

**STORYTELLING IN EXPERIENCE CREATION
CASE KAISUS LAPPLAND**

Kaisus Lappland

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The experience dominant logic has been transforming the tourism industry drastically and the tourism companies need to develop new ways to create deeper and more meaningful experiences for the tourists. Stories are one of the key elements in the creation of memorable experiences and therefore this thesis focuses on the role of storytelling in holistic and continuing tourism experience creation process.

The research questions were set as “What stories and storytelling are in tourism context?”, “How storytelling is used in meaningful experience creation?” and “How can it be used in ‘case Kaisus Lapland?’”. The theoretical background information was gained through literature material, and the indepth interviews focused on gaining real life examples regarding the thesis topic. The research findings showed the diversity of stories and storytelling in holistic experience creation. The efficiency and importance of this tool was recognized, and its role for creating meaningful tourist experiences was discovered.

The aim of the thesis was to adapt the gained knowledge for future experience product development for the commissioner. This was conducted by providing three practical improvement suggestions which focused on enhancing the already existing products by deepening and emphasizing the role of authentic stories in dramatization of holistic and continuous experience creation.

Key word(s) storytelling, stories, authentic experiences, holistic experience creation process, product development

Matkailun koulutusohjelma

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Matkailualan keskittyessä yhä enemmän elämyksiin yritysten on muutettava toimintaansa ja kehitettävä innovatiivisia toimintatapoja merkittävien ja mieleenpainuvien elämysten tuottamiseksi. Tarinoiden ollessa keskeisessä roolissa edellämämainitunlaisten kokemusten tuottamisessa, ovat ne tämän opinnäytetyön painopisteenä käsiteltäessä kokonaisvaltaista ja jatkuvaa matkailun elämystuontantoprosessia.

Opinnäytetyön tutkimuskysymykset ovat: Mitä tarinat ja tarinankerronta ovat matkailussa?, Kuinka tarinankerrontaa käytetään osana merkittävän elämyksen luontia?, sekä Kuinka tarinankerrontaa voidaan käyttää osana 'case Kaisus Lapplandissa'?. Tutkimuksen teoreettinen tausta on koottu kirjallisista lähteistä, ja haastatteluissa on keskitytty keräämään tosielämän kokemuksia aiheesta. Tutkimustulokset osoittivat tarinoiden ja tarinankerronnan monipuolisen merkityksen osana elämyksiä ja niiden kokonaisvaltaista tuottamista.

Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli soveltaa kerättyä tietoa opinnäytetyön toimeksiantajan elämystuotteiden kehittämiseen. Tavoite toteutettiin esittämällä kolme käytännön ehdotusta, jotka keskittyvät siihen, miten jo olemassa olevia tuotteita voidaan parantaa korostamalla autenttisten tarinoiden merkitystä elämystuotantokokonaisuuksissa.

Avainsana(t) tarinankerronta, tarinat, autenttiset elämykset, kokonaisvaltainen elämystuotantoprosessi, tuotekehitys

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	2
2	THESIS PROCESS, METHODOLOGY AND COMMISSIONER	4
2.1	THESIS PROCESS	4
2.2	QUALITATIVE RESEARCH.....	5
2.3	COMMISSIONER	7
2.3.1	<i>Kaisus Lappland</i>	7
2.3.2	<i>Target Group</i>	7
2.3.3	<i>Current Experience Creation</i>	8
3	PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT	10
3.1	INSIGHTS FOR PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT	10
3.2	EXPERIENCE CREATION	13
3.3	MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES	15
3.3.1	<i>Experience Pyramid</i>	15
3.3.2	<i>Dramatic Arc</i>	17
3.3.3	<i>Five Senses</i>	18
3.4	STORYTELLING IN TOURISM	20
3.4.1	<i>Defining Stories, Storytelling and Storification</i>	20
3.4.2	<i>Storytelling as Experience Creation Tool</i>	20
3.4.3	<i>Storification Process</i>	21
4	BENCHMARKING COMPANIES.....	23
4.1	PROMOTE ICELAND AND “INSPIRED BY ICELAND” CAMPAIGN.....	23
4.2	SAGA TRAVEL	25
4.3	CONCLUDING BENCHMARKED EXPERIENCE CREATION.....	26
5	CASE KAISUS LAPPLAND	28
5.1	DEVELOPING STORYTELLING BASED EXPERIENCES	28
5.2	CORE STORY AND DRAMATIC ARC	31
5.3	PRESENTING LOCALS.....	32
5.4	PILOT SHOW	33
5.5	CONCLUDING CASE KAISUS LAPPLAND.....	34
6	CONCLUSION	38
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	40

Matkailun koulutusohjelma

APPENDICES	45
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LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1. BLUEPRINT FOR PRE- AND POST EXPERIENCES OF HILJAISSUUS PRODUCT.	35
TABLE 2. CUSTOMER SERVICE JOURNEY MOMENTS -MODEL FOR PRE- AND POST EXPERIENCES OF HILJAISSUUS PRODUCT.....	36

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1. TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT (ACCORDING TO GARCÍA-ROSELL ET AL. 2010, MODIFIED BY ALAPURANEN).....	12
FIGURE 2. A HOLISTIC FOUR-STEP MODEL OF EXPERIENCE PRODUCTION (GELTER 2011, 230).	14
FIGURE 3. EXPERIENCE PYRAMID MODEL (TARSSANEN & KYLÄNEN 2009, 11).....	15
FIGURE 4. DRAMATIC ARC IN TOURISM EXPERIENCES (ACCORDING TO GARCÍA- ROSELL ET AL. 2010, MODIFIED BY ALAPURANEN 2015).....	18
FIGURE 5. FIVE SENSES WHEN CREATING MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES.	19
FIGURE 6. SERVICE STORY SCRIPT (ACCORDING TO KALLIOMÄKI 2014, MODIFIED BY ALAPURANEN 2015).....	22
FIGURE 7. EXPERIENCE PYRAMID FOR HILJAISSUUS PRODUCT.	30
FIGURE 8. STORY IDENTITY. (ACCORDING TO KALLIOMÄKI 2014, MODIFIED BY ALAPURANEN 2015).....	31

1 INTRODUCTION

In the present-day business life, providing goods and services is no longer enough. Instead the consumers are looking for experiences. (Pine & Gilmore 2011, IX.) To survive the competition the companies need to come up with new innovations and adapt to the changing business environment for creating the demanded extra value and holistic tourist experience products. For the last few years, storytelling has become a trend in the customer service industry, including the field of tourism product development. The aim of storytelling is to provide product content and to support the creation of memorable and meaningful experiences for the participants. It also provides a possibility for the companies to differentiate from each other and to emphasize the uniqueness and the values of their businesses. (Tarinakone 2015.) Therefore, this thesis discusses the role of storytelling in the tourist experience creation. It considers storytelling as a tool and supporting force for creating a successful and meaningful holistic tourism experience products.

The commissioner of this thesis is Kaisus Lappland. It is a small size tourism company located in Rovaniemi, Finnish Lapland. Kaisus Lappland aims to create and provide authentic touristic experiences which are based on localness and real Lappish lifestyle. The company has an interest for sharing the traditional and native stories and local values with their customers. In co-operation the author and the commissioner set the objectives and the goals for the research and general thesis content.

The research for this thesis was conducted by using literature and indepth interviews for gaining the needed theoretical background and real life examples. The interviews were executed with the owner of Kaisus Lappland and also with storytelling expert and benchmarking companies, Promote Iceland and Saga Travel. The interviews focused to gain information regarding the general holistic tourist experience creation and the role of stories and storytelling in this process. Another goal of the interviews was to clarify how multifacetedely storytelling, stories and their use is understood in the field of tourist experience product development. The findings of this thesis give an overview of the theory and practices of product development. It introduces

some of the useful and efficient tools and models for general product improvement and more specified tourist experience development process. The characteristics of meaningful experiences are discussed and presented in this thesis. Also the importance of continuity of the tourist experience and the practical tools for ensuring this phenomenon has been covered in this thesis.

This thesis aims to provide information and development suggestions to the commissioner for its future experience creation. The focus is on the use of storytelling as a tool. The recommended development propositions are based on the thesis research and its findings.

2 THESIS PROCESS, METHODOLOGY AND COMMISSIONER

2.1 Thesis Process

The thesis was inspired by the author's personal interest and affection towards stories, legends and beliefs. Especially the folklore, traditions and stories about real life shared by the parents and grandparents had emotionally roused the author. Childhood in a rural village, small community and its strong Lappish and Sami cultures have also had an impact for upwelling love for stories.

The core idea of the thesis was clear since the beginning of the thesis process but finding commissioner with aligned thoughts regarding stories and storytelling was a time consuming process. Finally the commissioner, Kaisus Lapland, was found and the objectives and final topic of the thesis were set. The focus of the thesis was defined to be the use of authentic stories and storytelling in experience creation. During the thesis process it became clear that the thesis topic was current and innovative as there has not been many similar works done before. However, this also set the challenges as finding theoretical background literature regarding use of stories and storytelling in business life and especially in tourism experience creation process was very limited. Also the multifaceted way of thinking about definitions of stories and storytelling was notable when approaching possible benchmarking companies. The words "story" and "storytelling" had very different meanings for different companies, and in many cases they were associated with fully fictional content, fairytales and a word "nonsense". Therefore, the importance of this thesis is even higher as it presents and provides another perspective to the topic.

