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Building a net database for Kymenlaakso Tourism

Bachelor's Thesis 2014

ABSTRACT

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The Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences started a project on Tourism to develop the industry within its region. Part of this project is to create a net database on tourism, to be used as a research tool for the university. The benefits of a net database on tourism can reach businesses within the industry. This thesis follows the progress of building such a database, and what observations can be made in the process for the tourism industry of the Kymenlaakso region.

The aim of this thesis was to fill in this information gap of insufficient publications for assessing the tourism situation. The objective was to find reliable and updateable data for Kymenlaakso tourism and present that in the form of a net database. From the collection of data and building of the database, tourism business using the website could better assess the tourism situation in Kymenlaakso and understand how it could be improved.

The study was conducted using action research, creating a net-database in order to make a change in the situation. Reflections and observations were used to come to the findings of the dissertation. From the observations of the research, new opportunities for improving the tourism of the region have been revealed. Suggestions for the further development of the database were also made.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research and Development Problem

Kymenlaakso University is conducting a tourism project. This will aid in advancing the areas tourism industry. As part of this project it was important to build a website where tourism information can be tracked. The previous experience of the author in building a website will be of help in this project.

In this dissertation the problem being solved is how to provide a solution to a lack of public information for the tracking of tourism development in Kymenlaakso. There is no reliable, collected database of Kymenlaakso tourism information for businesses, entrepreneurs, and individuals within the tourism industry on the web. For this thesis it was important to find out what reliable and updatable information and statistics are available from different sources in order to build content for this new web-database.

The thesis is written for the Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences and plays a role in the university's tourism project. A webpage is built for action research on the topic for this dissertation. The web page is to be used as a research tool for the university. With the help of this website and its contents, especially the statistics it provides, part of the role of tourism towards the Finnish economy may be noticed. According to the Finnish Tourist Board (source) statistics can help reveal the effects of the industry on the economy. In the case of this net-database the economy of the Kymenlaakso region.

In order to improve the situation of tourism in Kymenlaakso, considering the amount of jobs and quality of services it provides, there needs to be reliable data which can be reviewed to assist in finding out where improvements need to be done. An example of this data is accommodation statistics, which according to Statistics Finland is important to provide in order to help tourism investment strategy, and planning at state and local level.

1.2 Research and Development Objective and Limitations

This thesis serves a purpose, as it can help improve the tourism industry of the Finnish economy. This web-database is mainly focused on providing for Kymenlaakso tourism. Companies within this sector of business could better follow the situation and trends in their area possibly revealing new business opportunities. The aim of this thesis is to fill in this information gap of insufficient publications for assessing the tourism situation.

The objective is to find reliable and updateable data for Kymenlaakso tourism and present that in the form of a net database. From this data different information, usefulness to the industry and possible discoveries are looked into. As a limitation for this data analysis the dissertation focuses on the Kymenlaakso area, and the city of Kouvola in particular.

1.3 Research and Development Question

The main question of this thesis is how to collect and present reliable and updateable data for Kymenlaakso tourism. Sub-questions to be answered are the following; which are the best sources of information, where and from whom can the data be found, how to distinguish between reliable and unreliable data, how the data should be organized and which kind of information is most important to present.

2 DATA COLLECTION, STRATEGY, ANALYSIS, AND BUILDING A NET DATABASE

2.1 Overview

For the preliminary research on the subject matter for this topic of building a net database on tourism, different aspects of existing literature were assessed. The topic consists of different areas which need to be looked into before conducting the main form of research and plan how this will be done. These are broken down as the purpose of collecting tourism data, the analysis of the found data, the presentation of a database, and the importance of its updatability.

2.2 Means and Purpose of Collecting Tourism Data

As stated in the Master Plan of Tourism from Kouvola Innovation, it is aimed for tourism to become a major contributor to the local economy by the year 2022 (Finnish Consulting Group OY, 2013). Data collection for tourism is important as this can be a powerful economic industry. Tourism accounts for a great percentage of gross national product and can be a major source of employment where it is developed to its potential (Valles, 2001). In the city of Kouvola in Kymenlaakso new sources of employment and wealth are needed in order for the municipality to develop. The existing businesses are not contributing to the regions' economy as they did before. The pulp and paper industry, which used to be the main driver of Kouvola, is no longer thriving in the way it used to. There have been mills closed down in the city where the forest industry is much relied on. The tourism industry could be a way of getting a new source of wealth for the residents of the area. It can be said that within the European Union tourism plays a major role as a contributor to the economy; four out of five countries with the highest quantities of tourists are EU member states (Valles, 2001).

According to (Valles, 2001) creating goals and objectives for means of providing tourist satisfaction is important. He mentions that information intermediaries can help enhance tourism service quality. Different information intermediaries already exist in Finland, for example the Finnish Tourist Board, which plays a major role in attracting visitors to the country. From their sources other tourism services can get ideas as to what could be the main factors why tourists like to visit Finland. They also provide information about what kind of people like to visit the country, and from where the most beneficial visitors are coming from.

An information intermediary can exist and be provided through the internet, and it is a highly convenient way of publishing and sharing information. As (Valles, 2001) states, non-financial support for businesses can help by creating research systems for disseminating useful information such as this. In the case of this research, the goal is to provide just that, a net database and without financial support. This net database aims at providing information for the tourism industry of Kymenlaakso, and in particular Kouvola.

This net database will be a collection of information found elsewhere on the web. Even though this information may already exist somewhere, it is not well organized into a single source, where the user can easily find the information they need, without searching throughout the web for the bits and pieces. The information gathered on the database could be utilized by the tourist industry as a means of designing marketing strategies, it can also be used as a means of measuring the significance of tourism to the economy. The collected data from different sources could also help strengthen the relationships between the institutions where the information has been found (Canizal, ei pvm). No business stands alone, success relies on collaboration with sets of stakeholders (Adner, et al., 2013). Referring to these sources, it can be said that collected data gathered on the same source strengthens relationships between institutions which the information has been collected, greater success in business comes from collaboration between firms. The strengthened relationships could lead to further collaboration between institutions and greater business success.

