisers to help in a case of sickness was on a good level (4,5), although this issue should be developed to the highest degree due to its importance when traveling with underage people.

Before the survey, it had been assumed that scolding perceived as unreasonable would be mentioned by the children as a frequent case. However, the statement gained quite a good score of 4,5 showing that organisers and students understood each other's opinions and a need to follow common rules quite well. Nevertheless, when having a conflict with peers, student often perceived organiser's criticism as dishonest and not approaching the situation from the right side. Some respondents have noted that there were no conflicts during the stay, while others gave quite a low score for the statement. Therefore, the best option is to maintain a friendly atmosphere during travel and try to avoid conflicts. In



case they do arise, organisers should pay more attention to listening to different opinions and being empathic to children.

The lowest score gained the statement about organisers' communication with children in case they felt bored (4,1). Therefore, respondents were not entertained or spoke with at any time they were bored. However, as I have learnt from the experiential trip, children might feel bored even taking part in a sports game in case they do not prefer actively engaging in the activity. In addition, travellers should have some time reserved for being on their own or with friends and choosing their activity independently. Thus, boredom may arise during organised events or when not organising own free time in the best way, however, the issue is quite normal. Organisers still should put more effort in communicating with children who prefer not to be alone or do not organise themselves properly.

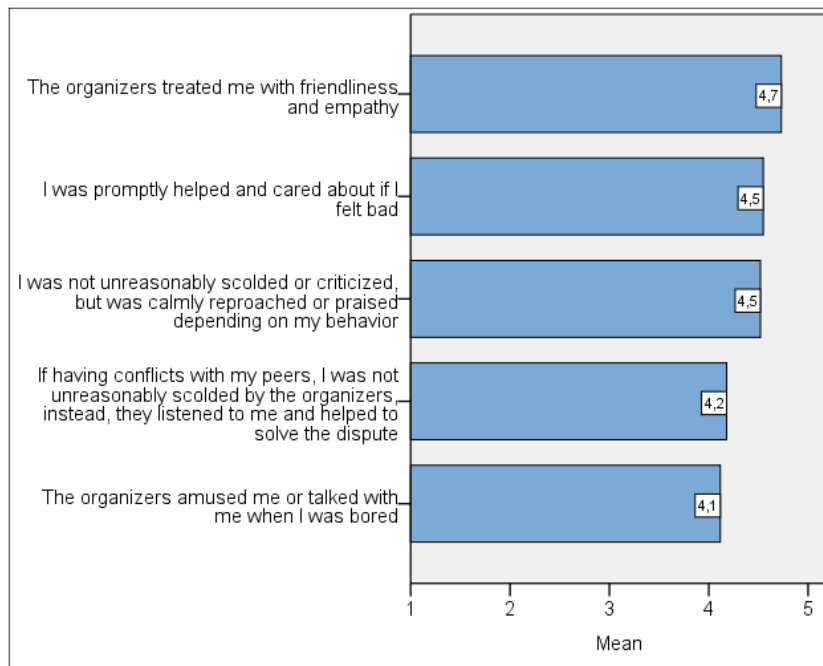


Figure 9. Empathy. From SPSS.

The overall scores for each of the dimension are shown in the Table 24.

Reliability and assurance received the highest scores out of the five dimensions. Empathy was placed in the middle. Then the tangibles and responsiveness followed meaning that those two dimensions require improvements the most.

Table 24. SERVPERF scores by dimension. From SPSS.

|             | Tangibles | Reliability | Responsiveness | Assurance | Empathy |
|-------------|-----------|-------------|----------------|-----------|---------|
| <b>Mean</b> | 4,3208    | 4,4745      | 4,3248         | 4,4733    | 4,4121  |

Calculated from the dimension's scores, the total score amounted for 4,4011.

Therefore, the service quality of trips assessed by the respondents was generally high, almost 4,5 out of 5 maximum possible score.

