

Tourist Perceptions and Motivations as Inspiration for Destination Marketing

Case: Finland & Helsinki

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Degree Programme in Tourism
Bachelor's Thesis
January, 2015

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The purpose of this Bachelor's Thesis was to identify and examine efforts used in marketing Finland and Helsinki as tourism destinations. This thesis explored the perceptions travelling individuals have of Finland and Helsinki and reviewed travel motivations and preferences as well as travel research customs. The aim was to derive concepts that may be utilised in strengthening currently adopted destination marketing themes and procedures. These were based on the most common perceptions, preferences and motivations evident in the research results.

The thesis consists of a theory and an empirical section that specifically answer the introduced research objectives. In the theory section, the main concentration is on destination marketing and management as well as travel motivation. These are supported by an account of tourism statistics and an introduction to marketing, marketing communications, internet marketing as well as destination branding, for a comprehensive understanding of the research matter. The empirical part consists of two expert interviews and a self-administrative online questionnaire. The interviews with two industry professionals were carried out to gain reliable, in-depth information on destination marketing in Finland and Helsinki. The interview results are presented together with collateral secondary research. The questionnaire was distributed online through social media channels targeting travelling individuals across demographics. The aim was to gain a varied and diverse set of data on tourist perceptions and motivations. The results are presented categorically by question. For clarity, the concentration is on Finland and Helsinki separately. The two case destinations are reviewed and compared collectively in the final conclusive discussion.

The results indicate that an extensive range of promotional procedures are utilised. The majority of them are similar within both destinations and are implemented in co-operation. The efforts successfully follow industry trends and are largely based on tourist perceptions, motivations and preferences. The perceptions and motivations reported by respondents suggest that there is a surprisingly high interest towards both case destinations. The data was positively diverse and largely in-line with the themes currently used for marketing Finland and Helsinki. However, certain aspects were mentioned more commonly than others. The final discussion and suggestions are based on these results.

The reasons as to why the destinations have not managed a significant breakthrough into the international markets is still questionable, even though the interest and preference related offer seem to be available in both destinations. Recognising the interest and utilising it productively is important to subsequently increase international arrival figures and tourism revenue.

Keywords: destination marketing, tourist perceptions, tourist motivation, Finland, Helsinki

Janna Partanen

**Matkailijoiden näkemykset ja motivaatiot kohdemarkkinoinnin inspiraationa
Case: Suomi & Helsinki**

Vuosi 2015

Sivumäärä 64

Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli tunnistaa ja tutkia Suomen ja Helsingin kohdemarkkinoinnin tavoitteita ja toimintatapoja. Opinnäytetyössä tutkittiin matkailijoiden näkemyksiä Suomesta ja Helsingistä sekä matkailumotiiveja, mieltymyksiä ja matkustamiseen liittyvän tiedon hakukäytäntöjä. Tarkoituksena oli johtaa konsepteja, joita hyödyntämällä käytössä olevia kohdemarkkinoinnin toimintatapoja ja teemoja voisi mahdollisesti kehittää. Esitetyt konseptit pohjautuvat näkemyksiin, mieltymyksiin ja motiiveihin, jotka opinnäytetyön tutkimustuloksissa olivat yleisimpiä.

Opinnäytetyössä on teoriaosuus ja empiirinen osuus, jotka tähdentävät esitettyjä tutkimuspäämääriä. Teoriaosuudessa keskitytään kohdemarkkinointiin ja johtamiseen sekä matkailumotivaatioon. Näitä tuetaan selonteolla matkailustatistiikasta, markkinoinnista, markkinointiviestinnästä, internet-markkinoinnista sekä kohdebrändäyksestä tarjoten kattavan ymmärryksen tutkimusaiheesta. Empiirinen osuus muodostuu kahdesta asiantuntijahaastattelusta ja itsevalvotusta online-kyselystä. Asiantuntijahaastattelut toteutettiin luotettavan ja seikkaperäisen ymmärryksen saavuttamiseksi Suomen ja Helsingin kohdemarkkinoinnista. Haastattelutulokset on esitetty teoreettisen tutkimuksen tukemana. Kyselyä jaettiin internetin sosiaalisen median välityksellä 18-vuotta täyttäneille matkailijoille. Tavoitteena oli hankkia vaihtelevaa ja monimuotoista tutkimustietoa matkailijoiden näkemyksistä ja motivaatioista. Tutkimustulokset on esitetty kysymysten mukaan kategorisoituna. Tulosten selkeyttämiseksi Suomi ja Helsinki käsitellään erikseen. Niitä käsitellään ja vertaillaan kollektiivisesti viimeisessä, päättävässä pohdinnassa.

Tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että laaja määrä promotionaalisia toimintatapoja hyödynnetään sekä Suomen että Helsingin kohdemarkkinoinnissa. Suuri osa niistä on samankaltaisia ja yhteistyössä toteutettuja. Toimintatavat ja tavoitteet seuraavat onnistuneesti toimialan kehitysuuntaa ja ne pohjautuvat suurimmalta osin matkailijoiden näkemyksiin, motivaatioihin ja mieltymyksiin. Kyselyyn vastanneet osoittavat yllättävän suurta kiinnostusta niin Suomea kuin Helsinkiäkin kohtaan matkakohteena. Vastaukset olivat laajalti positiivisia ja paljolti yhdenmukaisia tämänhetkisten markkinointiteemojen kanssa. Tiettyjä näkökulmia kuitenkin painotettiin enemmän kuin muita ja opinnäytetyön viimeistelevä pohdinta pohjautuu näihin tuloksiin.

On edelleen arvoituksellista, miksi kumpikaan kohteista ei ole saavuttanut merkittävää läpimurtoa kansainvälisille markkinoille, vaikka kiinnostus ja mieltymyksiin liittyvä tarjonta näyttäisi olevan olemassa molemmissa kohteissa. Kiinnostus on tärkeä tunnistaa ja käyttää tehokkaasti, jotta kansainvälisten matkailijoiden määrä ja matkailutuotto saataisiin kasvamaan.

Asiasanat: kohdemarkkinointi, näkemykset, matkailumotivaatio, Suomi, Helsinki

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1 Introduction

Tourism could be the main export industry in Finland. Even though nearly 70% of tourism in Finland is domestic, the potential of growing international tourism is significant and essential for the tourism industry. At the moment international tourism is growing by about 5% annually. Finland and its capital city Helsinki are relatively unknown internationally and the tourism industry lacks substantial government investment. Therefore, destination attributes need to be conveyed to potential tourists in a more creative way. This is the responsibility of the main marketing entity of Finland, the Finnish Tourist Board; internationally known as Visit Finland, together with the capital city marketing entities, collectively Visit Helsinki. The goal is to keep the tourism industry growing in a profitable and competitive manner, whilst increasing international demand, resulting in increased international arrivals and proliferated tourism revenue. (The Ministry of Employment and Economy 2010, 3-5; MEK 2014)

International competition for tourists is rapidly growing and Finland as well as Helsinki must find ways to break through in a manner that enables challenging and overcoming the vast competition. Much comes down to destination marketing and management, where a positive and strong destination image, destination brand and reputation are key factors. The emergence of the internet and the significant global use of its applications are to be utilised in a considerate and comprehensive manner to reach a broader audience and inspire them to travel specifically to Finland and its capital city. Communicating the most positive and truthful as well as appealing attributes of these destinations is to be carried out in an informative and imaginative as well as bold fashion, ultimately increasing the conspicuousness of the two destinations. All the more, the conveyed characteristics are important to be based on the perceptions and motivations of the travelling population, in order to guarantee that tourists' emotional as well as physical needs and desires are fulfilled and a positive experience warranted. The initial image tourists are presented is what travel decision making is based on. Therefore it should be carefully planned to steer tourists to the wanted direction of choosing Finland and its capital as a destination.

With this background, the aim of this thesis is to respond to the following objectives:

1. Identifying the case destinations' existing destination marketing efforts.
2. Identifying the existing perceptions of Finland and Helsinki as tourism destinations.
3. Identifying potential tourists' travel motivations.
4. Providing ideas based on research results and supporting theory.

These objectives are responded to with the support of comprehensive secondary research and theoretical investigation as well as primary research in the form of expert interviews and a

self-administrative online questionnaire. The interview results provide a more in-depth understanding of the on-going destination marketing efforts and their implications, in order to better evaluate their level of performance. Respectively, the questionnaire results provide an understanding of tourist perceptions, general travel preferences and motivations. In the discussion of this thesis, the most commonly mentioned aspects and concepts that may be strengthened and highlighted, in order to make the two destinations more appealing and consequently increase international arrivals, are pointed out.

The structure of the thesis is essentially divided into five main entireties:

- A brief account of the case destinations' tourism figures is provided in Chapter 2.
- From Chapter 3 until Chapter 6, the main theoretical background is provided. Tourism marketing and connected concepts of marketing communications and the prevailing trend of internet marketing are introduced, followed by a discussion of destination marketing and management. Finally, destination branding, travel motivations and destination choices are discussed.
- The research methodology of this thesis is introduced in Chapter 7.
- In Chapter 8, the results of the interviews and supporting secondary research are provided, responding to the first research objective. It is followed by an account of the second research objective, exploring the questionnaire results in-depth.
- Finally, the thesis is concluded in the form of a conclusive discussion and a recitation of the thesis process in Chapter 9 and 10. A full reference list is appended, followed by five related appendices.

The theoretical framework is attempted to be introduced in a clear and comprehensive manner with general definitions of important concepts. However, some prior knowledge is expected and required for the reading of this thesis. Essentially, an understanding of certain basic concepts of tourism, including 'travel and tourism', 'tourist and traveller' and 'destination' is sufficient and most importantly beneficial for complete understanding.

2 Tourism statistics

According to 2012 statistics from the Finnish Tourist Board (MEK) in co-operation with Statistics Finland, 7.6 million tourists travelled to Finland in 2012, growing by approximately 5% from 2011. International arrivals were largely from short-haul destinations. The largest group of visitors arrived from Russia, totalling up to 3.6 million visitors (47%) - an increase of 10% from the previous year. Estonians were the second largest group to visit Finland in 2012 with 758 000 tourists (10%), seeing an increase of 7% from the year 2011. The third largest nationality group was the 702 000 Swedish tourists (9%), an increase of 3% from the previous year. The majority of tourists came to Finland for leisure (55%) or business (21%). 10% of tourists arrived to visit friends and relatives, decreasing by 12%. The remaining 14% visited Finland for several other reasons. Also, leisure tourism to the country increased by 10% from the previous year and business travel increased by 8%. However, 9% of business travellers only used Finland as a transit destination. (Statistics Finland 2013; Visit Finland 2014)

Overall, 45% of tourists did not stay overnight. The remaining 55% stayed for an average of 4.1 nights. In 2013, 20.2 million nights were spent in Finland; 5.9 million of these nights were by foreign tourists and 14.4 million by resident tourists. The overall percentage saw a drop of 0.5% - however, 1.1% more foreign tourists stayed in the country overnight. Finally, the total of tourist expenditure crept up to about 2.3 billion euros, 300 euros on average and 2% less than in 2011. In addition, some 90 billion euros was generated in Finland from international conferences hosted in the country, proving the significance of business travel and Finland as a competitive world conference destination. (Statistics Finland 2013; Visit Finland 2014)

In regards of Helsinki's statistics, approximately 3.3 million overnight stays were recorded in the capital city in 2013, which is a decrease of about 3% from the previous year; mainly due to the decrease of international business travel affected by a global economic downturn. Out of all visitors in the capital city, the most were international in 2013 - a total of 53.4%, slightly less than the previous year. 1.74 million overnight stays were by international tourists, 4.4% less than in 2012. 1.52 million domestic overnight stays were reported, 1.5% less than the previous year. Domestically, the summer season was the busiest. Internationally, the most popular months were July and August, when 60% of overnight stays were international. The slowest time was around September and October. Out of all tourists visiting Finland in 2013, 29.7% stayed in Helsinki - most of them visiting from long-haul destinations - as compared to 31.4% in 2012. The majority of tourists visiting Helsinki came from Russia, followed by Germany, UK, Sweden, USA and Japan. The most significant increase was seen in the arrivals from China and Japan as well as Australia and Latvia - a specific Asian strategy implemented in co-operation with the national air carrier Finnair show in these statistics. However, several target markets recorded negative figures, including Russia, UK, USA, France and

Spain. Moreover, regionally, 25.9% of tourists visited the Uusimaa region, 22.5% the capital region and 16.6% specifically Helsinki. On average, tourists spent about 1.68 nights in Helsinki, the longest stays being from Icelandic, Canadian and Portuguese tourists. In 2013, 54.4% visited Helsinki for leisure, 43.5% for business and 2% for other reasons. The figures were largely the same the previous year. Additionally, compared to other Nordic capital cities of Stockholm, Copenhagen and Oslo, Helsinki lost the visitor competition. All other Nordic capitals managed to increase the number of overnight stays, whereas Helsinki recorded negative figures in the overall visitor statistics. (Visit Helsinki 2013, 2-4, 6, 9; MEK 2014)

In addition, 15.3 million passengers travelled to or via the Helsinki-Vantaa Airport in 2013, which is an all-time record. International air traffic increased by 5.6%. In regards of international passengers flying to or via Helsinki, the busiest months were July and August, the slowest was January. In comparison, domestic passengers were 9.7% less than the previous year, the busiest month being March and the slowest being July. 80% of all air traffic to Finland arrived to the Helsinki-Vantaa Airport. Another record passenger level was reported from the harbours in Helsinki in 2013 - 11.6 million passengers in total. 68% of all harbour passengers arrived from Estonia and over 20% came from Sweden. 63% of all by-sea traffic in the country arrived in Helsinki's harbours. In addition, 283 international cruise ships docked in Helsinki, bringing some 420 000 international passengers to spend the day in the Finnish capital, the majority from Germany, the UK and USA, followed by Australia, Mexico and Canada. (Visit Helsinki 2013, 7-8)

3 Tourism marketing

Communicating the right message to potential tourists is one of the most important factors in determining the success of a destination. Due to an immense variety of choice, motivations and preferences of tourists added to the quickly increasing competition between destinations, the importance of productive marketing and communications is truly highlighted. (McCabe 2009, 2; Singh 2008, 1)

Marketing is predicting, recognising, provoking and meeting demand. In other words, marketing is about understanding consumer needs and desires, recognising the vendible as well as target groups, sales platforms and channels, appropriate timing, promotional efforts and convenient quantities. All the more, marketing is a management function that organises and steers business activities involved in determining customer demand and converting that to purchasing power; finally distributing the demanded product or service to the consumers to achieve a profit target or another objective determined by an organisation. Additionally, marketing is concerned with the right marketing mix, the four P's of marketing theory: product, price, place and promotion. Marketing is about selling the right product at the right price to

the right people, using the most appropriate marketing and promotional methods. More specifically, tourism marketing is selling experiences in a destination at an appropriate price, promoting these experiences through correct channels that have potential to reach the appropriate travelling individuals who have the needed interest to travel to a certain destination. (Holloway 2004, 7; Briggs 1997, 43-44)