The tourism data collected for the website can be mostly gathered from public authorities with their information about other related topics supporting it. One of these public authorities is the Statistics Library of Finland, with thousands of experts in different fields, mostly from Helsinki but also in other regions as well (Statistics Finland, 2014). This will be one of the sources with vast information that will be utilized.

The Statistics Library of Finland provides statistics of the tourism industry. These statistics can be used to track changes over time, and to help clarify the industry goals. (Valles, 2001) believes that these statistics can raise awareness for action, and can be used as an assessment tool for policies, or activities and checking whether they are effective, sustainable, and progressing. Good statistics can backup ideas whether and help make investment decisions. Analyzing market growth can be a means of making

decisions on which areas require attention and development (Canizal, ei pvm). Based on these observations tourism statistics can in fact be used for developing tourism products.

By comparing annual reports the improvement of quality in services can be followed. As this website will be put up for the first time, without any history of development any past changes cannot currently be tracked. However keeping record of how the site develops as it gets updated by the next administrator, changes in the site could provide a means of making these annual reports in its own form.

The UNWTO defines quality in tourism as,

“the result of a process which implies the satisfaction of all the legitimate product and service needs, requirements and expectations of the consumer, at an acceptable price, in conformity with mutually accepted contractual conditions and the underlying quality determinants such as safety and security, hygiene, accessibility, transparency, authenticity and harmony of the tourism activity concerned with its human and natural environment.”

These are standards which quality can be measured by. In order for the website to work as a means for presenting these quality measurements, surveys or polls could be conducted for tourists through the website. The results of the surveys or polls could be displayed on the database for the businesses. These surveys or polls could be created with UNWTO’s definition in mind and also Valles’ definition of quality in tourism. (Valles, 2001) definition being the perception of the tourist of the extent to which their expectations are met by the experience brought by the product. Meeting the expectations of the customer is important and shortcomings will be noticed with declines in visitors.

Providing tourism statistics on the site could help see the result of advertising effectiveness, and also how well the channeling of tourists to sites is working. These channels can be brochures, websites, advertisements and other means (UNWTO, 2003).

The means of gathering tourism data in this research consists of secondary data. Finding existing data on the internet through files, and websites relating to tourism and

Kymenlaakso. When searching and gathering for such secondary data on the internet it is suggested by (Finn, et al., 2000) to have a search strategy. To narrow down results instead of sinking with information it is advisable to use relevant and strategic search words while using a search engine. Having knowledge of existing players in the tourism industry will help make better searches. For example using the names of government agencies involved, along with the tourism key words can narrow down the results. Looking for websites can help find information but also documents related, for instance strategy documents formed by local innovation offices.

2.3 Assessment and Analysis of Tourism Data

A useful aspect of secondary data is that it can be attained in short periods of time, not having to perform interviews, or collecting quantitative data with surveys. On the other hand (Finn, et al., 2000) remind that tourism information found publically is usually provided at such a broad scale that it does not give sufficiently accurate information for local level.

For this research interventions will be used to analyze the outcome of collected data and to find results, this is described further in the Methodology section of the thesis. Prior to this the data is assessed for suitability of use on the website, and how it will be used. An example of use of this information on the website would be an abstract that could introduce the data for the user. To make the site strongly user oriented it is better to give concrete answers to questions regarding the situation rather than just have a compilation of general information (Laimer & Weiss, 2009).

If other sites as the one being created exist for other regions, they can be used to overview the specific tourism situation, it can be used as an opportunity for making analysis, using the indicators of the destinations covered on the other sites with the one in mind. The analysis of comparing these different sets of indicators is called portofolio analysis (Laimer & Weiss, 2009).

Different methods exist for analyzing the performance of tourism industry and how competitive it is. One of these is the comparing of overnights and arrivals to other destinations (Pearce, 1997). Portofolio analysis also uses the comparing of tourism destinations (Laimer & Weiss, 2009). Developments of one market may hinder the

potential in another. This is why it would be a good idea to include statistics from Kymenlaakso but also from other areas for tourism in Finland. Comparing tourist data with other destinations can also be used as a means for benchmarking, this helps to provide ideas and opportunities for learning and improvement (Valles, 2001). This kind of assessment attracts practical decision makers (Laimer & Weiss, 2009), so providing data which enables potential for using these assessments makes the database useful for managers in the tourism industry.

2.4 Presentation of and reasoning for use of a Net Database

Many federal agencies have abandoned print publication and moved on to publishing information on the web mostly due to budget concerns (Hollis & Jobe, 1999). As this is a non-funded research using print publication would be too expensive. Although the purpose of these databases may be the same, electronic databases, like a website, offer current, and faster responses (Rao, 1998).

Developing access to public of governmental documentation online helps local communities. This raising awareness of actions taken by for example innovation centers to develop tourism in the region can help increase involvement of businesses and reveal opportunities for them which they might not have known otherwise. Publishing on the internet gives the easiest access to the public. Wills states that electronic publishing offers the reader access at anytime, anywhere, and printing on demand.

One aspect of providing data online for the reader is that the author will already be aware of the works in the area giving updated versions of published documents. Readers want to stay up to date, and be knowledgeable about what is developing in their area of interest (Wills, 1996). They tend to want to be able to exhaust bodies of knowledge available to them to make sure their aware fully of the situation. However what readers really demand is instead of a full archive, to be provided with the most recent knowledge. (Wills, 1996) suggests that to give out full benefit to users would be to create a subscription service available to them, sending out the most recent information as it is published (Wills, 1996).

(Hollis & Jobe, 1999) found that in state publications providing abstracts gave the reader a way of interpreting the data. Additional background information is also useful to the user. They also mention that when original sources of information are

linked to websites they work as a subject index. Similarly on the tourism website these links can provide the same purpose. (Wills, 1996) sees that linking also provides an interception to the user, it creates an opportunity for everything useful to be found relating to the topic. Providing links as useful sources for the reader can influence the users to have the site as their usual first stop, increasing traffic. Monitoring the traffic of the website could be useful as a means of checking for its popularity, if there is little traffic then it could be possible that the site is not being updated frequently enough or does not provide a broad enough overview to be the main page used by tourism businesses for their up to date knowledge in the region.

