

**Improving the Operations of a Service Company Through a
Customer Satisfaction Survey
Case: Adventure Park Peukkula**

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| <p>This bachelor's thesis introduces the process of conducting a customer satisfaction survey, in order to improve the case company's services in accordance to customers' needs.</p> <p>In these days, being able to answer customers needs is more important than it has ever been. Companies meet the constant need to continuously improve their services and keep up with changing customer requirements. Consequently, the end purpose of this thesis is to provide the case company Peukkula with the information they can use to better understand and meet customer needs.</p> <p>The case company which the survey was conducted for is a children's adventure park Peukkula located in Jyväskylä, central Finland. The company has a clear need to improve its services and attract more visitors to the park, since the growth of the company has not been as high as projected. The number of visitors has grown steadily year by year, but it is still not enough to turn the company into a profitable business.</p> <p>The actual research was conducted in two parts by using both qualitative and quantitative methods. First, a set of focus group discussions was conducted in order to discover the customers' requirements and to test the questions for the quantitative survey. Secondly, a quantitative survey was conducted in Peukkula during July 2013. The results were then analysed and are introduced in this report.</p> <p>As a short conclusion of the result, it can be stated that Peukkula's situation is relatively good. The feedback was mainly positive and the majority of the respondents were very satisfied with the service. Based on the results of both the focus group discussions and the quantitative survey, the key improvement points for Peukkula were identified. Some recommendations regarding the services of the company were also introduced.</p> | |
| <p>Keywords customer relationship management, customer satisfaction, service quality, customer loyalty, measurements, quantitative questionnaire</p> | |

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1 Introduction

This introduction chapter offers a brief introduction to the topic of this thesis, showing the importance of it in both general, and to the case company. In addition the research question and objectives are introduced, alongside with an introduction to the case company.

1.1 Research objectives

The purpose of the thesis is to conduct a quantitative customer survey for the customers of Peukkula during the summer season 2013. The end goal of the survey is to provide Peukkula with the information they can use to better meet the customers' needs. They will learn what their customers are satisfied with the company, and what they are unsatisfied with. Later on, Peukkula can also use the survey to easily collect and analyse information of their customers. Peukkula's wish was to start conducting the survey on a regular basis, in order to continuously keep up with the customers' opinions.

The collected information includes data about the customers' demographics, visiting habits, general satisfaction to the company's services, and also a few questions about the visibility of the company to its target market. The results will be analysed and the data will provide the company with essential information of who their customers actually are, how they feel about the company's different service aspects, such as the characters, activities, restaurants, and other facilities, and what improvement suggestions they might have.

In addition, one of the main ideas of the data analysis was to find out, whether there were any differences between the Finnish's and foreigner's perceptions of the park. Even though the amount of foreign visitors is substantially lower than the Finnish ones, Peukkula has a clear interest in attracting more foreign visitors. After the Finnish, Russians are the most frequent visitors (Riihimäki, A. 11 June 2013). Many of them visit Jyväskylä on a regular basis and have children of Peukkula's target age. It would be very beneficial for Peukkula to meet the foreign visitors' requirements as well.

1.2 Relevance of the topic

The key reason for measuring customer satisfaction is to provide managers with the information needed in making the right decisions regarding the service, and hence improving the customer satisfaction. Increased profitability is naturally also one key driver, since measuring the customer satisfaction and doing the required changes will most likely increase the company's profitability. Being able to efficiently gather data of their customers on a regular basis, will improve the company's ability to keep up with their customers' needs and continuously improve their service to the right direction. Without measuring the customers' perceptions, the company is not able to improve their services according to the customers' needs, and in the end this leads to decreased profit.

Today's business models emphasize the customer-centric view, and improving the customer relationships is seen as the key to improve company's performance. In addition, there is a continuous need for companies to produce high-quality products and services to be able to cope with the high competition. The use of customer satisfaction questionnaires offers companies a method in assessing the quality of their services. Knowledge of customers' perceptions and attitudes towards the business will improve the company's ability to make better business decisions. (Hayes 2008, 2).

In 2011 SBS (Sport Business School) conducted a similar quantitative customer survey in Peukkula. Some information regarding the customer demographics was lacking from the survey, and that is why Peukkula wishes to conduct a similar survey again. The company also wants to have a tool of their own to conduct these surveys by themselves on a regular basis, in order to maximize the response to customer needs. (Riihimäki, A. 11 June 2013).

Here is introduced a brief summary of the survey results conducted in 2011. First of all, quite many of the respondents said that they did not visit the Pikku Peruna restaurant (61 %) or the Rosvo Burger grill (48, 2 %) during their visit. Currently the names of these restaurants have been changed to Café Hilla and restaurant Eväsherkku. More than 50 % of the respondents spent more than three hours in Peukkula, and therefore this indicates that there might be something to improve within the restaurants. Another clear issue relates to

the shows and events: majority of the respondents (63,1 %) had not seen any of the shows. It is hard to say what the reasons behind these numbers are, but I'm very interested in finding out what the situation is now.

1.3 Research question and the investigative questions

Research question

How to improve Peukkula's services in accordance to the customers' needs?

Investigative questions

- IQ1 - How satisfied Peukkula's customers are, and how the satisfaction can be measured?
- IQ2 - How loyal Peukkula's customers are to the company and how the loyalty can be measured?
- IQ3 - How to create an effective customer satisfaction measurement tool?
- IQ4 - How do the foreign respondents' perceptions of the company differ from the Finnish respondents' perceptions?

1.4 Key concepts

Customer relationship management is the strategy that a company uses to handle customer interactions, focusing on creating long-term relationships with the customers and enforcing customer-centric approach in all its operations (Peelen 2005, 15)

Customer satisfaction is the extent to which a product's (or service's) perceived performance matches the buyer's expectations (Kotler & Armstrong 2010, 30).

Service quality is the degree and direction of the consumer's perceptions and expectations of a service (Baron, Harris & Hilton 2009, 168)

Customer loyalty is the likelihood of previous customers to return to buy from a certain company (Business Dictionary)

Quantitative survey is a research method where the data can be presented in a numerical form, and hence statistical methods can be used in analysing the data. (Adams, Khan, Raeside & White 2010, 26).

Focus group discussion is a personal interviewing that involves inviting six to ten people for a few hours with an interviewer to talk about a product, service, or an organization in accordance to an agenda of discussion topics made beforehand by the interviewer (Kotler & Armstrong 2010, 136).

1.5 The case company

The case company is a children's adventure park, Peukkula. The company is established in 2009 and it is located in Jyväskylä, central Finland. The company is relatively new, but has steadily increased the amount of visitors year by year. In 2010, 27 000 customers visited Peukkula. In 2011 the number increased to 30 000, and in 2012 the number of visitors reached 46 000. Between the years 2011 and 2012 Peukkula's turnover increased from 270 000 to 370 000. However, they are still not making any profit. The company is still in the growing phase, so the income is not enough to cover the basic investments. (Riihimäki, A. 11 June 2013).

Peukkula employs four full-time workers, and about 30 seasonal employees. About 65 % of Peukkula's revenue comes from the ticket sales, 25 – 30 % from the restaurants and cafés, and the rest from side-line products. Peukkula has two cafés and one restaurant in the area. The price for a children's ticket is 18 €, and 12 € for adults. Children under two years have free access. The tickets are valid for two days. Peukkula also has an evening ticket, which is valid after 4 PM. Then the children's ticket costs 10 € and adults and children under two years are free of charge. The park is open until 8 PM. During the winter season, the children ticket costs 10 €, and adults can go free of charge. (Riihimäki, A. 11 June 2013; Peukkula web pages).

The company's slogan is "Time together!". The idea behind the slogan is to advertise Peukkula as a place where the entire family can have fun together. Peukkula's activities are

focused on two different seasons: summer and winter. The indoor play area is open during the whole year, and the outdoor areas during the summer season. The summer season usually starts around May and ends in August. Peukkula's attractions are sort of "old-fashioned", meaning that there is nothing mechanical in the rides like for instance in bigger theme parks. Their attractions rely on traditional features. Activities are for instance pedal car track, wooden pirate ship, farm animal area and so on. The activities in Peukkula are also tied around the different characters Peukkula has, such as a princess, troll, inventor, and the mascots of Peukkula, Peukkis and Pinni. During the summer season Peukkula also organizes concerts and other events for children. (Peukkula web pages).

The competitive situation among children's adventure parks in the Jyväskylä area is not seen as a problem in Peukkula. The CEO Mr. Riihimäki states that they are actually doing a lot of co-operation with the other parks. For instance, people can buy combined tickets to Peukkula and the Hilarius Hiiri village, which is located in Laukaa 25 km from Jyväskylä. These two parks are benefiting from one another, when people visiting the other park can easily come to the other as well. (Riihimäki, A. 11 June 2013).

Currently Peukkula is facing a big challenge. In order to become a profitable company, they need to attract more visitors. The investments needed to overhaul the area have been bigger than they expected. They are going to the right direction since the amount of visitors has grown year by year, but there is still a lot to improve. The CEO's vision of the company's future is not bright. He says that if they will not succeed in attaining more visitors during the following few years, the company will most likely go down. (Riihimäki, A. 11 June 2013).

2 Improving customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a very broad concept consisting of various different elements. This chapter forms an overall picture of what is customer satisfaction, the different components of it, and how it can be measured and improved.

The whole concept of customer satisfaction goes under customer relationship management (CRM). CRM is a strategic view that emphasizes a customer-centric approach in all company's actions. The core idea of CRM is mainly about developing long-term relationships with the customers, as well as retaining old customers, and attracting new customers. It is a very broad concept that is essential to manage in the service business in order to keep customers satisfied. It binds together the aspects of customer satisfaction and loyalty. The end goal of CRM is to create a customer centric company where the customers' requirements are seen as the key priority. As a strategy, customer relationship management brings together marketing, customer service, and quality. (Baron & al. 2009, 191 - 194).

2.1 Customer satisfaction

Satisfaction, as a definition, consists of the customer's subjective judgement or feeling, their attitudes, and the extent to which their requirements are met (Hill, Roche & Allen 2007, 32). The concept of customer satisfaction is closely linked to service quality. Although in the book by Baron & al. (2009, 168) service quality is defined as the broader concept consisting of the company's overall performance and satisfaction relates only to customer's perception of one occasion of the service, these two terms are often used simultaneously. Basically, both of the definitions refer to the comparison between customer's expectations and the actual service.

Nowadays most of the companies understand the importance of customer satisfaction. If the customers are not happy, the company has little or no chance for success. On average, a company loses 10 – 30 % of its customers each year. The fundamental reason for customer loss is dissatisfaction. Perhaps the biggest stumbling block for companies in promoting customer satisfaction is cost effectiveness; many companies tend to be cost effi-

cient with the expense of customer satisfaction. Sometimes meeting the customers' needs may not be cheap, and the company has to be willing to make the required changes. (Hill & Alexander 2006, 2).

Basically, dissatisfaction arises if the company's offerings differ from the customer's expectations. The service quality gap -model is a good way in explaining the difference between the customer's perception and the company's offerings. According to the book by Hill and Alexander (2006, 6) the fundamental reason for the dissatisfaction can be traced to some of these five groups: promotional, understanding, procedural, behavioural, and perception. Figure 1 below illustrates the service gaps. The model serves as a framework for service organizations in attempting to improve the quality of the service.

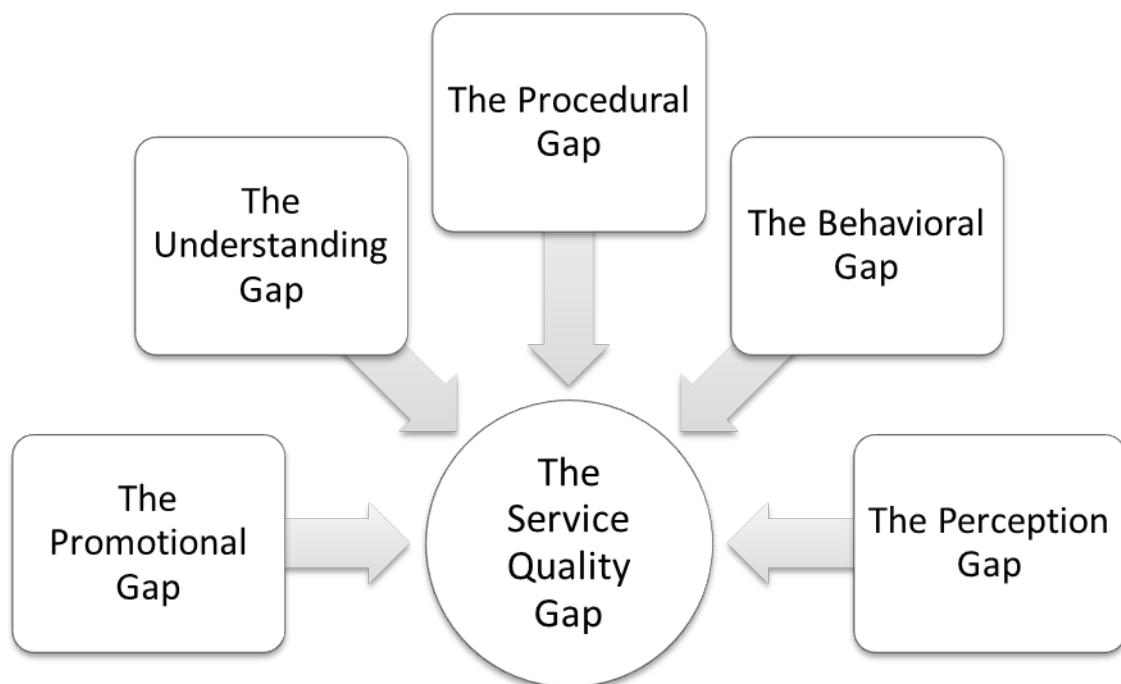


Figure 1. The service quality gaps (Hill & Alexander 2006, 6)

The first gap, promotional, refers to the company's marketing communications. For instance advertising can very easily create unrealistic expectations, which in turn affects the company's reliability. If the company fails to meet the customers' expectations created by false advertising, the customer instantly becomes less satisfied with the service.