3.1 Marketing communications

Marketing communications are central in tourism marketing in general as well as more specifically in destination marketing. It is carried out to strengthen the conspicuousness, availability and usability of tourism destinations and their products and services. In addition, the main goals include increasing and maximising sales and satisfying the consumer demand by planning and implementing products and services according to tourist preferences, needs, expectations and perceptions. This includes creating specialized and differentiated product and service combinations to different customer groups, taking into account industry trends and seasons, evoking new needs, desires, expectations and perceptions. The goals can also be more specific, such as increasing the conspicuousness of a destination, affecting consumer attitudes, maintaining and improving perceptions and mental images, creating desire to purchase as well as creating, developing and maintaining customer relations. (Karusaari & Nylund 2010, 67-69; Puustinen & Rouhiainen 2007, 229)

Marketing communications are about saying the right things to the right people in the right ways. It provides the means of presenting destinations, brands and organisations to appropriate audiences. It is the strategies, methods and processes through which information is distributed to target markets. Furthermore, it is crucial for a tourism company to adopt a marketing oriented approach with the consumer as the central focus of the strategy in order to succeed in the contemporary tourism business environment. It is important to understand how, where and when consumers access information and how they respond to the information available in order to get the right message across to the target groups. A marketing communications process is a combination of proactive and reactive operations and so a concentrated, strategic approach is appropriate. The target must be a defined audience largely due to the information-rich nature of today's society in addition to consumers' high awareness of their current purchasing and decision making power. (McCabe 2009, 8)

In other words, marketing communications in tourism are designed to inform tourists about products, services and destinations. It is the prime activity in creating positive mental images and assurance of quality. Capable marketing communication is informative, imaginative, straight-forward, considerate of target groups and most importantly interesting. Finding a

way to reach consumers over competitors is central. The choices marketers make in connection to marketing communications are affected by several factors, such as target groups, business culture, operative strategies and competitor strategies, level of customer relations and networks, budget, marketing channels as well as market size. Also, the variety of communications is to be decided on, considering the best applicability. This can be, for example, printed marketing material, advertising, sales promotion and fairs, PR or online commerce. (Puustinen and Rouhiainen 2007, 224-225, 229-230)

3.2 Internet in tourism marketing

Important to note are the technological developments and the revolutionary emergence of the internet, which have had significant implications on the tourism industry and consequently travel planning and marketing. Consequently, destinations' tourism organisations have had to go through a business process reshaping to benefit from the emerging technologies; switching their operations and processes, finding ability to compete internationally as well as succeed in the globally networked, internet powered business environment, where online travel services have been recognized as among the most successful and used online commerce applications. (Buhalis & Jun 2011, 3)

The internet is a central source of information during the travel planning stage. Some 95% of internet users rely on online sources; every month over 200 million travel and tourism searches are conducted. Therefore, it is necessary for destination marketing organisations and other tourism industry agents to understand how travel and tourism information search is carried out by users and how they review and utilise the information at different stages of the decision making process. Studies suggest that those using internet as the basis of their information search process tend to seek information related to certain sub-decisions of travel, such as the destination, expected expenditure, available activities, attractions and availability of transportation, using different sources depending on the stage of the planning process. This highlights the importance of internet marketing and the careful consideration of the vastness of the content that is available for potential tourists. Specifically user-generated information content is key, having the potential to affect travel decisions in any of the mentioned areas. User-driven online content, specifically in the form of social media are widely used by the vast majority of agents in the tourism industry. (Cox, Burgess, Sellitto & Buultjens 2008, 8; Parker 2012, 1)

In addition, the internet is useful to inspire tourists before, during and after the trip. The vast usage of mobile devices influences tourists' decisions and travel behaviour; it allows them to maintain information search, stay in contact with friends and family and send immediate information about their experiences through social media networks, emails and texting as

well as rate and review the destination online. Consequently, this benefits the receiving destination's tourism organisations who have powerful tools at their disposal due to these advances. Hence, there is not one tourism business that can afford to not use the opportunities the internet offers. Internet marketing and most importantly social media will most likely continue to be an important part of marketing for years to come and its constant development and growth will aid tourism marketers even further. (The Province of British Columbia 2011, 1; Parker 2012, 1)

4 Destination marketing and management

The role of destination management is to coordinate tourism supply, develop the destination, provide tourists with information, create and maintain quality tourism resources and promote the destination, lead the destination's tourism sector and guide the local community and government. Moreover - a significant branch of management - destination marketing is a proactive, strategic, visitor-focused process concerned with the development of a destination, integrating visitors', service providers' and the local community's interests. It is largely the responsibility of a destination management organisation (DMO). A significant task is the planning of marketing processes that favour the destination. A DMO determines the most effective ways to make a destination's tourism offer available to consumers and defines as well as develops the experiences on offer. Also, it creates a positive destination image and establishes a destination brand and supports these by developing advertising themes and promotional efforts. (Inkson & Minnaert 2012, 183-184; Morrison 2013, 6; Ritchie & Crouch 2005, 189)

Competition among destinations for a share of the global tourism expenditure is quickly growing as tourism is increasingly recognised as a key economic product. Tourists have a range of destination choices available and for a destination to be recognised and to attract visitors from the vast tourism market, a globally valued market position and destination image need to be established. Gaining a sufficient understanding of destination marketing as a significant part of destination management is vital; destinations' potential and success depend largely on the quality of the destination image. A destination management organisation must build a reputation that is true, attractive and genuinely useful for the destination's aims, reflecting the spirit of the destination and its people. Thus, growing destinations that do not receive as much attention, visitors and investment as others, begin to benefit, enhancing the opportunities to compete. (Mulec 2010, 14; Anholt 2011, 21-22)

Every country, region and city has to take part in the competition for a share of the tourism market. The reputation of a destination has a significant impact on relationships with other destinations as well as its attractiveness and social, political, economic and cultural progress.

Tourists make choices according to their prejudices and beliefs of destinations and so providing a quick and effective information package to help tourists' decision-making process becomes crucial. In addition, the destination has to be sold by the local tourist boards, not only to ordinary international consumers but to industry professionals as well. The reputation of a destination determines how easy, costly and complex this process is going to be and how the overall reputation is going to develop in the long run. A positive and solid destination reputation is of enormous value, because it shows the ability to attract tourists and continue the process for as long as the image stays as it is or keeps developing in a positive manner. Essentially, destinations only exist through marketing - a 'place' becomes a 'destination' through the images and information provided through promotional tourism material, which builds a positive reputation. (Anholt 2009, 1; Morgan, Pritchard & Pride 2011, 5)

The main question is rather straight-forward: how does a destination stand out from the crowd? Destinations have a variety of elements that attract tourists, satisfying their needs from arrival onwards. The quality and promotion of these elements will influence tourists' decision to make the trip. Effectively managing a tourism destination with an ultimate objective of improving its competitiveness and reputation also means managing the complex economic, social and environmental climate of the world, where uncertainty and threats are always possibilities. Therefore, there is no right way to stand out and that is why constant evaluation, monitoring and revising of destination management and marketing efforts are key. (UNWTO 2012, 14-15)

There are five prevailing tourism trends which strongly guide marketing processes. Firstly, emotional and experimental elements of travel are creating new, more accessible and affordable ways to experience a destination, emphasising the human interrelation dimension of travelling. Secondly, the non-monetary value of travel experiences are becoming more important for tourists, overcoming the value of money and the high cost of travelling as long as a destination can offer an enjoyable experience. Thirdly, the importance of ethical, responsible and sustainable travel is increasing within tourists. Fourthly, the influence of tourism is recognised as a positive in the development of cities and their economic, social, cultural and environmental balance as the population in cities is steadily growing. Finally, there is a growing importance on tourism spaces. Nature in particular as well as other well-cared spaces and their continuous protection and preservation is largely considered a value and an attraction within tourists. (UNWTO 2012, 14-15)

Finally, the significance of destination marketing and management is something that should not be taken lightly; no matter how effective the planning and development of a destination is, it will not gain international arrivals or step over the 'potential stage', unless the destination's offer is clarified and the destination portrayed as worth visiting. Furthermore, the

choice of a holiday destination is a major lifestyle indicator, which greatly impacts the need for strategic destination marketing and branding. Destinations have to have an emotional appeal as well as conversational capital and even 'celebrity value' - almost like a fashion accessory - to evoke a desire to choose it as a tourism destination. (Howie 2003, 141; Morgan, Pritchard & Pride 2004, 4)

5 Destination branding

Branding has become a fundamental component of destination marketing. Destination branding is about combining the attributes of a destination under one concept, which conveys a message of the destination's uniqueness, identity and personality as such, aiming to differentiate from competitors. Branding requires a strong vision about the destination, its development opportunities and needs as well as its potential success in the future. In other words, a brand is a bundle of a destination's characteristics that forms its image and identity. Essentially, it is a first impression, a promise to the potential tourists, an expectation of performance and a sign of reputation and integrity, which is affected by those visiting and more so their experiences, memories and perceptions. What attracts tourists to visit a destination over another is the emotional connection they have towards the specific destination. Therefore, it would be beneficial for a destination to use the emotional associations. Hence, creating a destination brand essentially include building an image, recognition, differentiation, consistency, brand messages, emotional responses as well as expectations. Destination brands give potential tourists an assurance of quality, reduce search costs and offer a way for destinations to establish a unique selling point. (Kaplanidou & Vogt 2003, 2; Schaar 2013, 3)

Even a smaller, growing brand with limited resources and funding can become a success and take over market shares from competitors, through effective, systematic planning and analysing as well as understanding. Tourism marketers must gain an understanding of brand psychology, differentiation and management if their brands are to succeed in the highly competitive markets. A competitive brand is tied to values shared by target markets, reflecting similar aspirations. A brand must be relevant to customers' needs and essentially be stronger than its competition. Long term branding is essential for success in the future and requires the establishment of brand presence, relevance and performance compared to competition. However, destination marketing and branding is in no way straightforward; there are several challenges that destination management organisations have to face during the process. Limited resources; small budgets, little management control, external and internal fluctuations and a vast number of stakeholders to consider are a few of them. Especially in the case of smaller, growing destinations, the limited amount of resources may be a significant issue. Most destination management organisations have to operate with small budgets and still market globally

as well as compete with not only other more established destinations but also with other global brands. (Morgan & Pritchard 2001: 228-229, 232; Morgan, Pritchard & Pride 2004, 62)

6 Travel motivation and destination choices

Being aware of tourist motivations and matching them with destination management processes is important to consequently pull tourists in. The 'push' and 'pull' factors are significant when discussing destination marketing and tourist motivation. The push factors are intangible desires that make individuals travel and leave their ordinary surroundings. The pull factors are the key elements destination marketers use in motivating and attracting potential tourists to a destination; the aspects of the destination that make it favourable and more interesting than others. In other words, it means the results of destination attractiveness as is perceived by potential tourists. They include tangible resources and perceptions and certain expectations such as novelty, potential benefits and truthfulness of the marketed image of a destination. (Jönsson & Devonish 2008, 399; Al-Haj Mohammad & Mat Som 2010, 41)

Due to the large variety of destinations, services and products available in the tourism market, tourists have the opportunity to choose where they travel and spend their disposable income. These choices are stimulated and motivated by effective destination marketing. At the same time, it is important to remember that every tourist is different from another. They all differ in a demographic sense, but also in regards of their travel motivations, preferences and interests that steer their destination choices. Several factors influence travel motivation; for example general perception of tourism and destinations, travel experience, individual decision-making patterns and personality, basis of motivation, attitudes, values and opinions and how they are formed and affected by different stimuli, such as social circles. The way tourists express their motivations and how they change and develop over time directly influences the demand of a destination and tourism in general. Tourism stakeholders need to be able to adapt and anticipate accordingly to succeed and literally motivate tourists to choose their destination over the vast competition available. Depending on the trends and developments in travel motivations, consumer desires may be predicted and used as the most crucial aspect in creating tourism offer in a destination as well as in planning destination marketing and development, consequently influencing tourist decision-making. (Mahika 2011, 15; Pearce 2005, 2; Kulkarni 2007, 55)

Tourist motivation is essentially generated by the fact that potential tourists live in a society and travel and tourism is a means of fulfilling a tourist's psychological need of prestige and status, belonging and recognition. Tourist motives are very much the emotional kind. From a more sociological perspective, travelling to a specific destination is much of a status symbol or possibly a rite of passage, a means of gaining freedom, chance of networking as well as a

possibility to escape the dullness of ordinary life. Normal human desires steer the motivations that affect decision-making. It all stems from a greater opportunity to take on travelling and from the simple joy of it. Tourism is also vastly accepted in most societies, making it altogether more attractive and achievable. Reasons tourists commonly give for travelling in are physical needs, such as activities and bodily and mental health; cultural needs, such as education, knowledge and religion as well as specific events and pursuing interests; interpersonal needs, such as spending time with friends and family, meeting new people, having fun and relaxing with peers; prestige needs, such as coming home with a tan, being seen in exclusive places and the general influence of peer groups. Furthermore, there are economic, social, political and physical factors, such as income levels, social status and education level, government restrictions on travel and tourism as well as mobility. In addition, demographic factors influence decision-making and tourist motivation; age, nationality and gender possibly the most. (Mahika 2011, 16; Hannam & Ateljevic 2008, 115, 118; Brown 2000, 28, 102-103, 107)

The most successful destinations are those that respond the best to the needs of a given target market and concentrate on marketing efforts that match the destination's most significant attributes and the potential tourists' large pool of psychological needs and perceptions. Generally, the perceptions and psychology behind tourist motivation are determined by personal motives and the way a destination is viewed. The evaluation of tangible products as well as the intangible, psychological interpretation of a destination are necessary for tourists to be attracted to travel, gain travel satisfaction and potentially express destination loyalty. (Al-Haj Mohammad & Mat Som 2010, 42)

7 Research methodology

Research for this thesis was conducted using qualitative research methods. Primary research was carried out in a form of two semi-structured interviews with industry professionals and a self-administrative sentence completion questionnaire. Secondary research and the theoretical background supported the research process, helping to gain a deeper and more practical understanding of the research matter.

7.1 Research questions, aims and objectives

The research is based on the following questions:

- How are Finland and its capital city Helsinki marketed as destinations?
- How are Finland and Helsinki perceived as destinations by travelling individuals?
- What motivates tourists to choose Finland and/or Helsinki as a destination?
- ➔ How can the results be utilised in destination marketing in order to strengthen the destination images and increase international arrivals figures and tourism revenue?