Further, the scores gained by each educational centre and school for each dimension were analysed. Table 25 below will be useful for the service providers in order to see their advantages and disadvantages, possibly improve the service quality. Nevertheless, the reliability of the provided data may be questioned by the fact that different number of students were assessing each institution. For instance, many respondents have been on trips with School 533 and Nordic School, around three to four with Aurinko Camp and School 152, while many of other public schools were assessed only by one respondent.

Table 25. Dimension scores by service provider. From SPSS.

|                                                    | Tangibles | Reliability | Responsiveness | Assurance | Empathy |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|----------------|-----------|---------|
| <b>Aurinko Camp</b>                                | 4,27      | 4,20        | 4,00           | 4,47      | 3,80    |
| <b>British English studio of foreign languages</b> | 4,40      | 4,00        | 4,20           | 3,40      | 5,00    |
| <b>Educational camp 12</b>                         | 4,60      | 4,20        | 4,40           | 5,00      | 4,40    |
| <b>ISE Yakutsk</b>                                 | 4,60      | 4,20        | 3,80           | 4,20      | 4,60    |
| <b>MAOU "Gymnasium" (Reutov)</b>                   | 4,80      | 5,00        | 4,60           | 4,40      | 4,80    |
| <b>Nordic School</b>                               | 4,33      | 4,49        | 4,37           | 4,48      | 4,51    |
| <b>On their own</b>                                | 4,57      | 4,72        | 4,65           | 4,75      | 4,58    |
| <b>School</b>                                      | 4,80      | 4,50        | 4,20           | 4,70      | 4,80    |
| <b>School 152</b>                                  | 3,70      | 3,30        | 3,65           | 3,50      | 3,80    |
| <b>School 1571</b>                                 | 4,40      | 5,00        | 3,60           | 4,40      | 4,80    |
| <b>School 168</b>                                  | 3,50      | 4,40        | 3,40           | 4,10      | 4,50    |
| <b>School 454 (Kolpino)</b>                        | 4,80      | 5,00        | 4,60           | 5,00      | 5,00    |
| <b>School 470</b>                                  | 4,00      | 4,40        | 4,80           | 4,80      | 4,80    |
| <b>School 492</b>                                  | 3,60      | 4,20        | 3,60           | 3,60      | 3,60    |
| <b>School 518</b>                                  | 5,00      | 4,60        | 5,00           | 4,60      | 5,00    |
| <b>School 533</b>                                  | 4,27      | 4,48        | 4,34           | 4,50      | 4,28    |
| <b>School 567</b>                                  | 4,40      | 3,80        | 4,40           | 4,80      | 4,60    |
| <b>School 639</b>                                  | 4,80      | 4,80        | .              | 4,40      | .       |
| <b>School 652</b>                                  | 4,20      | 4,60        | 3,80           | 4,80      | 4,60    |
| <b>School 677</b>                                  | 4,40      | 4,80        | 4,60           | 4,40      | .       |
| <b>Sports camp</b>                                 | 4,20      | 4,80        | 3,80           | 4,80      | 4,40    |
| <b>Sports school</b>                               | 4,20      | 4,80        | 4,60           | 4,20      | 4,60    |
| <b>With an English tutor</b>                       | 4,60      | 5,00        | 4,80           | 4,60      | 4,60    |

Table 26 depicts the average total score gained by each provider. Considering schools assessed by multiple respondents, Nordic School achieved a high level

of perceived service quality with 4,45 points, which is above the average 4,4 across all the service providers. School 533 gained quite a close to that level score of 4,37. The respondents assessed the service quality of trips with Aurinko camp by 4,15 score and public schools 168 and 152 gained scores lower than 4 points: 3,98 and 3,59 respectively.