During the thesis process, the effectiveness of storytelling was personally experienced by the author in a practical level. As facing a challenge to receive some of the interview responds on time the author first contacted the interviewees with typical e-mail reminders. However, there was still lack of responds and therefore the author approached the interviewees with a storyline regarding the thesis and missing interview answers. Less than six hours later, the interviews were completed.

2.2 Qualitative research

The purpose for realising this study is to find out the answers for the research questions and to develop understanding towards the role of storytelling in tourism experience creation process. The research questions were defined as “What stories and storytelling are in tourism context?”, “How storytelling is used in meaningful experience creation?” and “How can it be used in ‘case Kaisus Lapland?’”.

Due to the characteristics of the research questions, objectives and for gaining the indepth understanding towards the subject, the thesis has been accomplished by using the qualitative research method. This method focuses on gaining subjective assumptions regarding to the attitudes and behaviour (Kothari 2004, 5). Therefore, this approach provides the author precise and detailed information for the analysis regarding the research topic (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2011, 8 – 9). Generally, the different forms of interviews are used as the technique for collecting the qualitative research data (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2011, 5). The indepth interviews were also implemented in this thesis process.

The interviews were conducted for the benchmarking companies, storytelling expert, and the owner of Kaisus Lapland. The indepth interviews offered the interviewees a chance to tell their personal opinions and experiences regarding the thesis subject (Henkell, Hutter & Bailey 2011, 109 – 111). The thesis interviews were performed via e-mail, Skype and face-to-face discussion. They were formed as semi-structured interviews, which provided the guidelines and main questions but left space for spontaneous conversation and information sharing.

Kaisa Alatalo, the owner of Kaisus Lapland, was interviewed for gaining the knowledge of the company’s backgrounds and the present situation regarding the use of storytelling in their experience creation (Appendix 1). This interview was supported by face-to-face conversations, e-mail discussions, and the content of the company’s website and social media channels. These provided suitable background information for the thesis process.

An interview with the storytelling expert Anne Kalliomäki focused on gaining general information on storytelling. The interview was formed to concentrate on the use of stories and storytelling in business life and in different phases of the experience creation process (Appendix 2). Kalliomäki's book *Tarinallistaminen – Palvelukokemuksen punainen lanka* (2014) and her Tarinakone website have also played a strong role as a source for the theoretical part of the thesis among the other literature materials.

In this thesis process, benchmarking was one of the research methods used. This was the case as benchmarking can be used as a strategic tool for the business development. It can help the company to recognize the faults and weaknesses in its own operations and to learn from the mistakes the other companies have made. Successful benchmarking can provide new ideas and examples for future development. (e-conomic 2015.) To simplify, benchmarking is executed by comparing two or more businesses and their operations with each other and this way gaining knowledge about the successful business actions and processes. (Komppula & Boxberg 2002, 123-125.) In this case benchmarking was conducted for two companies, Promote Iceland and Saga Travel. They were selected by the nature of their business and the similar core values with the thesis commissioner.

In the case Kaisus Lapland' benchmarking was used for gaining knowledge about the use of storytelling in touristic experience creation. This way the author and the commissioner were able to receive information on the different possibilities, to familiarize themselves with updated and innovative solutions and perspectives and to learn about the actions and processes which the chosen benchmarking companies had experienced to be useful. In this research the benchmarking companies were interviewed regarding to their background, how they understand and define storytelling and explain, describe and evaluate its use (Appendices 3 & 4). These questions aimed to provide knowledge of the differences and similarities of the actions and the issues which the benchmarking companies felt to be important.

2.3 Commissioner

2.3.1 Kaisus Lappland

Kaisus Lappland was founded in February 2014. It is a small size tourism company in Finnish Lapland and it is owned by Kaisa Alatalo. The purpose of the business is to promote Lappish lifestyle and culture by providing cultural tours around Lapland for its customers. (Alatalo 2015a.)

According to Kaisa Alatalo, the Lappish culture can be divided into three sub categories: local everyday life, folk culture and so called high culture. All these cultural types are taken into account in the main product of the business which is to provide one-week all-inclusive cultural holidays for small groups year-round. These package holidays begin and end in Rovaniemi but the programme will take place in various locations in Finnish Lapland. Meeting the local people and artists, experiencing the real life of Lappish inhabitants and extraordinary Lappish features are the main focus of the package holidays. The holidays are scheduled and built around traditional Lappish cultural festivals which are included as one of the core activities in the holiday programme. (Alatalo 2015a.)

2.3.2 Target Group

Visit Finland and Regional Council of Lapland have set the 'modern humanists' as the primary target group of tourism marketing in Lapland and in Finland in general (Matkailun edistämiskeskus 2014, Regional Council of Lapland 2015, 18-23). This is also the case in Kaisus Lappland. This is the result of supply and demand. It is clear that the content of this particular product meets and fulfills the needs of this designated target group.

The modern humanists are described as a target group which seeks touristic experiences outside the mass tourism and main stream products. They have interest towards new, different cultures and they are open-minded when familiarizing themselves with the everyday life of the local inhabitants in their destination. (Visit Finland 2014).

According to Visit Finland (2014), the modern humanists can be divided into three subcategories: cultural enthusiasts, active families and modern humanist couples. Due to the type and character of the product and its content the business of Kaisus Lappland only focuses on cultural enthusiasts and modern humanist couples. The target group has also been narrowed with two other characteristics as Kaisus Lappland has decided to focus on over 50-year-olds coming from German speaking countries. (Alatalo 2015b.)

The package holiday products are offered for small groups, maximum 8 customers per group (Alatalo 2015a). This action will support the idea of meeting one's expectations and offering quality product for globally and responsibly conscious customers. It will also enable the possibility for personal contact to be created between the customer, guide and local participators.

2.3.3 Current Experience Creation

Kaisus Lappland has focused on providing authentic and memorable experiences for its customers. The products are conducted with holistic approach which allows realistic and honest interaction with the local community. The customers are provided with the opportunity to experience the cultural characteristics, importance of nature and daily lifestyle of Lappish people. (Alatalo 2015b.)

The business is implemented by using the dramatic arc as a guideline for the progression of the holiday product. The experiences are aimed to begin on the website where the customers receive the first touch of the content of the holiday and are provided with the first expectations towards the programme of their upcoming visit to Lapland. The pre-experience phase is formed of the general information provided in different social media channels but also via the personal blog of Kaisa Alatalo. The pictures are also used for introducing Lapland, Lappish culture, nature, activities, etc. for the possible guests. Once the tourist has booked the holiday, individual traveller's distinctive pre-experience will be offered a boost as they receive a personalized travel journal with few pictures and greetings from the company. (Alatalo 2015a.)

From the pre-experience the experience creation continues to the on-site experiences which are created in co-operation with the customers, local

inhabitants and Lappish surroundings. The programme serves the tourists a chance to have an effect on their own experience creation by offering the setting and the activity where the tourists can act, communicate and interact with the surroundings in the way that suits them best. Once the holiday is over, the on-site experience turns to post experience. Kaisus Lapland uses the same channels for both pre- and post experience. On these channels the customers can recollect their memories from the holiday by viewing the pictures and other content of social media channels. (Alatalo 2015a.)

3 PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Insights for Product Development

Tourism products are one of the main motivators for tourists to travel. They are due to meet and fulfil the demand and needs of potential travellers. However, tourism product development is a complex process which includes variety of stakeholders, tangible and intangible elements, and other components to be taken into account. Tourism product development is the key process for production of wanted values, themes and meanings and it is strongly connected and affected on the global and local changes and demands (García-Rosell, Kylänen, Pitkänen, Tekoniemi-Selkälä & Vanhala 2010).

Previously tourism product development has been considered as a managerial process but nowadays due to the increasing awareness regarding the sustainable responsibilities of businesses, also the tourism businesses have emerging need to involve the local stakeholders into their product development process (Porter & Kramer 2006, 78 – 81) and this way strengthen the sustainability of their business actions (García-Rosell & Mäkinen 2013, 396 – 397). Therefore, the dynamics have changed and tourism product development process has characteristics of socio-cultural interaction where the local community and consumers play a major role in producing the tourism products and experiences. Due to the variety of participating stakeholders and the changing needs of the consumers the tourism product development can be seen as constantly progressing and on-going process. (García-Rosell, Haanpää, Kylänen & Markuksela 2007, 445 – 449.)

Also the growing mediating role of technological innovations has clearly affected on tourism product development process (Neuhofer, Buhalis & Ladkin 2012, 36). Currently the tourism industry has increased the amount of technological tools and channels to use in their product development and final products (Guisado-González, Guisado-Tato & del Mar Rodríguez-Domínguez 2014, 67). These tools are crucial for enabling the growing need for customers to co-create their own touristic experiences in different stages of the experience creation process (Singh & Sonnenburg 2012, 189 – 190). Therefore, the technological innovations in the product designing and

implementation process are need to be taken into account by the business. (Guisado-González, Guisado-Tato & del Mar Rodríguez-Domínguez 2014, 67.)

Another affecting force to be considered is the changing attitudes and demands of the consumers. The companies have had to react to the change of dominating central demands. The shift from good dominant logic to service dominant logic (García-Rosell, Haanpää, Kylänen & Markuksela 2007, 450) and from there onwards to experience dominant logic (Pine & Gilmore 2011, IX), has set the challenge for the businesses to keep up in the changing product environment.