The research aim is:

- To identify the methods undertaken by marketing entities of Finland and Helsinki, consequently analysing the performance level and possibilities of strengthening the marketing processes based on tourist perceptions and travel motivations.

Four directional research objectives are:

- Identifying the case destinations' existing destination marketing efforts.
- Identifying the existing perceptions of Finland and Helsinki as tourism destinations.
- Identifying potential tourists' motivation to travel to Finland and/or Helsinki.
- Providing ideas based on supporting theory and research results.

7.2 Research approach and data analysis

Qualitative research consists of interpretive, material practices including notes, interviews, texts and recordings. It is a naturalistic approach; things are studied in their natural settings attempting to interpret phenomena and meanings. Qualitative research looks to find answers to specified questions, systematically using a set of procedures defined in advance. Evidence is collected and used to produce credible, undetermined findings, applicable outside the boundaries of a certain study. It seeks to clarify a research problem from the perspective of the population involved, therefore especially effective in collecting cultural information; preferences, opinions, behaviours, values and social contexts of populations. (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, 3; Mack, Woodsong, Macqueen, Guest and Namey 2011, 1)

The research approach in the case of this thesis is inductive. It is based on the analysis of data to derive concepts, themes, interpretations and models. A theory is concluded from the research data, as opposed to a deductive research approach, where an existing theory is tested and challenged through research. Data is analysed manually through a mix of descriptive, thematic and content analysis methods by finding reoccurring themes, concentrating on content and emphasis of the results. Essentially, it is about defining what the collected data means, what is important and interesting given the scope of the study and what kind of information is most beneficial to achieve the answer to the initial research questions. (Thomas 2006: 238; Haven-Tang 2014; Taylor-Powell & Renner 2003, 2, 5)

7.3 Ethical considerations

Ethical issues are to be considered in all research. Researchers are responsible for ensuring participants are unharmed, privacy and confidentiality is guaranteed and intrusiveness minimised. To avoid misunderstandings, disrespect or any other kind of harm, a researcher must

guarantee a clear description of the process, what it entails and how data will be analysed and used afterwards. (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden 2001, 93; Lichtman 2013, 52-53)

Proof of consideration of the above issues of clarity, privacy and confidentiality as well as participant consent, protection and responsible publication during the research process of this thesis may be found in a form of a participant information sheet (Appendix 1) and a participant consent form (Appendix 2).

7.4 Reliability and validity

The concepts of reliability and validity are most commonly used in quantitative research as they are closely connected to measurable results. However, they are accepted as applicable in all forms of research due to a recognition of a need to test and validate qualitative research methods and results. In qualitative research, reliability and validity often refer to the quality of the research, more specifically the ability to generate understanding through achieving credibility, confirmability, applicability and especially consistency and trustworthiness. Thus, reliability is the consistency of research results, the accurate representation of the study population as well as the capability of reproducing research results under similar methodology. Validity determines the legitimacy and accuracy of research results and whether the research actually measures what is intended to measure. Consideration of appropriate research design and methodology, convenient analysis methods, relevant assessment criteria as well as presentation of results ensure reliability and validity. (Golafshani 2003, 598-599, 601-602; Hiltunen 2009)

In regards of this thesis, the scope of the study and the planning of the research methodology is believed to enhance reliability and validity. The research objectives are met successfully and the study matter is such that may be repeated or continued with the same methods as well as with alternative research efforts, depending on the needed information and data.

7.5 Interviews and questionnaire

Interviews are divided into structured, semi-structured, unstructured and group interviews and the type chosen depends on the context and expectations of the interview. The type chosen for this thesis is semi-structured interviews, which are less formal than structured ones, but pre-planned, with open-ended questions to gain information on specific themes, whilst letting the participant share their own views; regarded as planned conversations. In general, a qualitative research interview aims to uncover both factual information and a level of meaning to what the participants say. The purpose of interviewing is to get the other person's

in-depth perspective of a certain theme. (Haven-Tang 2014; Boyce & Neale 2006, 3)

Two individual, semi-structured expert interviews were conducted for this thesis. The first interview was conducted with the Finnish Tourist Board Research & Development Director Kristiina Hietasaari on 22 August 2014 in Helsinki (Attachment 3) and the second with the Marketing Director Outi Leppälä of the City of Helsinki's Department of Economic Development and City Marketing on 2 September 2014 in Helsinki (Attachment 4). These professionals were purposively chosen to guarantee appropriate, knowledgeable and reliable expertise that would best support the answering of the research questions. A separate question form was prepared for both interviews. However, the questions were similar, following a pre-determined categorisation of questions: 1) destination marketing and development, 2) tourist perceptions and behaviour, 3) competition, 4) industry trends and 5) future forecasts. Following a similar pattern in both interviews was believed to enable a more effective comparison and analysis of the interview data, instead of gathering two sets of varying data, which could harm the coherence of the presentation of results. Additionally, both interviews were tested with four individuals; two university students and two university tourism lecturers. The aim of the piloting was to estimate the time the interview would take and to see if the questions were comprehensive and clear enough as well as generating appropriate information.

In addition, using a questionnaire as a research method involves collecting and recording consistent, direct and factual information from a larger pool of people. The type of information gained depends on the respondents' personal perceptions, preferences, opinions, attitudes, knowledge and behaviour. Questionnaires also allow a more extensive geographical coverage without putting in the time, costs and travel. Furthermore, the absence of the researcher allows a higher level of anonymity; increasing the reliability of responses and reducing unbiased. (Leung 2001, 187, 189; Phellas, Bloch & Seale 2012: 184-185)

The sentence completion questionnaire is based on a form of projective techniques methods. Projective techniques are indirect ways of exploring respondents' opinions, behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and motivations - especially favourable in market research and consumer motivation studies. The methods are based on the free interpretation and responding to a stimuli, such as a start of a sentence, that are supported by an individual's personal frame of reference; meaning knowledge, experiences and values among others. Moreover, the questionnaire was based on purposive and maximum variation sampling. The goal of purposive sampling is to concentrate on certain characteristics of a population the research is interested in; the sample comprising of potential tourists of different nationalities in the case of this thesis. Maximum variation sampling is used to obtain a vast variation of perspectives, experiences, behaviours, perceptions and ideas from a variety of individuals to establish a deeper understanding of the matter being studied. (Donoghue 2000, 47-48; Lund Research Ltd 2012)

The questionnaire (Appendix 5) consists of 17 sentence completion questions, divided into three parts: perceptions of Finland as a tourism destination (questions 1 - 5), perceptions of Helsinki as a tourism destination (questions 6 - 10) and travel preferences (questions 11 - 17). The first two parts created information on the respondents' perceptions, motivations, experiences, information search customs as well as knowledge on the two destinations. The third part informed about motivation, preferences, information search customs, experiences and ideals of travel and destinations in general. The respondents' demographic information was inquired in the beginning of the questionnaire in a total of four questions, including gender, age, nationality and professional status. A total of six supporting, multiple choice questions were included, informing the researcher about the respondents' travel history to Finland and Helsinki as well as on their length and time of stay. The questionnaire was created using Google Drive as a tool and platform of responding and data collection, utilising the automatic creation of an online link and a spreadsheet for data collection. Furthermore, the questionnaire was piloted with 10 respondents before wider distribution. The aims were much the same as with the interviews, but also tested the quality and variation of answers to guarantee a wider sample of perceptions, motivations and opinions. It was distributed electronically through different social media platforms, using the researcher's personal, educational and professional networks as a starting point - relying afterwards on the quickness of further sharing by the respondents on social networking sites. Through these platforms, the questionnaire attracted some 66 respondents from several different countries worldwide. The questionnaire was first distributed and responded to on the 8th of August 2014 and the last received response was recorded six weeks later on the 20th of September 2014.

8 Results

The results are presented by starting with a description of the case destinations' marketing efforts, embedding into the description the results of the two conducted expert interviews. This is followed by a presentation and discussion of the questionnaire results.

8.1 Case: marketing Finland internationally

The Finnish Tourist Board, internationally known as Visit Finland, is to advance tourism to Finland from international markets, in co-operation with tourism entities, in a way that results in Finland being the emotional and rational destination choice. Tourism revenue is to be increased, aiming for 5 billion euros from international travel by 2018. In order to achieve this, the conspicuousness of Finland has to be improved, resulting in a strong destination image and brand, with comprehensive and appealing tourism and congress offer. In addition, Visit Finland conducts market research, in order to effectively get familiar with the target markets, as well as tourism trends, to enable appropriate and successful marketing planning. The

information is comprehensively analysed, consequently enabling the differentiation of procedures in different markets. Furthermore, the Finland Convention Bureau promotes Finland as a congress and meetings destination, providing free-of-charge expertise and consultation services for planning and marketing international congresses and business events. (MEK 2014)

According to the Finnish Tourist Board Research & Development Director Kristiina Hietasaari, there are three goals: increased amount of visitors to Finland, increased amount of revenue from tourism and more specific goals relating to different ways of marketing. More specifically this means campaigns; how many are considering or could consider visiting Finland before, during and after a campaign, online efforts; amount of contacts, shares and clicks on a numerical level as well as B2B activities and how many individuals take part in them. Regarding the primary goals of increasing visitor numbers and tourism revenue, Hietasaari states that the quantitative results are slightly dragging. Several external factors influence this, such as fluctuating global economic and political situations; marketing is often not enough. However, considering the overall situation of destination marketing in Finland, Hietasaari believes the procedures are on the right track, although a lot has to be considered and achieved as competition increases significantly all the time. (Hietasaari 2014)

The amount of people travelling all over the world keeps rising and there is enough potential for every destination, but Finland loses the competition to many in visibility, much due to a low marketing budget, compared to the budget of many competitor destinations. Finland receives a state fund of some 10 million euros annually for destination marketing, whereas for instance Sweden gets three times and Norway four times the same amount. This is enough of a reason to explain why Finland struggles, to an extent, in getting heard and noticed among other destinations. The limited amount of resources highlights priorities; specific target markets need to be chosen for each year and activities need to be carefully considered to assure the best outcome. Extraordinary and innovative ways to break through without actual marketing in the traditional sense have to be found. (Hietasaari 2014)

8.1.1 Themes

The marketing efforts and planning of a Visit Finland brand and a Finland image takes inspiration from two sets of themes: the Four Cs' and three inspirational concepts. The themes are not necessarily used directly in marketing communications but serve as inspiration and base of ideas. The themes are based on tourists' perceptions and motivators as well as what Finnish people regard as Finland's strengths. These are believed to be the best bet in attracting visitors. (Visit Finland 2014, Hietasaari 2014)

The four Cs were created as means to capture the style and thoughts behind the challenger brand of Finland, meant to differentiate the country from competition. They summarise the strengths and values as well as most significant, truthful and positive attributes of Finland on which the brand promise is based on. 'Creative' stands for Finland being culturally, academically and technologically attractive, offering unique architecture and design. 'Contrasting' is to do with Finland being the meeting point of eastern and western influences as well as providing the best of both worlds in many ways; cold and warm, winter and summer, sun and darkness as well as four changing seasons. 'Cool' tells about Finland's nice, lively, refreshing and trendy nature, while 'Credible' represents the country's outstanding efficiency, functional infrastructure, safety and security, as well as advancing technology. (Lehtonen 2010)

The marketing theme 'Silence, please' is based on the idea that Finland is believed to still truly offer a counterweight for the busy lifestyle so many live today. Even in the biggest cities, silence and pure nature is present and relaxing is made possible. Welfare, healthy food, sauna and cottage life are emphasized. 'Wild & Free' responds to the notion that people travel for unique experiences. It is believed that in Finland, one can experience something unforgettable provided by the Finnish nature and vast array of activities. 'Cultural Beat' is being highlighted especially in cities and the uniqueness of Finnish culture is brought out by pointing out internationally known concepts: small but big cities, Finnish food, Christmas, design and architecture all the way to Finnish lifestyle and people. (MEK 2014; Hietasaari 2014)

Hietasaari adds, that different themes are systematically presented to different target markets. Prior to implementation, research is conducted to figure out tourists' preferences and motivators. Different nationalities are motivated by different things; for example in Japan, Finland rides on peacefulness and welfare and Chinese tourists in contrast are into the wilder experience side of the country. In Europe, one country may have different segments within it; families that want to experience the Wild & Free nature of Lapland and wealthier older people that come visit Finland for its culture and calm lifestyle. All these differences need to be considered or else marketing will eventually fail. (Hietasaari 2014)

8.1.2 Target markets

The Finnish Tourist Board's Research & Development Director Kristiina Hietasaari states that in terms of market research, the starting point is the target markets and groups. These are per se profiled and familiarized with better and better in order to know exactly who is motivated by what. It is all based on comprehensive investigation and analysing of the potential and expected growth of each country that could be targeted. For example, Russia has proven to be a good bid for Finland for years and at the moment Finland is the market leader from all Nordic countries in Japan. On a more negative note, there is India, where the global potential

is huge but their interest towards Finland is not enough. Moreover, Finnish companies are not too keen on targeting India as it is considered a difficult market and so it is not even considered at the moment. (Hietasaari 2014)

Furthermore, according to Hietasaari, the next step is to choose the target groups within the wider target market and in this case it is vital to know the behaviour, motivations and preferences of certain segments. The goal is to gain insight into their values and desires, as well as attitudes, so that Finnish tourism can be promoted in the correct way. It is also helpful to know what they think and know about Finland, whether it is positive or negative; why tourists want to visit Finland, but also what puts them off travelling to Finland. That way it is easier to develop and offer them exactly what they need and expect from experiences to products and services. It starts from marketing; a positive and attractive image of the country has to be displayed in order for tourists to pay to visit Finland. (Hietasaari 2014)

Visit Finland divides its target markets into three different categories:

- Short-haul countries, where Finland is known as a tourism destination. The countries in this category are Russia, Germany, Holland, Belgium and Switzerland, from where relatively steady visitor figures are recorded annually.
- Countries where Finland is known, but not as a tourism destination. The countries in this category are the UK, Italy, Spain and France. This group of countries are regarded as having the most growth potential in terms of individuals travelling to Finland.
- Long-haul countries where Finland is unknown. These countries are China, Japan and USA. However, China and Japan and the Asian market in general are currently the main markets for Finland and significant growth has been recorded from these countries. In addition, most marketing activities in the USA are carried out in co-operation with other Nordic countries. (MEK 2014; Hietasaari 2014)