As suggested by (Rao, 1998) when constructing a net database and in this case for Kymenlaakso tourism, firstly the presentation of ideas and information should be thought through, as to what combination of text and graphics are the best. Another point of consideration is that it should provide quick and easy navigation, which gives more reason for the visitor to come back (Rao, 1998).

2.5 The Role of Updatable Information

Given that this website is to be maintained and updated, as part of this thesis is to get it running, the information of where to get updated knowledge for the site should be left for the next administrator. Keeping a record of how often the new data is available is also recommendable. Regular checking and updating ensure good collection management (Draffan & Corbett, 2001).

Tourist activity depends on various factors. Paying attention to seasonality and knowing when to find information regarding different tourism products. The impact of tourist seasonality can be seen with tourist activity (Alejziak, 2013). The different seasonal products can be looked in to whether their combination is enough to provide activity all year round. Climatic conditions of the region may be looked into to see which tourism products impact the area most. For example with the ski resort of Kouvolaa, Mielakka which depends on snow cover, does the overall popularity of the city increase during the winter? Another resort which prospers during a different time would be Repovesi national park, where most visitors would come during at times outside of the winter season. A non-climatic cause which falls into seasonality that

affects the number of incoming tourist would be the holiday schedule distribution (Jackson & Hinch, 2000). Being aware of these factors, the administrator for the site should be aware of which areas of the site are most critical for updating during the different times of the year.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Methods and Application of Data Acquisition

For this thesis action research was selected as the method of choice for the study. Action research is defined as the practice of changing or in this case developing something in order to create a change in the situation Kemmis et al. 1981(cited in Anttila n.d.) In order to make a change using this methodology, a net database for Kymenlaakso tourism which did not originally exist. The situation it is hoped to improve would be the need for a greater industry of tourism in the area.

To find out the situation of the tourism industry and its development a website was created. By building a website, or net database, content is collected and organized. The content for the site was searched and gathered throughout the web. Its purpose was to create a convenient way of finding information without the user having to go through the same ordeal. This information package was aimed to serve entrepreneurs, businesses, and individual within the tourism sector. On the website they can find out what are the existing services, and plans for development in the industry.

The situation of the tourism industry in Kymenlaakso is unlikely to be changed directly because of this creation. On the other hand, publishing a full information package can create new awareness which in turn can lead to new actions by its users who can utilize the information it provides.

In order for reasonable actions to follow the content found for the website should be assessed. The content actually inserted should also be assessed. Part of action research is making interventions during different stages of execution. These interventions are used to reflect on the passed course of action and come to new findings. Action research is practitioner-based research, and is known as a self-reflective practice as individuals or practitioners reflect on the work. This reflection is the key element within this type of research (Vaccarino, et al., 2007). The principle of this research is identifying a problematic area, imagining the solution, trying it out, and evaluating it whether it worked McNiff (2002, cited in Vaccarino et. Al 2007). The findings from the reflections during interventions can be used to evaluate the work and come to new findings. An intervention is simply looking back at what has been done so far and using critical thinking to assess the progress and what kind of results can be drawn.

According to with action research, the research problem is solved with a spiral of planning – acting – observation – reflection on the situation, this is the general idea Noffke & Stevenson (1995, cited in Vaccarino et. Al 2007). Planning in this case was mostly done whilst compiling the literature review of the thesis. Finding out which kind of factors have to be taken into consideration for this action. Acting was the building of the site at its different stages. Making observations from the progress, and reflecting on these was the method for finding new results. Below In Figure 1 is a graphical representation of the action research process defined by Kurt Lewin.

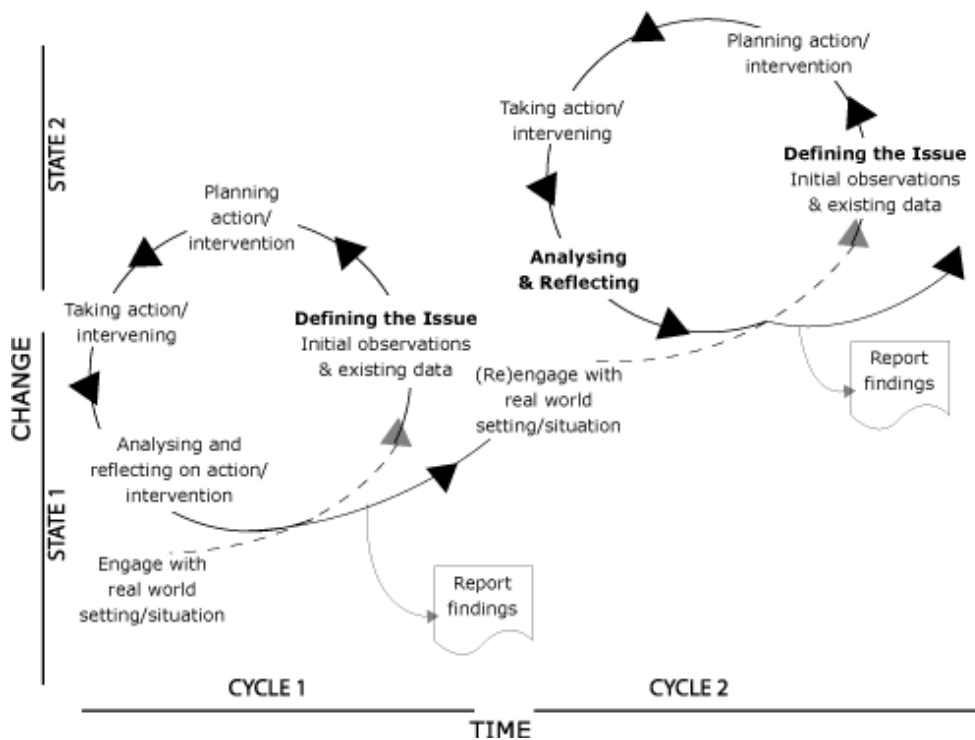


Figure 1. Kurt Lewin's diagram of Action Research: (adapted from Lewin 1946, (Leemans, 2014)

The actual data acquisition, (finding content for the website in the form of secondary data), occurs mainly at the first stage or first cycle of the action research. After compiling a substantial amount of data the information gathered is assessed through analysis and reflection during what is called an intervention. For this first intervention the data is checked on to see whether it is sufficient and relevant to the topic of providing the net database for the tourism industry. Attention should be paid to whether this information can be utilized, how it is presentable, and what kind of information is still missing as to what further secondary data collection must be done.