The second gap, understanding, occurs when the management of the company does not have a good scope of the customers' actual needs and expectations. In other words, they are not answering to the customer demand. Often companies might think they know what the customers want, but actually have no clue. It can be that due to constantly changing customer needs their information is out-dated, or they simply do not know their customers.

The procedural gap results if the company does not do what it is expected to do. This may relate to the earlier gap, where the company does not know what customers want, or the company has failed to put the necessary procedures into action. The procedural gap also consists of the dependability of the service provider and accuracy of the performance, mentioned in the book by Baron & al. (2009, 169). Customers expect a certain type and level of service every time they visit the company, and the company should be able to meet these requirements consistently every time.

The behavioural gap relates to staff performance. Sometimes the personnel fails to work in accordance with the company's procedures. Personnel's training is one way in avoiding the creation of this gap. In addition, the company should be able to expand its strategy to the whole company, so that the whole personnel know what their role is in adding value to the company. Employee satisfaction is also a crucial point in staff performance. The book by Hill & al. (2007, 20) mentions a study conducted in the University of Harvard. The study indicates that the more satisfied the employees are, the more satisfied are also the customers. This is due to the fact that employees, who are satisfied with their jobs, are also more helpful in serving the customer and give out a positive feeling. Especially in the service business, happy and helpful personnel are a crucial point for customer satisfaction.

The last point is the perception gap. Sometimes the customers' perceptions do not keep pace with the actual performance of the company. For instance, if a company has previously had a reputation of low quality products, but has then changed its scope towards better quality. It may take several years before customers get accustomed with the change.

Additionally, Baron & al. (2009, 170) also mentions the tangible dimensions of a service. These are for instance, seating, lighting, or in case of Peukkula: the attractions. These are very important parts in providing customers with good service and meeting their expectations.

2.1.1 Measuring satisfaction

Measuring customer satisfaction is important due to the fact that customers' "attitudes drive behaviour". In practise, this means that if the customer has good perceptions about a certain company, they will most likely use its services and vice versa. Therefore customer satisfaction is a good indicator of future customer behaviours and the company's performance. However, it is much more difficult to measure the quality of the service than measuring the quality of a tangible product. With tangible products there are often certain measurements of quality that can be used to evaluate the product. However, with services the customers make judgements about the quality of the service, delivery process, and the final outcome. What makes it even harder to measure, is the fact that each customer perceives the service individually. (Baron & al. 2009, 168; Hill & al. 2007, 32).

It is essential to focus the measurement on the customer's point of view and their requirements. Only then the company is able to get reliable results. As mentioned earlier, customer satisfaction is based on the extent to which the company meets the customers' requirements. In order for the survey to reflect the correct satisfaction or dissatisfaction issues, the survey has to be based on the same criteria that customers use in their evaluation. In several books this is referred as the "lens of the customer". This sounds like a very obvious fact, but it is actually the first mistake companies often do. This is because companies' perception is often quite different from the customers; companies tend to focus on costs, products and processes, whereas the customer focuses on the benefits, outcomes and results they wish to achieve. Often companies tend to ask questions that are relevant for the company. For instance, if the company has recently invested in their customer database system, they want to ask question related to the database. This however, does not have much to do with the issues affecting customers' satisfaction. (Hill & Alexander 2006, 17-18; Hill & al. 2007, 36 – 37, 45).

In order to keep the questionnaire focused on the customer's point of view, the key issue is understanding the customer requirements. Focus group discussions or face-to-face interviews are both good methods for this purpose. In the interview, customers are for instance asked to rate certain services or qualities in accordance to their importance. The book by Hill & al. (2007, 45) lists three points, why knowing the customers' requirements is essential before conducting the survey:

- It ensures that the survey does not include anything that is not important to customers and does not influence their satisfaction judgement
- It provides the basis for identifying priorities for improvements (areas where the organization should focus its resources for maximum gain in customer satisfaction)
- It enables the calculation of an accurate headline measure of customer satisfaction for tracking purposes (in order to monitor the organization's success in improving customer satisfaction)

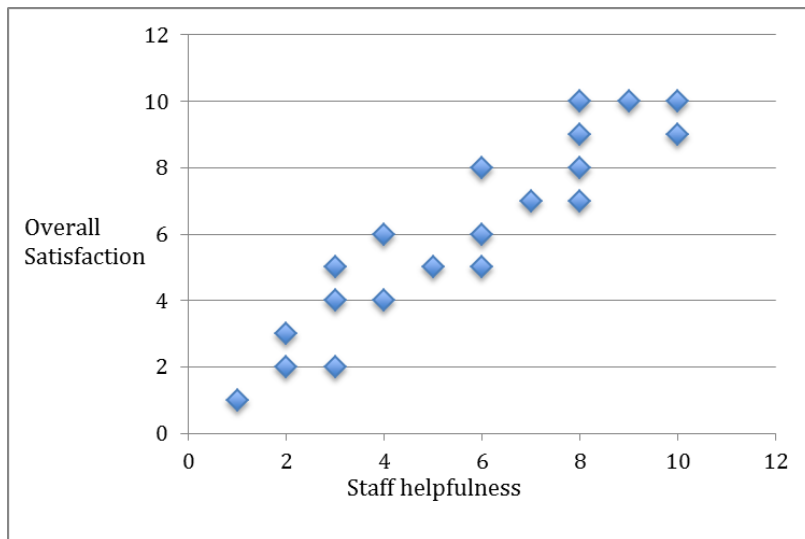


Figure 2. Fictive correlation table (Hill & al. 2007, 49)

In defining the major customer requirements there is a system called the correlation technique. The correlations are created by simply asking customers how satisfied they are with the company overall on a scale from one to ten (one being the least satisfied). This result is then correlated with the customer satisfaction score for the other requirements, for in-

stance staff helpfulness. Figure 2 on the previous page shows a fictional correlation table, where there is a strong correlation between overall satisfaction and staff helpfulness. This indicates that staff helpfulness is a key requirement in customer satisfaction. In real-life cases, the correlation is rarely this strong. However, even smaller correlations can give guidance to companies of the importance of each aspect to the customer. (Hill & al. 2007, 48 - 49).

Quantitative surveys are the most commonly used method in measuring customers' satisfaction. It is an effective way to gather opinions from a large number of people, and they are relatively easy to use and analyse. Quantitative survey is also a convenient method for the respondent, since it is relatively easy and fast to fill in. The surveys can also be done in both paper form and web form, depending on the current needs. (Hayes 2008, 7 - 9).

2.2 Customer loyalty

Customer loyalty is defined as the customer's willingness to continue using a certain company's services on a repeated basis, and voluntarily recommending the company to friends and associates (Lovelock 2001, 151). It should be cherished and taken care of, since loyalty can easily be lost. Even one disappointing incident for the customer can make him change to a competitor. Customer loyalty is also viewed as the key indicator of overall business performance. As the book by Bob Hayes (2008, 79) states, researches have demonstrated a strong link between customer loyalty and financial success and growth. (Lovelock 2001, 151; Hayes 2008, 80).

Loyalty also affects the company's profitability. It is a well-known fact that is far more cost efficient to keep the existing customers loyal, than trying to attract new ones (Hill & Alexander 2006, 13). In addition, customers' life-time value increases over time. The book by Christopher Lovelock (2001, 152 - 153) introduces four reasons why customers' profitability increases every year the customers stay with the company. Firstly, it is argued that customers usually increase the amount of money they put in a company over years. They may visit the company more often, or simply make bigger purchases. Secondly, as customers become more experienced with the company's procedures, their demands towards the

company decrease. Consequently, there is less demand for information and assistance regarding the service. Thirdly, loyal customers often recommend the company to their friends and acquaintances, which might bring more customers to the company. Word of mouth is seen as one of the most effective marketing methods, because people often trust other people's recommendations. It is also relatively easy and cost free advertising method for companies. Lastly, loyal customers do not necessarily need premium prices and discounts, and are more willing to pay the regular prices. (Baron & al. 2009, 192).

An important factor in keeping customers loyal is the ability to turn the negative experiences into positive ones. Even in the case of service failure, the customer can still remember it as a positive occasion if it is handled correctly. In service business, the employees are the centre of this, since they usually are present with the customer when the problem arises. The book by Baron & al. (2009, 207) mentions a study that clearly indicates that the employees verbal response to service failures had a huge impact on the customer's perception about the company. For instance, if the customer is upset about waiting in line for too long, a complementary drink or discount coupon can change the incident into a satisfying experience in favour to the company. The study also showed that employees who had the possibility to do something unexpected for the customer and be flexible in their job, were the most successful in changing service failures into a positive experience. (Baron & al. 2009, 207, 208).

2.2.1 Types of loyalty

There are several reasons why customers keep using a certain company's services. The book by Baron & al. (2009, 194) states that the more intangible the service is, the easier the customer can change to use the competitor's services. Basically, the division of loyal customers can be made into two: customers who want to stay, and customers who feel they have no other choice. It has been said that customer behave differently whether they are the company's customer by their own choice or not. Those who are not the company's customers by own choice tend to be more negative and not co-operative towards the company, and behave in ways that might create difficulties for the company. (Baron & al. 2009, 197).

In addition, there are also several other reasons why customers stay loyal to a certain company. Firstly, the exit costs for the customer might be too high. This means that the customers are staying at a certain company simply because it is too much trouble for changing. This can be the case even if the customer is not completely satisfied with the company. The reluctance to change might be for instance due to increased time and effort needed in seeking a new company, or the fear that the other company will not be as reliable as the old one. (Baron & al. 2009, 197).

Habitual loyalty is perhaps the most common forms of loyalty. It refers to a situation where the customer has used a company's services for years as a part of his routines. For instance, a certain beauty salon that is close by to the customer's home or a grocery store on the way to work can be a part of the customer's lifestyle. However, this type of loyalty is easily breakable if for instance a company with better options opens nearby. (Hill & Alexander 2006, 15).

The service provider might also have a detailed understanding of the customer's needs. This is referred as committed loyalty. For instance hair dressers, manicurists, or doctors might have this kind of strong interpersonal relationship with the customer. Customers feel that they get the service they want from this certain company and they want to return again. This can also be applied to restaurants, hotels, and other similar companies that have certain qualities that customers value. This can be for instance a good vegetarian menu, excellent service, or some other special feature. This is naturally the most desired types of loyalty, but it requires the company to continuously meet their customers' requirements at every customer encounter. (Baron & al. 2009, 197; Hill & Alexander 2006, 15).

Some people are using a certain company's services simply because there are no other choices available. Hill and Alexander (2006, 14) refer to this as the monopoly loyalty. This can be the case if a certain company is for instance the only company providing a certain service in the area, or the customer is forced to use a certain company's services due to a

signed contract. Often customers with this type of loyalty are the least satisfied with the company's services. (Baron & al. 2009, 198; Hill & Alexander 2006, 14).

Hill and Alexander (2006, 14 - 15) also introduce the concept of incentivized loyalty, where the customer uses the company's services due to for instance coupons or bonus cards. This type of loyalty is often used by supermarkets, where customers receive a certain amount of bonus each time they use the company's services. However, studies have shown that after all incentives do not play an important role in creating loyalty.

2.2.2 Levels of loyalty

Different levels of loyalty can be distinguished by the level of positive commitment the customer has towards the company. Figure 3 shows the loyalty pyramid with the different levels of loyalty. The pyramid is originally designed for business-to-business purposes, but can be applied to business-to-consumer actions as well.



Figure 3. The loyalty pyramid (Hill & Alexander 2006, 16)

The lowest level of the pyramid, the suspects, include all the customers in the market place who are either unaware of the company's offerings, or have no intention of visiting it. Prospects are potential customers, who have an interest towards the company, but have not yet taken any purchasing actions. Customers are classified as "one-off purchasers"

who are not yet fond to the company, but have used its services. Clients are repeat customers who have used the company's services several times, but whose support to the company is passive rather than active. Advocates are the strongest form of business-to-consumer relationships. They are clients who actively support the company by recommending it to others. In the original pyramid by Hill and Alexander, there was also a 5th ladder on top, "partners". This ladder was eliminated since it does not suit the business-to-consumer purposes.

In order to move customers upwards in the loyalty level pyramid, the company should offer them the services they are expecting from the company at each point.

2.2.3 Measuring loyalty

Customer loyalty can be measured through quantitative surveys. As an example, customers are asked to rate their level of affinity for, endorsement of, and approval of the company. It is an interesting fact, that actually those customers who give negative feedback and complain about the service are often the most loyal customers (Baron & al. 2009, 207). Below are introduced some commonly used metrics that can be used in quantitative surveys. (Hayes 2008, 80).

Customer retention measures whether the customers will visit the company again. It is the lowest level of loyalty, and only answers the question of how many previous year's customers are still the company's customers this year. On the company's strategic point of view this may not be the most effective measurement, since the results only focus on the past. In order to find out the customers' future plans, a question asking whether the customers will visit the company again on a regular basis would be more suitable. (Hayes 2008, 80).

Asking customers about recommendation is also a good indicator of loyalty. Asking about whether they might recommend the company to someone is perhaps too shallow, since it is very easy to give a positive answer. A better result is gained by asking how likely they are to recommend the company to others. Another good way of measuring loyalty is to ask

whether they have already recommended the company to someone in the past. (Hayes 2008, 80).

Accessibility and attractiveness of alternatives measures how many options of companies there are in the same industry, and how attractive those companies are to customers. For instance, question: “Compared to other adventure parks, how would you rate Peukkula?”, is a good way to measure the attractiveness of competitors. (Hayes 2008, 80).

2.3 The measurement tool

According to Hayes, (2008, 1) measures allow businesses three key findings: 1. knowing how well the business process is working, 2. knowing where to make changes to create improvements, and 3. determining whether the changes led to improvements.