Specifically so-called ‘modern humanists’, whom constitute about 15% of the world’s travelling population are targeted. Finland is attractive to these humanists because it matches their values and attitudes. This group of travellers have certain characteristics such as openness to new experiences and personal development, values quality of life and social responsibility, have the financial means, have interest towards different cultures and local lifestyles, are interested in unique experiences and adventure, are not ones for mass tourism and are independent and spontaneous. (MEK 2012; Hietasaari 2014)

8.1.3 Competition

Kristiina Hietasaari from the Finnish Tourist Board mentions that other Nordic countries are Finland's biggest competition and unfortunately, Finland drags behind in comparison to countries like Sweden and Norway. However, co-operation with Nordic countries is practiced. Especially in long-haul target markets, such as Asia and USA, marketing activities are carried out together, but each country has their own processes going on simultaneously. Due to the distance to these long-haul markets, none of the Nordic countries are really strong enough to succeed on their own, compared to Mediterranean destinations for instance. If conspicuousness and attractiveness of the whole Nordic region can be strengthened - concentrating on Nordic nature, culture, lifestyle, welfare, standard of living as well as cuisine - all the countries essentially win and the combined marketing activities pay off. Naturally, Finland is influenced by the co-operation and is the smallest destination and hence relatively easy to ignore. That is why Finland works together with the rest of the region only in chosen markets. Finnish marketing entities are aware of the competitors' activities and basically wishes to do the exact opposite to them or at least something differing so that Finland would be the destination that stands out as the most attractive destination choice. The Visit Finland brand mission states that Finland is a challenger and that is a great starting point - the aim is to be different from all the rest. (Hietasaari 2014)

Hietasaari adds that Finland is able to beat the competition when it comes to the winter season. Developing, branding and selling winter tourism has succeeded better in Finland than with competitors - overnight stay figures suggest that Finland had the most stays out of all Nordic countries in December, January and February. The biggest reason is the Finnish Lapland, where marketing has been very successful. Luckily, tourists have acknowledged the vast winter activity offer in Finland, in which productization has succeeded; reindeer safaris, snowmobile driving and ice swimming for instance, have enabled this positive situation. Hard work is required to keep the position, however, as the Swedish Lapland has started to be marketed similarly and is catching up. In contrast, the summer season is clearly quieter in comparison to competition. Accessibility is most likely the biggest struggle; it is easier to go to southern Sweden or Denmark from Europe or even to Norway rather than all the way to Finland - to the 'last corner' of Europe. It is a very substantial problem. (Hietasaari 2014)

In addition, when considering competition, the notion of Finland's strengths and weaknesses is worthy of thought. Hietasaari suggests the strengths of Finland to be the country's positive reputation - not many have anything negative to say about Finland. This positive reputation is strengthened by the local people whose welcoming, relaxed and open-minded attitude towards tourists and is well known in many target markets, as well as their real warmth and active interest to inform foreigners of their home country. Also, Finnish people are regarded as

authentic and their own kind, away from the international homogenisation and common western lifestyle. In addition, nature is a significant strength and often the main reason of tourists travelling to the country. The Finnish nature and the dominating presence of it in addition to its calmness and quietness sets the country apart from many destinations. Moreover, Finland could be the top destination for wellbeing tourism if the correct sales efforts were put in place. Additionally, Lapland and the mysterious nature of the North keeps proving to be one of the most appealing aspects of the country. Also, Finland gets the most return visitors and that speaks volumes about the country as a destination - many visitors tell about the easiness to fall in love with Finland and what it has to offer. (Hietasaari 2014)

At the same time, the biggest weakness according to Hietasaari is the weak overall conspicuousness. Tourists have none or not enough perceptions of the country in general and naturally neither as a tourism destination. Also, poor accessibility and the remote location of the country from the main international markets, together with the perception of expensiveness - although not necessarily true - makes Finland unappealing. If tourists do not want to put the effort in to travel all the way to Finland because they do not see it as interesting enough or alternatively know nothing at all about the country, the industry is going to be affected. Also, so far Finland's marketing entities and tourism companies have concentrated possibly too much on the short-haul markets, specifically Russia and consequently there is not enough interest from companies and not enough effort put into other markets. (Hietasaari 2014)

8.1.4 Activities

Research & Development Director Kristiina Hietasaari explains that Finland's destination marketing efforts are roughly divided into two: consumer marketing and industry targeted marketing, which both have differentiating marketing activities and aims. Consumer marketing is targeted at travelling individuals, whereas industry marketing is targeted at tourism professionals, such as travel agencies and tour operators. Consumer marketing has become more important over the last few years and attention moved more to its direction and less on business to business (B2B) marketing. (Hietasaari 2014)

Hietasaari explains that in consumer marketing, a couple of markets are chosen as the main interests at a time to ensure smart distribution and utilisation of the marketing budget and overall success. Starting from 2013, the main market is the Asian markets of China and Japan. The growing concentration directly on potential tourists is simply explained by the increased individual activity of tourists and travellers, which decreases the role of travel agencies and tour operators. This is a challenge for Visit Finland as it requires more resources than for example B2B-marketing, even though opportunities online have created more ways to gain wide visibility with little cost. However, if tourists do not know about Finland and have no interest

towards the country, they are not going to ask any professional entities about it either. Hence, individuals cannot be ignored and have to be activated by appropriate marketing. Moreover, performance levels of consumer targeted destination marketing are monitored to an extent, but full figures cannot really be known. It is easier to follow the progress in online platforms, with the amount of shares and clicks for example. Essentially, the indicator of success is how much tourism to Finland increases annually and how much revenue tourism generates, but how much marketing alone affects these figures is hard to say. (Hietasaari 2014)

The main online platform Visitfinland.com and social media channels have proven to be most useful starting points with individual consumers. Visit Finland makes great use of these platforms considering user figures, potential of reaching the travelling population and the appropriateness of the channels in the tourism industry. The goal is to inspire those interested in Finland and bring together Finland-enthusiasts with lively, colourful and visual appearance as well as unique, out-of-the-box online content. The chances of gaining more visibility and status in international tourism markets improve every time a social media user is successfully inspired to share the content further to even more potential tourists. At the core is the official travel website of Finland Visitfinland.com. It is intended to be a strikingly visual entirety of the best in Finland in the form of carefully presented information, articles, images and videos, available in nine different languages from English to Chinese. As a many a time awarded travel website, it is designed to inspire potential visitors in the first stages of travel decision making, reinforce the decision to choose Finland as a destination and serve as a connecting platform of the Finnish country brand and tourism products, companies and other co-operation partners, to enable a comprehensive and satisfying decision-making and research process for everyone considering travelling to Finland. In addition, the purpose of several social media channels being used is to reach the target groups in the main markets whilst effectively improving Finland's attractiveness and conspicuousness as a destination in an inspiring way, as well as gain information on tourist perceptions, motivations, ideas and demands, in order to develop Finland's tourism services. The social media channels are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Flickr, Pininterest, Weibo and VK.com. (MEK 2014; Visit Finland 2014)

Even though attention is gradually moved onto consumer-based marketing, marketing targeted at industry professionals remain its importance and several activities are devoted to it. B2B marketing has become one of the most effective ways of marketing Finland as it is the most direct way to activate sales and companies are continuously interested in it, because it often proves to be the easiest and quickest way of making sales. This, alongside media-related efforts, has subsequently positively affected the amount of people coming to Finland and the amount of revenue generated. (Hietasaari 2014)

Hietasaari points out it is very much more effective to see and experience a destination, rather than just hearing about it, and this notion is widely utilised by Visit Finland. Every year, the Finnish Tourist Board brings some 200 journalists and bloggers to visit Finland as a part of PR and media work, to familiarize foreign media professionals with the country's different destinations, regions and tourism offer as well as marketing themes and their real origins. These professionals represent various forms of media from lifestyle and travel magazines to blogging and TV and radio. The purpose of these arranged visits is to inspire the professionals to write and talk about Finland, leading to further visibility and coverage for Finland as a destination in the professionals' countries of origin - hoped to inspire media consumers to visit Finland. Examples of these trips include a 2013 trip called 'Culture on the Coast', with Finnish coastal cities Pori and Rauma as the destinations in the middle of the summer, introducing the culture of the part of Finland, as well as 'Polar Night Passion' planned for December 2014 in northern Utsjoki, as means of introducing foreign media professionals to the winter nature and the relaxing aspect of Finland. Notably, PR and media co-operation has become of great importance for Finland's destination marketing. The media professionals mostly come from the Board's target countries, but individual media representatives show interest in coming over to Finland and occasionally it is enabled, depending on resources. However, the annual PR and media co-operation plans include the most important target markets. Additionally, media releases and newsletters are distributed to spread the word of Finnish tourism within the industry; also through the Finnish Tourist Board's foreign PR agencies in countries such as the UK, Germany, Russia, USA, Japan and France. (Hietasaari 2014; MEK 2014)

Furthermore, visits are arranged as part of Visit Finland's B2B-marketing activities. Annually, foreign representatives of tour operators and travel agencies, incoming agencies and congress and event organisers are brought to Finland to urge and develop sales between these entities and Finnish tourism providers and suppliers. Also, the Finland Convention Bureau invites industry agents and organisations to visit Finland to introduce the congress and events potential of the country to international meetings industry markets. The visits are hoped to improve the conspicuousness of Finland, diversify the industry and prolong visitor stays. In addition, there are sales events. Workshops, seminars and other events are arranged in Finland and abroad in regional co-operation, targeting professionals. The goal is to bring industry vendors and buyers together for networking on an international level. Moreover, taking part in industry fairs attracts the potential customer base to get to know Finland and the country's tourism offer. Visit Finland regularly attends fairs in London, Singapore, Barcelona, Frankfurt and Berlin. (Hietasaari 2014; MEK 2014)

Additionally, promotional campaigning is a part of Finland's destination marketing. Visit Finland campaigns concentrate either on the image of Finland or a tourism product. They are designed to create interest towards Finland and offer a direct way to purchase a trip to the

country. Most importantly, the campaigns spread the word and improve destination conspicuousness. Online and social media campaigns are the most common, supported by print advertising. In 2014, continuing to 2015, an image campaign under the concept of 'Meaningful Encounters' is targeted at the Japanese and Chinese markets. This campaign highlights the continuous presence of nature, fauna and local people as well as the active nature of Finnish tourism offer. Furthermore, welfare, health, calm and balanced lifestyle and unique, even magical experiences are conveyed to these markets. Print advertising and material strongly support campaigns as well as other marketing efforts. The engaging, visual and creative aspects that are conveyed to potential tourists is intended to be visible in these materials whilst being attractive and informative. (MEK 2014; Hietasaari 2014)

8.1.5 Future

Hietasaari thinks the future of Finland's destination marketing looks relatively positive. Political decision-makers have acknowledged the positive impact and growth potential of tourism in Finland at an increasing level, especially at the moment when other industries have shown lack of growth. The current agents at the Ministry of Employment and Economy have shown support but it remains to be seen whether the new ministry agrees. The role and significance of tourism-related companies are great, but their operations are very small and limited. If the development of these companies starts to struggle and their operations wither, the chances of marketing Finland effectively will suffer. Also, in addition to the political attitudes, limited marketing budget and weak regional co-operation, the attitude of Finnish people remains a problem to an extent. Even though interest in tourism is slowly increasing, the majority of the Finnish population still find it remarkable that someone would like to come to their country. Finland is a big country and most tourists visit for a short time and stay either in Lapland or the Helsinki region and so tourism in Finland is not very visible for the local population. Hence, interest towards it is not too strong either. Ultimately, it remains to be seen what will happen in the future, but the goals and activities stay the same and the Finnish Tourist Board is going to have to keep working and see where all the effort will lead. (Hietasaari 2014)

8.2 Case: marketing Helsinki internationally

In charge of marketing Helsinki, including tourism, events, congress and trade marketing in regards of research, promotion, development, tourist information and a variety of event productions is Helsinki Marketing Ltd. It operates under the City Marketing Unit, which is a part of the Economic Development Department of Helsinki. The department works to increase the attractiveness and overall conspicuousness of Helsinki in the eyes of the people living in the

region as well as tourists, professionals and companies. Most importantly, Helsinki City Marketing operates to enhance and develop a strong and attractive Helsinki image for tourists. (Helsingin kaupunki 2014)

According to the Marketing Director Outi Leppälä from the Helsinki City Marketing Unit, the tasks of the department are to steer the activities of Helsinki Marketing Ltd and the coordination, strategic planning and implementation of the whole of Helsinki's marketing activities, covering not only tourism, but an array of trades. These include for example attracting investment, student collaboration, property marketing, international sales projects and fairs as well as attracting and implementing events, meetings and congresses. In regards to tourism, collaboration with the Finnish Tourist Board is significant. Due to the merging of the Board with Finpro in late 2014, the co-operation is soon to include international communications and export activities, putting emphasis on attracting companies to the Finnish business market. (Leppälä 2014)

In addition, the Helsinki Convention & Events Bureau offers free assistance to international congress organisers from the application and research stage to finding venues and co-operations partners, all the way to marketing. The aim is to offer the congress organisers the best of the city; assuring a quality experience and consequently positively influencing the perceptions of the thousands of congress participants. The responsibility of the Bureau is to create a competitive and positive image of Helsinki internationally, promoting the possibilities of the city as a meeting, event and international congress venue, consequently attracting international events to the capital city. The Bureau aims to increase the number of international meetings and congresses organised in Helsinki, whilst increasing participant numbers - getting the city amongst the most popular meeting industry destinations, whilst promoting Helsinki's diverse and competitive nature. (Helsingin kaupunki 2014; Visit Helsinki 2014)

The aim of these entities is to enhance Helsinki's destination brand and get it amongst the most competitive destinations in the international markets. The goal is to make Helsinki an appealing all-year-round leisure destination and the leading congress destination within the Nordic countries, with the highest quality congress services and venues in the whole of Europe. Helsinki is promoted as a tourism destination in co-operation with a variety of organisations in the tourism industry in Finland, on a regional level as well as internationally. The objectives include the development of tourism in Helsinki and enhancement of Helsinki's appeal to tourists through marketing, promotion, assistance and research. (Somero 2012, 20-22)

Marketing Director Outi Leppälä states that the goals of destination marketing of Helsinki is to significantly improve the city's conspicuousness, increasing visitor numbers as well as tourism

revenue and adds that bringing out the city's versatility is key; Helsinki is considered an expensive and faraway destination and therefore these negative perceptions are to be hidden to an extent by systematically highlighting everything Helsinki actually has to offer for every kind of visitor. The economic side of tourism business is important and that is why Helsinki really needs to increase the visitor numbers from the significant tourism markets of Japan and China, as well as Europe - even further away if possible. The bottom line is to get visitors from many different countries into Helsinki and keep tourism expanding and developing. In addition, winter travel in Helsinki has to be improved. It is working in Finland in general, especially in Lapland, but Helsinki is trying to gain a share. Productization and developing offer and marketing activities in the winter season are the starting points. Beneficial for Helsinki is the annual Travel Fair in Finland, which happens to be in the middle of the winter, welcoming a fair number of international tourism agents. In addition, together with Visit Finland, Helsinki brings international media professionals to visit the country and Helsinki, some of them timed in the middle of winter. So far, these visits have been hugely successful and so Visit Helsinki has to keep on going along the same path. Visitors need a unique Helsinki experience, memories, appropriate products and services. Most importantly, Helsinki is working towards wide international recognition. (Leppälä 2014)