During the first course of action the main tool for finding secondary data was the use of online search engines. Personal local knowledge of the area helped making the first discoveries of information about tourism in Kymenlaakso. The personal knowledge gave ideas of what kind of keywords would find accurate results. After making the first discoveries, finding more data became easier, as new search words were thought of from the existing information found.

Once the actual website started being built (with its structure), goals of the information search became clearer. As found out in the literature review, searching the web without goals as to knowing what is being looked for causes the searcher to get lost. The reason why the structure helped was due to the way it categorized information. What is meant by the structure are the main links and headings of the site. These categories were; accommodation, dining, program, marketing, and useful links. Data gathering became more efficient at this point and as the website progressed it began to take shape making it even more convenient to compile the information properly. In fact, proper action research requires acquiring specific and accurate data for specific reasons and purposes (Anttila n.d.).

Action research is a processual method that uses the development of the action which is observed. The author can make their own observations, yet also outside perspective can be utilized to gain observations made by others as well, being accomplished with a test group in this dissertation.

3.2 Methods and Application of Data Analysis

In action research the data analysis happens mostly during the interventions. The interventions are carried out for finding outcomes which are analyzed further (Vaccarino, et al., 2007). During an intervention the result of process is reflected on which is a critical component of action research. Reflecting by critical assessing the process is a way of analyzing the data. Reflections are also a means of making observations, and figuring out what further action can be taken to make more findings.

3.2.1 Cycle one

In this case of action research for its first cycle there was the first planning and course of action. The first intervention was after the first course of planning and action

which was to figure out how to find and collect reliable information. Once the information was gathered it was reviewed as to whether it can cover the content requirements of the site. Key information was found from the data which would make up the foundations of the site.

3.2.2 Cycle two

For the second stage, another round of the spiral of action research began the building of the site. The observations from the first cycle was used to execute this second cycle. Having the majority of data ready to be put up on the net database. During this stage organizing the data on to the database started to give a better perspective of what had been found. Different elements of the website revealed where content improvements are needed. Perhaps these insufficiently covered elements showed that these are areas which need attention in the tourism industry of Kymenlaakso. Content was attempted to be uploaded in a manner which gave the user a progression of knowledge, so it would be easy to follow the information given.

After the course of action of building the site came for the reflection of what had been accomplished. For this personal critical thinking and observations were made. In addition to this a test group was gathered to give outside perspective for feedback on the website. The test group visited the site and critically assessed different aspects of what the database is trying to achieve. They also gave any other suggestions that might have come up during the visiting of the site.

3.2.3 Cycle Three

As a third stage of action, after the database is completed, the administrator of the database should use tools to monitor traffic of the website. Experimenting on what brings in more traffic to the database and what makes it more popular. They could study search engine optimization, a tool used to score higher on search results from search engines (Jobber, 2010). Using action research after implementing actions to make changes, and to reflect for observations to continue to improve this matter.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Actions of First Cycle (Gathering Secondary Data for Database Content)

Results for finding tourism related data for the database was mostly done through the use of internet search engines, such as Google. Using different keywords in both Finnish and English. For example; “Kymenlaakso Tourism,” or “Tourism Statistics Finland.” There were a couple of tourism websites representing agencies in this field, one serving to attract people to visit Finland, another to track down statistics on how many people are visiting different regions in Finland and from where. Visitors may have come from within the country to Kymenlaakso and from abroad as well.

The goal for this net data base is to provide more than just statistics of visitors for Kymenlaakso but also to provide information on other aspects of Tourism. These being dining, the program of the area, accommodation, and also on what are the current marketing strategies. All of these topics were covered in the information search.

4.2 Actions of Second Cycle (Construction of Database)

For this second intervention of the second cycle of action research the website of development of tourism in Kouvola is assessed upon the main completion. From the website it is possible to see what kind, and how much information has been gathered with the purpose of developing tourism in Kymenlaakso in the form of this public database.

The building of the site progressed by using a tool provided by the university to integrate web pages into their own site of Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences; [Kyamk.fi](http://kyamk.fi). The web tool used is called Content Manager. It makes it possible for people to build web pages without having knowledge of html coding. In the [Kyamk](http://kyamk.fi) webpages content manager also makes it easy for the user to create sites in both languages. Providing a language option to the page is standard on the site. Content was done both in Finnish and English.