Due to these recent changes and the effect of external trends, the businesses' actions need to be pro-active when developing new products and updating the old ones by redeveloping them (Dwyer, Edwards, Mistils, Roman & Scott 2009, 63 – 65). The companies also need to understand the pace of the changes and their likely impact for being able to adapt to the transitions efficiently (Sentürk 2012, 11 – 12, 17). For forecasting the changes, affecting elements and the pace and type of the change, the companies can use general tourism foresight and its practical tools in their product development processes. This will help recognising, predicting and evaluating the shifts but also ease to see the possibilities to impact them by businesses' own choices. (Lapin Korkeakoulukonserni 2015.)

Tourism foresight and its tools, like PESTE and Weak Signals, can be used to ease the managing of increased uncertainty and to systematize the disputation regarding the possible and plausible changes in the business environment. It mostly focuses on implementing the qualitative tools, which are based on opinions, intuitions, etc. Therefore, tourism foresight is not a quick solution for responding to the changes. Instead, it should be adapted as a lasting element for the company's product development process. (Güell 2012, 161 – 163.) The tourism foresight has a major role in the product development process as the external changes have a direct connection to the customers' needs and demands and this way to their experience creation. While tourism foresight focuses on external factors, the businesses need to design their products based also on the impacting internal factors. These forces stem from inside

the company and they include elements of resources, innovative thinking and know-how.

Figure 1 shows the complexity and together intertwined components of tourism product development which all are impacted by internal factors. It also presents the role and expansion of surrounding external factors which are affecting on the development process.

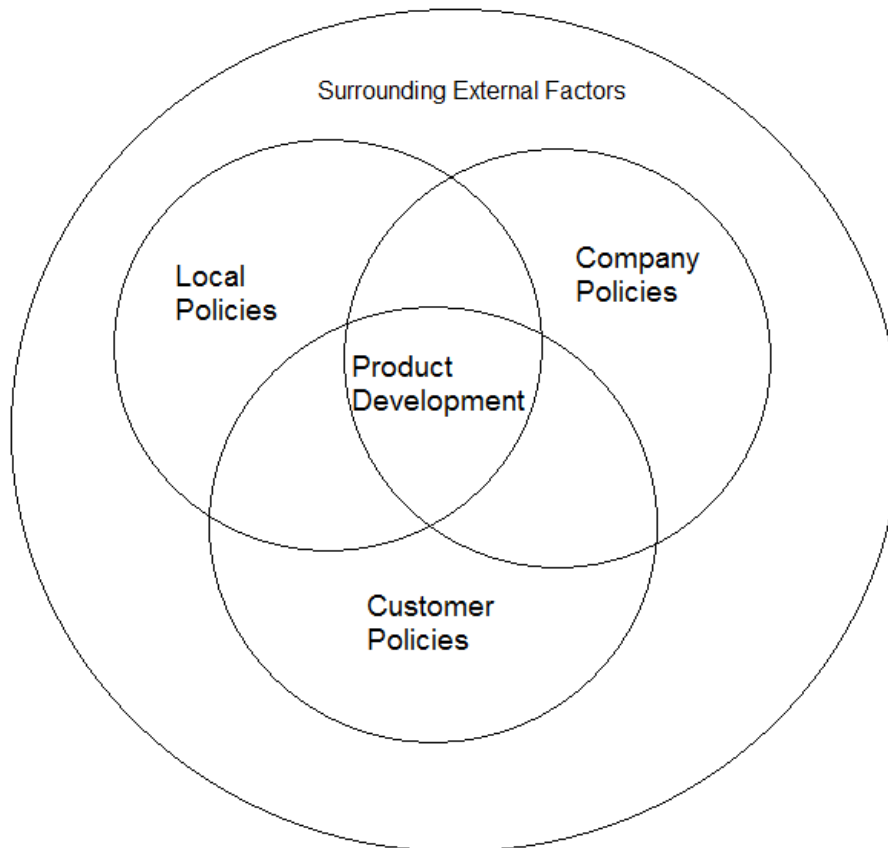


Figure 1. Tourism Product Development (According to Garcíá-Rosell et al. 2010, Modified by Alapuranen).

The companies need to recognize these internal and external components, react on them and to develop their practices and products for creating deeper relationships with their customers through demanded experience products (Weiermair 2014, 3 – 7). This can be done by emphasizing the companies' expertise and unique characteristics in holistic experience product creation process.

3.2 Experience Creation

In the business life the experiences are demanded extra value provided with the services or products. Experiences are planned and designed entireties which make the commodities memorable by having an impact on one's emotions. (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 17.) They are staged, meaningful, personal, revealed over a duration of time and they are aimed to provide sensations for the consumers (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 9). The experiences are on-going (O'Dell & Billing 2005, 15) and they can be divided in three stages: pre-, onsite- and post experiences. In tourism, it is typical that the pre-experience stage begins much prior to the actual holiday or other service (Neuhofer & Buhalis 2012, 3) and the post experience can last for a life time.

The Figure 2 presents the model of holistic experience production presented by Hans Gelter in his article *Polar Tourism – Challenges and Possibilities for Transmodern Tourism* (2011, 230). It shows the four steps of the experience creation process. These steps are experience producer (company), experience production (experience method), experience product and overall tourist experience. The figure also presents the tourist experience production to include the aforesaid pre- and post phase experiences which are remarkable components in the holistic experience creation and in experience based product development. (Gelter 2011, 230).

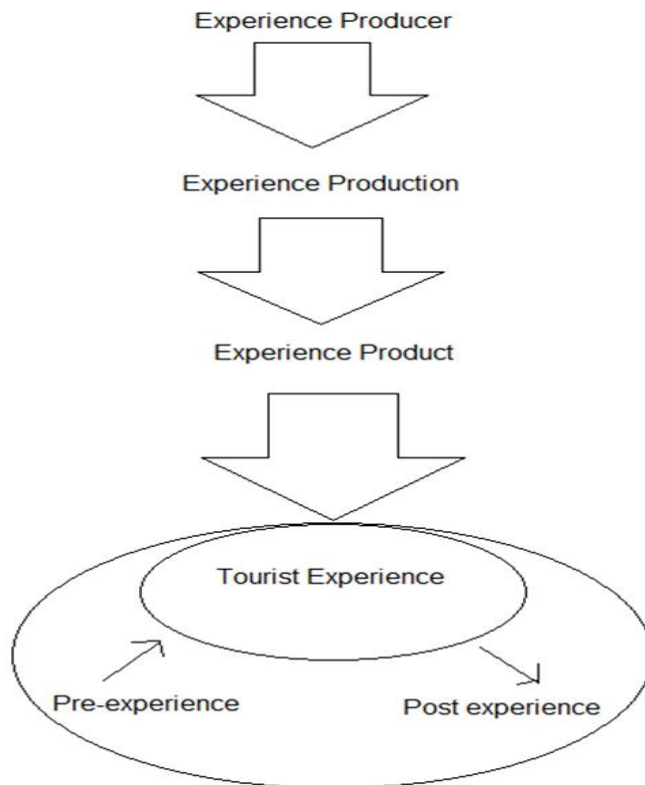


Figure 2. A Holistic Four-Step Model of Experience Production (Gelter 2011, 230).

The purpose of pre-experience is to attract the consumers and to engage them to the product or service in question. Pre-experience begins as soon as the consumer hears about the product or service (Multidimensional Tourism Institute 2015). The pre-experience stage is used for differentiating from the competitors by creating unique images and expectations for the overall experience (Ritchie & Ritchie 1998, 16 – 20). However, the information and images provided should not be too unconditional as the pre-experience should be influential for a variety of consumers and their emotions. The pre-experience can be created in both virtual and face-to-face contact. In a majority of cases these ways support each other and help to build a stronger base for the experience creation. (Kalliomäki 2014, 34 – 35). Due to the constant development of the technology, the tourists and the tourism companies have an enormous amount of tools to communicate, share and gain information and create expectations. This is the critical phase in experience creation where the customers will be engaged to the services and the relationship between the customer and the business is formed (Gretzel & Jamal 2009, 471 – 481).

On-site experience begins as soon as the consumer arrives to the destination, to the set of activities or when the realization of the product begins in any other way. The on-site experience includes everything the consumer has seen, done or felt during the trip, activity or other. (Multidimensional Tourism Institute 2015.) Post experience takes place whenever the activity, visit or other product has been finished. The post experience is about recollection. (Multidimensional Tourism Institute 2015.) At this phase the consumer is remembering the overall experience, the feelings and single occurrences, and going through them. This phase can last for decades or even for a life time.

3.3 Meaningful Experiences

3.3.1 Experience Pyramid

Meaningful experiences differ from traditional services by customisation and theming. The organiser or destination needs to provide a well planned entity, built with carefully designed elements, to offer a chance for the customers to define their own experiences. (Kylänen & Tarssanen 2007, 136-140.) For this reason Lapland Centre of Expertise for the Experience Industry (LEO) created a product development tool called experience pyramid (Figure 3). With this tool the different elements of the product or service can be analysed in physical and mental levels. (Tarssanen & Kylänen 2009, 11).