Conclusively, according to the latest Strategy Programme 2013-2016 of the City of Helsinki, the city is to be made more familiar and interesting on an international scale by strengthening the city's marketing efforts. Helsinki is to be marketed selectively, emphasising its strengths in a long-term process as one unit, including tourism marketing, related events, congresses and companies, as well as attracting experts, investment and businesses. In addition, the city is to compile a comprehensive description of places suitable for events. Also, Helsinki's appeal in the Russian and Asian markets is to be improved as an investment. Therefore, tourism services are to be developed for the demands of larger tourists groups, specifically keeping in mind those arriving from Russia. This includes immaculate transport and business connections. On a broader scale, Helsinki is to develop tourism in co-operation with the region of Uusimaa as well as the whole of Finland, emphasising accessibility, competitiveness and innovation. Furthermore, the above entities are to distribute information to Helsinki's visitors as well as residents about the city and its services, events and attractions, whilst ensuring the availability of tourist information and supporting services in person, in print and online throughout the year. Helsinki is to be marketed as a tourism, congress and events destination, in collaboration with the Finnish and international travel trades, monitoring the development of the city's tourism through research and statistical work. The aims are to create a coherent Helsinki brand, develop tourism and destination marketing in the region systematically, improve Helsinki's conspicuousness and accessibility as well as tourism products and services according to consumer demand, and finally, make Helsinki Finland's most important

destination, while increasing revenue from tourism. (Helsinki City Council 2013, 12-14; Visit Helsinki 2014)

8.2.1 Themes

Inspired by the unique and appealing offer that is based on the mix of influences from western and eastern cultures in Helsinki, a set of marketing themes have been determined and used from the year 2015 onwards. The themes highlight the eccentric culture of the city with its competitive location and complementing city design and size, local people, design, architecture, cuisine, nature, maritime appeal as well as contemporary events. (Helsingin Markkinointi Oy 2014, 7)

Leppälä explains that Helsinki wants to especially emphasise the city's culture and cultural events; tourists ought to know about the lively nature of Helsinki - something is constantly happening. Leppälä believes that culture is a strong way for Helsinki and Finland to gain more conspicuousness and one day be comparable with city destinations such as Prague and Stockholm. Much like the two, Helsinki could be known as an interesting and a distinguishable city break destination. In the end, Helsinki has multiple strengths, the challenge is getting that acknowledged by the travelling population and first convey it with correct kind of marketing. Therefore, choosing the correct themes that are most importantly true as well as appealing is crucial. Helsinki is increasingly known as an attractive destination, but with regards to marketing, it is much of an empty board that has to be filled systematically and boldly; competition is to be beaten by highlighting the city's vibrant personality without any modesty. The goal is that the name 'Helsinki' rings bells within a lot of people, in a lot of places. Helsinki has to arouse interest and different mental images. Helsinki is not a boring little town and it is the responsibility of the marketing entities to promote this and hence increase the city's conspicuousness. (Leppälä 2014)

Leppälä adds, that marketing starts with consumer research. Information is sought for on reasons why tourists choose Helsinki as a destination and also why they do not, in order to know what needs to be developed. Even though marketing is practiced, tourists seem to be surprised by what Helsinki is actually like and what it has to offer and that in itself can be used as a base for development; for example, Helsinki's maritime appeal and the presence of nature as well as liveliness may be highlighted even more, consequently increasing visitor numbers. As it stands, Helsinki and Finland go largely hand in hand - similar themes are brought out; design, nature and cuisine for instance are aspects that the travelling population often connect to the two destinations. Lately the local people have been considered a strength, most importantly their friendliness and hospitality, which have been noted by visitors. People are now a fundamental part of marketing Helsinki - images of nice scenery are not enough.

Helsinki is a versatile and buzzing city and that has to be shown. In this case, research is key and Helsinki and Finland are both putting much needed effort on it. For example, the City Marketing Unit is carrying out a perception research with 16-25 year olds in ten different countries, starting in autumn 2014. The aim is to find out what individuals from this certain age group from eight European countries, as well as Japan and South-Korea, know about Helsinki and what they connect to it, as well as how interesting the city is in their eyes. (Leppälä 2014)

8.2.2 Target markets and groups

Rather similarly to the target market division of Finland, Helsinki's target markets are divided into three categories, emphasis being put on the Asian and Russian markets:

1. Short-haul markets, including Sweden, Russia and the domestic market.
2. Europe, including the UK, Germany, France, Italy and Spain.
3. Long-haul markets, including Asia; in particular Japan and China, South Korea and USA.

In the short-haul markets, families, friend groups and couples are targeted, similarly to the European markets. In the long-haul markets the emphasis is on friend groups and couples. (Helsingin Markkinointi Oy 2014, 8; Visit Helsinki 2014)

Helsinki's marketing strategies differ between target markets and groups. Different priorities are visible, especially between the domestic and international markets, says Marketing Director Outi Leppälä from Helsinki City Marketing Unit. She adds that the opportunities and interests of different markets and groups vary and that is the reason for varying marketing strategies. Most importantly, marketing entities need to respond to what is demanded for, as well as expected from Helsinki, and that is the starting point of all marketing. Planning the marketing activities and procedures is by no means straightforward and plans need to be constantly altered and adapted to reach the required goals and consumer demands. Tourists are all different, come from different backgrounds and have varying values. It is all to be considered in successful destination marketing. (Leppälä 2014)

8.2.3 Competition and networking

Marketing Director Outi Leppälä talks about competition and the need of co-operation and networking. Asia for instance, the main target market for Helsinki as well as Finland at the moment, is competed in with other Nordic countries, where the Scandinavian brand is strong. However, tourists often connect the brand to Helsinki's competition - Stockholm, Oslo and

Copenhagen - and Helsinki is forgotten. This is apparent in cruise tourism as well, where Helsinki needs to show that it has just the same level, if not more, of potential than all the other somewhat similar destinations. At the same time, with congresses and the meetings industry, competition goes even further and Helsinki is head to head with city destinations, such as London and Madrid. That is where a city brand is the key to competition; quality, activities, appeal, location, infrastructure, hospitality, safety and professionalism for example, are all considered factors. The strengths of Helsinki are to be pointed out boldly. What is important to remember is, that Helsinki does not only compete with other destinations for visitors and visibility, but collaborate and network with them at the same time - as well as the main target markets - to establish the same results. (Leppälä 2014)

Leppälä points out the strengths of Helsinki that can and are used to overcome competition. The comprehensive story and background of Helsinki is a significant strength; Helsinki's location and history is unique and is further supported by the mix of eastern and western influences that have roots in the time of the Russian and Swedish empires. Moreover, the compact size of the city and the northern location enable the peaceful, safe and authentic, as well as refreshing and functional characterization of the city. Helsinki is a vast city with a relatively ranging tourism selection. Withal, nature within a city is a major factor appealing to visitors alike. Helsinki is home to urban nature; it is a vibrant capital city surrounded by the Baltic Sea and other bodies of water, the archipelago, beaches and forests. In addition, typical Finnish flora and fauna are present in the capital city together with attractive parks, gardens and yards - not to mention the four changing seasons that each bring the city out in a different light. This aspect of Helsinki alone makes it one of, if not the most, unique capital cities in the world. What is more, nearby regions and their natural surroundings are easily accessible from the city, deepening the natural characteristics of the country, as well as enabling organic food production and urban cropping, likewise beneficial for industries outside of tourism. In regards to city services and their functionality, Helsinki does not lose the competition. Public transport is reliable and functional, city layout and networks are simple and comprehensive and service price range and their availability and functionality is assured, and provided, in high quality. The city culture is another strength. The availability of Finnish design in products and services, unique architecture, discernible city districts and traditional cuisine, sciences, art, sports, as well as education, are thoroughly presented and accessible in the university city. Additionally, the activity and positive reputation of the local residents and their welcoming and interested attitude towards tourists rouses the profile of Helsinki as a destination. Finally, Helsinki's responsible, open, social and accessible nature enhances the economic, environmental, social and political stability of the city and enables comprehensive guidance, services and support to the city's tourism offer. (Leppälä 2014)

On the other hand, the aspects Leppälä regards as weaknesses start with the low international conspicuousness of Helsinki; the city remains unfamiliar to many potential tourists. In addition, the expensiveness and a lack of international service culture in terms of attitudes, aesthetics and for example opening hours, compared to many other capital cities, are factors that affect the tourism industry, more specifically in the quieter seasons. The low level of internationality - although increasing - also shows in the homogeneity of the city culture; compared to many world capitals, foreign cultures are yet to integrate into the city's culture and local lifestyle as much as in many other cities. Helsinki's remote location and distance from mainland Europe affects this as well as the whole tourism trade. Climate in Helsinki, as well as in Finland generally, is a weakness; the long coldness and darkness of the country and the capital city can be overwhelming for tourists, but can also prove to be a potential strength to those looking for a certain kind of experience. Also, although considered interesting and different by some visitors, the local people's shyness, sense of privacy, reserved and introverted nature, as well as a somewhat limited conviviality, may be unappealing. However, the fact that Helsinki offers a homogeneous yet authentic Finnish capital city experience, characterized by a completely different language and unique values and lifestyle, slowness and quietness, as well as emptiness, may also be regarded as a strength, naturally depending on the perspective. (Leppälä 2014)

Moreover, networks are built as a marketing effort together with industry agents. Four important networks are Gay Friendly Helsinki, Helsinki Cruise network, Family Tourism network as well as Helsinki's Congress marketing network with the Helsinki Convention & Events Bureau. Firstly, the Gay Friendly Helsinki-networking has been ongoing since 2009 and is targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) travellers, tour operators and travel agencies in the UK, USA and Germany. The aims include service, product and activity development for the specific target group and integrating the LGBT perspective to the rest of the marketing activities in the mentioned markets. Also, businesses and marketing entities research this customer group and distribute the information for the industry. In addition, the companies in the network gain visibility in Visit Helsinki's website. Secondly, the Helsinki Cruise network connects local companies operating in the cruise industry and aims to increase Helsinki's and Finland's competitiveness in the Baltic Sea region and develops the services provided for the approximately 400 000 cruise passengers arriving in Helsinki in the summer season, improves co-operation between the entities in the network and markets the network's services and products to passengers as well as shipping companies. Thirdly, the Family Tourism network operates alongside family campaigns as means of planning, monitoring and developing the concept, as well as connecting industry agents and building marketing systems for a shared marketing concept targeted at families. Finally, the partnership with the Helsinki Convention & Events Bureau is especially important, as Helsinki is amongst the most popular congress and meetings destinations. The aim, together with the Bureau and congress and events providers,

is to develop and enhance congress services and promotion. (Helsingin Markkinointi Oy 2014, 41-45)

8.2.4 Activities

According to Marketing Director Outi Leppälä, the base of all marketing planning of Helsinki as a destination is comprehensive and diverse thinking. Travel and tourism is business just like any other and results are required. Therefore, Helsinki's marketing entities work to get local tourism-related companies interested in collaboration and try to use the total available budget extensively and imaginatively, subsequently working for desired results. In-depth planning is the start, thoughtful implementation the end and in order to do that, vast collaboration and a range of platforms is needed. (Leppälä 2014)

Marketing activities for the city of Helsinki are roughly divided into four main categories. These are online channels, personal channels, campaigns and printed material. Seven online channels are used: main website visithelsinki.fi, visit Helsinki blog, Facebook and Twitter, YouTube and Instagram as well as newsletters. Personal channels include tourist information centres, PR activities, sales events and fairs. Campaigns are designed to differ between target markets and groups and are implemented through different media, aimed to build the conspicuousness of Helsinki as a destination. Printed material comes in the form of brochures, guides and maps as well as reports, mainly supporting other promotional activities, especially important for tourists that have already arrived to the city. (Leppälä 2014; Helsingin Markkinointi Oy 2014, 6)

Leppälä continues by pointing out the importance of the online channels, visithelsinki.fi being of most significance. In addition, visibility on third party websites, social media, blogging and collaboration with international media have proven to generate the most success. In social media, the focus is on the experiences, perceptions and opinions of those that have visited Helsinki and those that are considering it, as well as how they share the information. The stature of this consumer-based thinking has increased in the last five years. It requires a good deal of resources but nevertheless, it is crucial to keep these channels active and topical. Furthermore, the way Helsinki is portrayed in foreign media and online channels is monitored and evaluated through media tracking, and the content is reported and used to Helsinki's advantage - either as positive feedback or from a developmental perspective. Foreign reporting shows proof of the thin line between Helsinki and Finland, but Helsinki's significance is increasing all the time as city tourism and city destination branding becomes more and more focused on globally. In addition, a majority of campaigns have moved to online channels. Online campaigns, social media and other online activities are easier to evaluate and monitor and often prove to be the most cost-effective and worthwhile. (Leppälä 2014)

The official travel website of Helsinki offers travellers and professionals vast, up-to-date information on the most significant and interesting destinations, attractions, events and travel services as well as news in Helsinki. A new concept 'Hel Yeah!' specifically inspires and comprehensively introduces potential tourists to the diverse offer of the city in a visual and lively manner, gathering up the most attractive attributes of the city in one, especially effective in the building of a Helsinki brand. The information is available in eleven different languages from English to Japanese and is expected to get some 2 million visitors by the end of 2014 - a rise from some 1.6 million annual visitors. In regard to industry professionals, visithelsinki.fi offers information for event and congress organisers, media representatives, travel agencies and tour operators, as well as current and potential co-operation partner and other stakeholders. In addition, the Visit Helsinki online blog, administrated by Helsinki Marketing Ltd and starring writers, provides a more local perspective on Helsinki's culture, including accounts of design, cuisine, nature and events, based on lived experiences. It is aimed to inspire travel to Helsinki and inform domestic and international travelling individuals and industry professionals about the city's offer. The blog reached 59 300 readers in 2013-2014, the majority of readers from USA, the UK, Japan, Russia and Germany. (Visit Helsinki 2014; Helsingin Markkinointi Oy 2014, 24, 27-28; Leppälä 2014)