Table 26. Overall score by service provider. From SPSS.

|                                             |      |
|---------------------------------------------|------|
| School 454 (Kolpino)                        | 4,88 |
| School 518                                  | 4,84 |
| MAOU "Gymnasium" (Reutov)                   | 4,72 |
| With an English tutor                       | 4,72 |
| On their own                                | 4,65 |
| School                                      | 4,60 |
| School 470                                  | 4,56 |
| Educational camp 12                         | 4,52 |
| Sports school                               | 4,48 |
| Nordic School                               | 4,45 |
| School 1571                                 | 4,44 |
| School 567                                  | 4,40 |
| School 652                                  | 4,40 |
| Sports camp                                 | 4,40 |
| School 533                                  | 4,37 |
| ISE Yakutsk                                 | 4,28 |
| British English studio of foreign languages | 4,20 |
| Aurinko Camp                                | 4,15 |
| School 168                                  | 3,98 |
| School 492                                  | 3,72 |
| School 152                                  | 3,59 |
| School 639                                  | .    |
| School 677                                  | .    |

To compare the average scores of all dimensions in relation to gender, the Table 27 was created. Generally, there were no big differences in assessments made by girls and boys, although male respondents gave quite higher scores than female for all dimensions.

Table 27. Dimension scores by gender. From SPSS.

|               | <b>Tangibles</b> | <b>Reliability</b> | <b>Responsiveness</b> | <b>Assurance</b> | <b>Empathy</b> |
|---------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------|----------------|
| <b>Male</b>   | 4,38             | 4,54               | 4,37                  | 4,49             | 4,42           |
| <b>Female</b> | 4,29             | 4,44               | 4,30                  | 4,46             | 4,41           |

Moreover, comparison of scores given by students who travelled independently of their parents before the trip and those who did not shows that children with independent traveling experience rated the service quality higher (Table 28). For instance, they rated responsiveness statements 4,37 on average, while students going to a camp for the first time gave only 4,18, or 0,19 points less. Therefore, repeated experience of going to holiday camps and trips with organised groups enhances child's confidence and enjoyment during travel.

Table 28. Dimension scores by previous independent travel experience. From SPSS.

|                                                                       |            | <b>Tangibles</b> | <b>Reliability</b> | <b>Responsiveness</b> | <b>Assurance</b> | <b>Empathy</b> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------|----------------|
| <b>Have you been to a trip or a camp without your parents before?</b> | <b>Yes</b> | 4,35             | 4,52               | 4,37                  | 4,51             | 4,45           |
|                                                                       | <b>No</b>  | 4,22             | 4,34               | 4,18                  | 4,37             | 4,28           |

Furthermore, the average answers given by respondents with previous travel experience abroad and without were compared (Table 29). Students who were abroad before the trip (majority of respondents) assessed most of the dimensions as being of higher quality compared with students who were abroad for the first time.

Table 29. Dimension scores by previous travel experience. From SPSS.

|                                  |            | <b>Tangibles</b> | <b>Reliability</b> | <b>Responsiveness</b> | <b>Assurance</b> | <b>Empathy</b> |
|----------------------------------|------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------|----------------|
| <b>Abroad for the first time</b> | <b>Yes</b> | 4,42             | 4,28               | 4,22                  | 4,40             | 4,30           |
|                                  | <b>No</b>  | 4,31             | 4,50               | 4,34                  | 4,48             | 4,42           |

The only dimension that received lower score by more experienced travellers was tangibles. Thus, children who are going abroad for the first time require more

support and help from the organisers, while more experienced travellers are more selective in terms of living conditions and environment.

## **5 CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 Summary of major findings and managerial recommendations**

To conclude the findings of my research, several practical implications that might assist service providers in organising and managing future educational trips to Finland are explained.

Reviewing literature and analysing information received from contacting educational centres showed that there is a lack of systemized information collection about educational tourism to Finland. In order to constantly measure and improve service quality of educational tourism, a regular method of information collection should be introduced. The SERVPERF method could serve as a model for questionnaire. Thus, scores for various dimensions and from different trips can be easily compared and analysed.