2.3.1 Customer satisfaction survey

The model shown below in figure 4 is a very simplified illustration of the development and use of a customer satisfaction questionnaire. In step one customer requirements and different quality dimensions of the product or service are identified. The knowledge of the customer requirements is essential, because it both provides a better understanding of the way the customers define the quality of the service, and will help in developing the questionnaire. The better the company understand customer’s requirements, the better it is able to satisfy their needs. Step two reaches to develop a questionnaire that will give specific information about the customers’ perceptions. This information should correspond to the customer requirements identified in step one. (Hayes 2008, 8)

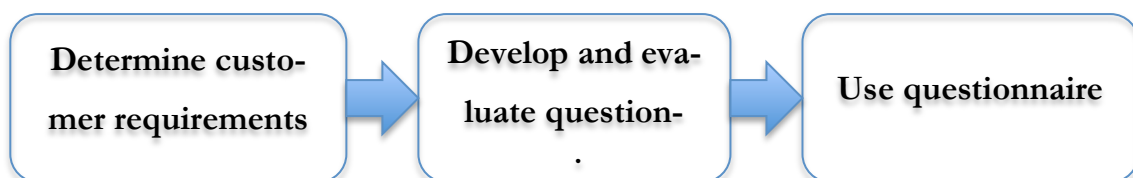


Figure 4. A general model for the development and use of customer satisfaction questionnaires (Hayes 2008, 8)

In continuation, measures can be divided into two categories: soft and hard measures. Hard measures are more concrete and objective criteria, such as the manufacturing time of a certain product, or number of parts used in the manufacturing process. The hard measures are often used in the manufacturing industry. Soft measures are more often used in the service sector and other non-manufacturing fields. This is due to the fact that the hard measure objectives are not necessarily giving the answer to the right question; the time it takes to go through a service process might not reflect the true quality of the service. An example of a soft measure is a customer satisfaction questionnaire which determines customer's perceptions and attitudes concerning the quality of the service or product they received. This way the company is also able to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their customer's perceptions. (Hayes 2008, 6).

2.3.2 Questionnaire design

Questionnaire design is one of the most crucial points of the survey. If the questionnaire is poorly designed, the gathered data is not sufficiently reliable for management decision-making. Being able to form the right questions is the most vital part of a questionnaire, and also the one that most companies fail to do. A successful customer satisfaction questionnaire should offer accurate measures of satisfaction and loyalty, and also demonstrate the relationship between them. In creating the satisfaction questionnaire, it is important to include questions of what actually is important for the customers, keeping in mind the customers' requirements. This way the understanding gap mentioned in the previous chapter can be avoided. (Hill & al. 2007, 87 – 91).

The questionnaire should be made as easy as possible for the customer, since if it looks difficult the customer will not complete it. A lot of "white space" should be left, since it makes the questionnaire look easier to the respondent. Also the instructions should be made very simple and clear. Quite often the questionnaires end up being too long when companies want to include all kinds of questions that might benefit the company. This will not only result to customer's loss of interest, but also the relevance of the results will suffer. The book by Hill & al. (2007, 87) states, "a professionally designed questionnaire that

is appealing, easy to read and spacious can improve response rates by up to 20 %”. (Adams & al. 2010, 130 – 138).

It is important to keep it professional, but if the questionnaire looks interesting, customers might be more willing to give answers. Generally, all the easy questions, such as demographics, should be put first and the harder and longer questions at the end. This is because the respondent might lose interest to the questionnaire right away if it seems too tricky. In addition, anonymity can be an important fact to people, and if the identity is to be kept secret it should be mentioned right in the beginning of the questionnaire. Finally, the return mechanism should be simple enough. (Hill & al. 2007, 87-91; Adams & al. 2010, 130 – 138).

There are also some points the company should avoid when trying to attain higher response rate. These are for instance prove draws, free gifts, coupons, and donations to charity. Since the response rate in customer satisfaction surveys is usually higher than for instance in direct mailing, gifts or coupons are not very cost-efficient. In addition, it might give the customer an impression that the company is trying to sell something. Studies have also shown that there is no significant difference in response rate whether an incentive is offered or not. (Hill & al. 2007, 87-91).

Word choices are also a crucial part. Vague words that can be understood in many ways, such as “some”, should be avoided. In addition, it is important to include a small introduction of the survey before the actual questionnaire. This will work as a selling tool in order to maximize customer participation. This does not only apply to quantitative questionnaires, but to all surveys from interviews to online surveys. The book by Hill and Alexander (2006, 178), introduces three main points to include to the introduction:

- Objectives of the survey
- How the survey will be carried out
- Benefits for the customers

2.3.3 Response formats

In addition, there are several different response formats to consider when designing the questionnaire. The format chosen mostly depends on the information needed to acquire, but they are also used to bring variety to the questionnaire. (Adams & al. 2010, 133).

The first response format is a checklist format. There the respondent is asked to choose one of the ready-made options provided in the questionnaire. For instance, a question could be: “What is the reason to choose this specific company?” and the options would be: a. price, b. location, c. quality of the services. This type of question can also be modified to have a multiple choice format. It is a relatively easy to use and analyse type of format, but it is sometimes hard to come up with all the possible choices the respondent might think. (Hayes 2008, 62 – 65; Adams & al. 2010, 133).

Questions can also be turned into category format. The category format is often used when discovering the demographics of the respondents. Many respondents for instance do not like to give their exact age or salary, so it is better to use certain age categories. (Adams & al. 2010, 134).

Likert-scale format is where the respondent is asked to grade a certain service on a scale from one to five. This allows the respondent to have more variety to their answer and express the degree of the opinions rather than just saying “yes” or “no”. The likert-scale is often used to measure satisfaction. In addition, scales of more than just two response options are more reliable in the statistical point of view. (Hayes 2008, 62 – 65).

Another scale format is the attitude statement. There the respondent is given a list of statements and asked for their level of agreement. For instance, 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree. In a similar way, semantic scales measure the respondents feeling about a certain issue, but here the respondent is asked to mark their opinions on a line that goes from low to high. Figure 5 on the next page illustrates an example of a semantic scale. (Adams & al. 2010, 135).



Figure 5. Example of a semantic scale (Adams & al. 2010, 135)

Open ended questions can also be added to the questionnaire. There the respondent does not have ready-made response options, but is asked to write their response to a designated area with their own words. Open ended questions are often used to discover the respondents' specific feelings and/or problems. The amount of open ended questions should however be kept in minimum, for several reasons. First of all, analysing them can be very time consuming, since the researcher has to go through and analyse each answer individually. Secondly, some reliability issues might come up with the data, since the researcher might interpret the answer differently than the respondent has meant it. Lastly, the respondents usually see the open ended questions too long to answer and just skip it. (Adams & al. 2010, 132).

3 Research

In this chapter the research methods and results are introduced in detail. The research methods consist of two parts: focus group discussions and the quantitative survey. The results are divided into subchapters for easier reading.

3.1 Research methods

The research of this study was conducted by using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative part consists of focus group discussions, and the quantitative to a quantitative customer satisfaction survey. Firstly, a set of focus group discussions was conducted in order to test the questions for the quantitative survey. The idea of the group discussions was to find out the basic customer requirements, and see if there is any need to modify the questions. The second part of the research is the quantitative survey, which was conducted in Peukkula during July 2013. The research methods are explained in detail in this chapter.

3.1.1 Focus group discussions

In a focus group discussion people representing the target population of the survey are brought together to discuss certain topics. The idea is that the researcher has a ready-made agenda, a list of discussion topics, which the group then discusses. The researcher works as the facilitator of the discussion. He/she does not offer any of his own opinions, but makes sure the discussion flows in accordance to the topics, and that each topic is discussed. (Rubin & Rubin 2012, 30).

Focus group discussions are an excellent way of gaining similar information as in face-to-face interviews. It is well suited for instance finding out about customer perceptions and value expectations. The idea is to choose people who have knowledge or experience of the certain problem of interest (Rubin & Rubin 2012, 3). Group interviews also enable to gather responses from several people simultaneously, and save a lot of time from the researcher (Adams & al. 2010, 150).

Two sets of group discussions were conducted in the beginning of June 2013. The attendees were mothers between the ages of 26 to 35 with 1 – 3 children. The children's ages were mainly between 1 to 4 years, although one mother had children over 5 years old. The group was gathered by the researcher. All of the attendees had visited Peukkula within the last year, in order to ensure that they had seen the latest changes in the park and could give their opinions about the current state. The first discussion was not a great success, since only three people out of eight attended. Due to the low attendance rate, a second discussion was conducted with six people. The agenda of the discussions can be seen in attachment 1. The discussion topics are closely related to the quantitative questionnaire, and were meant to test the relevance of the survey questions.

The discussion was an excellent way of gaining broader insight to the questions. The people were really talkative and offered great viewpoints to my discussion topics. It was nice to notice that there were many things in common in these two discussions. Several of the ideas mentioned in the first discussion were repeated in the second.

The group discussion helped me to evaluate whether my questions were relevant and understandable. The groups also filled out the quantitative questionnaire so that I could measure the time it approximately took to complete the survey, and see if they had any problems or comments regarding the questions. The focus group discussions were only not beneficial for testing the questionnaire, but also in gaining highly valuable opinions about Peukkula. I got a deeper understanding of the perceptions, and was able to use that information in both the data analysis and recommendations for the company.

3.1.2 Quantitative questionnaire

The quantitative survey was chosen since it was the best option for the purpose of collecting satisfaction opinions from dozens of respondents at once. The survey was done on a paper form and was divided to Peukkula's customers during July 2013 at the moment of purchasing tickets.

The original plan was to conduct the survey as an online version sent via e-mail. However, I ended up using the paper form instead for two reasons. First of all, Peukkula had experienced a very low response rate in their previous online surveys. They had discovered that the paper form surveys had substantially greater response rate, especially if incentives were provided. Secondly, during the last two years Peukkula had gone through several changes that could affect the customers' perception. If the questionnaire was sent via e-mail, we could not have guaranteed that the respondents had visited Peukkula within a few years, and actually seen the current state of the park. For answering the questionnaire, customers were given a free beverage of their choice when returning the questionnaire.

The survey was designed based on the theoretical framework presented earlier. Many of the questions were chosen since they were supported by the theory. Especially the loyalty questions were mainly formed by the books by Hayes 2008 and Hill & Alexander 2006. The questions formats were chosen based on Adams & al. 2010. The whole questionnaire can be seen in attachment 2.

In order to reach the international visitors, the questionnaire was available in Finnish and English. Originally I had planned a Russian version to be handed out as well, since majority of the foreign visitors of Peukkula are from Russia. However, the translation of the questionnaire was not delivered in time and I was not able to conduct it with the other two languages.

3.2 Research results

All together I got 52 responses back. The amount of responses is slightly lower than I had expected, but I might have been having unrealistic expectations about the response rate. Out of those 52, 7 responses were given by foreign visitors.

Despite the fact that we had agreed with the CEO of Peukkula that the surveys were handed to each customer in the moment of paying the tickets, this was not the case. When I went to collect the surveys, I asked a few questions from the ticket sales office. First of all, they had no idea what the survey was for, nor did they know it was supposed to be

handed to every visitor. The questionnaires had been located on a side desk, and only occasionally handed over to a customer or if the customer had specifically asked for a feedback form. They had also not mentioned about the free drink the customer receives when returning the survey. I believe that if the employees had been informed of the questionnaire and actively given it to the customers, the response rate would have been substantially higher. Peukkula has dozens of visitors daily, and given the time the questionnaire was shared, there should have been substantially more responses. At the end this is naturally my own fault. I should have made sure the employees were briefed well enough and that the questionnaire was handled as we had agreed with the CEO.

However, I think the amount of responses is sufficient in forming a coherent picture of the customer satisfaction. This is also supported by the fact that the responses, without a few exceptions, were very similar. No extreme grades were given. Respondents gave a lot of similar grades, and same opinions about both the good things and improvements were mentioned in the open feedback.

Since the amount of responses given by foreign visitors was so low, the data is not enough to form a reliable picture of their perceptions. However, I decided to include the data to the report since it might give some direction to the foreign visitors' opinions. The comparison between the foreign and Finnish responses was also a crucial part of the international aspect of the thesis. The figures and conclusions formed from the foreigner's data can only be used as directional information.

As the questionnaire was handed on a paper version directly to the visitors of the park, it is sure that they were the right people answering the questions. The respondents were visiting the park when they filled out the questionnaire, so the responses are representing the opinions of the visitors' quite accurately. It should be mentioned that the data presented below comprehends both the Finnish and foreign respondents' answers, unless otherwise mentioned.

3.2.1 Demographics

Figure 6 in below shows the age division among the respondents. Clearly the biggest age category was the 35 – 44 years old (42,2 %), and the second biggest 25 – 34 years old (31,1 %). Substantially fewer responses were given by the “older” people. Naturally this indicates that most of the children visit the park with their parents or other friends or relatives of that age.