In terms of social media, Visit Helsinki has gained some 15 500 likes and 8 500 followers respectively on Facebook and Twitter. About 8 500 individuals have subscribed to Visit Helsinki's YouTube channel and approximately 227 000 viewers have found its content. In addition, Visit Helsinki has 1600 followers on Instagram. These channels aim to provide an inspiring, collective, up-to-date account of the Finnish capital city with attractive and lively content, including information on events and city culture in the form of videos, blog entries, news articles and images. Moreover, the Helsinki Marketing Ltd newsletter offers tourism professionals topical news and information on the development and plans of travel and tourism in Helsinki. (Visit Helsinki 2014; Helsingin Markkinointi Oy 2014, 28)

Tourist information centres are a fundamental part of distributing information to visitors as well as locals on a personal level. Tourist information centres in the heart of Helsinki, the Helsinki-Vantaa Airport and the central railway station provide face-to-face guidance, transportation tickets, tour tickets and entry tickets to Helsinki's main attractions. In addition, printed material is available, supporting the more active processes; including visitor guides in several languages, target group - specific brochures and booklets targeted for example at families, activity-specific guides targeted for example at cruise visitors and brochures for the vaster capital area. Also, comprehensive maps and attraction information leaflets are provided. Professionals are offered their own material, such as an annual booklet introducing marketing collaboration opportunities. In addition, a group of trained students working as

'Helsinki Help' are providing guidance on the street level all over Helsinki. Last year, approximately 250 000 people visited the central tourist information, some 312 000 at the airport and 161 000 found advice from the Helsinki Help-guides. (Visit Helsinki 2014; Helsingin Markkinointi Oy 2014, 30-34, 35-39; Leppälä 2014)

Marketing Director Outi Leppälä points out PR activities, largely in the form of visits targeted at international travel and lifestyle media and international tour operators, travel agencies and other tourism industry agents. The goal of inviting media professionals to Helsinki is to introduce them to the city's tourism offer and gain more visibility and conspicuousness for Helsinki through the visitors' distribution channels at their country of origin. Annually, several hundred media professionals and nearly a thousand tourism professionals are welcomed to Helsinki, much of these visits arranged in collaboration with Visit Finland, as well as air carriers and other co-operation partners. Essentially, these visits comprise of tours around the main attractions of the city, introductions to the culture, as infrastructure and several other activities and places regarded of interest to a potential tourist. The visits have a great meaning, especially when congresses and business events are expected. These are supported by fairs and sales events where Helsinki's marketing entities and co-operation partners have a chance to be heard and seen. Altogether, these systems are stressed and co-operation integrated as much as possible with local companies, international professionals, air carriers and cruise providers. It is persistent, proactive work; at the moment the year 2016 is under planning. The effort will hopefully result in tourists, air carriers and cruise providers taking on Helsinki as one of their destinations. (Leppälä 2014; Helsingin Markkinointi 2014, 47)

In addition, three campaigning themes are focused on. Firstly, a City Break-campaign is targeted at 24 to 45 year old couples and groups domestically, as well as in the capital area of Sweden and the biggest cities of Russia. The campaign is meant to hearten the motivations to travel to Helsinki and introduce reasons to choose the city as a destination, by highlighting the unique city culture and competitive events and tourism offer. Information is distributed through online channels and PR activities throughout the tourism season. Secondly, a family campaign targets families with children in Finland, Sweden and Russia. The campaign proposes activities and attractions that specifically meet the demands of this group. Service providers are encouraged to promote Helsinki as an appealing family destination through online channels, PR work and media advertising. Lastly, Winter Fun Helsinki-campaign is designed to strengthen winter tourism in Helsinki and inspire a range of companies and agents to bring out the best of Helsinki in this quieter season. The target group is largely the locals, domestic travellers and those visiting Helsinki around January and February. Most importantly, the winter campaign is meant to improve the customer volumes and sales of local tourism companies as well as expand the offer of the city throughout the year. This is done through online channels, companies' own promotional channels, Helsinki's own promotional channels, as well as

PR activities. Campaigning is executed in co-operation with Visit Finland in the markets of the UK, Germany, Italy, France, Japan, China and USA. (Helsingin Markkinointi Oy 2014, 12)

8.2.5 Future

Between 2014 and 2020, Helsinki Marketing Ltd wishes to enhance and strengthen current partnerships, significantly increase the conspicuousness of the city in the pre-determined target markets and be the most appealing destination in the Asian markets. In addition, Helsinki's marketing entities want to create innovatively competitive strategies that establish new talent and professionalism that eventually results in Helsinki's destination marketing and the city brand being the strongest in Europe. Specifically in 2015, the aim is to build a marketing strategy together with the vaster Helsinki region through which an appealing and persistent marketing concept is achieved, including productive campaigns targeted at stopover-passengers and the Russian market. Companies desired to collaborate with Helsinki are the municipalities and marketing organisations in the region and regional tourism-related companies. Finavia, air carriers, shipping companies, the Finnish National Rail and other transportation providers as well as accommodation providers, attractions and activity providers alongside travel agencies are anticipated to be integrated in the co-operation. The goal is to create a close network for the international markets and hence more visibility for the tourism agents in the region and the city itself. (Helsingin Markkinointi Oy 2014, 9)

8.3 Questionnaire: perceptions and travel preferences

The questionnaire was distributed online through social media channels, resulting in 63 admissible responses, out of a total of 66. 54% of the respondents were female and 46% male, representing a total of 19 different nationalities; the majority of them British (23,8%) and Australian (15,9%), followed by Israeli (7,9%), Portuguese (6,4%), Italian (6,4%), French (4,7%), Serbian (4,7%), Latvian (4,7%), Russian (4,7%), Irish (3,2%), American (3,2%), Canadian (3,2%) as well as Norwegian (1,6%), Czech (1,6%), Swiss (1,6%), Bangladeshi (1,6%), Croatian (1,6%), Greek (1,6%) and South African (1,6%) individuals. 57% of them were between 18 and 25 years of age, 22% between 26 and 35 years old, 11% were between 36 and 45 years old and 10% over 45 years of age. Additionally, the majority (63%) are in the workforce and the rest (37%) identified themselves as students.

A majority of 67% of respondents had not been to Finland before, whilst 33% had. Most of the visitors (76%) travelled to Helsinki and 24% visited elsewhere in Finland. The most popular travel months were June, July and August when 48% of the respondents arrived to the country. 19% visited Finland in February and March, whilst the rest (33%) spread out evenly throughout the year. 10% of visitors to Finland stayed for a day, 14% for 2 to 3 days, 28% for 4

to 5 days and 24% respectively for 6 to 7 days or over 7 days. Moreover, approximately 50% of respondents visiting Helsinki arrived in June, July and August and 50% spread throughout the year. 13% stayed for a day, 18, 5% for 2 to 3 days, 25% for 4 to 5 days, another 18, 5% for 6 to 7 days and 25% for over 7 days.

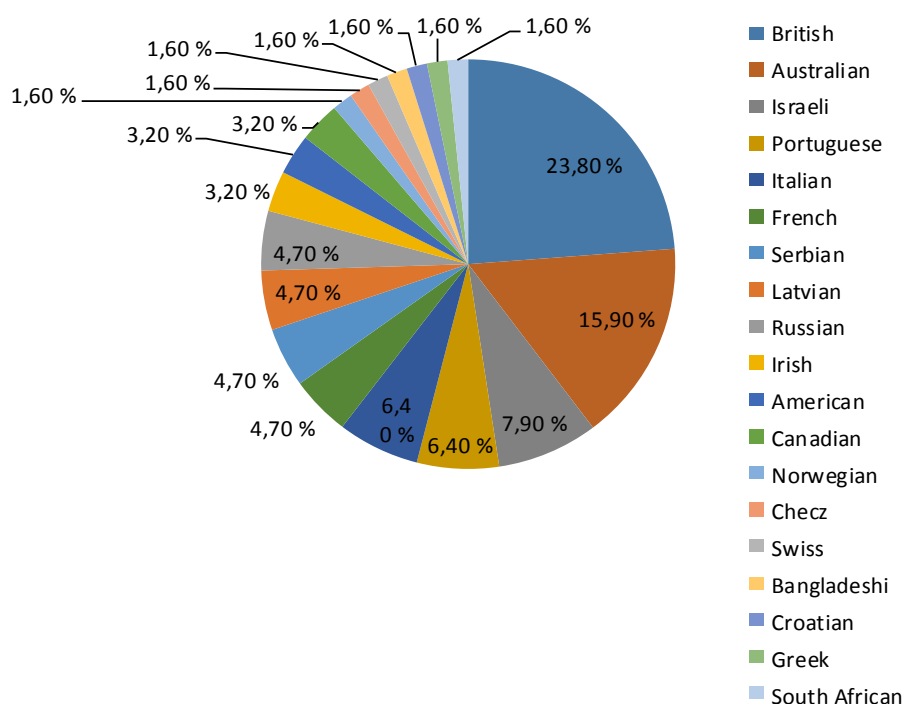


Figure 1: Nationality distribution

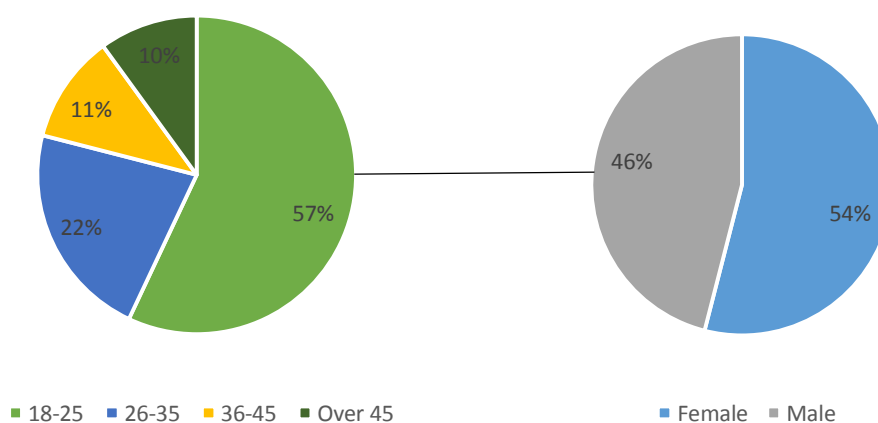


Figure 2: Age and gender distribution

The reasons of travelling to Finland were stated to be - in order of most mentions - leisure; experiencing the culture and cuisine, meeting new people, experiencing something new and different, seeing snow and ice, enjoying nature, learning about Finnish traditions and customs, visiting an event and relaxing and exploring for the enjoyment of travelling, followed by business and education, visiting friends and family, visiting Helsinki/Lapland, a stopover

destination on the way to Sweden/ Estonia/Russia, summer camps and other organised activity. In regard to Helsinki, the reasons for visiting the city were business and education, cultural learning, experiencing the city culture and nightlife and to see the Finnish capital city and the surrounding areas, as well as visiting friends and family.

8.3.1 Perceptions

The view of Finland as a destination was largely similar within the respondents that had visited the country - from Australia, UK, Israel, France, Portugal, Bangladesh, Croatia, Latvia, Russia and the Czech Republic - proving to be mainly positive and not significantly altering between different demographics. However, those between the ages of 18 and 35 most commonly mentioned the impressiveness of the Finnish culture and local people, whereas the older age groups of 36 to 45 and over 45 stressed the natural surroundings and calming nature of the country as well as its historical offer. British, Australian and French respondents largely brought up cultural aspects of the country and many of the other nationalities - although very diverse in views - mentioned the unsatisfactory climate as well as the wondrous nature. In regards to the overall experience, both ends of the spectrum were reported; most of the visitors enjoyed their trip and would return to Finland, whereas others would not necessarily consider a return visit, mainly due to the weather and expensiveness, as well as a limited tourism offer in comparison to many other destinations.

The respondents' descriptions of Finland clearly highlighted the country's nature and landscapes; the close presence of nature, the vast, picturesque and attractive open areas and countless places to explore, beautiful scenery and countryside, a range of different natural areas, maritime appeal and the outdoor activity opportunities were mentioned repeatedly. Another positive aspect reported commonly was the peaceful, calming and relaxing, as well as fun, active, charming, cool, vibrant, traditional, diverse and distinct nature of the country. Rather surprisingly, several respondents said Finland could not really be compared to any other country they had visited and had become one of their favourite countries. The unique and authentic Finnish culture, traditional cuisine and the excitement of cold winters and warm summers, safety and stability, calm yet determined way of life and especially the friendly, smart, warm and honest Finnish people had been impressive. However, even though the majority were content with Finland and considered it a positive experience with high motivation to return, some negativities were mentioned. Finland's weaknesses were suggested to be the extreme coldness and a relatively halting weather, smallness, remoteness and expensiveness as well as limited tourist areas and activities. In addition, strict laws, depressing winter time and a low tourist appeal as well as lack of destination advertising and promotion were listed. Having said that, the negative reports were from a minority of the respondents.

Notably, these respondents - all but one from Europe - had only stayed in the country for a shorter period of up to 3 days and only one of them for leisure.

The respondents would recommend Finland as a destination generally for the same reasons. The local people, culture and language, four changing seasons, cleanness, safety and stability, easiness of getting around, outdoor appeal, vast range of activities for singles, groups and families, nightlife, local sports and uniqueness and calmness were the most named reasons for recommending the country as a destination - most of these reasons regarded as distinct features of the country. In addition, comments on Finland being able to offer an extraordinary, traditional type of experience and culture, appealing to many different kind of people, a nearly flawless reputation and transparent authenticity sprung out from the responses. On the contrary, the most common reasons behind visitors not recommending Finland as a destination were bad weather, depressiveness, expensiveness and remoteness as well as not having enough to do for more than a day.

Similarly, respondents that had not visited Finland at the time of the distribution of the questionnaire were asked to describe how they imagine Finland to be as a destination. Expectedly, the descriptions largely matched the prior descriptions of those that had been to the country and differences were not outstanding between different demographics. However, the culture, local people, nature and lifestyle were stressed by the youngest age group that commonly imagine Finland as a beautiful and magical as well as lively country dominated by nature. Although very similar to the answers of other age groups, the oldest age groups reported most commonly of not being familiar with Finland and had the most negative perceptions.

Withal, Finland is commonly perceived as an interesting destination that has a unique culture, impressive local people and outstanding nature that seem appealing to most of the respondents. Culture, visiting friends, education and business as well as nature, changing seasons, activities, Helsinki and Lapland along with good reputation and positive recommendations seem to be the most typical motivational factors for travelling to the country. At the same time, the climate, coldness, remoteness, expensiveness and overall unfamiliarity with the country and its offer seem to be the most common reasons for passing Finland as a destination choice. In terms of nationality groups, most of the respondents from Europe as well as Australia perceive Finland more positively than others, however the answers are diverse and not one nationality group jumps out significantly.