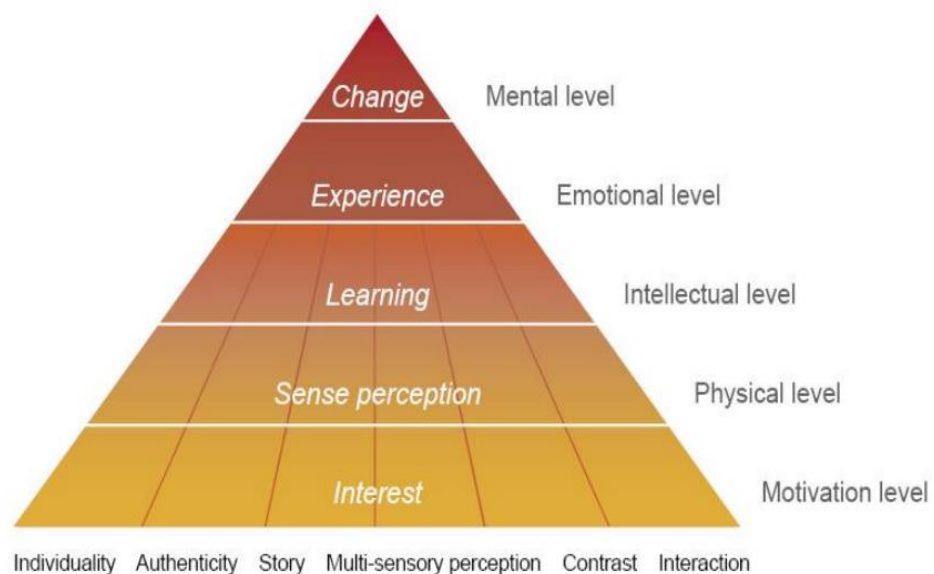


Figure 3. Experience Pyramid Model (Tarssanen & Kylänen 2009, 11).

The pyramid has six elements which create the foundation for the meaningful experience products. These elements are named as individuality, authenticity, story, multi-sensory perception, contrast and interaction. (Tarssanen & Kylänen 2009, 15 – 16.)

Individuality describes the unique characteristics of the product, its customer orientation, and adaptiveness and flexibility to different situations and customer groups. Authenticity, or other words the credibility and genuinity of the product, focuses on the existing lifestyle and culture of the product environment. In this element, also the social responsibility and local identity should be taken into account. (Tarssanen & Kylänen 2009, 15 – 16.)

Stories are one of the key elements which bind together the different parts of the product and experience creation process and make it look and feel like a whole. Stories facilitate the following of the progress of the experience and help the customers to understand the content and its meaning. By using the story element while designing and executing the experiences the businesses have a tool to build an emotional and intellectual tie between the customer and the content of the product. Therefore, it is crucial that the designed storyline will remain the same throughout the experience chain. (Tarssanen & Kylänen 2009, 15 – 16.)

Multi-sensory perception is a component where the role of the five sensory stimulants and their delicate designing will be realized to support the production of meaningful experiences. Contrast element emphasizes the difference between customers' everyday-life and the content of their holiday. When planning and executing the contrast the company should aim to provide new, exotic and extraordinary meaning which offers the customers new perspectives. Interaction component includes the communication between the business, its customers and the local inhabitants. Successful interaction serves the customers a feeling of communality and experiencing together. (Tarssanen & Kylänen 2009, 11 – 14.)

The effect of each of these elements will be analysed in the following experience levels: motivational, physical, intellectual, emotional and mental. (Kylänen & Tarssanen 2007, 139.) Motivational level takes place prior the

actual implementation of the product. At this level the customer's are intrigued and their expectations are created. In physical level the expectations are fulfilled by experiencing through the senses and physical surroundings. Focus on intellectual level is in learning sensations, applying the new knowledge and forming the opinions. While moving to the emotional level, the role of customer individuality increases. On this level the customers define themselves the meaningfulness of already experienced levels and their content. Mental level is the climax of the experience pyramid where the customers have a possibility for personal change of mind set or lifestyle if the previous experiences have been meaningful and deep enough. At this point the customers can adopt new values and paradigms for themselves. (Tarssanen & Kylänen 2009, 15 – 16.)

3.3.2 Dramatic Arc

In tourism industry the core story of the business can be seen in the same way as the main plot of the theatre play. It works on its own but for dramatization it needs the suitable surroundings (virtual or physical location), front and back stage (invisible preparations and visible activities and services), hero and supporting cast (customer and other participants in the experience creation), side plots (all the extra excitement which is offered), etc. (Singh and Sonnenburg 2012, 189 – 192.) For planning successful dramatization the business can use the model of dramatic arc as a product designing tool (García-Rosell et al. 2010).

The model of dramatic arc stems from the theatre and movie industry and dramatization is a tool which can be successfully used in all industries (Kalliomäki 2014, 173-74.). Dramatic arc is a model which represents the continuity of the story script through the product or service. It includes the pre-, onsite- and post experience, and shows the necessity of each of these stages.

Figure 4 shows the dramatic arc structure of the touristic experience and emphasizes the importance of the continuous and well designed unity. In this model, the pre-experience takes place in phase A. It represents the customer's expectations, tension and growing interest towards the product or service. This is the part where the product or service is introduced to the customer and the

interest and attention of the customer is gained. (Kalliomäki 2014, 173 – 175). At this point the necessary and possibly some extra information will be shared (Lapland University Consortium 2015). The on-site experience is placed between points B and F. It includes the stages where the tension increases, the peak experience is reached (García-Rosell, Kylänen, Pitkänen, Tekoniemi-Selkälä & Vanhala 2010) and the tension starts to moderate. After the on-site experience is over the post experience and recollection of the previous occurrences and feelings will take place at phase G.

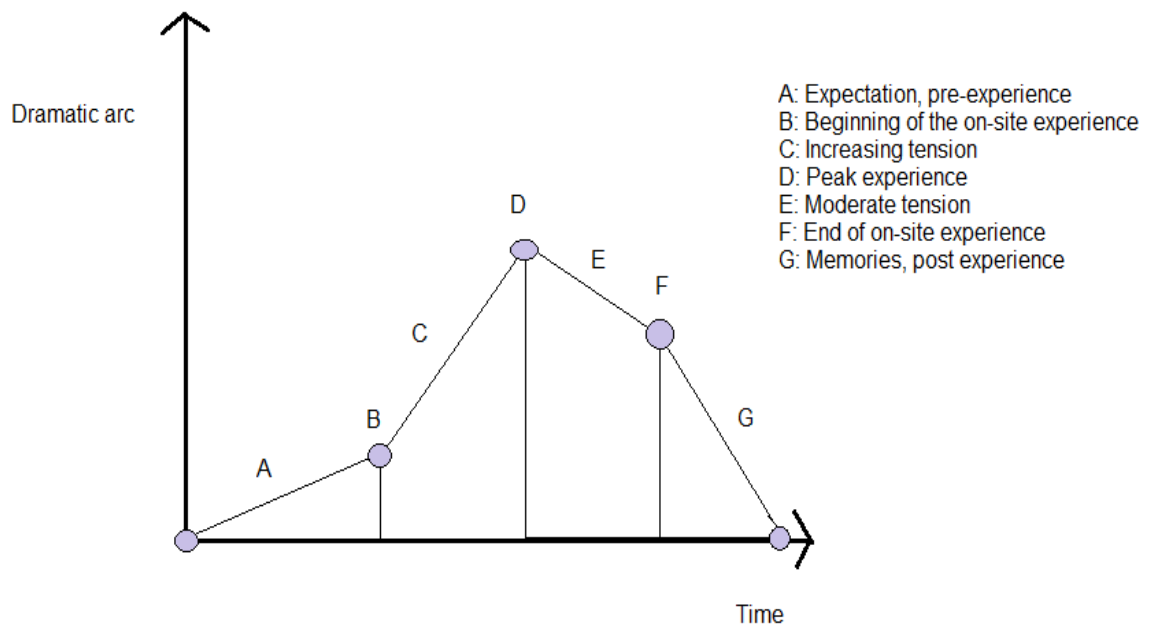


Figure 4. Dramatic Arc in Tourism Experiences (According to García-Rosell et al. 2010, Modified by Alapuranen 2015).

3.3.3 Five Senses

The senses, external sensory stimulants, and individuals' perspectives and preferences help people to form their personal images of their surroundings. The previous tourism industry studies have acknowledged the human body and its senses as a centric theme in experience creation. Therefore, the role and importance of using sensory stimulants for successful customer engagement in emotional and intellectual level has increased drastically. (Agapito, Mendes & Valle 2012, 62 – 69.)

It is realized that in order to create more meaningful and memorable touristic experiences all five senses (Figure 5) should be taken into account when

planning the services and products (Alakoski, Bäck & Isacsson 2009). According to Pine and Gilmore (2011, 88) the effective use of sensory stimulants can make the experience more memorable and engaging for the customers and tourists. This is due to the subconscious habit of associating for example specific music or fragrance to specific situations, locations or memories. Engaging the five senses also supports the idea of one's individual experience as the people are affected by the different senses in different ways. The sensations create a unique combination of personal emotions and recollections which are affected by external and internal elements and components. (Agapito, Mendes & Valle 2012, 62-65).