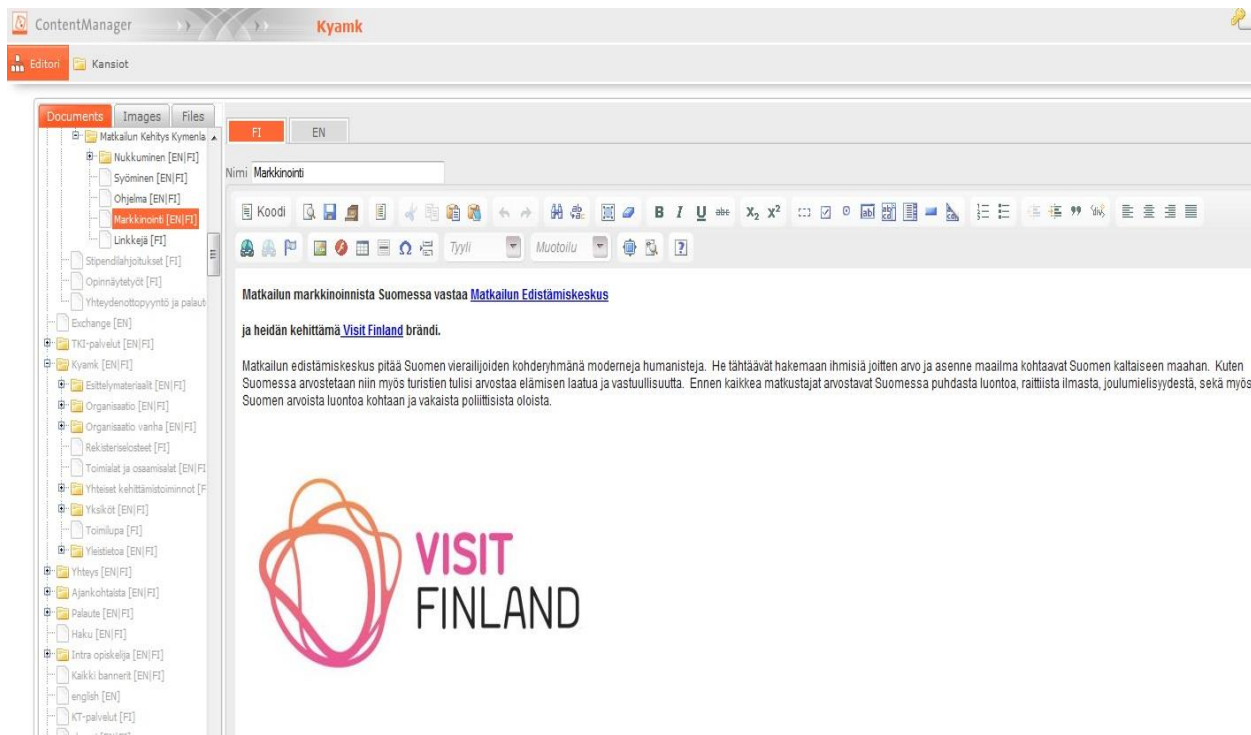


Figure 2. Screenshot of content manager

The above image of content manager (Figure 2) shows that the program is similar to a basic word program. The user can simply write content, add images, hyperlinks etc. easily thanks to its layout of tools. The few instances when the code had to be looked into were when inserting a video into the site. There is an option on the content manager tool bar to have the html coding showed for modification. The videos of this site were using embed code's from related tourism promotional videos found on Youtube.

To get started with the website the most convenient way of outlining the work for organizing data was to first create the main structure, this being the navigation menus of the site. Having a lot of information from different aspects of tourism the creation of the site navigation was the best way to start organizing the data found on the first cycle and gaining an understanding of how the building will progress. In content manager this simply happened by adding folders on the left menu in the correct order to get the structure wanted.

Suomeksi | Sitemap | Mobile | Feedback

Student Intra | Username: Password:

KYAMK
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Search from pages...

Accommodation Dining Events and Program Marketing

Project

Business life » Projects » Development of Tourism in Kymenlaakso » Accommodation

Development of Tourism in Kymenlaakso

Accommodation in Kymenlaakso

Check from the left menu for links to the overnight stays data in Finland and Kymenlaakso given by the Statistics Library of Finland. From the pages you will find data on Kymenlaakso and the rest of the country.

The different accommodation possibilities of Kouvola can be found [here](#) from the pages of Visit Kouvola.

Accommodation from the Kymenlaakso [area](#).

Staying the night in [Reповesi National park](#).

Modified: 24.11.2014 13:17

Lue tämä sivu suomeksi [Nukkuminen](#)

Overnight stays in all accommodation property January-August 2014

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Figure 3. Screenshot from the Tourism Development site of Kymenlaakso (www.kyamk.fi/matkailutilastot)

The navigation menus can be seen with the main headings at the top where the navigation bar lies as a column, these are the different categories: sleeping, dining, marketing, and links (not seen here being only available on the Finnish version.) On the left hand navigation as rows can be seen the access for further information about visitor statistics.

4.3 Application of a Test Group

A number of participants were asked to review the finished database. These included students from the university and professionals in working life. A brief description of the database and its purpose was sent to the participants. Which problem the database is solving, whom it is meant for, and why. The providing of a convenient database for the research purposes of Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences, serving the tourism industry of Kymenlaakso. The database aims to assist in viewing the current situation of the tourism industry. The views, opinion, and testing of the site was to gain perspective for the researcher on getting perspective, and ideas as to what could be done for further developing the database.

The participants were given some points of consideration when visiting the database, these being as follows:

- Sufficiency of covering each category of tourism
- Meeting of requirements for details on the subject
- Clarity, understanding, and organization
- Choice of language
- Utility of discovering new information
- Matching of content in the two languages of Finnish and English (success level of accurate translation)
- Attention to any missing content
- Ideas for adding or improving content

Feedback based on these considerations was asked for but any other feedback was also welcomed from the test group.

5 DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Reflections and Observations from First Cycle

Information was found on ongoing marketing campaigns. There was a study about which kind of people would enjoy a visit to Finland and how to attract this consumer segment. According to (Matkailun Edistämiskeskus, 2012) it was stated that a person who is aimed to attract is a “modern humanitarian, a person that cares for the community and worlds future,” and someone “who is open to foreign culture and new experiences,” these were qualities which a Fin would look for a tourist visiting their country.

Two of the more comprehensive sites were the Official Travel site of Finland and the version in the Finnish language of the The Finnish Tourist Board. The Official Travel site of Finland is more of a place for the tourist themselves, to discover more about Finland and finding what they can look forward to from a visit. The marketing on this site can be useful for business to give ideas on what generally attracts people to visit and see what advantages they could have in their services with their attraction points.

The Tourist Board of Finland or in Finnish, “matkailun edistämiskeskus;” MEK for short is the actual developer of the Visit Finland brand. This currently government run agency could have its operations moved to Fin Pro soon (Finlex, 2014) has developed the brand of Visit Finland. Their primary goal is to attract people from around the world to explore Finland as tourists.

During the search for data a strategy for the development of Tourism in Kouvola was come across: Kouvolan Seudun Matkailun Master plan, or The Master plan of Kouvola tourism. From the plan information on the goals of the local tourism industry could be found and how to proceed to achieve these. It turns out that tourism is aimed to be developed into a major contributor to the local economy by the year 2022 (Finnish Consulting Group OY, 2013).

There wasn't much to elaborate for dining in the area, except the portion of the website of Visit Kouvola which gave information on all the major restaurants of Kouvola. This could be put up on the site, usually something used by tourists themselves, however awareness at hotels and tourist services of this can help them give their customers

guidance on the area. The website of Visit Kouvola had more to offer than just restaurant information but also covered content such as the program of events and happenings in the area. Visit Kouvola is a tourism website developed by the city and Kouvola Innovation, Kinno, to provide tourist information for the city's visitors.