In the second part of the questionnaire respondents were asked to answer the same questions but steer their attention specifically to the capital city of Helsinki. The respondents that had been to Helsinki - from UK, Australia, Israel, France, Portugal, Bangladesh, Latvia, Russia and Croatia - had fairly positive and similar views on the city, mostly concentrating on its cultural

richness and peaceful nature as well as unique, somewhat tranquil lifestyle of the locals, even though they were residents of a capital city. The age group of 18-25 year olds stressed the surprisingly lively culture and welcoming nature of the local inhabitants and many of the 26 to 35 year olds were impressed by the easiness of getting to places even in a larger group or with children, as well as the compact size of the city; everything you need is easily accessible and easy to find - even on foot. Even though the negative perceptions included the expensiveness, dullness, darkness and limited tourist activity and attraction offer as well as quietness, contrasting views could be seen: the fact that Helsinki is not a tourist centre full of attractions and activities compared to many capitals in the world, its calmness and even remoteness were regarded as a positive - highlighting the presence of nature and opportunity to relax, wonder and explore the real life in Helsinki, instead of running from attraction to attraction with other tourists.

The responses suggest Helsinki's strengths to be the unique city culture; the city has everything that a capital city needs to have in order to be appealing yet different to many other world capitals. Helsinki was described to be small, yet lively and vibrant, with a range of opportunities and points of interest that would appeal to most city travellers, being suitable for a range of tourist preferences. Helsinki is perceived much as a 'diamond in the rough' that enables discovery and self-challenge with the nature providing opportunities that many other capital destinations in the world lack. In addition, the local people and lifestyle, great cuisine and surprisingly lively nightlife and interesting architecture and simple city layout were worth a mention. In contrast, according to the responses, Helsinki's weaknesses are to do with the city's unfamiliarity, remoteness, expensiveness, darkness and boring, limited and monotonous tourism offer.

Furthermore, the respondents that had been to Helsinki would recommend it for its one of a kind culture and lifestyle, as opposed to many other capital cities; cuisine, nightlife, music, sport, architecture and events as well as locals, safety and stability, presence of nature all around the city, maritime appeal, quietness, calmness and openness and history and easiness - all contributing to a pleasant and comprehensive experience. Those that would not necessarily recommend the city, nor consider a return visit based it on the city's weather conditions, expensiveness, unfamiliarity, limited attractions and activities, smallness and remoteness.

The way respondents that had not been to Helsinki before imagine the city goes largely hand in hand with the way they imagine Finland as a whole. Some of them perceive Helsinki as a busy capital city in the middle of nature with a variety of tourist attractions and activities as well as other tourists. Others perceive it as relaxing and calming yet different and unique to other capital cities. The overall perception of the city is relatively positive and it seems to

interest the respondents fairly well, especially among the 18 to 35 year old respondents. Different aspects of culture, active lifestyle, calm and relaxed nature, uniqueness and unfamiliarity, as well as an overall positive reputation of Helsinki seem to be appealing to this group. However, at the same time the unfamiliarity and inconspicuousness of Helsinki is a deal breaker, more commonly with the older age groups, creating a perception of an unworthy destination. More so, a part of the respondents connect Helsinki with dullness, expensiveness, darkness and low tourism offer. In regards to nationality groups, Australians and the British seem more interested in the capital city and perceive it more positively than respondents of other nationalities - although the perceptions vary and not one nationality can be said to have completely altering perceptions.

8.3.2 Information sources and points of interest

Respondents were consequently asked where they had obtained information on the two destinations. In the case of both Finland and Helsinki, the results were similar, although Helsinki was most commonly connected to education and business as a source of information and Finland to internet sources and recommendations. A list of all information sources reported can be found below in order of reference.

1. Finnish friends: locals, exchange students, business colleagues
2. People that had travelled to Finland and Helsinki
3. Education
4. Business
5. Internet: Google, TripAdvisor
6. Have not heard much or anything
7. Media: TV, news, newspapers, magazines
8. Advertisement
9. Sports
10. Tourist information centres

Furthermore, respondents listed down points of interest regarding the two destinations. History, culture and local people were largely emphasised when considering Finland and night-life, city culture, tourist attractions, sports, events and competing destinations when considering its capital. A categorised summary of the responses is provided below for comprehensive reference.

CULTURE

- What are the similarities and differences of the Finnish and other Nordic cultures?

- How would a Finnish person sum up their history, culture and lifestyle?
- What are Finnish people like?
- Are residents in Helsinki really posh and conservative?
- How could the traditional Finnish cuisine be described?
- How do people have fun in Finland when they seem so reserved?
- How expensive is Finland / Helsinki as travel destinations?
- Why are the laws so strict?
- Why are Finnish people so happy, yet modest and private?
- Is there a historical basis for the Finland vs Russia/Sweden rivalry?
- What is the political situation of the country?
- Why the Finnish education is regarded the best in the world?
- Why do Finnish people seem so hung up on historical events?
- What do Finnish people think about other European countries?
- How come there are so many Finnish people travelling and moving away from home?
- Why do Finnish people seem to be a lot nicer to tourists than their own people?
- How would a Finnish person describe the ultimate Finland experience?
- What sports do they play in Finland?
- Are there any big sports events and teams in Helsinki?
- Where do I go if I want to see sports in Helsinki?
- Is Helsinki good for nightlife?
- Is Finland an active country in terms of music and musical events?

TOURISM OFFER

- Does Helsinki have accessible attractions and holiday activities?
- Is Helsinki a complementary destination for families with children?
- How long do I need to truly experience Helsinki?
- Why does Lapland always stand out when talking about Finland?
- What attractions does Finland have?
- Is there enough to do for a whole holiday?
- Can I experience real life in Finland/Helsinki or are tourists offered another kind of image and experiences?
- How easy is it to get to more scenic and natural areas from Helsinki?
- What are the main natural and cultural attractions in Helsinki?

AREAS, CLIMATE AND NATURE

- Where are the best areas in Finland for a true countryside experience?
- What are the best places and areas to visit in Helsinki and when?

- What are different areas/regions known for?
- What are the summers like or is it really always cold?
- What is the country like in the height of winter?
- How cold does it actually get?
- How come Finland has so much greenery in the middle of cities?
- What is the importance of Helsinki to Finland?
- Is Helsinki a big cosmopolitan city?
- How can a capital city be so small - is it actually worth visiting for more than a day?

COMPETITION

- What sets Finland apart from surrounding destinations?
- Why would I choose Helsinki over more established city destinations?
- Why is Helsinki meant to be so different from other capital cities?
- How is Finland different to other European countries?
- Why is Helsinki so unknown compared to Stockholm and other surrounding cities?
- Why is Helsinki not promoted and advertised as much as many other places?

8.3.3 Travel preferences

The last part of the questionnaire asked the respondents to describe their travel preferences in general. The concentration was on travel and tourism interest, considerations when planning a trip, information search customs, experiences sought for and an ideal travel experience. The respondents reported to have an interest towards travel and tourism for the enjoyment of exploration and discovery of the unknown and the opportunity to get a break from ordinary life. Moreover, interest in other cultures and history, traditions, customs and different lifestyles motivated travellers, as well as being in the tourism field of profession. In addition, travelling was said to create the best of memories and aid in personal growth and cultural learning, as well as self-challenge, tolerance and open-mindedness.

However, more differences in answers could be seen when asked about the considerations during the decision-making process, more so to do with the age group the respondents belonged to, while the answers proved to be as expected. Even though the responses had cross overs, respondents from the youngest age group of 18-25 commonly said to mostly consider the level of interest and opportunities for an exciting and memorable experience, the level of expenses and value for money, the languages spoken at the destination, the range of activities on offer, recommendations and reviews of peers as well as time available, travel company, climate, sun and scenery, destinations' culture and authenticity as well as heritage, local people and nightlife. The 26 to 35 year olds stressed expected expenses and value for

money, the potential of a positive experience, climate, accessibility, family activities, accommodation and hospitality, available information, safety and culture. The 36 to 45 year olds mostly mentioned special interests, season, recommendations and reviews, location and accessibility, culture, amount of attractions, easiness of getting around as well as safety and political, social and economic situation. Moreover, the over 45 year old respondents stressed the destination's tourism offer and how it matches their interests, contacts in a destination as well as location and level and content of information readily available.

Contrastingly, factors that make the respondents hold off from travelling to certain destinations - similar across the demographics - include bad recommendations and reviews, high expenses, language barrier, bureaucracy, unsatisfactory location or poor accessibility, bad weather, general unsafety; unrest, war and poverty and high crime rate as well as poor sanitation and diseases, unstable political and social situation, national aggression or racism, completely unfamiliar customs and rules, tourist traps, homogenisation of tourism offer and low level of attractions and activities. In addition, rural, remote and socially quiet destinations did not appeal to the respondents. At the same time, a couple of respondents stated there is absolutely nothing that would keep them away from any destination.

In addition, the most popular travel information search platforms were listed to be the internet and websites such as TripAdvisor and Lonely Planet, as well as regional government websites. Also, travel agencies, recommendations and reviews and printed material such as guide books and information leaflets were mentioned to be used to find out more about potential travel destinations. The sources of information did not significantly alter within different demographic groups and especially the internet proved to be the main source of information across the field.

Furthermore, the aspects that the respondents collectively prefer to see and experience are the local culture, history, lifestyle and cuisine; a traditional atmosphere, real people and specific things to the prevailing culture. In addition, nightlife, main tourist attractions and areas, scenic nature, the outdoors, architecture and famous landmarks, shopping, sports, music and arts were mentioned. All in all, the respondents call out for something new and different - even unique and extraordinary. The majority highlights the need to not necessarily feel like a tourist but be one with the locals and experience the destination the way they experience it; gaining an authentic and culturally teaching experience that helps them to learn about new places, lifestyles and values. Excitement, discovery, adventure, enjoyment, self-challenging and the mystery and unfamiliarity of destinations seem appealing, especially among the younger age groups.

The last question served as a conclusive point of the questionnaire, inquiring about the ideal travel experience of the respondents. The results are summarised below for comprehensive reference.

- New and one of a kind experiences within different cultures.
- Discovery: no boundaries, no schemes, something unexpected.
- A hot destination in the sun with beaches and the sea.
- Experiencing different cultures and heritage on a budget with a loose itinerary.
- Positive encounters - feeling welcomed by the local population.
- Something for the whole family, concentrating on children.
- Experiencing history, culture, cuisine, art and architecture of cities worldwide.
- Relaxing in nature and in the countryside with an easy access to nearby towns.
- Relaxing on a yacht - island hopping whilst fishing and swimming.
- A destination that comprehensively connects authenticity, endless undisturbed coast and big cities with bright lights and a range of activities and places to experience.

9 Conclusive discussion

Based on the information provided by the two destination marketing experts and further research on destination marketing of Finland and its capital Helsinki, the expression of the efforts is relatively affirmative. Appropriate marketing entities have clearly obtained a comprehensive range of promotional activities and channels which follow current industry trends. This shows, for instance, in the vast use of online possibilities, which in today's competitive international market is the best bet in reaching tech-savvy consumers or in other words, potential tourists. Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are adopted in a competitive and interactive manner. In addition, research and strategic planning seems to take place effectively, showing especially in the specific target market as well as marketing concept choices incited by tourist perceptions and motivations. These choices show comprehensively in the destinations' online content as well as supporting material, potentially strengthening tourists' interest. However, even though the marketing efforts seem to be carefully planned, implemented and adjusted, the results are somewhat dragging. Both of the destinations work on a very limited budget, especially compared to main competition but other than that, it remains a slight mystery as to why the destinations have not managed a significant breakthrough into the international markets - even though, based on for example the results of the questionnaire in this thesis, the interest and preference-related offer is there. Supposedly, the biggest challenge still remains in developing interest into action and consequently more international arrivals. Having said that, in particular Helsinki is in fact growing as a destination and keeps getting more international recognition. More well-steered

work is however required for the capital city to reach its full potential and become the leading tourism area in Finland, as well as a leading destination in Northern Europe.

The questionnaire results provided in this thesis show how similar the perceptions and motivators to travel to the case destinations can be within different demographics. This supports the notion of both Finland and Helsinki being competitive destinations with something for everyone. In addition, even within those that had not visited the two destinations, the range and diversity of perceptions and a relatively high interest was surprising, bringing even more emphasis on why exactly have the destinations not been any more successful in growing international arrival figures and consequently tourism revenue. At the same time, the responses echo the themes and concepts utilised by the destination marketing entities as well as current tourism trends, highlighting aspects such as nature and culture, proving the marketing efforts are on the right track. Also, the responses clearly point to Finland and Helsinki going hand in hand, especially when Helsinki, together with Lapland, is the main destination in the country. Notably, Helsinki also proved to be of interest to the respondents, as only one stated not being interested in the capital, preferring to travel elsewhere in Finland.

In the case of Finland, the respondents stressed aspects such as culture, local people, nature and certain characteristics of the country such as safety, calmness, liveliness, traditionalism, authenticity and uniqueness, as well as contrasting and diverse appeal and a nearly flawless reputation, which in some cases had made Finland their favourite country. On a more negative note, unfamiliarity, expensiveness, remoteness and unsatisfactory climate were most commonly mentioned. Regarding Helsinki, the majority mentioned the cultural richness of the city, the interesting and tranquil lifestyle of the locals and the unique and welcoming nature of the city, as well as its simple and easy layout. At the same time, the presence of nature was impressive to the respondents, which also made it a one of a kind capital city destination. Helsinki was considered 'a diamond in the rough' that is potentially appealing to a range of tourists and proves to offer an extraordinary experience. Even though the expensiveness, remoteness, quietness and low tourist appeal were considered displeasing, the same were contrastingly considered a positive; Helsinki is diverse yet not a tourist trap that enables relaxation, exploration and self-challenge. Furthermore, according to the points of interest inquired from the respondents, the interest is largely on the culture and lifestyle, tourism areas and activities as well as competition, most commonly gaining information from Finnish friends, recommendations, education and business and the internet.

Furthermore, in general, the respondents stated to be motivated by the enjoyment of travel, discovery, interest in other cultures and lifestyles, traditions and customs, creating the best memories and learning. During the travel planning process, the respondents reported to con-

sider aspects such as appeal, value for money, diversity of tourism offer, culture, recommendations and reviews, accessibility, seasons, climate, safety, cleanness and available information. The information search concentrated largely on the internet, followed by recommendations and reviews, as well as printed material. During their travels, the respondents collectively looked to experience cultures and lifestyles, main attractions, traditional atmosphere and the real life as well as nightlife, sports, events and shopping. Unique, extraordinary, authentic and educational experiences as well as discovery, adventure and mystery are appreciated, especially amongst the youngest respondents.