In order to measure the service quality objectively, questionnaires should be distributed to customers right after the service encounter, thus, in the end of the trip. Then children will not alter their answers due to forgetting negative experience or focusing on good details of the trip.

Secondly, to enhance customer retention, schools and educational centres should organise and support social media activity, especially in Vkontakte. The overview of results has shown that students who are actively communicating regarding educational trips through social media platforms tend to be more loyal to the service provider and eager to return to the same company for the next holidays.

Thirdly, the experiential trip and results of the pilot questionnaire have shown the lack of intercultural communication with foreign peers. Previously organised trips

included communication with Finns and exposure to the foreign school educational system in practice. Therefore, students' learning was enhanced, and they were motivated and interested more throughout the trip. Communication was mentioned as one of the preliminary goals of traveling abroad, one of the difficulties to overcome and as a needed improvement for future trips. Therefore, educational travel experience to Finland should become more culturally inclusive by cooperating with local schools and community.

Moreover, price-quality ratio was acknowledged as quite imbalanced from the customers' point of view. In particular, transportation was not affordable and comfortable enough. While the price level is quite defined by the country's economy and taxation system, service providers should consider a possibility to offer more affordable educational travel options. Another problematic issue was effectiveness and attraction of English sessions to students, which also creates improvement opportunities in a concrete activity. Tangibles and responsiveness are dimensions that require advancement the most.

Furthermore, the survey has shown that the more students travel abroad and the more independent trips they are involved in, the better perception of service quality they have. Therefore, repeated travel by the customer would not only improve the customer retention but would also enhance the confidence of students during the trip and increase the effectiveness of learning. Service providers should encourage children to go on trips several times in order to have better experience and learning outcomes. Another opportunity is to introduce a program consisting of several interrelated educational trips to Finland.

To conclude, the service quality of educational tourism from Russia to Finland was analysed and several implications for service providers were defined. The aims of the research have been achieved, as well, by analysing theoretical and practical data, assessing the service quality by the surveys and making practical improvements recommendations. As for me, practical relevance of this research is a priority, so that it can be distributed to educational tourism service providers and applied for further development of educational tourism to Finland.

## 5.2 Evaluations of the study

Evaluating my study, it is to be considered reliable and valid to a necessary extent. Reliability of a study refers to results measured being more or less the same every time the measurement is conducted. From my point of view, an improvement to this issue could be done by conducting the questioning for the surveys right after the service encounter. As was discussed earlier, children tend to alter their perceptions of a trip to more positive and forget part of their experience with time. Therefore, I would expect the answers to differ in the end and some time after a trip. However, systematic responses collection within every travel experience is possible only with its incorporation by each service provider. I suggested this measure to be implemented for more reliable measurement of educational tourism service quality.

Validity of a research refers to the extent a research measures what was intended. The pilot questionnaire cannot be identified valid referring to the service quality measurement as it is not based on a theoretical concept from the field. Thus, the survey was changed to have high validity and measure service quality with a well-established SERVPERF instrument.

## 5.3 Limitations of the research

The main limitations of this research were connected to sampling strategy and the chosen convenience sampling method. Due to the difficulties in finding appropriate respondents and no existing online customer base, the methods of searching for the respondents were quite restricted. Ideally, all participants of educational trips should take part in such a questionnaire if obtaining legal consent from their guardians.

Other limitations of the research refer to the methodological implications and psychological characteristics of children. As was explained in the paper, children tended to forget the experience partly after some time, show loyalty to their

teacher by giving higher scores and choose the pictures they more preferred by its look in a questionnaire. A possible further research from pedagogic point of view on the methods of questioning children could improve this issue. In addition, literature review was, in overall, quite short due a limited amount of information on the topics and limited access to some of them. Further papers on the topic of longer format could add a lot on the analysis of existing theoretical base of educational tourism and aim at finding reliable statistics on it.