For people in the restaurant and travel business there was a site for the union of travel and restaurant industry in Finland. This union is abbreviated MARA. Some information on their site that could be useful is for example the statistics of alcohol consumption in bars and restaurants of Finland. It was decided that this could be provided on the useful links section of the site. After the first intervention and course of action it seemed that in order to complete a database more secondary data would be required.

5.2 Reflections and Observations from Second Cycle

5.2.1 From Construction of Database

Although a fair amount of information on tourism of Finland could be found during the first course of action, getting specifically into Kymenlaakso and Kouvola proved more of a challenge. It can be noticed from their publications that Statistics Finland gave much data about how many are visiting different areas of Finland without getting into further details about specific cities (Statistics Finland, 2014). This could be expected as in the literature review it was found out that the problem with secondary data is that public information on tourism usually provides at such a general level that it does not account for accurate information at local level (Finn, et al., 2000). The monthly statistics found from Statistics Finland could be useful on the website as a means for users to forecast numbers of incoming tourists.

Liitetaulukko 1.2. Kaikkien majoitusliikkeiden kapasiteetti ja sen käyttö, tammi-elokuu 2014

Maakunta	Liikkeiden lukumäärä	Huoneiden lukumäärä	Huoneiden käyttöaste, %	Huoneiden käyttöasteen muutos edellisestä vuodesta, %-yksikköä	Yöppymisen vuorokausihinta, euroa (sisältää alv. 10 %)
Koko maa	1 223	61 731	48,6	0,0	49,20
Manner-Suomi	1 172	60 487	48,8	-0,1	49,35
Uusimaa	144	14 790	62,1	0,4	63,43
Varsinais-Suomi	75	3 824	50,3	0,7	45,12
Satakunta	44	1 633	38,9	-3,4	49,86
Kanta-Häme	34	1 587	35,4	-1,3	45,03
Pirkanmaa	75	4 490	47,6	-0,2	48,90
Päijät-Häme	38	2 085	43,3	1,5	47,01
Kymenlaakso	30	1 184	42,6	-0,4	44,63
Etelä-Karjala	40	1 910	51,9	-0,9	46,38
Etelä-Savo	89	2 651	40,6	-1,6	35,89
Pohjois-Savo	53	2 698	47,5	-1,1	43,93
Pohjois-Karjala	55	1 611	44,1	1,8	42,86
Keski-Suomi	54	3 340	47,9	1,6	49,96
Etelä-Pohjanmaa	53	1 936	41,4	-1,5	39,05
Pohjanmaa	35	1 410	45,2	-1,9	46,55
Keski-Pohjanmaa	18	610	42,5	0,4	46,00
Pohjois-Pohjanmaa	102	4 492	45,8	2,4	37,67
Kainuu	49	2 294	41,7	-4,1	36,62
Lappi	187	7 942	41,4	-0,5	43,66
Ahvenanmaa	51	1 245	39,5	4,9	.. 1)

1) [...] Tieto on liian epävarma esitettäväksi.

Lähde: Majoitustilasto. Tilastokeskus

Figure 4. Example of Statistics table found on Statistics Finland (Statistics Finland, 2014)

5.2.2 Observations from Completed Database

Having the complete database it turns out that the most data can be found within the marketing of Tourism in Finland and Kymenlaakso. This could be considered the most important for tourist businesses as the information offered gives opportunity to part take for them. As an example for the marketing done in Kouvola, Kouvola Innovation offers marketing tools to attract Russian visitors for entrepreneurs and their businesses.

The customer segmentation of Kymenlaakso tourism had similarities with the aim's of the tourism marketing agency of Finland, the Finnish Tourist Board. The built website introduces with the marketing of tourism in Finland. When gone on to describe the marketing for Kymenlaakso it turns out that both are aiming at reaching markets

further away, in the case of Kymenlaakso, Russia in particular. The reason for aiming to get tourist from afar is due to the poor economic outlook of the European Union (Visit Finland, 2012). There is more money to be attained from outside the EU.

Some basic aspects of Finnish tourism followed in Kymenlaakso are the same which occur elsewhere in Finland. These being the enjoyment of a clean nature, lakes, fresh air, the respect towards these, and also the stability and peace that exists in Finland. People also come here to experience true Christmas spirit (Visit Finland, 2012).

One tourist attraction of Kymenlaakso that came up in the theme of nature expeditions was the Repovesi National Park. It's an example of the opportunity provided for enjoying the clean nature in Kymenlaakso. Another example of outdoor activities provided is the ski slopes of Mielakka.

Russians like to shop during their visits to Finland. The founding of major shopping center Veturi is an example of an attempt to bring more visitors from Russia to Kymenlaakso. Most efforts from the local government involve marketing towards Russian customers. For example the joint venture of Kouvola Innovation and Cursor for "Valitse Kymi," or "Choose Kymi," involves presenting attractions of Kymenlaakso to the Russian media. The Russian media in turn writes articles about these for Russian citizens for promoting the area. Another part of this venture was the part taking in events and fairs in Russia for promoting tourism as well as different workshops (Kinno, 2010).

During this intervention it is notable that the most comprehensive part of the database offered is the marketing page. Taking a look at the accommodation page it can be noticed that not much information on accommodation is available on the web. Vital information such as places to stay the night in Kouvola and the rest of Kymenlaakso as well as a separate page for the Repovesi National Park. Something that is found more interesting by businesses would be the accommodation statistics provided by the Statistics Library of Finland. This can be a measure of the number of expected tourists to visit the province.

An important collection of information for the tourism industry would be the events and program page. It is easier to attract tourists when there is much happening in the locality. It is important for Tourism services to be aware of these events so that they

can organize travel packages better for organizing their tours around these schedules, giving the tourist a chance to experience these events. The major events of Kymenlaakso are briefly introduced on the database, and links are provided for the full year event schedules.

The dining page does not seem particularly useful for the tourism entrepreneur, possibly someone in the accommodation sector could use the information guide for their guests to consult their customers about where to find places to eat.

The useful links page has only been provided in Finnish due to the fact that there are too few English sites on this subject. One of the problems which occurred whilst building the site was finding links that offered both Finnish and English language.