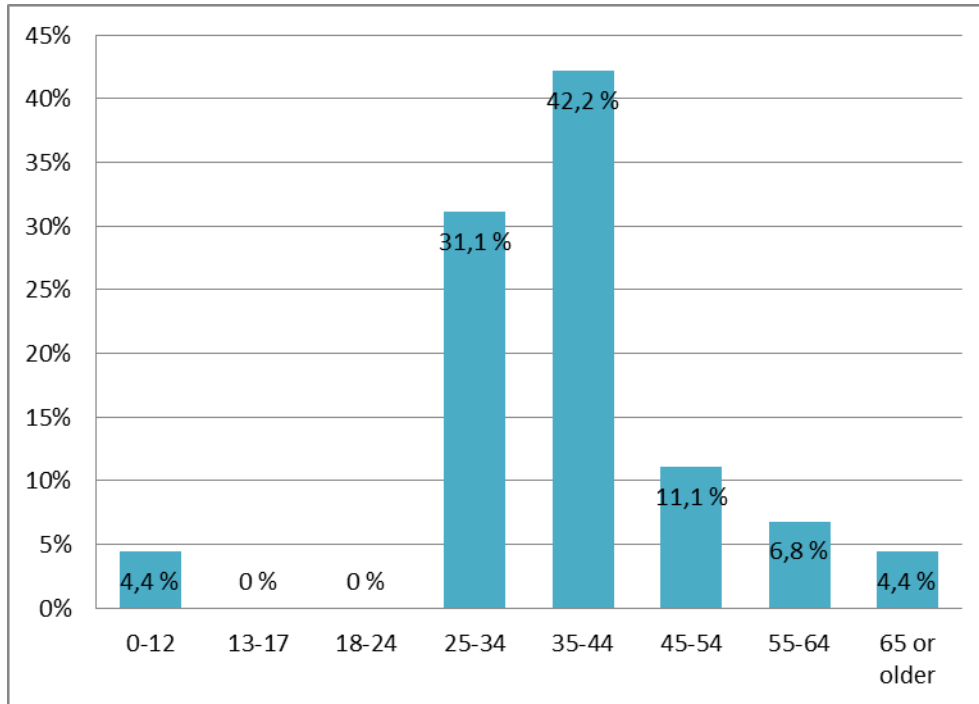


Figure 6. Age division among respondents

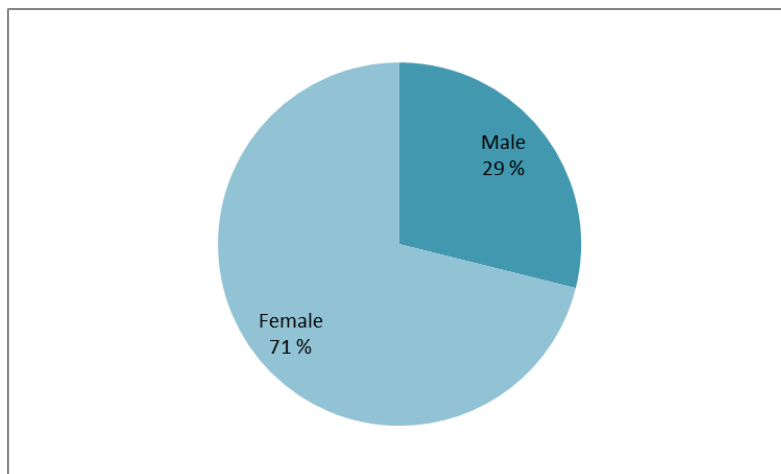


Figure 7. Gender division among respondents

Figure 7 on the previous page shows the gender division among the respondents; 71 % of the respondents were female and 29 % male.

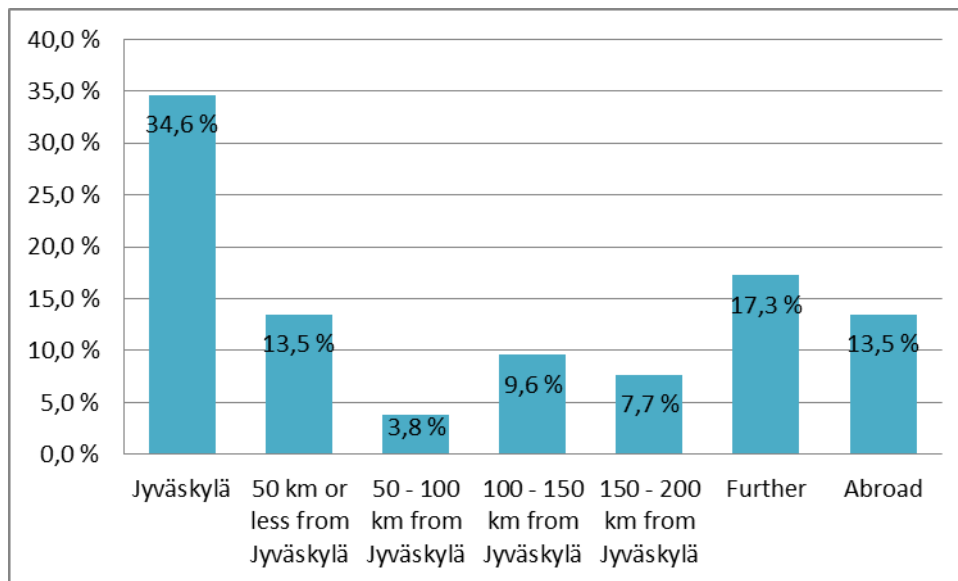


Figure 8. Place of resident of the respondents

Figure 8 above represents the places of residence of the respondents. Most of the respondents were from the area of Jyväskylä (34,6 %). An interesting fact was that the second biggest portion of respondents (17,3 %) came to visit the park from longer than 200 km from Jyväskylä. It would be very interesting to know the reason for this; why Peukkula is so popular that far from Jyväskylä? One possible reason for this is that the biggest cities of Finland, such as Helsinki and Turku are further than 200 km from Jyväskylä. Those cities hold more population who are visiting the park. This is also a very positive fact for Peukkula that their visibility is not restricted to the areas nearby. Surprisingly, minority (3,8 %) of the people visited Peukkula 50 – 100 km from Jyväskylä.

As seen from figure 9 on the next page, majority of the children visiting the park are 5 – 7 years old (42 %). The 2 – 4 years old were the second biggest respondent category with 39 %. Many of Peukkula's activities are designed for children of 5 – 7 years old. Especially the outdoor activities can be so fast tracked that the younger children cannot keep up. On the other hand, there are activities that are better suited for younger children, such as sto-

rytelling and song singing. These two age categories being the biggest age categories among the respondents indicates that Peukkula has succeeded in creating activities that attract their target age categories. Clearly less of visiting children belonged to the age category of 8 – 10 years old (16 %), and only 1 % was older than ten years old. 2 % of children were less than one year old.

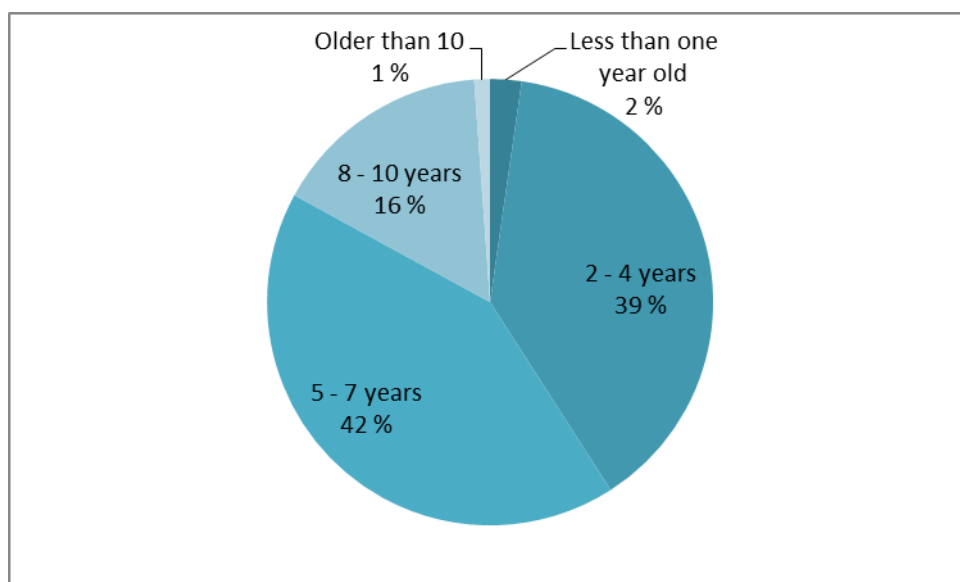


Figure 9. Ages of children visiting the park

3.2.2 Visiting habits

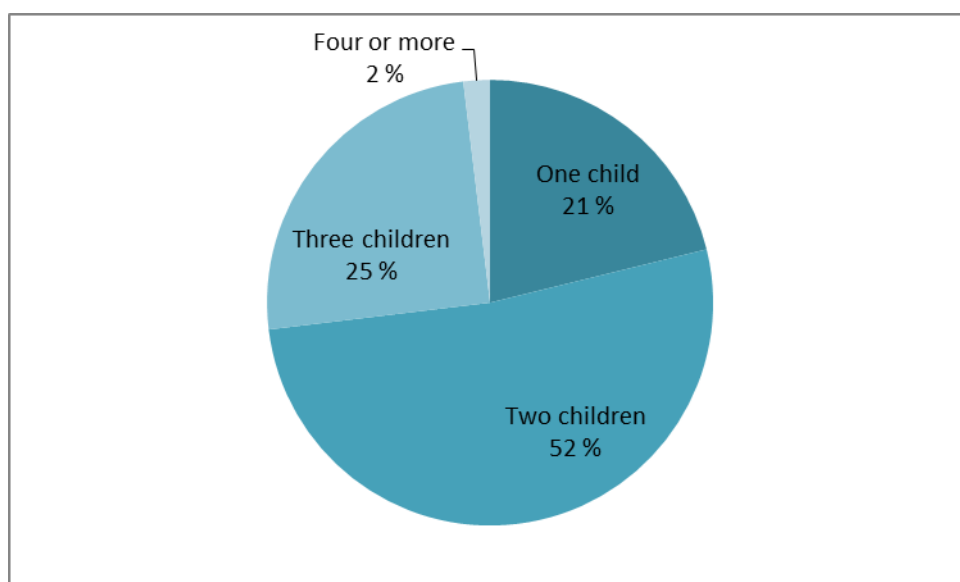


Figure 10. Amount of children on the visit

Figure 10 on the previous page represents the amount of children that the respondents had with them on the visit. Majority (52 %) were visiting with two children. 25 % were with three children, 21 % with one child, and only 2 % had four or more.

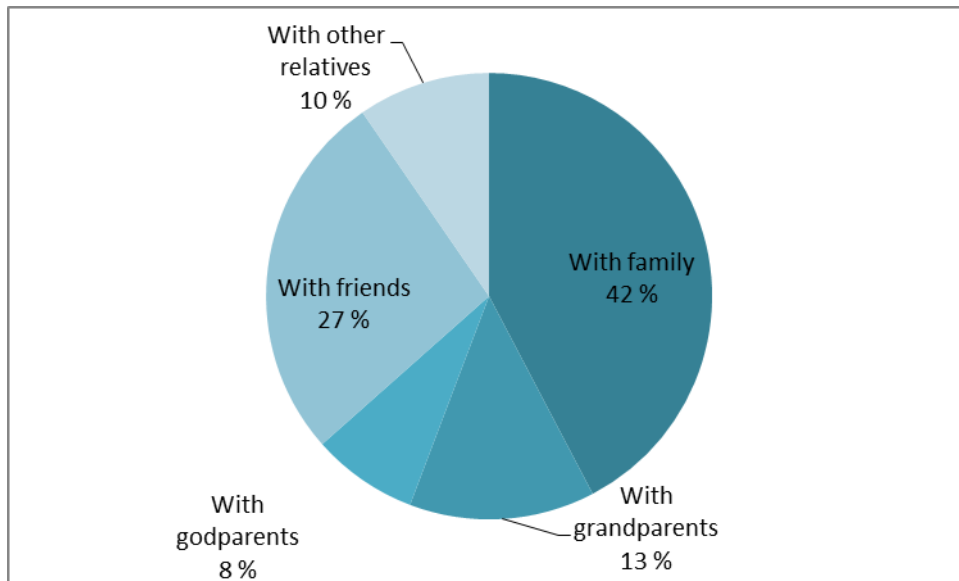


Figure 11. With whom did the respondents visit the park

Figure 11 above shows the party in which the respondents visited the park. Majority, 42 %, came with family and 27 % with friends. 13 % of the respondents visited Peukkula with grandparents, 10 % with other relatives, and 8 % with godparents.

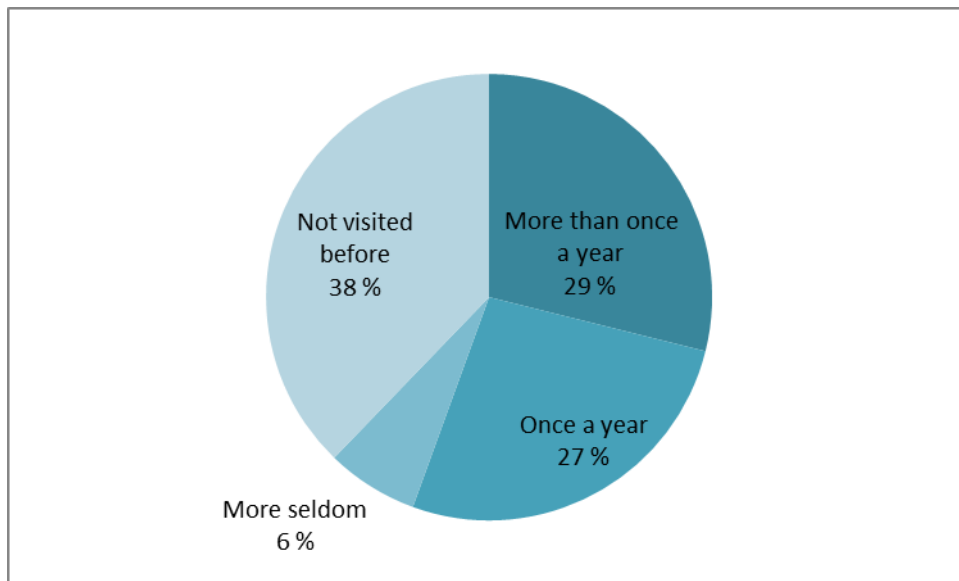


Figure 12. Frequency of visits by the Finnish respondents

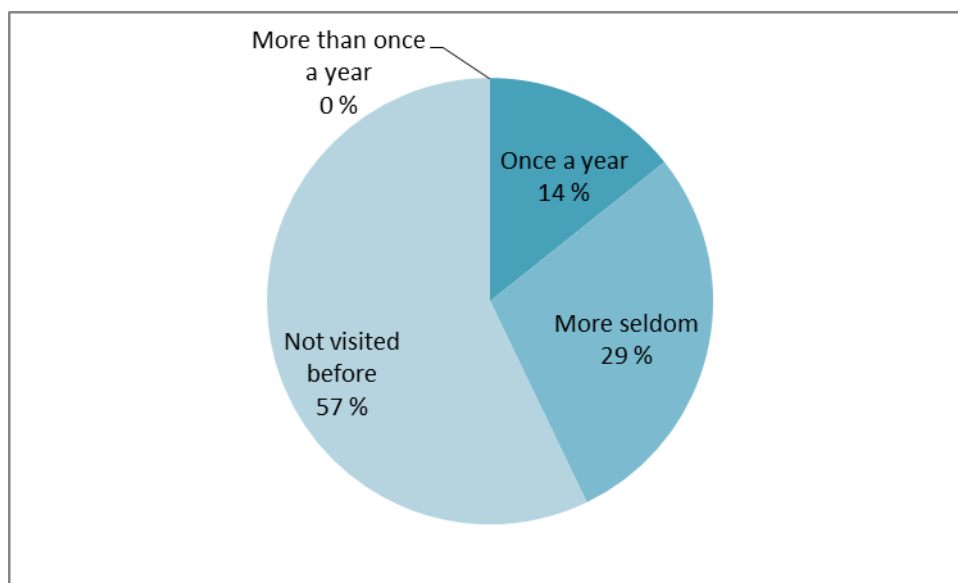


Figure 13. Frequency of visits by the foreign respondents

Figures 12 and 13 above indicates the frequency the respondents have visited Peukkula. Figure 12 shows the visits of the Finnish respondents, and figure 13 the visits of the foreign respondents. The response division among the Finnish respondents was quite equal; 27 % of the respondents visit Peukkula once a year, and 29 % more than once a year. However, the majority, 38 %, had not visited Peukkula before. This is a positive number for Peukkula, since it means that they are gaining new customers. The open feedback given by the customers was also that positive that the customers are very likely to return to Peukkula. It is also a positive fact that Peukkula has so many regular visitors, only 6 % of respondents visited Peukkula more seldom than once a year.