When designing the products, the business should consider the importance of each sense, and its role in the touristic experiences (Kalliomäki 2014, 136). The senses should not be strained by overloading the sensations. Instead, the use of sensory stimulants should be carefully designed to support and to increase the value and characteristics of set theme or story. Sound, sight, smell, touch and taste are all important elements for complementing the core experience but emphasizing the key senses and harmonizing the others in right proportions is more efficient than overwhelming the customer. (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 88 – 92.)

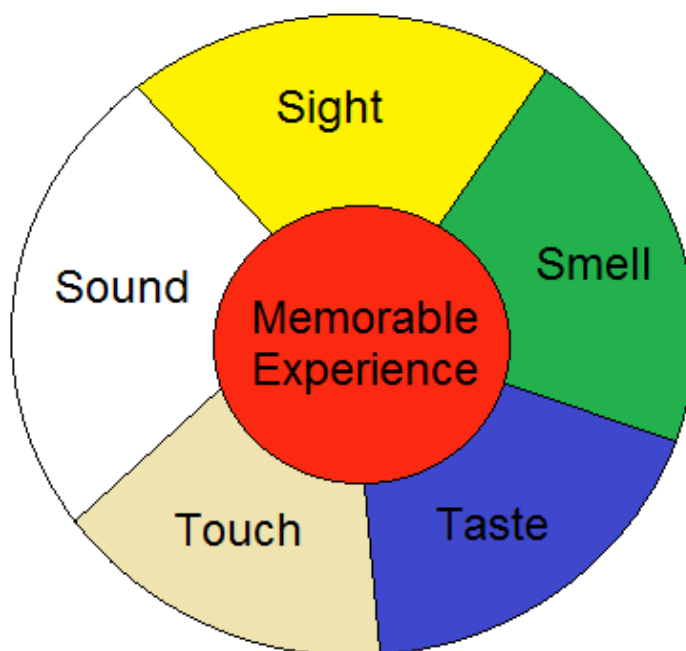


Figure 5. Five Senses when Creating Memorable Experiences.

3.4 Storytelling in Tourism

3.4.1 Defining Stories, Storytelling and Storification

Stories can be either long or short, fact or fiction, script or real life incidents (Rauhala & Vikström 2014, 53-62). They are continuous and they consist of the beginning, middle and end. Stories provide theme for conversations by describing events and phenomena, explaining morals and sharing awareness, and feeding the imagination and creativity of people. Stories contain elements like characters, attitudes and problems which create emotions, meaning and ease the recollection of the subject. (Singh & Sonnenburg 2012, 189.)

Storytelling is a social phenomenon (Singh & Sonnenburg 2012, 191) and therefore it can be seen as a form of communication (Kalliomäki 2015). It is about telling or writing the stories forward. Storytelling can be accomplished for example through talk, acting, music or by simply pointing the way to the next part of the story.

Storyfication is about harnessing the stories and storytelling to be used as a method for dramatizing the products and services. This way they turn into memorable experiences. (Kalliomäki 2015.) This way also the products and services will have a clear dramatic arc, which will consist of a beginning, a middle and an end.

3.4.2 Storytelling as Experience Creation Tool

Going on a holiday is no longer only an action of purchasing a product. Instead, it is about a lifestyle and fulfilling one's emotional needs. The choices made by the customers are statements of the values of individual travellers. Therefore stories are a crucial tool for engaging the attention of the consumers. Through the presented stories the customers identify the values of the company and compare those to their own value system. (Jensen 2015.)

Story is the element which can bind together all the components of the experience and makes it memorable and significant. However, the story must be realistically and believably designed and presented for the product to

become a solid entirety. (Tarssanen & Kylänen, 144.) By using the stories as a tool to create strong emotions the business can create a solid bond between the customer and the company and to increase the quality of the product (Jensen 2015). Therefore, the storytelling needs to be carefully and strategically designed and executed to reflect the desired themes and values. The stories and storytelling can be co-created interactively with the customers by providing tools, platform and stage for this action. This way both written and visual content of the product experience can reach a new level of versatility and engagement. However, in this case the business needs to closely foster and manage the process for keeping the content interesting and suitable for its purposes. (Singh & Sonnenburg 2012, 190-192.)

The effectiveness of using storytelling as a strategic tool in business can be confirmed through the model of three Es. The three Es stand for economical, ecological, and ethical. The economical aspect can be explained as the same or similar stories that last time and can be used repeatedly. The way the story is told can make the difference for how it is used and understood. (Osterwalder & Pigneur 2010, 171 – 179.) These characteristics can provide intangible value for the product and create the connection between the business and the customer which can increase the purchase of the product (Jensen 2015). Ecologically the storytelling is an ideal element for the business as it does not necessarily require specific physical surroundings. The stories themselves can be told, showed and experienced without straining the environment. Ethicality of the storytelling is recognizable when the stories are used for example for introducing the local community, their traditions and heritage for the customers.

3.4.3 Storification Process

In storification process the stories and storytelling are systematically harnessed for creating memorable experiences. Anne Kalliomäki (2014, 78 – 79) has introduced storification process model with three elements. The elements are Story Identity, Story Stage and Service Story Script.

Story Identity focuses to find the core story for the company. This story forms the base and leads the way for all further actions regarding stories and

storytelling. (Kalliomäki 2014, 78.) The core story is permanent, authentic and it should be able to encapsulate the values, themes and emotions of the company (Kalliomäki 2015).

The element of Story Stage presents how the storification process proceeds to choose the permanent but still adjustable service environment which supports storytelling and the company image (Kalliomäki 2014, 78 & 141). Service environment can consist of digital or physical sets or it can be a mixture of both (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 41-45).

Service Story Script stands for the creation of daily stories which can be told as a part of the services (Kalliomäki 2014, 79). These stories should be connected to the core story, for example, by presenting some of the core story's characteristics more specifically. These stories are malleable for the effect of changing elements like the personality of the customer (Singh & Sonnenburg 2012, 192). Figure 6 shows the structure of the Service Story Script.

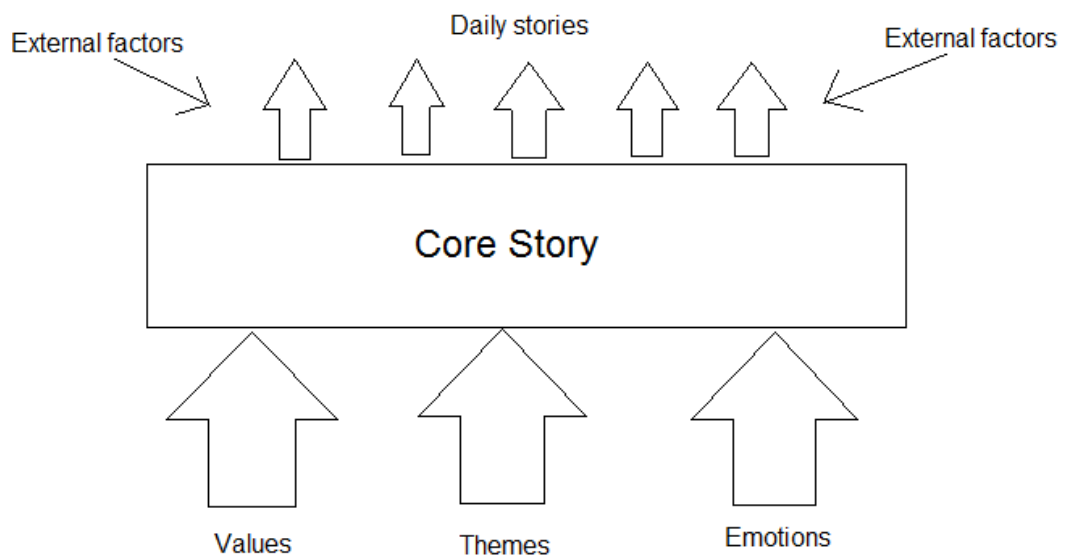


Figure 6. Service Story Script (According to Kalliomäki 2014, Modified by Alapuranen 2015).

4 BENCHMARKING COMPANIES

4.1 Promote Iceland and “Inspired by Iceland” campaign

Promote Iceland is an Icelandic marketing organization, established in July 2010. Promote Iceland’s task is to market Iceland, Icelandic tourism and other industries abroad. In tourism marketing Promote Iceland acts as a host and a guide for the co-operation among different stakeholders. It leads and manages the marketing campaigns, the process behind them and the channels used. Inspired by Iceland was the first tourism marketing campaign managed by Promote Iceland. It was originally set to deal with the impacts of economic crisis and volcano eruption. From 2011 onwards the main focus of tourism marketing has been to increase the demand in foreign markets for Iceland as a destination for tourists during the low-season and this way to ensure all-year-round tourism in Iceland. (Guðjónsson 2015.)

The main target group for Icelandic tourism is “enlightened tourists” (Guðjónsson 2015). This target group is very similar to the modern humanists who are set as a primary target group in tourism in Finland (Matkailun Edistämiskeskus 2015) and in Kaisus Lapland (Alatalo 2015a). Enlightened tourists are described as 20-65-year-olds, whose education and income are above average. They are adventurous, interested in different cultures and willing to travel to new and exotic destinations. (Guðjónsson 2015.)