#### **5.4 Suggestions for further studies**

As the topic of educational tourism and its service quality is under-researched it is suggested that various researches in the field that would add methodological and theoretical knowledge are possible. Firstly, a broader research employing outcome based, transformational approach to educational tourism instead of a process one could be conducted. Therefore, clear objectives should be introduced with a thorough measurement of the achieved results afterwards. In this research, the trips in question did not have measurable objectives and results to be achieved. They did follow general educational and entertainment goals, but organizing a pilot trip which plan would follow the transformative approach characteristics and analyse the results concerning customers' perceptions and the actual achieved knowledge could be an option.

Secondly, customers with prior wide experience of participating in educational trips could be a sample for a form of a SERVQUAL questionnaire, so that they would assess their expectations before the service encounter in addition to the perceptions from the service. The debate on the validity of SERVQUAL and SERVPERF instruments is still ongoing. Practical testing could represent whether the first or the second instrument better measures service quality of educational tourism for underage students. When the instrument was chosen for the survey in this research, an assumption of the SERVPERF being more suitable in this case. Thirdly, a possible research could focus on certain age groups of underage children, study in detail the correlation between motivation to learn and satisfaction with the tourism services, study the effect of multiply trips united in one program on the customers perceptions and skills learnt. Therefore, possible



researches could be conducted focusing on concrete aspects mentioned in this work. Another possibility would be extending a research to all age groups without limiting it to underage children.

Moreover, methodological issues can be explored more for better facilitation of future research of educational tourism. Thus, researches should aim at finding the most efficient methods of questioning different age groups of underage children in order to motivate children for answering and receive objective responses. For instance, short structured interviews could be tested for being more suitable with younger participants.

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**THE PILOT QUESTIONNAIRE**

Test for students participants of the educational trip

General part:

1. Gender: male/female.
2. Age: ... years.
3. Are you abroad for the first time? Yes/no.
4. Have you been to a trip or a camp without your parents before? Yes/no.
5. How many years have you been studying English? ... years.

Main part:

1. Did you like the trip? Rate from 1 to 5.
2. Choose the main reasons why you wanted to go (from 1 to 3 reasons):
  - 1) Communication;
  - 2) Visiting Finland;
  - 3) Learning new things: English language, museums, sightseeing;
  - 4) Rest and entertainment;
  - 5) Parents or other relatives insisted;
  - 6) Other reason.
3. What did you like/remembered most about the trip?
4. Did you have to overcome difficulties?
  - 1) No. I did not face any difficulties during the trip;
  - 2) Getting up early, sticking with the timetable;
  - 3) Feeling sick;
  - 4) Difficulties in communication with other students;
  - 5) Boredom;
  - 6) Necessity to clean after oneself and maintain order;
  - 7) Food and accommodation;
  - 8) Independence (traveling without parents);
  - 9) Other.
5. What would you like to improve in the trip?
6. What you liked most about the trip?
  - 1) Visiting towns;
  - 2) Communicating with peers;
  - 3) Group exercises and games in English;
  - 4) Visiting the water park;
  - 5) Visiting the museum;
  - 6) Free time;
  - 7) Walks outside;
  - 8) Watching a film in English;
  - 9) Other.
7. During the previous trips children took part in staging a performance in English and performed it in front of the Finnish students at local schools, spent time with them. Would you like to take part in such activities?
  - 1) No, I am not interested in taking part in theatre performances;
  - 2) No, I am not interested in learning English language;



- 3) No, I feel shy to perform or communicate with foreigners;
- 4) Yes, great!
- 5) Yes, I would like to perform and take part in theatre performances;