The website being completed for further updating it seems that the database would be most useful for a tourism business starting up as existing services are likely already aware of most of the information offered. Not to say they could not benefit from it, only further feedback will tell. The site has potential to grow into something more informative, with deeper knowledge for the business, this is possible with further research, perhaps seeking from additional sources will allow for this.

Having the website up and running it becomes easier for the next administrator to have a good starting point for developing the site into a more detailed overview of the tourism situation. The more time spent on developing the site, the more aware the author becomes aware of the different aspects of tourism here in Kymenlaakso. Going back to some of the original sources, it turns out that there are more information packages available on the outlook and future of the Tourism industry for Finland. Also focusing on this topic causes the developer to think about the situation outside of the project work. Being situated in the area, having the project as one's task it becomes something to think about on a daily basis when traversing around the area. It comes to the creators attention, that not everything is covered on the site. As found during the first intervention and course of action it seemed that in order to complete a database more secondary data would be required. This is likely because of the fact that not all the knowledge and information of tourism can be found on the web. An additional method for sourcing information for the site is required.

Having noted all of this, it would be advisable to have a local who has spent several years in the area to take over the project. Likewise to my personal experience as a tourist and similar opinions of other tourists, the fact that when people travel, they find that meeting and spending time with locals gives them the best experience as they can provide for travel experiences which would otherwise have never come to the tourists attention. Locals have further knowledge about the city and can recommend on some of the best places, events, and venues to go and experience. Locals can also give a taste of the local culture, and lifestyle of the people in the city. Having someone who could guide the actual tourist with the less common knowledge, could also be an advantage to the one in business itself. Spreading local knowledge on the database helps for the tourist businesses to get fresh ideas for their travel packages, brochures, improve staff ability to consult visitors and provide better customer service thanks to this.

Creating a unique guide, especially with culture, and local lifestyle could lead to ideas which could become business opportunities for the sector. Currently the tourism industry in Kouvola is mostly focused on more mainstream ideas of the industry.

The administrator of the database could start their own tourism business based on the concept; “meet a local.” A personal guide for the tourist to meet to find out about what actually goes on in the city. Not just someone who is there to give out information on where to find what, and what are the main things to experience around here, but someone who knows about the people of the area, what it’s like to live here, someone who can tell about the less known. This could become a cultural experience for the tourist.

Another point that I found was missing in the tourist industry of Kymenlaakso, which could provide an opportunity for someone in the business, is that there is little publications on visiting the area. With this idea of meet a local, maybe the new “meet a local,” entrepreneur could promote their services with a local lifestyle and culture blog. As found on the literature review by the ideas of (Wills, 1996), readers want to stay up to date, and be knowledgeable about what is developing in their area of interest. They tend to want to be able to exhaust bodies of knowledge available to them to make sure their aware fully of the situation. However what readers really demand is instead of a full archive, to be provided with the most recent knowledge. (Wills, 1996) suggests

that to give out full benefit to users, would be to create a subscription service available to them, sending out the most recent information as it is published. Usually blogs are updated regularly, an option for the visitor to subscribe to the blog could meet the recommendations of (Wills, 1996). Blogs can be used by websites to gain traffic, from my personal experience of running a blog website, these increases can be seen in relation to blog updates. Increasing the traffic or in other words popularity of the site could lead to more contacts to the administrator from local businesses. Contacts from the businesses could give the administrator an additional source of information for the content of the database.

Something to add to the site would be a contact form and presentation of the administrator, there should be a professional photograph of the author. This would make the site more professional, and more credible. The creator being open for communication and presenting themselves as a motivated individual to improve the sector, with their own personal contribution of running a unique business that makes close contact with the visitors themselves. Someone who has connections with the tourists, and also other tourist businesses in the area, bridges the gap between the customers and the businesses. The administrator should be available to the tourist business and should also make personal efforts to make contact with the tourism services in the area and inform them about their observations from providing the service. The actions from pursuing this service would give the administrator an additional source of information for the content of the database as they could post updated information about their findings.

To make a better “meet a local service,” the administrator and now entrepreneur should have a network of other locals that can broaden the perspective the service provides. This new business opportunity could also employ a handful of people in the area. Why not have teams across Kymenlaakso. The “meet a local service,” could target different target groups. Having someone for the different age groups of tourists who aim to serve for different types of people visiting the area. They could all have their own blogs, their own personalized knowledge from different cultures of people. This service could be especially popular for those visiting the area alone. From studies of people who travel to a destination by themselves, these people usually end up spending time with people they meet at the location of travel. Young people tend to stay in hostels because of this, because they share a room with strangers who are also

open for making new contacts to enjoy their experience with. From the findings on the website of the accommodation section, it seems there are not many hostels in Kymenlaakso, leaving out this segment of people. The meet a local service could help attract more people who travel alone. Being in contact with businesses about the observations made from serving different target groups of tourists could help develop the industry.

Meeting locals is a trending way for tourists to gain new experiences. Services exist like the well-known couch surfing website, and different cell phone applications have been made for the tourist to hook up with locals. Other business opportunities have been developed by entrepreneurs such as dine with a local service. These are all similar ways of making this opportunity real. A lot of the time the people who inform themselves as available in these services are not dedicated to it. Having a group of people with further experience by being dedicated could make for a higher quality service.

The entrepreneur could be the one actually updating the Kyamk web page of tourism development and would give them more incentive to provide their best knowledge and research further for the database to improve. The administrator will surely be motivated to turn the site into a professional run service, as it would work as their marketing channel for the business that runs on the side. A new section could be added on the site where the tourists can find their blog. The blog could have a “subscribe,” option, meeting the ideas of (Wills, 1996) to serve visitors with recent information as it comes. The employee running the site and meet a local service could use their knowledge gained to inform businesses on their blog about the ideas they gain from the tourist perspective on the area. Blogging for both promotion of the services for the tourist to read, and also blogging about ideas gained for the businesses could be done. Existing tourism business could find this interesting, and maybe getting in contact with the local business about these ideas for developing the tourism industry could improve the site’s ability to provide information for all businesses in the industry.

To attract more people to use the “meet a local,” service the administrator could also consider adding a “meet a fellow traveler,” section where lone tourists looking for company could arrange to meet fellow travelers to get familiar to the local attractions and events together.