The marketing of Icelandic tourism is focusing on stimulating the demands of the main target group and it is based on six key themes: adventurous, pure, creative, sustainable, mysterious and cultural. These are the elements which are included in all the messaging and images which are shared in global media. These themes have also built the foundation for the guiding light in tourism marketing, shown below, which was created in co-operation of variety of tourism stakeholders. The manifesto has a role of guiding background story for the marketing campaigns of Icelandic tourism. Promote Iceland manages the storytelling and the platform, but the individual people tell the stories. (Guðjónsson 2015.) This way the traditional smooth and polished marketing has turned to creating authentic, real and interactive touristic pre-experience.

“Iceland, it is not for everyone. It is not for those who go where everyone else goes. It is not for conservative and expected traveller. It is for those who travel the world to experience something different, to come back with stories to tell, and secrets to share. Stories of Iceland do not stop when winter comes. Every season and every region in Iceland offers secrets of adventurous and enlightened traveller. So welcome all those who travel with the spirit of adventure, exploring, and creativity. It may not be the first place you think travelling this season but it will be the first place you tell your friends about.

Come and be inspired by Iceland.” (Guðjónsson 2015.)

Based on the key themes and the background story, in 2010 Promote Iceland launched a campaign called Inspired by Iceland in co-operation with tourism actors from private and public sectors. Each year the focus and theme of the campaign changes but the values and key elements remain the same.

The first theme, in 2010, was the Iceland Inspires, where the people were sharing their stories and experiences of Iceland. This campaign included also installing webcams around Iceland, Inspired by Iceland –video and printing daily billboards to foreign cities. In 2011, theme was Iceland Invitations. During the year, 300 Icelanders invited tourists to meet them and join them for small activities like going for a walk or a horse ride. As part of Iceland Invitations everyone who visited Iceland during the off-season gained the title of Honorary Islander. In 2012, the theme of the campaign was Iceland by Another Name where Promote Iceland launched a name competition. Anyone could suggest a new, personal and emotional name for Iceland. Once the winner was decided Promote Iceland filmed a video about the feeling of the new name.

In 2013, the theme was Share a Secret. The Icelanders were asked to share their information about the hidden jewels of Iceland which were then put on a digital map where the tourists could find the location and gain more information about these secret places. The #Icelandsecret was also launched in the same year for sharing the experiences for the fellow travellers. Based on the shared secrets, in 2014 a Secret Tour was organized for one lucky adventurer. Year 2015 campaign still continues with the secrets with the name Ask Guðmundur – The Human Search Engine, where people all over the world curious about

Iceland can ask an actual Icelander, Guðmundur, anything about Iceland. Promote Iceland has also launched the Guðmundur Hangouts, where randomly selected visitors get a chance to spend time with Guðmundur in once-in-a-lifetime event all over the country. (Guðjónsson 2015.)

The aforesaid campaign, its themes and objectives are connected with each other by the common background story, presented above. They are executed by emphasising the local characteristics and authentic stories. Even though, Promote Iceland is primarily a marketing organization, it has expanded its role from creating pre-experiences also to the field of on-site and post experiences. The campaigns and their content have provided useful tools, on-site information and possibilities for the travellers in Iceland. The supporting elements like maps, hang outs, etc. have provided possibilities for the travellers to connect to the local community and their lifestyle. Even the post experience has its place in the social media platform which is provided by the organization. Therefore, the Icelandic tourism marketing can be seen to follow a clear dramatic arc in their actions. Also the senses are taken into account in forms of visual and audio advertising, and interaction between the tourists and the locals.

4.2 Saga Travel

Saga Travel is an Icelandic tour operator. It is located in Akureyri, by Lake Mývatn in north-Iceland. They provide variety of tours which present Iceland, nature and culture for their customers. The tours are designed and operated for small groups of Iceland enthusiasts. The target group for Saga Travel's business is similar to the general target group of Icelandic tourism: adult travellers who are interested of culture and new experiences. (Sigurðsson 2015.)

Saga Travel uses stories and storytelling for standing out from the substantial selection of Icelandic tour operators. Instead of offering locations and attractions for their customers, they offer stories and legends, meaningful experiences and authentic connection to Iceland. The stories are based on the core values of the business, which are Icelandic nature, culture and heritage. The storytelling begins and ends on the company website and social media

channels where the company delivers pictures, videos, conversation topics, and greetings from Iceland. On these channels also the customers are encouraged to share their experiences, stories and thoughts about their trips. This way a long-lasting connection between the travellers and the business is built. However, the majority of unique storytelling happens still in the on-site experience phase. (Sigurðsson 2015.)

In Saga Travel's business the stories are used for enriching the touristic experience of their customers. Through the stories the local guides feed the information and knowledge about Icelandic history, heritage and traditions for the travellers with entertaining approach. The on-site storytelling of Saga Travel is somewhat informal. The business has set certain guidelines for the stories used while creating on-site experiences. However, the guides are encouraged for spontaneity and personal touch in the customer service. Therefore, the content of the product and the stories vary depending on the interests of the customer group, general atmosphere of the tour and the personality of the guide. (Sigurðsson 2015.)

In the future, Saga Travel is still planning to focus their business stories on culture and nature, and spontaneous storytelling. However, they would like to expand their social connections and availability to share the stories through new technological innovations which could be used in all different experience creation phases. (Sigurðsson 2015.)

4.3 Concluding Benchmarked Experience Creation

The use of storytelling in experience creation process of both benchmarked companies is strong, visible and substantial element in their business. Both companies have built their products and actions upon and around the unique stories which are based on the local characteristics, history and culture and nature. The stories are created in co-operation with the different actors of the product environment and they take place in each part of the experience creation process.

The benchmarked companies have a clear set of dramatic arc in use. The products are developed to begin in the virtual set, more specifically in social media channels. These channels are designed to play a role of platform for

social communication and interaction between variety of participating parties. The companies are providing the central part of the content. This content includes pictures and videos, short texts and discussion openers. These elements feed the pre-experience by engaging the customers with the audiovisual content and interactive product development elements. On these platforms the discussion is free, people are able to share their experiences and stories and strengthen each others expectations and pre-experience.

The storytelling continues as the experience creation process moves on along the model of dramatic arc to the on-site experience phase. Even though Promote Iceland is primarily a marketing organization, they also provide occasional on-site experiences in co-operation with local tourism companies for promoting the Icelandic tourism business and to provide more content for the marketing process. In this part of the experience creation the sensory stimulants and elements of meaningful experiences play even more vital role as the diversity of these characteristics expand and the setting will be concretized for the product of both benchmarked companies. The customers get to feel the sensations of seeing the locations and environment, hearing the authentic surroundings, touching the concrete objects, smelling the new aromas and fragrances and tasting the unfamiliar flavours. These multi-sensory perceptions are creating the contrast between each customer's everyday-life and the holiday experience.

Both of the benchmarked companies are emphasizing the authenticity by providing unique and once-in-a-lifetime on-site experiences outside the mass tourism. In these surroundings the small customer groups are met as individuals and they have a chance for personal interaction with other parties of the experience creation process. All this is bound together with carefully designed but still adjustable storytelling, which aims to entertain and teach the customers about history and culture of the area. After the physical on-site experience surroundings, the post experience takes place again in the virtual service environment. The storytelling process continues in similar ways as the pre-experiences and the social media channels take the role of social interaction platforms for supporting the recollection phase of the customer experiences.

5 CASE KAISUS LAPPLAND

5.1 Developing Storytelling Based Experiences

Kaisus Lappland has a clear vision and aim in their products. The values, themes and wanted emotions are set with appreciation of local lifestyle and culture. Based on the research and the gained knowledge during the thesis process, the author created development suggestions for Kaisus Lappland's experience creation process. These practical improvement ideas focus on stories and the use of storytelling as a pivotal force in the company's tourist experience creation.

For giving concrete examples for some of the development suggestions, the author has chosen to focus on Kaisus Lappland's product called Hiljaisuus. The word hiljaisuus is Finnish and the English translation is silence. The holiday package programme is based on the year 2015 programme as the updated version was not available by the time of publishing this thesis. Hiljaisuus product is organised only once a year and it is timed around Hiljaisuus-festival in the beginning of June and the festival is playing a major role in the programme of this holiday package. (Kaisus Lappland 2015.) The festival aims to bring together the artists and the audience, and to provide inspiration and feeling of community for all participants (Hiljaisuus –festivaali 2015). The festival offers the customer a sense of contrast between the event and the location. The lively programme consists world class performing arts, music and variety of workshops. However, it is held in quiet rural village of Kaukonen.

Day 1 includes the arrival to Rovaniemi, dinner, getting to know each other and accommodation in a typical Lappish holiday house. Already on the first day the customers experience the midnight sun of Finnish summer. Day 2 involves Lappish breakfast, following visit to museums. There the customers hear and see a piece of Lappish history, nature and culture. After the lunch the transfer to the village of Kaukonen begins. In Kaukonen, the customers will participate Hiljaisuus festival and have the first sense of this small, intimate and unique event. The accommodation is organized in even more remote and rural village of Kierinki. During days 3 and 4 programme includes local food and more

festival activities. On day 5 the customers have a chance to try typical Lappish activities like rowing a boat and fishing. The programme includes also introduction to traditional Finnish pallet dance in form of dance lesson and the pallet dance event. Day 6 the customers are experiencing the Lappish nature by picking berries and herbs from the forest for the cooking activities later on. Afterwards the local artist will introduce her pictures and paintings, and the customers have a chance to take part to workshop of Lappish handcrafts. On day 7 the interaction with locals continue as the group will meet a local craftman and see his work. In the evening the smoke sauna will be heated and the delicate process of the heating will be explained and introduced for the customers. Day 8 includes the transition from Kierinki to Rovaniemi, free time, dinner in Lappish restaurant, and accommodation and stories about Hotel Pohjanhovi which is the oldest hotel in the city of Rovaniemi. On day 9 the programme ends after the breakfast. (Kaisus Lappland 2015.)