Appendix 1/2

- 6) Yes, I am very interested in meeting Finnish students and visiting their school.
8. Would you go on a similar trip one more time?
- 1) Yes, because ...
  - 2) No, because ...
9. Have you learnt new things during the trip? (Choose from 1 to 3 options).
- 1) No, I have not learnt anything new and have not seen anything interesting;
  - 2) Yes, I saw new places and followed the guided tours;
  - 3) Yes, I learnt new English words and actively participated in exercises;
  - 4) Yes, I learnt to be more independent and organised;
  - 5) Yes, I learnt new things about traditions of celebrating Christmas and New Year abroad;
10. Have you gained new knowledge of English language, practised your skills? (Very little, a little, sufficiently, much, very much).
11. Write down 3 adjectives that, from your point of view, describe Finland most precisely.
12. Are you interested in learning English language? (At school, courses, individually with a tutor, with parents, through group games, while traveling). Rate from 1 to 5 your general interest and underline the methods that you prefer mostly.
13. Do you think that learning English is important for you?
- 1) No. I think I will not need it;
  - 2) No. I am pushed by my parents, I have not thought about the benefits of learning;
  - 3) Yes. I want to study well and have good grades at school;
  - 4) Yes. I will need it in further studies and future job;
  - 5) Yes. I want to communicate with foreigners and/or understand foreign films, books;
  - 6) Yes. I often travel/want to travel in the future and need to communicate in English.

Thank you for taking part in a research for my thesis!

## THE MAIN QUESTIONNAIRE

## Questionnaire for students participants of the educational trip

Attention! A kind request to all students who has, at least, once been to an educational trip or camp to Finland to take part in our questionnaire, that will take not more than 10 minutes to fill and will give you a chance to win 2 cinema tickets.

Your participation in this quiz is a big help to the research made in the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences. And also you will help to the organizers of the trips to Finland.

Filling in the questionnaire is easy. In the general part you just need to answer a couple of questions. In the second part you should choose one (only one) smiley face that best fits your opinion.

The questionnaire is anonymous – there is no need to write your name or surname anywhere! If you would like to take part into a competition, write "I took part in a quiz, want to win the tickets" to my direct messages in Vkontakte <https://vk.com/id286147805>.

Thank you very much in advance for your answers!

Anna

The general part:

1. Gender:

- 1) Male
- 2) Female

2. Age:

... years

3. Are you abroad for the first time?

- 1) Yes
- 2) No

4. Have you been to a trip or a camp without your parents before?

- 1) Yes
- 2) No

5. How many years have you been studying English?

... years

6. What school/educational centre was the trip's organizer?

... school/centre

The main part:

Choose one variant for each question:



1. Tangibles
  1. I liked the accommodation conditions.
  2. It was convenient and comfortable to travel by bus.
  3. Meals were delicious and varied.
  4. Trips (e.g. to museums and the waterpark) were entertaining and informative.
  5. I think that the price of the trip was justified.
2. Reliability
  1. Events during the trip began on time, according to the timetable.
  2. I was always looked after, I was not allowed to walk on my own outside and in towns.
  3. I was not worried during the trip, I could rely on the organizers.
  4. I lost my belongings or bags while traveling (reverse scale).
  5. I was accidentally left by the group in a public place (reverse scale).
3. Responsiveness
  1. I quickly got help if I had difficulties.
  2. When I asked for, the organizers could promptly get in touch with my parents or relatives.
  3. I could always ask the English teacher a question.
  4. The guide (or the organizer) answered the questions concerning the plan of the trip and information about the visited sites.
  5. The organizers took into consideration my adequate wishes during the trip when possible (e.g. to visit a shop, to organize a quiz).
4. Assurance
  1. The English teachers were fluent in English language.
  2. The guide knew various facts about the visited sites.
  3. English language classes were effective and interesting.
  4. The organizers oriented well in the towns, public transport timetables.
  5. The organizers confidently helped during the border and customs checks, knew the documents issues and rules well.
5. Empathy

1. If having conflicts with my peers, I was not unreasonably scolded by the organizers, instead, they listened to me and helped to solve the dispute.
2. The organizers amused me or talked with me when I was bored.
3. I was promptly helped and cared about if I felt bad.
4. I was not unreasonably scolded or criticized, but was calmly reproached or praised depending on my behaviour.
5. The organizers treated me with friendliness and empathy.