Among the foreign respondents, there was much more variety. Majority, 57 %, had not visited the park before. 14 % visited the park yearly, and 29 % more seldom than once a year. None of the foreign respondents visit the park more than once a year. This is not surprising, since naturally foreigners do not come as often as the Finns, however, I believe many of the respondents have for instance relatives or summer cottages near Jyväskylä, since 43 % of them were not first-timers in Peukkula.

Clear majority of both the Finnish and foreign respondents had not visited the park during the winter season. Only 14 % of foreigners and 38 % of the Finnish had visited the park during winter, as seen in figures 14 and 15 below. 5, 8 % of the respondents said that they had not known that the park is open during winter. This is a promotional matter that Peukkula should be issuing. Additionally, the winter-time activities should be improved, since another 5, 8 % said that there are not enough activities for children compared to the summer season. A few other comments also stated that they would like to know the detailed program in advance.

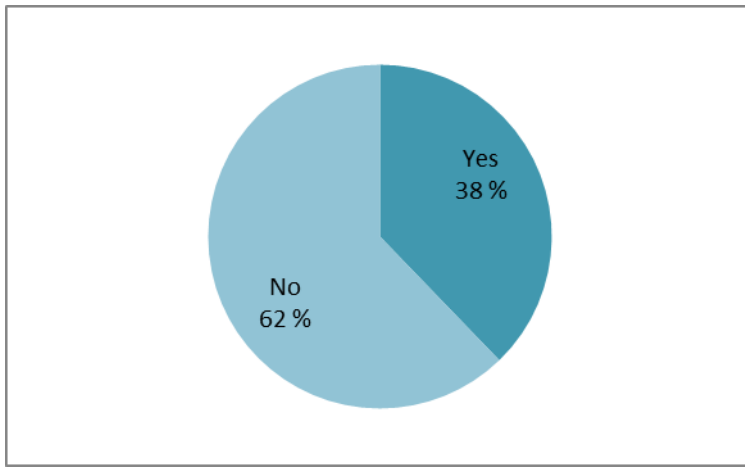


Figure 14. Percentage in which the Finnish respondents have visited Peukkula during the winter season

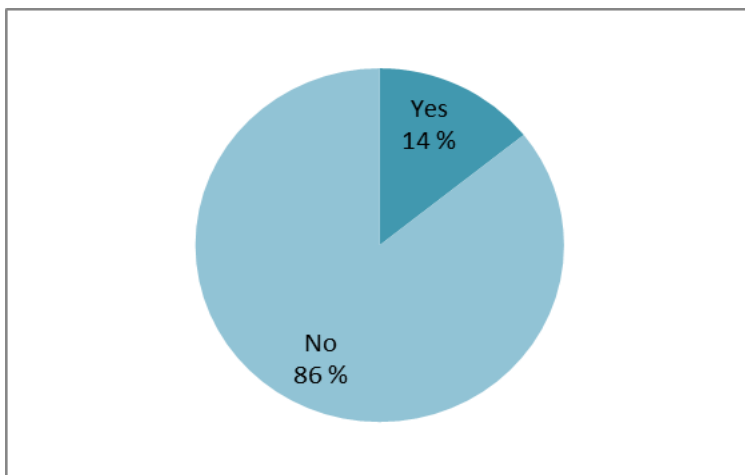


Figure 15. Percentage in which the foreign respondents have visited Peukkula during the winter season

3.2.3 Satisfaction

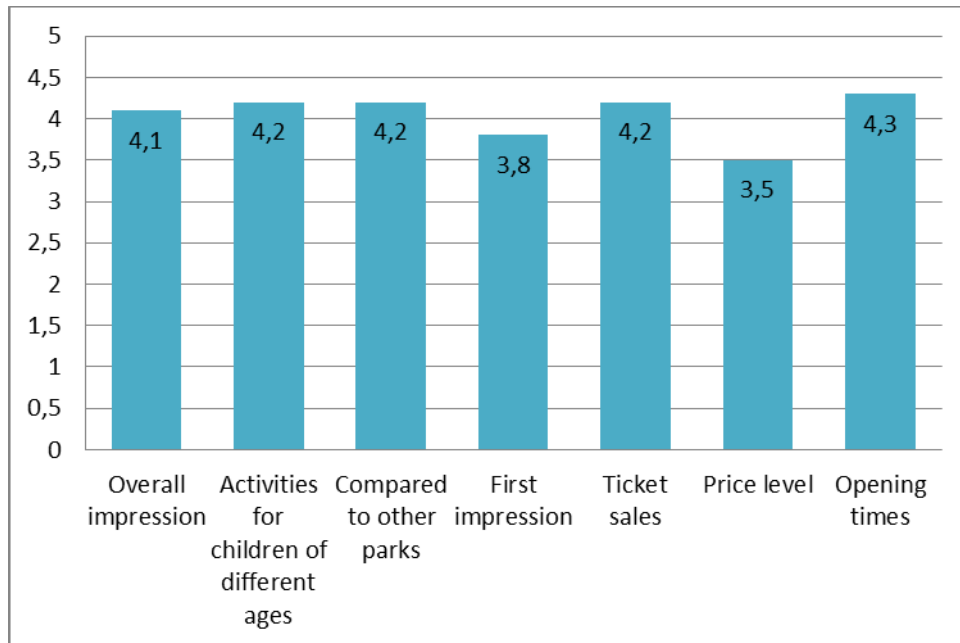


Figure 16. Average grades given by Finnish respondents

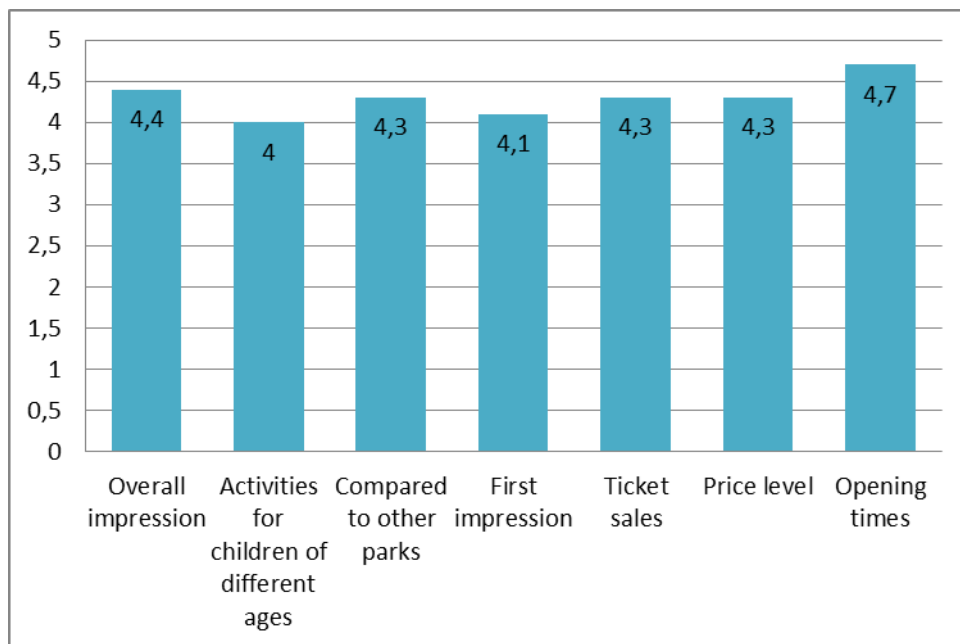


Figure 17. Average grades given by foreign respondents

Above are shown two figures, 16 and 17, which represent the average grades of certain areas of Peukkula's services. Figure 15 represents the grades given by Finnish respond-

ents, and figure 16 for grades given by foreign respondents. Overall there are no big differences between these two figures.

Generally all the respondents have given good grades, although the foreign respondents gave slightly better grades than the Finnish respondents. The average grade for first impression was clearly lower among the Finnish respondents (3,8) than with the foreign respondents (4,1). Finns were also clearly less satisfied with the price level (3,5) than the foreigners (4,3). Both the foreign and Finnish respondents were most satisfied with the opening times (4,7 and 4,3).

In order to find out the general satisfaction and loyalty of the customers, it was good to find out whether or not they have already recommended Peukkula to someone. Perhaps surprisingly the numbers turned out to be quite positive, and 62 % of the Finnish respondents had already recommended Peukkula to someone, as seen from figure 18 below. People recommending something to others is one of the most effective ways in gaining popularity. This indicates that Peukkula's situation should be improving in terms of customer inflow. Of the foreign respondents, none had recommended Peukkula to anyone.

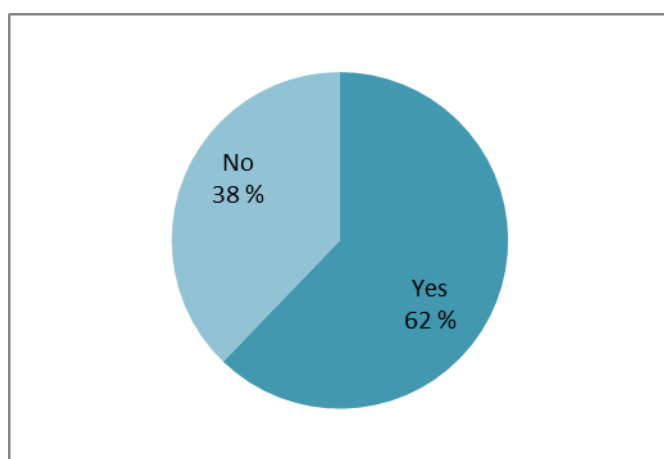


Figure 18. The percentage in which the Finnish respondents have recommended Peukkula

Figure 19 on the next page indicates the likeliness of the respondents to recommend Peukkula to someone. When asking the respondents how likely they would recommend Peukkula to anyone, the average grade by Finnish respondents was 4,6. The number was

slightly lower among the foreign respondents: 3,6. However, these numbers are quite positive, and majority of the respondents would recommend Peukkula to their acquaintances.

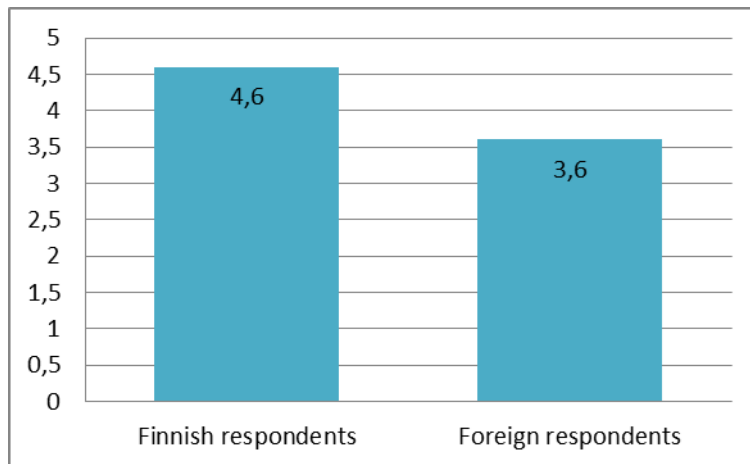


Figure 19. How likely the respondents are to recommend Peukkula (5= very likely, 1= not likely)

3.2.3.1 Restaurants

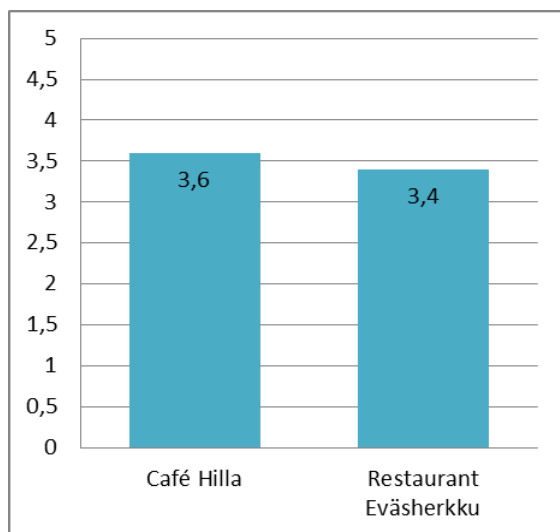


Figure 20. Average grades for restaurant services given by Finnish respondents

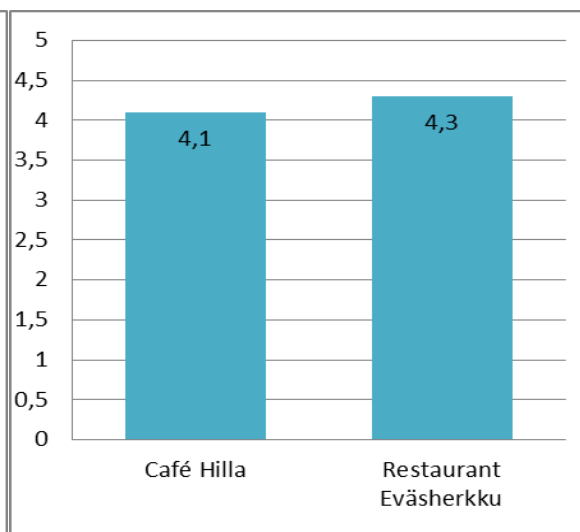


Figure 21. Average grades for restaurant services given by foreign respondents

Figure 20 and 21 on above represents the average grades given to the restaurant services of Peukkula. Figure 20 on the left shows the grades given by Finnish respondents, and figure 21 on the right represents grades given by foreign respondents. Peukkula has two

restaurants, Café Hilla and Restaurant Eväsherkku. The Finnish respondents gave slightly lower grades to the restaurants (3,6 and 3,4) than the foreigners (4,1 and 4,3), but still both restaurants scored better than the average.