As (Canizal, n.d.) stated collected data from different sources could also help strengthen the relationships between the institutions where the information has been found. When businesses find some of their information on the site, they would probably be sparked with interest by this. They will also find information from other sources, and it could be possible that they receive new knowledge about these other institutions. They could potentially see some opportune for co-operation with the other sources. Collaboration between institutions strengthens business success (Adner, et al., 2013). More success in tourist businesses, improves the tourism sector.

5.3 Observations made from Reflection of others

One of the participants from the test group was a web developer who had an expert opinion on the database. In their opinion further improvements were on the style and layout of the database. A list of feedback follows:

1. Create a logo specifically for this part of the Kyamk webpages.
2. Use more visuals, and use a punchline on the homepage so everyone understands immediately what it's about.
3. Ensure perfect text.
4. Divide text into paragraphs, and make big gaps between them.
5. Use subheadings
6. Use more styling on the tables.
7. Adding more visuals in each section will make it better.
8. Menu on the left should only be a submenu of current main section

From this feedback the layout of the site can be improved by asking the next administrator to consult for help from graphic designers of the university to create visuals. Some of the visuals on the existing site are actually visuals taken from other websites, with the permission of their creators.

For meeting the criteria given by this observer, like improved styling, and modification of the menus, the developer of the site will have to find how to customize the website further, and get around the limitations of content manager. Perhaps discussing this with the IT staff of the university who provide Content Manager and training on its use could help achieve this. Were the next administrator to have some experience in marketing, they could probably come up with a punchline, similar to a slogan.

A second participant believed that the Finnish language needs brushing up and also found that a useful element on the database could be the use of a map service. Some of the participants had the opinion that the points of consideration were covered well and that they learned new things about the areas tourism situation.

Another suggestion by an external observant was to information such as transportation services of the area. This could help businesses see the ability of their customers to reach their location of business. The same observant suggests providing an information package on shopping in the area. Shopping being a popular activity of tourists finding out how to take advantage of this on the database would be useful.

6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Summary of Main Findings

One of the objectives of this dissertation was to provide societal good for the tourism industry of Kymenlaakso, to better follow tourism trends and possibly reveal new business opportunities. As a result of the action research at least one business opportunity has been revealed. This being the potential for the next administrator to become an entrepreneur utilizing their site as a marketing channel for the “meet a local service.” Providing this service not only provides the administrator with a business idea, but if they were to go through with it there are side benefits which meet the main purpose of the site; to provide information on the tourism development of Kymenlaakso. If they used the blog about their experiences of a city in the province with the experiences they provide to tourists and what they discover from the customers opinions the site can become more consultative to tourism businesses. If the tourist industry of Kymenlaakso were to improve, so would the economy of the area. Kymenlaakso needs new sources of income and creating a prospering tourist industry could be one solution. There is definitely room for improvement for the website, however it provides a solid start, and from this research there has been new ideas and methods for developing the site.

From searching for data on the web it can be noticed that the tourism industry of Kymenlaakso in general does not utilize the web as an information service on the sector to its full potential, as the administrator needs to find additional ways of attaining knowledge for the content.

The research problem of the non-existence of a tourism database for the Kymenlaakso area has been handled. Now the foundations of a tourism database exists as a research tool for Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences. The database has potential to consult businesses to improve their services.

The research question of how to find reliable and updatable data for Kymenlaakso tourism has been handled during the research. As for the sub-questions of this like which are the best sources of the information and where can the data be found. New ways of attaining data for the site have been discovered. During the research the main source of data was the web. From the findings to make a better database data needs to

be looked in additional sources as well. The best sources on the web for information in this topic come from; The Finnish Tourist Board, Kouvola Innovation, Statistics Finland, Visit Kouvola, Kaakko 135, and Kouvolan ydinkeskusta ry. The next administrator can search for additional web sources, but for finding additional reliable and updatable data, should also use their personal knowledge and new personal observations of the area which they make. This being done by providing the “meet a local,” service. The creation of a blog would further the sites updatability. An existing source of updatable information comes from the data publications of Statistics Finland.

The administrator should also aim to make connections with the different tourism businesses that exist, using the discoveries they make from visitors whilst providing their service which could make companies interested in co-operating with them as they have something to exchange. An additional source of information that was come across could be the utilization of print publications.

From experiencing now the use of action research first hand, it is notable that this can be a means of revealing business opportunities. Without performing this action research on this thesis, the idea of “meet a local,” service wouldn’t have been come across. To back this up, there are some previous experiences of the author which can be seen as similar to action research from personal lifestyle hobbies. When naturally being a participant of a personal project of the author, actions in the progress revealed new discoveries during the progress. Previous actions like these from the author have caused the participant to find new product ideas, as the products were not available to serve the action of a lifestyle change to the participant in the country. Action research in this case tackles the development of something new to make a change in the situation, to make a change in the situation, what is missing must be created. New creations can lead to new opportunities.

6.2 Implications for the Commissioner

With the findings from this research some suggestions can be made as to what kind of employee it is recommended for an internship to administer the database. First of all the employee should have good knowledge of both Finnish, and English. Also it is advisable to find someone who has spent a long time in the Kymenlaakso area, someone who is a local, or at the minimum to have a good understanding of the area from

experience and who has locals within their network. This would be necessary for the employee to take advantage of the “meet a local,” service idea. A person with a social, and entrepreneurial spirit could cater for the new business opportunity. An interest in journalism and blog writing should be considered an asset of an applicant. The applicant should be excited about the opportunity the managing of the database, and be willing to develop the service along with its incentive of attaining personal earnings.

Based on reflection from others the next administrator needs to work more with the IT staff, and also work with graphic designers. It is suggested that the commissioner would recommend this co-operation to the intern, to make the sites own visuals, and to improve the layout of the database.

6.3 Suggestions for Further Research and Development on the Evaluation of the Own Study

The use of visuals was noted by an observant, to improve the study it could be researched how visuals can be used to make for better marketing of websites. Another suggestion from the observers would require the study of how to take advantage of providing map services on a database. For improving traffic (making the database more popular) it is suggested that the administrator does further research on search engine optimization.

To develop the new service idea, research should be done on networking and business communication. With the new service idea in mind furthering knowledge from research in public relations and journalism would also be useful.

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