Figure 7 presents the experience creation of Hiljaisuus product through the Experience Pyramid model. It shows how the different elements are taken into account in motivational, physical and intellectual levels. Emotional and mental levels has been left blank as the experiences on those levels can not be designed due to the individuality and uniqueness of each customer (Tarssanen & Kylänen 2009, 11 – 16).

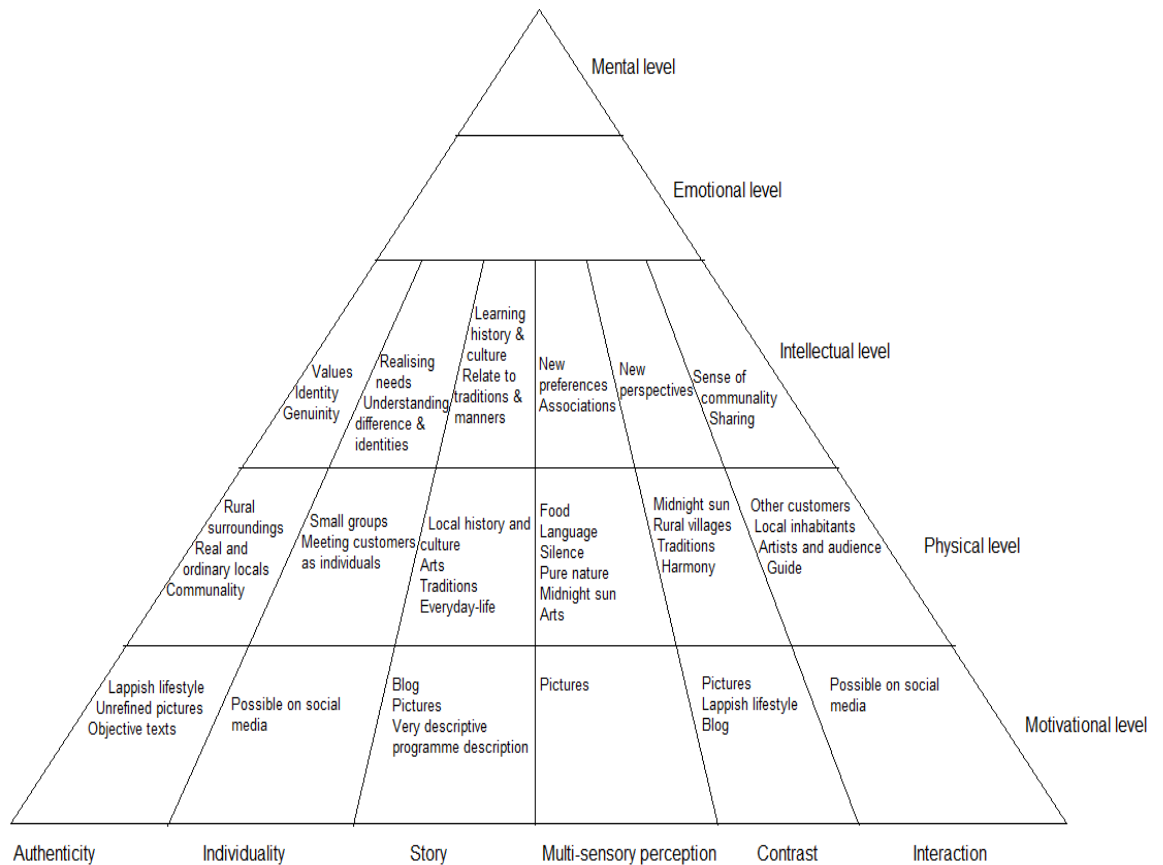


Figure 7. Experience Pyramid for Hiljaisuus Product.

In the thesis the dramatic arc and more specifically the continuity of experience progress has been in a central role. However, due to the realization provided by Figure 7 and the thesis research, the author of this thesis detected that the role of pre- and post experiences in overall experience creation process of Kaisus Lapland is not as visible and vital as it should be for providing holistic and deep tourist experiences for its customers. Even though, there is a possibility for individuality and interaction via social media, this kind of behaviour is not distinctly encouraged and highlighted. Therefore, the given development suggestions focus on highlighting and strengthening the pre- and post phase customer experiences. In the proposed development ideas the values, themes and central meanings of Kaisus Lapland's business are noticed and emphasized.

5.2 Core Story and Dramatic Arc

As Kaisus Lappland's products are at the moment mainly based on the individual values and themes of the company, the author of this thesis would suggest the company to create a story identity for the business. For this Kaisus Lappland could use the idea presented by Anne Kalliomäki (Figure 8).

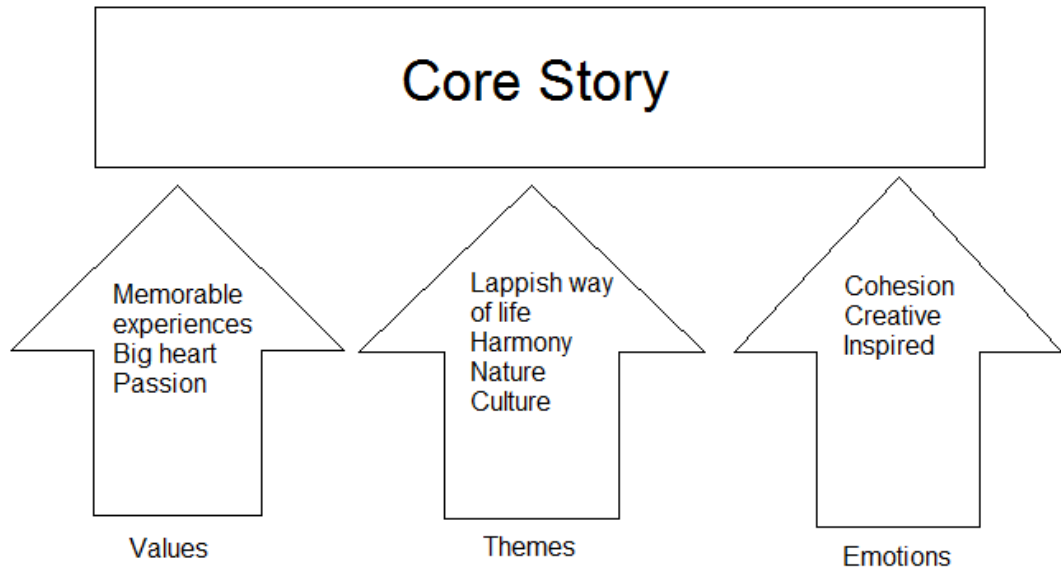


Figure 8. Story Identity. (According to Kalliomäki 2014, Modified by Alapuranen 2015).

Figure 8 presents the values, themes and desired emotions named by Kaisus Lappland (Alatalo 2015a). These characteristics should be taken into account when creating a core story for the business. This action would ease to concretize the aforesaid elements for the business itself, for their customers and for the variety of co-operative parties. The core story would make understanding, remembering and adapting the values and themes easier, and present the story of the business for all participants by creating clear framework for the storytelling actions (Kalliomäki 2014, 78 – 80, 103).

The manifesto of Promote Iceland is a good example of successfully created background story (Guðjónsson 2015). It provides a clear base, focus and guidelines to follow (Guðjónsson 2015) but it also leaves space for different themes, and spontaneous and flexible storytelling for different stakeholders.

The core story would provide the structure for accurate dramatic arc which would ensure the seamless continuity for the progress of Kaisus Lappland's overall business and products. The story identity would also provide a base for successful thematisation of each product. Kaisus Lappland is already using the individual themes for its products but via core story the themes could gain stronger background and provide deeper insight for the business and its individual product.

5.3 Presenting Locals

One of the main themes of Kaisus Lappland's business is the Lappish lifestyle and traditions. However, in present situation this theme is presented in pre- and post experience only by Kaisa Alatalo. Other locals are participating only during the on-site experience phase. (Alatalo 2015a.) Therefore, the second product development idea focuses on expanding the role of localness in the experience creation process and considers the socio-cultural aspect of it. Based on the core story, suggested to be created, Kaisus Lappland could present the locals as a supporting storytelling element for its experience creation.

Firstly, the company could create a photo gallery to introduce local inhabitants, artists and co-operative parties which the customers are going to meet during their holiday in Lapland. In Hiljaisuus product, these people could be the owner of the accommodation facilities in Kierinki, the local craftman, some of the festival artists, etc. In addition to the pictures, the people could be introduced with short stories. These stories would be created according to the set core story but they would be personalized and unique.

Secondly, the aforementioned or other locals could be asked to make short video and literal blogs. The content of the blog would follow the guidelines but would tell one's personal views about Lapland and Lappish way of life.