17,8 % of the Finnish respondents had not visited Café Hilla, and 20 % Restaurant Eväsherkku. Many of these people had had their own snacks with them, and since Peukkula offers wide green areas outside, many people prefer to eat outside when it is warm. Another reason for the respondents not to visit the restaurants might be the low quality of the food. Many of the respondents hoped for “home cooked” meals instead of french fries and hamburgers. A bigger salad variety was also hoped. This came clear from both the focus group discussions and the open ended answers of the survey. People also hoped a restaurant to be open outside during the summer time.

3.2.3.2 Characters

Figures 22 and 23 on the next page indicate the average grades the respondents gave to the characters of Peukkula. Figure 22 shows the grades given by the Finnish respondents, and figure 23 the responses given by foreign respondents. First of all, it is clear that foreigners rate the characters a lot lower than the Finnish. It is hard to say for sure what the reason behind the difference is. However, my own guess is that the foreign children do not get similar contact with the characters as the Finnish children do due to a language barrier.

The grades given by the Finnish respondents were quite positive. Also from the open ended feedback it came clear that the characters were the most praised part of Peukkula’s activities. People were extremely pleased with the way the characters were able to engage children in the activities, and took the children very well into consideration. Natro-troll and Kekko the Inventor scored slightly less points than the other characters (4,1 and 4,2). They may not be as interesting as the others, or children might be a bit scared of them. These two characters were also the two least seen ones; 17,3 % of the respondents had not seen Natro-troll during their visit, and 15,4 % had not seen Kekko the Inventor. Pirate Scarface was the most popular character among the Finnish respondents with an av-

average grade of 4,5. It was also the most seen character; only 1,9 % of the respondents had not seen it during their visit.

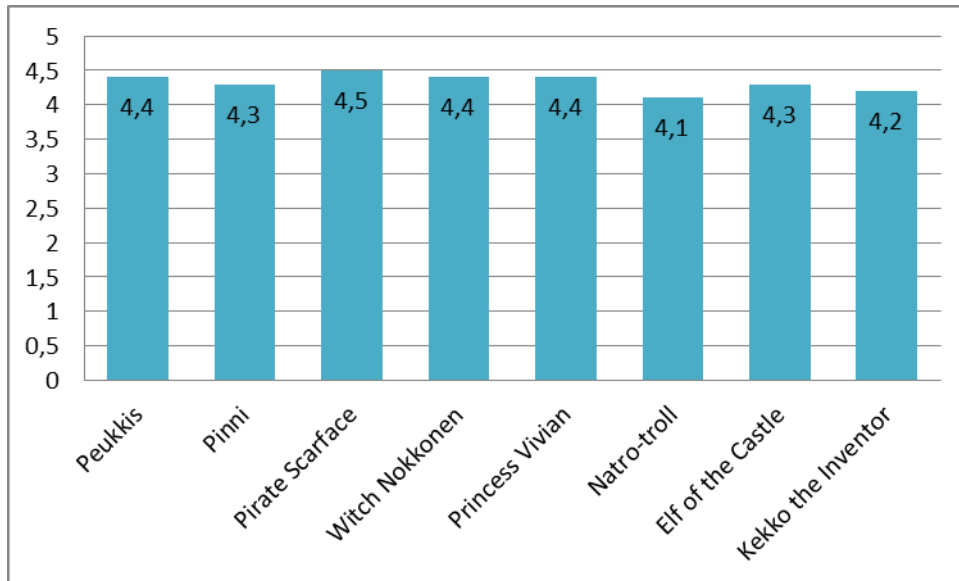


Figure 22. Average grades of the characters given by Finnish respondents

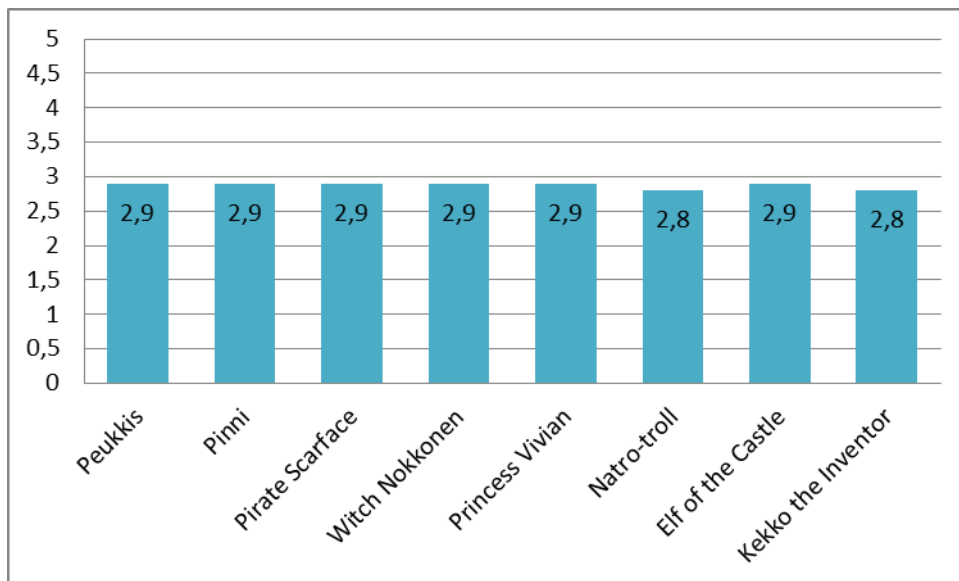


Figure 23. Average grades of the characters given by foreign respondents

3.2.3.3 Shows and events

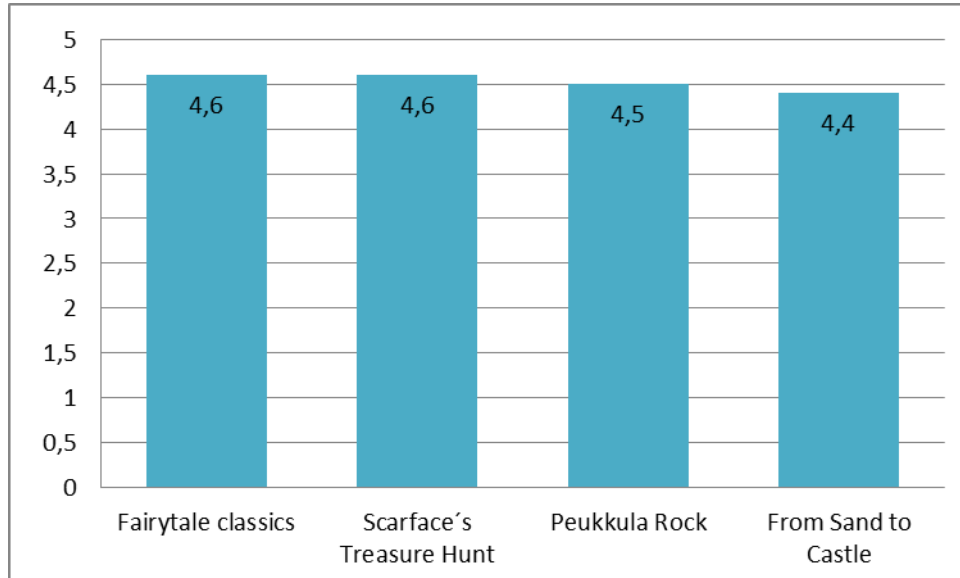


Figure 24. Average grades of shows given by Finnish respondents

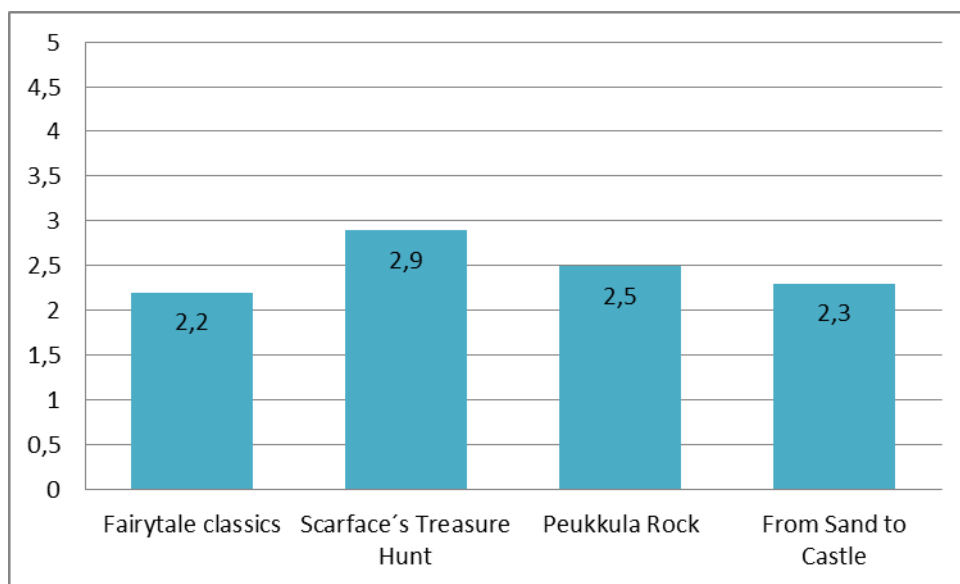


Figure 25. Average grades of shows given by foreign respondents

A similar case is seen from the grades of shows and events held by Peukkula. The grades given by foreign visitors are substantially lower than the grades given by Finnish visitors, as seen from figures 24 and 25 above. The difference can again be explained with a language barrier; foreign visitors do not enjoy the events as much as the Finnish ones, since they are not in their own language. If the amount of foreign visitors will significantly in-

crease in the future, the language barrier is a big obstacle for Peukkula. Unlike for instance in Moomin Valley where the characters do not talk, Peukkula’s characters are based on verbal interaction with the children.

The grades given by Finnish respondents are quite good, and it seems the visitors are very happy with the shows and events. However, 9, 6 % of all the respondents had not seen any of the shows. 53, 8 % had not seen “From Sand to Castle”, 42, 3 % had not attended Scarface’s Treasure Hunt, and 26, 9 % had not seen Peukkula Rock. The percentages are quite big compared to the fact that all these shows are presented several times during the day. The visitors are given the schedule and location of each event when entering the park, so they should be aware of them. In addition, the characters responsible of each event are continuously advertising their own events to children and guiding them to attend them. An additional question should be added to the questionnaire specifying the reason why the respondent had not attended the events.

3.2.3.4 Facilities

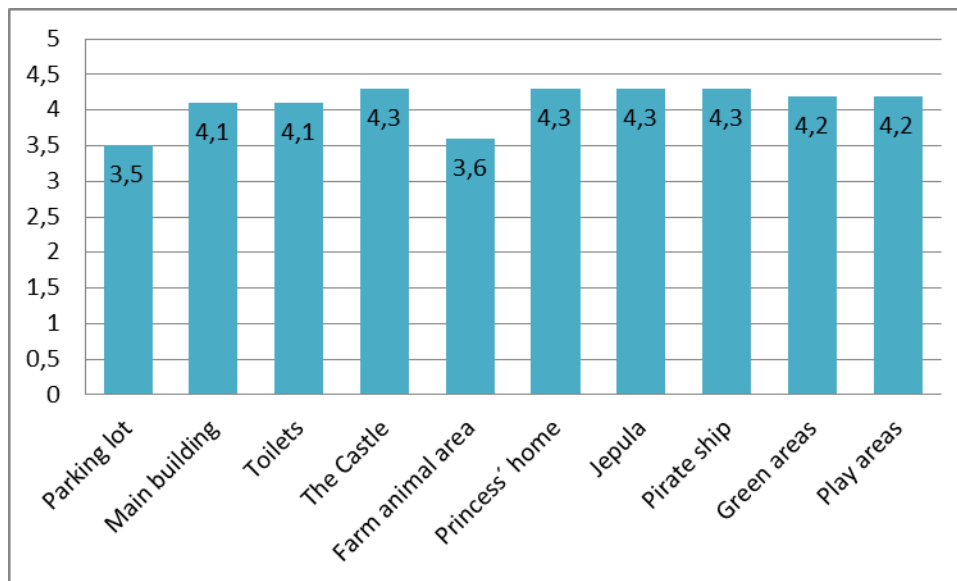


Figure 26. Average grades of the facilities given by Finnish respondents

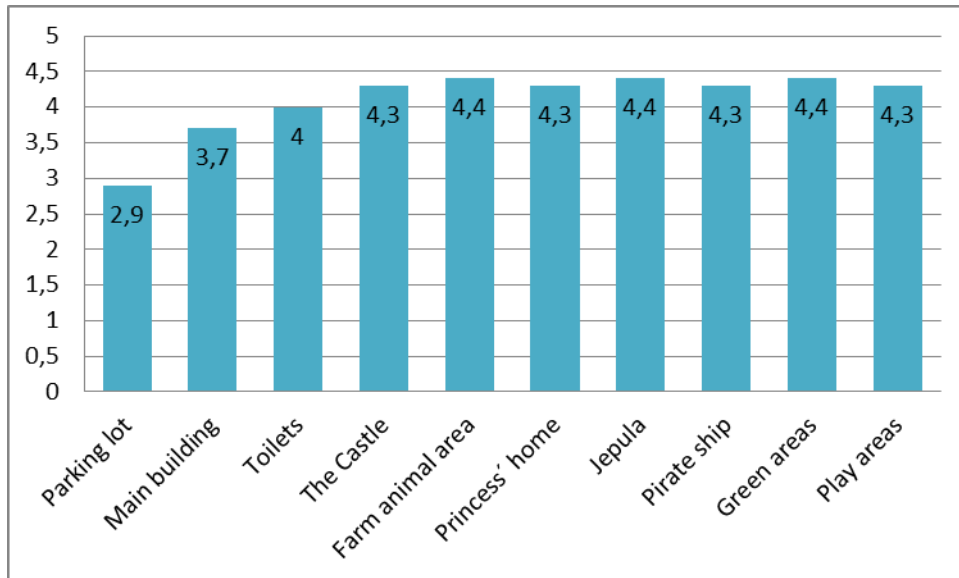


Figure 27. Average grades of the facilities given by foreign respondents

Figures 26 and 27 above indicate the average grades of Peukkula's facilities given by the Finnish and foreign respondents. Overall all the grades are better than average, although parking lot scored slightly less than other facilities. Especially foreign visitors were quite unsatisfied with the parking, since the average grade was only 2,9. Finnish respondents also gave lower scores to the farm animal area (3,6).