Based on this account, three motivational concepts and mentionable keywords are derived as most important:

Culture is among the main themes of both Finland and Helsinki's destination marketing, especially in the case of Helsinki, but due to its high significance within the travelling population, its appeal should be strengthened. The Finnish people, their lifestyle and the life of the residents of a small capital city were mentioned repeatedly in the questionnaire responses. In addition, authentic and traditional experiences were commonly called out for as well as being one with the locals, rather than feeling like a tourist. Finland is not crammed with tourists and compared to many capital cities, Helsinki seems quiet - providing a great setting of an authentic, real life experience for tourists. The local population should be put in the limelight and give them means to offer the tourists what they want to experience, whether it is organised dinners with a Finnish family or a night out with a group of Finnish people. The welcoming nature of the locals could be put to use, at the same time strengthening their own perceptions of the country as a tourism destination. Tourists may not want to see the most prolific restaurant or event in Helsinki. The majority of them seem to look for the places where the real people go - even if it is a local live band in a crowded bar or a day out in a park with a picnic, even a snow fight in the middle of the city followed by a sports event. Providing them even the smallest glimpse of the way Finnish people live their lives and how they are as a nationality seems to be a wanted experience. In addition, integrating the locals and their lifestyle into tourism may aid in enhancing the image Finnish people have of their native country and capital. If the local perceptions would be even slightly more positive in general, the industry may gain more visibility and recognition within the Finnish world of business - possibly resulting in more concentration on tourism and therefore more supportive budgeting.

Nature is highlighted the most in the marketing efforts of Finland and is largely based on the vast presence of it, as well as its purity and calming effect. It is also amongst the most common aspects connected to the country by other nationalities and a strong trend in travel and tourism. The travelling population appreciate ecological solutions, green innovation, natural scenery and landscapes that provide opportunities for a range of activities. The untouched

presence of nature is something that sets the destinations apart from many others, especially in the case of Helsinki, making it all the more diverse than most world capitals. A significant part of Helsinki's appeal is the fact that one can relax and discover in the middle of the city at such close proximity to greenery and, at the same time, have the vibrant buzz of a bigger city. Highlighting the opportunities of urban nature and ecological thinking ought to appeal to environmentally conscious tourists, even those looking for adventure, mystery and uniquely comprehensive experiences.

Diversity and contrasts could potentially be the most appealing aspects to today's tourists looking for a comprehensive and unique experience as well as discovery, adventure and educational growth. Emphasising aspects such as the four changing seasons, light and darkness, holiday seasons, different ways of life, western and eastern influences, bilingualism, tolerance and open-mindedness, presence of nature in the middle of a capital city and the mix of internationalism, traditionalism and authenticity could be beneficial. Diversity also shows in the varying descriptions of the two destinations. Finland was not only described as calming and remote but also cool and lively. Helsinki was impressive due to its quietness as a capital city but also for its vibrant and inspiring city culture. All the more, the one of a kind nature of both destinations were mentioned strongly and indeed the surprising diversity was the key factor. Boldly pointing out the truthfulness of Finland and Helsinki actually being able to offer something for just about anyone, depending on the timing of the trip, could arouse interest and show the possibility of an encompassing experience that cannot necessarily be provided by many global destinations.

- Expensiveness and value for money

Finding a way to show potential tourist that compared to many destinations, especially Helsinki is not as expensive as the majority seem to think. Travelling to Finland in general is known to be expensive, but conveying the possibility of value for money in the experience available could strengthen the desire to travel. Expensiveness was commonly mentioned as a negative in the case of Helsinki and so, even blunt comparisons to other world capital cities could make a difference.

- Remoteness and accessibility

Finland is a far away destination from the perspective of many. However, it is rather easily accessible by different methods of transportation, especially from the neighbouring countries highlighted in the case of Helsinki and its ferry connections to more popular capitals, such as Stockholm. In addition, being a member of the European Union makes Finland significantly

more accessible from other member countries. Rather simply, creating a comprehensive example map of connections, flight routes and times, and strengthening collaboration with national air carriers and their marketing communications may be of help, potentially increasing the interest and sense of easiness of travelling to Finland or Helsinki, even for a shorter time.

- Recommendations

It becomes relatively clear in the responses that there are not many negativities to mention about Finland and Helsinki from those that have visited. Nearly a half of the respondents stated of knowing someone that has visited one or both of the destinations or know a Finnish person. According to the responses, the majority of the respondents would travel to Finland and especially Helsinki, solely based on reviews and recommendations. Utilising the nearly flawless reputation of Finland and Helsinki in the form of, for example, testimonials and tourist interviews and videos, may prove to be beneficial in attracting not only repeat visitation, but newcomers as well.

10 Thesis process

The thesis process commenced in the beginning of 2014, with the compulsory tasks in the study modules Theme to Thesis and Research Methods, for which the author comprised a collective Research Proposal assignment. At the time of the first thesis assignment, the author was studying as an exchange student in Cardiff, Wales, and so the schedule and progress of the thesis process were affected by the international studies and examination periods at the Cardiff Metropolitan University. Therefore, apart from contacting industry professionals inquiring about interview possibilities, the actual thesis work did not properly start before the author had returned to Finland in the summer of 2014. The process started with the reviewing of appropriate secondary research sources and building of a theoretical background, followed by the implementation of primary research efforts of interviews and questionnaire, consequently deriving results and discussions.

The first of the two interviews was carried out on 22 August 2014 with the Finnish Tourist Board Research & Development Director Kristiina Hietasaari. The second interview was conducted with the City of Helsinki representative, Marketing Director Outi Leppälä on 2 September 2014. A full reviewing of the interview data followed shortly after the meetings to ensure reliability of results. In addition, the distribution of the self-administrative questionnaire was initiated on 8 August 2014 and the first response was received on the same day. The questionnaire remained in distribution for the next six weeks. The last response was received and recorded in the Google Drive platform on 20 September 2014.

The thesis process was somewhat disappointing to the author in regards to the personal speed of work and ability to commit, even though the final documentation is as close to the initial planning as possible and support was significant throughout. Due to unexpected personal difficulties at the time of the process, the progress was slow and the schedule unfortunately altered significantly. All in all, it was a long process of trial and error, which has fortunately resulted in a decent thesis that the author is content about. All the more, the thesis subject was solely chosen due to the author's personal interest in finding out the answers to the research objectives and therefore, even though challenging, carrying out the thesis work has been highly rewarding and educational. In hindsight, the scope of the study could have been narrowed down even more for a more specific analysis and more compact documentation. However, the author believes the best bet was to go with personal interest and maintain the range of interview and questionnaire questions to derive the presented results in response to the initial plan. Also, even though the thesis subject was not directly assigned by the related entities, the author hopes that for instance the industry experts interviewed for this thesis will find the time to introduce themselves to the final document and find the discussion in any way useful.

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Appendix 1: Participant information sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

The purpose of this research project is to create an overview of the destination marketing methods adopted by two case destinations - Finland and the capital city Helsinki - and in addition gain insight into tourist perceptions on the two case destinations. The performance levels are to be consequently evaluated and development opportunities assessed and suggested based on results.

Your participation will enable the collection of data which will form a part of a study being undertaken as part of the researcher's studies at Laurea University of Applied Sciences.

You have been asked to participate because you fit the profile of the population being studied, that is you are either:

- A tourism industry professional over the age of 18 or
- A non-Finnish individual regarded as a potential tourists to Finland, over the age of 18

The research involves participation in a semi-structured interview or answering a sentence completion questionnaire. The duration of an interview is from 40 minutes to an hour and may be carried out either in English or in Finnish, depending on your personal preference. The interview will be recorded for later analysis. Filling in the questionnaire is estimated to take from 15 to 25 minutes of your time and is carried out fully in English.

There are no significant risks associated with the study. There will not be any collecting of sensitive or confidential data of yourself individually. However, if you do feel that any of the questions are inappropriate, you can stop at any time without giving any specific reason. You can change your mind and withdraw from the study at any time. All information provided will be held in confidence. Your personal details (e.g. signature on the consent form) and your interview / questionnaire data will be kept in a secure location by the researcher. If the use of any information that would enable your identification is required, your official, signed permission will be requested in advance. A high level of professionalism from the researcher is guaranteed throughout.

You will receive a copy of this information sheet to keep.

Please feel free to ask any questions from the researcher about the above study before, during or after the session.

Appendix 2: Participant consent form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Please complete this section by ticking the box where appropriate.

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet provided about the study and have had an opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have received satisfactory answers. _____
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. _____
3. I agree to take part in the study. _____
4. I agree for the interview to be recorded. _____
5. I permit the use of the name of the organisation I represent in the final documentation of the study. _____
6. I permit the use of my professional title in the final documentation of the study. _____

Signature _____

Name in print _____

Date ____ / ____ / 20____

Appendix 3: Interview questions - MEK (English)

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Matkailun edistämiskeskus
The Finnish Tourist Board

Marketing Finland as a destination

1. What are the most common marketing methods used in marketing Finland as a tourism destination and why have these methods been chosen?
2. Which of these marketing methods have proven to be the most effective and why?
3. How is the effectiveness of different marketing methods measured, evaluated and monitored?
4. How have the marketing strategy changed during the last few years and why?
5. What are the main goals of market research and which factors are important to consider?
6. What are the main goals of marketing and branding Finland as a tourism destination? Have these goals been achieved? If not, why?
7. How are the marketing themes decided on? Are different themes portrayed to different target groups? What is attempted to be achieved by this market segmentation?
8. For which reasons is Finland targeted to the target markets currently chosen, such as Britain? Does any kind of co-operation come into play with these countries?

Competition

9. What are the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities (SWOT) of Finland as a tourism destination? How are these factors taken into consideration?
10. How are competitor destinations and their marketing strategies taken into consideration? How does it affect the destination marketing of Finland?
11. How is Finland more successful or less successful than its neighbouring countries in terms of tourism? How does Finland answer to the competition?

Tourism in Finland

12. How do you perceive the current state of tourism in Finland in general? Have there been any notable changes? How is tourism supported in the country, for example financially?
13. What might be the reason for Finland still being a relatively unknown country and tourism destination?

Tourist perceptions of Finland

14. For which reasons do tourists mainly seem to be travelling to Finland? Are these reasons affected by used marketing themes and methods?
15. Could you describe how Finland is most commonly perceived by tourists? How does Finland's destination marketing affect these perceptions?
16. Is the way Finland is portrayed as a tourism destination in other countries monitored in any way? How does it affect the promotional activities?

The future of tourism in Finland

17. How do you see the future of Finland as a tourism destination? Which factors would mostly affect the country's future as a destination? Which entities in Finland could or should be involved in developing tourism?

Appendix 4: Interview questions - Helsinki City Marketing (English)

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Helsingin kaupunki: Kaupunkimarkkinointi

Helsinki City Marketing

Marketing Helsinki as a destination

1. What are the most common marketing methods used in marketing Helsinki and why have these methods?
2. Which of these marketing methods have proven to be the most effective and why?
3. How is the effectiveness of different marketing methods measured, evaluated and monitored?
4. Who is Helsinki targeted for and why?
5. Could you describe the marketing strategy of Helsinki? How has the marketing strategy changed during the last few years and why?
6. What are the main goals of Helsinki market research of and which factors are important to consider?
7. What are the main goals of marketing and branding Helsinki as a tourism destination? Have these goals been achieved? If not, why?

Competition

8. What are the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities (SWOT) of Helsinki together with the vaster capital region as a tourism destination? How are these factors taken into consideration?
9. How are competitor destinations and their marketing strategies taken into consideration? Who are the competitors? How does it affect the destination marketing of Helsinki?
10. How is Helsinki more successful or less successful than its competitors in terms of tourism? How does Helsinki answer to the competition?
11. What could Helsinki learn from competitor destinations, such as other Nordic capitals or popular worldwide city destinations?

Tourist perceptions of Helsinki

12. Could you describe the city and region image that Helsinki's marketing activities aim for?
13. What seems to attract tourists to Helsinki? Are these reasons affected by used marketing themes and methods?
14. How is Helsinki most commonly perceived by tourists? How does marketing affect these perceptions?
15. Is the way Helsinki is portrayed as a tourism destination in other countries monitored in any way? How does it affect the promotional activities?

The future and development of tourism in Helsinki

16. How do you perceive the current state of tourism in Helsinki? Have there been any notable changes? How is tourism supported in the city and surrounding areas, for example financially?
17. Who does Helsinki and the capital region co-operate with in terms of developing tourism in the region and how is the co-operation affecting tourism and marketing activities in the region?
18. How do you see the future of Helsinki and the capital region as a tourism destination? Which factors would mostly affect the region's future as a destination? Which entities in Finland could or should be involved in developing tourism in the region?

Appendix 5: Questionnaire

Perceptions of Finland and Helsinki & travel preferences

This question form consists of a total of 17 sentence completion questions, divided into 4 parts:

1. Demographic information
2. Perceptions of Finland as a tourism destination (1 - 5)
3. Perceptions of the city of Helsinki as a tourism destination (6 - 10)
4. Destination preferences (11 - 17)

Please consider the questions carefully to ensure reliable and credible data. Your time and effort are highly appreciated. Please submit your answers by Monday, 22 September 2014.

A. Gender

- ☐ Male
 ☒ Female
 ☐ Prefer not to disclose

B. Age

- ☐ 18 - 25
 ☒ 26 - 35
 ☐ 36 - 45
 ☐ Over 45
 ☐ Prefer not to disclose

C. Nationality

British

D. I am

- ☐ A student
 ☒ Working
 ☐ Retired
 ☐ Prefer not to disclose

E. I have been to Finland

- ☒ Yes
 ☐ No

F. I have been to Helsinki

- ☒ Yes
 ☐ No

G. I stayed for

- ☐ A day
 ☐ 2 - 3 days
 ☒ 4 - 5 days
 ☐ 6 - 7 days
 ☐ More than 7 days
 ☐ N/A

H. I visited in (month): August

Perceptions of Finland as a destination

1. I would describe / imagine Finland as
2. I travelled to / I would travel to Finland because
3. I would / I would not recommend Finland because
4. I got information about Finland from
5. I would like to know this about Finland

Perceptions of Helsinki as a destination

6. I would describe / imagine Helsinki as
7. I travelled to / I would travel to Helsinki because
8. I would / I would not recommend Helsinki because
9. I got information about Helsinki from
10. I would like to know this about Helsinki:

Travel and destination preferences

11. I have an interest towards travel and tourism because
12. When planning a trip abroad, I consider the following factors:
13. I search for information about destinations from
14. While travelling, I want to see
15. While travelling, I want to experience
16. The following factors put me off travelling to a destination:
17. My ideal travel experience is