3.2.4 Visibility of the company

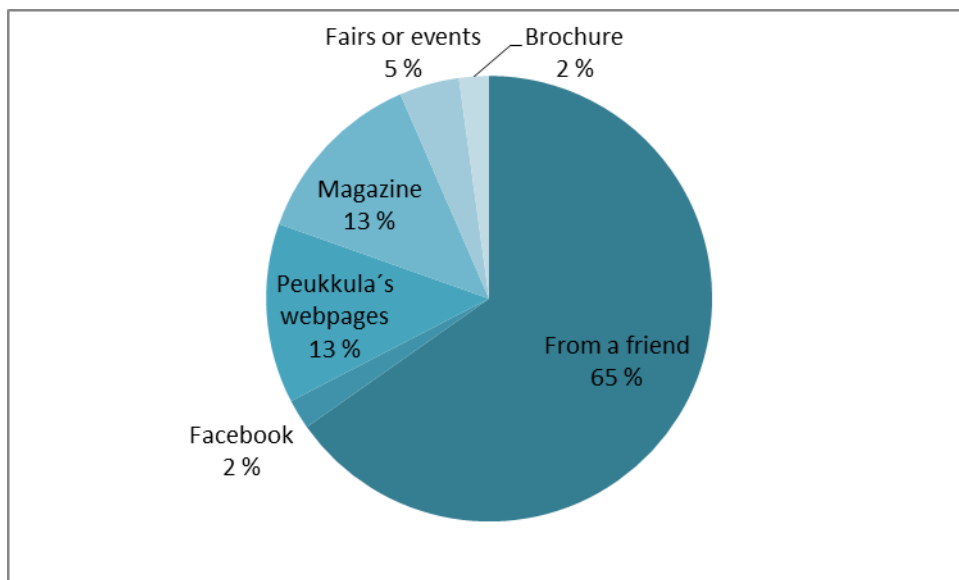


Figure 28. From where the respondents got the information of Peukkula

Clear majority (65 %) had got the information of Peukkula from their friend as seen in figure 28 on the previous page. This is also supported by the earlier data that majority of the respondents would recommend Peukkula. 13 % had got the information from Peukkula’s web pages and Magazines, 5 % from fairs or events, and 2 % from brochures and Facebook.

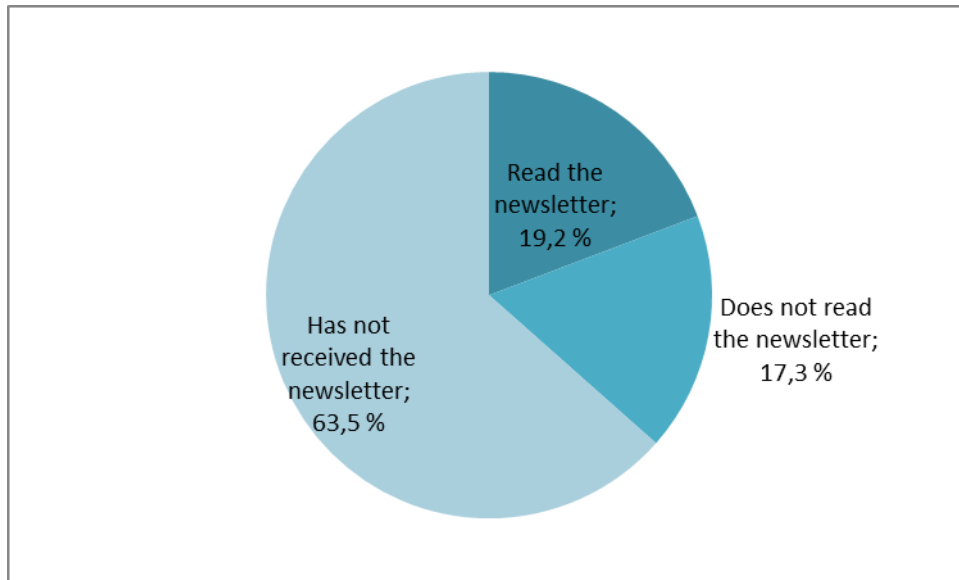


Figure 29. How many of the respondents read the newsletter sent by Peukkula

Figure 29 above indicates the percentages in which the respondents read, do not read, and receive the newsletter sent by Peukkula. It is clear that majority of the respondents (63, 5 %) have not received the newsletter. All together 36, 5 % of respondents have received the newsletter, out of which 17, 3 % do not read it. There might have been some misunderstandings about the question formation, and respondents were confused with not reading the newsletter, and not receiving it at all. I believe some respondents answered “Do not read the newsletter”, even if they have not received the newsletter. Consequently the amount of respondents who has not received the newsletter is possibly bigger. The question layout should be modified more comprehensive when the questionnaire is conducted later.

4 Discussion

In this chapter the results of the research are analysed, and the validity and reliability of the study is also discussed. The recommendations for improving the company's services are introduced. At the end I will also discuss my own learning within this project.

4.1 Interpretation of results

In this sub-chapter is presented the analysis of the results. The results are categorized according to the different service aspects, so that the big picture can be understood better.

4.1.1 General satisfaction

Peukkula was most praised by its uniqueness. Visitors are extremely pleased with the fact that Peukkula is not trying to be a fancy super modern adventure park, but rather an old-fashioned and comforting place for children to play and be children. They are not trying to be anything fancier than what they actually are, but rather keeping it simple and focusing on the core service. Two comments from the quantitative survey actually stated that Peukkula is "the best place of the summer".

Peukkula's problem does not seem to be in the quality of the service, since the feedback is mostly very positive. Respondents in the focus group discussion stated that they have heard several cases that once a family has visited Peukkula, they will most likely visit it again. The problem rather relies in getting the people visit the park in the first place.

The first impression however, gained a few negative feedbacks. When you first arrive at Peukkula, it does not look very inviting. The building looks quite small and there are no decorations or colours on the outside (except for a big Peukkula poster on the wall). Also the inside of the main entrance is very pale. A mother from the focus group discussion told that in their first visit to Peukkula their first thought was "is this it?" and almost turned away. However, when you go further to the park you start to see more and more of the activities, and only when the view to the outside area opens the visitor realises the size of the park. Also a few open ended comments from the quantitative survey stated that at

first they were quite sceptical about the park, but when leaving the park they were convinced they will visit it again.

4.1.2 Characters and shows

The characters got most of the positive feedback. Majority of the comments stated that the characters are amazing, and take the children amazingly well into consideration. Respondents stated that the actors are not just playing their role, but act very much according to it. Peukkula has succeeded in creating a group of characters that interests children of different ages and gender.

Consequently the shows gathered positive feedback. The mothers in the focus group discussions said that it is fun even for the adults to play along with the children. The songs are funny and the lyrics easy to remember. However, one negative comment arose from the quantitative survey. One parent mentioned an important fact that you can only hear the performers if you are sitting on the front row. The actors should definitively have microphones on, so that everyone could hear them.

4.1.3 Food services

In the focus group discussion the negative points related to the restaurant services were mainly about two things: product range and quality of the food. The attendees stated that the food in Peukkula is normal low-quality fast food, hamburgers and fries, which you get from all the children's parks. Nowadays fast food is served everywhere, and parents are tired of feeding low quality food to their children. Also the open ended answers from the quantitative survey had a few comments wishing for healthier food, and especially bigger salad variety. According to the focus group discussion, many of the visitors even prefer to eat their own snacks outside, or go someplace else to eat and then come back to the park. As mentioned earlier 17, 4 % had not visited café Hilla, and 20 % Restaurant Eväsherkku. The reason for this might be the dissatisfaction to the food selection.

A bigger product range for the cafeteria and restaurant were also hoped in both the quantitative survey and the focus group discussion. Respondents also hoped for a cafeteria to be open outside during the summer season. Apparently there is a cafeteria outside, but it is not open very often.

4.1.4 Price

From both the focus group discussions and the quantitative survey it became clear that the pricing gained most dissatisfaction. Especially the relatively high price for adults raised many comments. As mentioned before, the first impression of Peukkula is not very inviting, and they rather keep their park simple than invest in fancy facilities. The high pricing does not fit into this picture. Currently Peukkula is charging 18 € for children and 12 € for adults during the summer season. During the winter time the prices are somewhat lower: 10 € for children over two years old, 6 € for children ages 1 – 2, and adults and younger children for free. Many of the parents in the focus groups said that they don't want to take any additional people, such as grandparents, to the park since there is no point for them to pay for it. However, most likely each visiting customer would buy other products of the park, such as food or beverages, or even the side-line products. This is an important thing for Peukkula to consider, since they might lose some customers with this pricing system. As a comparison, many of the competitor parks, such as HopLop, are free of charge for the adults coming with the child.

The price issue also came clear from the quantitative survey results. As it can be seen from the figure 16 on page 31, the average grade for pricing is clearly lower than the other areas: 3,5. The open feedback area also gathered some comments on the pricing. One comment had a great idea about flexible ticket price that you could for instance buy only a two-hours ticket. This respondent was very shocked of the price, since they had only come for a few hours. This kind of time range is of course hard to monitor, but some flexibility to the pricing system is clearly needed.

4.1.5 Maintenance

Maintaining the facilities should be improved, in order to improve the overall image of Peukkula. Currently the facilities and attractions are slightly out of shape, and it instantly affects the overall picture customers form of the park. 15, 5 % of the Finnish respondents had comments about the low maintenance of the area. According to the comments, visitors are displeased with the fact that the areas are not well in order, for instance there are lawn movers on the side of the pedal track, big windows of the inside play area are dirty, and game machines in the restaurant are out of order.

The parking place was also commented. It is said to be too small and in really bad shape. During the summer when I visited the park myself several times, there were several deep pits on the entrance that a smaller car might actually suffer some damage. Even today the pits have still not been covered.

4.1.6 Visibility

There is a clear need for Peukkula to improve their visibility both in the area of Jyväskylä and in other parts of Finland. Already in the focus group discussion visibility became one of the most discussed problem areas. Even some parents who lived in Jyväskylä had not known about Peukkula for a long time before someone else had introduced the place to them. One mother mentioned that she had tried to find Peukkula's brochures from the city centre of Jyväskylä without success. Peukkula should make themselves more visible in the cities and areas nearby.

In addition, the winter season should clearly be brought more visible. From the figure 14 on page 31 it can be seen very clearly that majority of the respondents have not visited the park during winter, and what is worse, many of them stated the reason that they simply did not know the park is open during winter time. Peukkula's revenue is mostly gained during the summer, and by increasing the visitor amount during the winter Peukkula could allocate their revenues more evenly during the whole year.

4.2 Validity and reliability

The credibility in the focus group discussions was secured by the fact that all the attendees had visited Peukkula during the summer season within one year. Hence they had the knowledge I needed in forming the picture of customer requirements and overall satisfaction. They also offered me with great real-life examples, which also made me understand their points of view better. There were three attendees in the first focus group discussion, and six in the second one. This amount was enough to get the discussion flowing and offer sufficient data. The second discussion was organized to get more opinions, and ensure that there were no major differences in the opinions of the attendees.

The questions for the focus group discussion were formed so that they did not give out any desirable answers. The questions also required the respondent to explain their answer a bit further, so short “yes” and “no” answers were excluded.

The focus group discussions were recorded, and I also took notes of the main points. I relied mainly to the hand written notes in the data analysis, since I had everything I needed in there. However, it was good that I had the audio as well, since a few times I had to check from there if I had understood the idea what the person said correctly. I also listened the audio through a few times after the analysis to make sure I had all the points covered. The analysis of the focus group discussion was written right after the discussions took place in order to secure the data was fresh in my mind. I was also very careful not letting my personal opinions about this company interfere with the analysis.

Regarding the quantitative survey it was important to secure that the questions were measuring the right things. The questions in the quantitative survey should also have been designed so that the respondents understood it. In order to avoid this kind of situation, the focus group discussions were organized. Since the questions were tested before publishing the actual questionnaire, it was secured that the questions were understandable. Also, since the answers of the survey were very similar with each other, it indicates that the respondents have understood the questions in a similar way. It also means that the results can be more or less generalised to the whole population of Peukkula’s customers.

4.3 Recommendations

Here are presented the recommendations for improving the company's services. The recommendations are based on both the focus group discussions and the quantitative survey.

4.3.1 Improvements for visibility

Visibility is the most important area of improvement for Peukkula. The first step would be making Peukkula more visible in the area of Jyväskylä. They have already done some advertising in the local newspapers, but it does not seem to be enough. The advertisement should be more frequent and more visible in size and colour. Brochures should also be available more easily in the city.

The winter season's visibility should be additionally increased. This can be done by advertising the winter season activities already during the summer season. Peukkula should actively focus on telling visitors they are open during the winter time as well. In addition, Peukkula should develop new activities and events for the winter so that people would be more interested.

The newsletter is also one way to increase visibility and also keep existing customers loyal. The figure 29 in page 41 showed that majority of the respondents who received the newsletter, also read it (19, 2 %). However, the percentage of the respondents who did not receive the newsletter at all was the highest (63, 5 %). Peukkula should more intensively gather visitors to their customer database so that they could reach more people with their newsletters, and hence get them to visit more often.

Peukkula has attended a few child fairs, which is an excellent start in making them known in other parts of Finland. One of the mothers in the focus group discussion had visited their section in the fairs, and told it was great they had all their characters with them in the fairs. Children tend to be more interested in going to places which they know. For instance the Moomin Valley in Naantali is very popular because so many people knows the

Moomins. By making the characters more known to children, they will be keener on coming to Peukkula to visit the characters.

One very good opportunity for Peukkula would be to have a partnership with the Housing Fair Finland Co-op (Suomen Asuntomessut Oy), which will be held in Jyväskylä in summer 2014. The Housing Fairs attracts 150 000 - 200 000 visitors yearly to the hosting cities. Plenty of families with small children will also be attending. Big advantage for Peukkula is that it is located quite near to the Housing fair area. Peukkula's brochures could for instance be shared at the ticket admission to the fairs, and have their logo and link to their web sites on the Housing Fairs' web pages. It is highly possible that once Peukkula becomes visible to these people, they might visit it again the next year and even recommend it further to their friends.

Another possible partnership would be the Neste Oil Rally Finland in Jyväskylä. On the first view this does not seem like a logical place for children's park to co-operate, but it is a well-known fact that many families with small children visit the rally on a yearly basis. In addition, Neste Oil Rally is actually trying to improve their brand image from alcohol-filled event to a more family-orientated one. There is a big possibility that they might be more than willing to take a local children's park as their partner.

4.3.2 Improvements for the restaurant services

It would be a great advantage for Peukkula to offer healthy home-cooked food with bigger salad variety instead of unhealthy fast food. They should really focus on developing their product range into healthier direction, since there clearly is a demand for it. If serving separate portions is too costly or inefficient, a buffet could be considered. Peukkula could take the advantage of ready-made frozen food, which you just heat at the location of service. Naturally the quality is not that good as with real "home-cooked" food, but this way Peukkula would not need to invest in additional restaurant staff and customers would value it more than fast-food.

4.3.3 Improvements for pricing

The pricing system should really be considered again in the management of Peukkula. Customers are quite displeased with the current system since the price for adults is quite high. After all, they are bringing their children there to play and not themselves. It makes no sense that the adult ticket is only 33 % lower than the children ticket. If taking of the adult price off completely is unprofitable for the company, it should at least be substantially lowered.

The company could also consider the option for lower price for shorter visiting time. Currently the tickets are valid for two days, but majority of the visitors only come for one day. In addition, there are people who would like to visit the park for only a few hours. Perhaps the prices could be lowered by modifying the validity time of the tickets?

4.3.4 Improving the maintenance

Better maintenance to the facilities is clearly needed. Finishing touch is required throughout the park to create an image of a well-maintained park. The area should be tidied up, and all the excessive items, such as lawnmowers should be removed. The attractions should also be taken care of better. One parent stated in the open feedback that his children are always full of sticks from the wooden parts of the attractions when leaving the park.

The first impression could be improved by renovating the lobby area, since it truly does not look inviting. The ticket sales desk is old and the paint has faded away years ago. With small painting jobs and re-organizing the furniture the place would definitely look much more inviting to the customers. The cafeteria tables are unorganized in the middle of the place where children are running back and forth. With these small changes the overall impression of the park would definitely change into a positive direction.

The outside of the building also needs some reforming. Colours and decorations suggesting that there actually is a fun children's park inside should be added to the front door.

4.3.5 Additional products and services

Nowadays the trend of children's birthday parties is changing. Before most birthday parties were held at home, but nowadays the parents are looking for something different, and perhaps easier place for celebration. This is a great market opportunity for Peukkula. There is already the option available, but it should be brought more visible to the customers. For instance, most of the focus group attendees did not know there was this possibility. However, one of the mothers in the focus group discussion had attended a birthday party in Peukkula a few years ago, and was extremely pleased with the concept. The birthday girl had wanted a princess themed birthday, and the princess character of Peukkula had actually attended the party and played with the children. There are not many places in Finland with this kind of concept. Peukkula should take advantage of their characters, such as the witch, the princess, and the inventor, and create themed birthday parties. Based on the comments in the focus group discussion I would say there is a huge interest in this kind of service.

Peukkula also has a great variety of children's songs they have created themselves. They have even published a CD called "Peukkulan elämää" [Life in Peukkula] in 2011, which is sold at the park. Many parents stated that the songs are actually very good, and much more sensible unlike for instance The Smurfs. However, not many people know the CD has been published. The songs are sung at the park in Peukkula's shows, but apart of that there is no other advertisement going on.

4.3.6 Improvements for the questionnaire

After executing the questionnaire, there were a few changes I would recommend Peukkula to do when conducting the questionnaire again.

Question 5. There should be added a blank space after the question of asking the respondents place of residence. If the respondent answers "abroad", there should be a space where the respondent could specify from which country he/she is. This does not have a

big influence on Peukkula's activities, but it would be interesting to find out from where the people are visiting the park.

Question 11. As I was making the analysis of the quantitative responses, I realized I was lacking the average grade for restaurant services in general. Hence, in question 11 the respondents should also give a grade from 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest, and 5 being the best) to how satisfied they are with the restaurant services in Peukkula. This would have been an important piece of information in discovering whether people are really satisfied with the restaurants compared to the other services or not.

Question 14. Quite many of the respondents (9, 6 %) had not seen any of the shows or events during their visit. An additional blank space should be added to ask the respondents to specify the reason why they have not seen any of the shows.

Question 19. Quite many of the respondents replied that they had not received the news letter (63, 5%). There should be an additional question to ask whether they would be interested in receiving the newsletter. A blank space should also be added where the respondent could write their e-mail address. This would be an effective way for Peukkula to first discover whether people are really interested in the newsletter or not, and secondly to increase their customer database. The options in the question should also be specified a bit more. I discovered there were probably some misunderstandings of what the answer options meant. The options should be changed as follows:

- I receive and read the newsletter
- I receive the newsletter but don't read it
- I haven't received the newsletter and I have no interest in it
- I haven't received the newsletter but I would like to get it

E-mail address where the newsletter could be sent _____

Lastly, a question specifying the rate in which the customers are willing to visit Peukkula again should be added. This is important information regarding the overall satisfaction and

loyalty of the customers; if the customers are satisfied, they will most likely visit again. The question should be in a likert-scale format, asking the respondent “how likely would you visit Peukkula again?”. The scale would be from one to five, one for “not very likely”, and five for “very likely”.

4.4 Own evaluation

Overall I learned extremely much during this project. I can say I now have a quite good knowledge base about customer satisfaction measurements. My specialization studies in the field of marketing helped me a lot with this project, since I was already somewhat familiar with the theories of CRM and customer-centric approach. During my specialization studies, I developed a clear interest towards customer management, and this project has just made it stronger. In the future I wish to work with CRM, and improve companies’ ability to know their customers.

From my studies in HAAGA-HELIA, the most helpful issues regarding this project were all the real-life projects and surveys completed in courses. They gave me a sense of confidence that even though I did not exactly know how a customer satisfaction survey is conducted; I knew I was able to do it.

In addition, I am very pleased with the outcome of the thesis, since it is very beneficial for the case company, if they just understand to take advantage of it. The research offers Peukkula a lot of useful information about their customers’ perceptions, and also crucial recommendations in improving their services. The theory I gathered supported very well both the question formations and data analysis.

This project has not been as easy and smooth as I originally thought. I faced several challenges which I had to overcome to be able to conduct a successful research that offered benefits to the case company. The co-operation with the case company was not ideal in any matter. I would have wished for more support from them and a more active attitude regarding the project. It seemed that at first they were very excited about this thesis, and offered me a great platform to start formulating the topic. However, when time went on,

they were less and less responsive to my contact attempts. I received no feedback at all when I sent them versions of the unfinished thesis for evaluation. Naturally they are very busy people, but why accept a thesis project if they did not have time to put any effort in it?

If I could do one thing again with the project, I would organize a briefing meeting for the staff of Peukkula about the handling of the questionnaire. I was very upset by the fact that the questionnaire handling had not been put in action as I had agreed with the CEO. The employees at the ticket sales did not even know what the purpose of the questionnaire was, or that it was supposed to be handled to every customer. I should have definitively taken care of that myself, and also monitor the process by visiting Peukkula a few times during the questionnaire collection. Then the handling of the questionnaire might have been as I had meant it.

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Attachments

Attachment 1. Agenda for the focus group discussions

1. In general
 - a. What is your overall impression of Peukkula?
 - i. For instance from the play areas, restaurants, toilets, parking lots
 - b. How is Peukkula doing compared to other children's parks of the same size?
For instance HopLop or Hilarius Hiiri
 - i. How is Peukkula's price level compared to these? Is it worth the money?
 - c. What do you think is the target age category of Peukkula?
 - i. How has Peukkula succeeded in offering activities to children of that age category?
 - d. What kind of customer service are you expecting and what have you received?
2. Content and expectations
 - a. What do you think of the characters of Peukkula?
 - b. What do you think of the shows and events of Peukkula?
 - c. What expectations do you have regarding the restaurant services?
 - i. What do you think of Peukkula's current restaurant services?
 1. What is missing, what is good, where to improve, quality of food, price level, and so on
3. Visibility
 - a. Would you recommend Peukkula to others?
 - i. Why, why not?
 - b. Where have you originally found out about Peukkula?
4. How do you think Peukkula should improve their concept/services?
5. Were the questions in the questionnaire relevant and understandable?

Attachment 2. The quantitative questionnaire

Customer satisfaction survey of Peukkula - summer 2013

Hello and welcome to Peukkula!

Peukkula is constantly improving its services and wants to offer the customers better experiences. Help us by giving your opinion, so that we can offer you even better adventure experiences in our park.



By returning the survey you will receive a free beverage of your choice from the info-point.

1. Age of the respondent

- 0 - 12 years
- 13 - 17 years
- 18 - 24 years
- 25 - 34 years
- 35 - 44 years
- 45 - 54 years
- 55 - 64 years
- 65 or older

2. Gender

- Male
- Female

3. Number of children in your group?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 or more

4. Ages of the children (you may choose several options)

- less than 1 year
- 2 - 4
- 5 - 7
- 8 - 10
- older than 10 years

5. Place of residence

- Jyväskylä
- 50 km or less from Jyväskylä
- 50 - 100 km from Jyväskylä
- 100 - 150 km from Jyväskylä
- 150 - 200 km from Jyväskylä
- Further
- Abroad

6. How often do you visit Peukkula?

- More than once a year
- Once a year
- Less than once a year
- I have not visited Peukkula earlier

7. Have you visited Peukkula during the winter season?

- Yes
- No

If your answer is no, you may tell us why:

8. With whom are you visiting Peukkula with? (you may choose several options)

- With family
- With grandparents
- With godparents
- With friends
- With other relatives

9. How well you think Peukkula has succeeded in offering activities for children of different ages? (1=very badly, 5= very well)

1 2 3 4 5

10. How would you rate Peukkula compared to other children's activity parks of the same size? (1= a lot worse, 5= a lot better).

1 2 3 4 5

11. How would you rate the following sections of Peukkula? (1= very bad, 5=very good)

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| First impression | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Ticket sales | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Price level | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Café Hilla | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Restaurant Eväsherkku | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Opening times | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Overall impression | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

12. Did you visit Café Hilla or Restaurant Eväsherkku during your visit?

Yes No

If your answer is no, you may tell us why:

13. How would you rate the following characters of Peukkula? (1=very bad, 5= very good)

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Did not see |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|--------------------------|
| Peukkis | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Pinni | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Pirate Scarface | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Noita Nokkonen (witch) | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Princess Vivian | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Natro-Peikko (troll) | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The Elf of the castle | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Kekko Keksijä (inventor) | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |

14. How would you rate the following shows of Peukkula? (1=very bad, 5= very good)

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Did not see |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------------------|
| Pihateatterin satuklassikko (story telling) | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Arpinaaman Aarrejahti (treasure hunt) | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| PeukkulaRoc | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Hiekasta linnaksi (sand castles) | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |

15. How would you rate the following areas of Peukkula? (1=very bad, 5=very good)

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Parking lot | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| The main building | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Toilets | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| The Castle | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| The Farm Animal area | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| The House of the Princess | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Jepula | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| The Pirate Ship | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| The Green areas | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| The play areas | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

16. Have you recommended Peukkula to anyone?

Yes No

17. How likely you would recommend Peukkula to someone? (1=not very likely, 5= very likely)

1 2 3 4 5

18. Where did you find out about Peukkula?

- From a friend
 - From Facebook
 - From Peukkula's web pages
 - From a newspaper
 - From fairs or events
 - From a brochure
 - Other, what?
-

19. Do you read the newsletters sent by Peukkula?

- Yes No I have not received any newsletters

20. Do you have any recommendations or suggestions to improve Peukkula's services?

Thank you for your answers!



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