Thirdly, Kaisus Lappland could provide similar communication between the travellers and the locals as in the Ask Guðmundur – The Human Search Engine –campaign, organized by Promote Iceland (Guðjónsson 2015). For the customers who are taking part of the Hiljaisuus holiday, this would be a chance to gain specific knowledge about the area and to create connection to villages

and communities of Kaukonen and Kierinki. Kaisus Lapland could have one or more local inhabitants as contact persons to communicate with the potential travellers. The customers could ask general questions about Lapland and Lappish lifestyle and get greetings from a local contact person who would be able to provide variety of suitable answers and stories. Like the storytelling in case of Saga Travel, this service and the stories would be spontaneous and distinctive and created ad-hoc (Sigurðsson 2015).

Fourthly, the locals could simply also be asked to participate to the general conversations and discussions on the social media platforms. This action would not demand commitment from the locals but it would spice up the customer's pre- and post experience interaction.

These basic actions would enable the company to adapt to the increasing importance of businesses' social responsibility (Porter & Kramer 2006, 78 – 81), provide meaningful content for cultural experiences seeking modern humanists (Visit Finland 2014) and help the customers to create a bond with the business, locals and Lapland in general. The actions would also support the idea of dramatic arc as the interaction would strengthen the pre-experience and help to carry on the recollection of the post experience phase.

5.4 Pilot Show

For introducing and showing the core story, values and themes of the business, Kaisus Lapland could film a short video of its product. The video would purely focus on presenting the experiences provided. It would provide perspectives and expectations for the potential customers and support the recollection phase of previous guests as they could reflect their own experiences to the ones shown in the film.

The video could be conducted by filming individual customer's journey or by following the whole group during the Hiljaisuus product. This would help to build the emotional connection between the business and the customers, as the feelings and reactions showed on the video would be real and authentic and presented by fellow travellers.

Even though, the video would cover the experience entity, it should be kept short and concise for ensuring the effectiveness and informativeness of the content. By providing this kind of videos for each individual product, Kaisus Lapland would be able to show the variety of the different themes and product contents.

The video could be presented on the website and social media channels for supporting the holistic tourist experience of the customers. It would enable to create feelings and sensations for the holiday and support the use of sensory stimulants by providing audiovisual content for the pre- and post experiences of Kaisus Lapland's customers.

5.5 Concluding Case Kaisus Lapland

By providing the development suggestions mentioned above, the author of this thesis wants to draw attention to the importance of the continuity of the comprehensive experience creation process, progress of dramatic arc in the business and importance of meaningful experience elements. These components intertwine by powerful tool of stories and storytelling and create a natural entity. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the development suggestions by presenting them through Blueprint- and Customer Service Journey Moments-models, based on the Hiljaisuus product of Kaisus Lapland. However, the following suggestions are adaptable and suitable also for the general business improvement of the company.

Table 1. Blueprint for Pre- and Post Experiences of Hiljaisuus Product.

Concrete Elements	Website and Social Media
Customer Process	Familiarizing with the business and the product content, values and story Information retrieval Creating expectations Creating connection with the business Recollecting the experiences Communication and interaction with business, other customers and the locals
Visible services	General content of the channels: pictures, videos, texts, programme descriptions, photo gallery, etc. Encouraging the communication
Intangible Touch Points	Creating feeling of Lappish hospitality Introducing the core story and values Feeling of communality
Invisible Services	Gathering and creating the content Building the network and co-operation Managing the channels and content

Table 1 is a Blueprint model for Hiljaisuus product of Kaisus Lapland. It presents visible and invisible processes and intangible touch points of the business reflected to the customer process. This table shows how the website and social media channels could be turned to more supportive customer service stage for pre- and post experience phases by simple but still effective actions.

Table 2. Customer Service Journey Moments -Model for Pre- and Post Experiences of Hiljaisuus Product.

Customer Service Journey Moments	Website and Social Media
Authenticity	More content, for example audiovisual material Participation of locals, socio-culturality
Individuality	Personal communication with the contact person Familiarizing with each other Encouraging to share own experiences, stories and other content
Story	Clear and recognizable core story Interactive communication Stories of previous customers, locals Videos, pictures, etc.
Multi-Sensory Perceptions	More content Videos, pictures, music, etc.
Contrast	More content, for example audiovisual material
Interaction	Providing discussion topics Encouraging to share own experiences, stories and content Local participation

Table 2 is presenting the Customer Journey Service Moments model based on the aforesaid product. This model can be used as a tool for recognizing the concrete service moments in customer's experience journey. This table shows the concrete suggestions for how the improvement ideas on Table 1 could be executed. Table 2 shows how the elements of meaningful experiences should be taken into account in the online pre- and post experience phases of Hiljaisuus holiday product. All the elements are considered, but as shown, the roles of individuality, interaction and story elements are emphasized

Both tables recommend the business to increase the communication between the different actors, creating more pre- and post experience content and adding participation of locals. The storytelling based experience creation development suggestions given by the thesis author to Kaisus Lappland are directional and they should be refined and sophisticated by the company for its personal use and purposes.

6 CONCLUSION

The field of tourism industry has been shaped by variety of shifts and changes of customer needs and demands based on the impact of external and internal forces. Therefore, the tourism businesses need to develop and redevelop their products to fulfil the expectations of modern tourism customers. The businesses have an urge to come up with products which highlight their field of expertise and uniquely offer meaningful experiences for individual travellers.

The main focus of this thesis project was to consider the characteristics of successful tourism experience creation and the role of storytelling as a tool which naturally intertwines the different experience elements and product components for unforgettable, meaningful and individual entity. The theoretical background was gained through literature regarding product development, experience creation, storification and the different factors impacting the field of tourism industry. The indepth interviews and benchmarking provided the necessary supportive knowledge for familiarizing with this multifaceted topic.

The benchmarked companies were chosen by the type and nature of their business but also by the fact that they have consciously designed storytelling as part of their products and services. Finding benchmarking businesses which met all these standards was a demanding part of the thesis process due to the differences of understanding and defining stories and storytelling. Only two companies were chosen based on the criteria and their interest of taking part of the research.

Due to only recently increased interest towards storytelling as a product development tool to gain larger scale valid and indisputable research results is not possible. This thesis process has shown the multilaterality in understanding definitions of stories, storytelling, storification and their role in touristic experience creation. For gaining accurate research results in the future, the storytelling has to reinforce its role as a product development tool so that it will become recognized more widely in business life. This demands time and successful results and experiences from the businesses. Therefore, the author suggests further investigation and research regarding the topic.

Even though the thesis process faced some challenges, the aimed knowledge and understanding towards the topic was achieved. The findings show the importance of holistic approach for tourism business experience creation and the role of stories and storytelling as an efficient tool. The goal for the thesis process was to provide useful theoretical information and practical development ideas for the commissioner. This target was achieved and the author was able to offer recommendations for the commissioner's future experience creation process focusing on storytelling based experience creation process.

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APPENDICES

- Appendix 1. Interview Questions for Kaisus Lappland
- Appendix 2. Interview Questions for Storytelling Expert
- Appendix 3. Interview Questions for Promote Iceland
- Appendix 4. Interview Questions for Saga Travel

Appendix 1. Interview Questions for Kaisus Lapland

1. Please introduce yourself and your company (location, type, etc.).
2. What services and products do you provide? (Please give detailed examples.) What are their purposes?
3. What kind of experiences do you wish to provide to your customers?
4. What are the core values and themes of your business?
5. What is your target group?

6. How do you define storytelling?
7. How do you feel about using storytelling in tourism business?
8. How are you already using storytelling in your business?
9. How do you execute the experience creation now? Why are you willing to develop it?

10. What are you expecting to gain from storytelling based experience creation?
11. What are you expecting to gain from this thesis?

Appendix 2. Interview Questions for Storytelling Expert

1. Please introduce yourself and your company. What is your relation to storytelling/background related to storytelling?
2. Could you please describe how do you understand the concept of storytelling?
3. What forms and channels it has?
4. What is the process behind storytelling?
5. How is successful storytelling achieved?

6. Why should storytelling be used in tourism business? What kind of (additional) value it gives to the business?/What kind of difference does it make?
7. How, and with which techniques, can storytelling be used while creating experiences in tourism?

8. Are there certain characteristics which define or can limit the use/usefulness of storytelling in tourism product development? Please tell an example.
9. How have the companies experienced the use of storytelling in their businesses?
10. How could storytelling be used in the future? / What are the possibilities of storytelling in future? Please tell an example.

Appendix 3. Interview Questions for Promote Iceland

1. Please introduce yourself and your business (location, type, etc.).
2. What services do you provide? And what are their purposes?
3. What are the core values and themes behind your business?
4. What is your target group?

5. How would you define storytelling?
6. Do you use storytelling in your business? How? What forms and channels?
7. Do you use different ways of storytelling in different stages (pre, on-site, post) of experience creation? How do they differ? Why?
8. Which channels do you feel are the most useful for creating pre-experience for your target group? Why?
9. What is the role of your customers in the pre-experience creation process?
10. Has the storytelling based actions for pre-experience creation changed along the time? How? Why?
11. How storytelling could be used in the future? / What are the possibilities of storytelling in future? Please tell an example.

12. Who is telling the stories? How are these people educated?
13. Are the stories created "ad hoc" or is everything more or less planned? Do you control storytelling?
14. How do you create the stories? What is the creation process like?
15. Have you collected feedback, related to the use of storytelling, from your customers? How have the customers experienced the use of storytelling in your products/services?
16. Do you feel that the use of storytelling has affected your business? How?

Appendix 4. Interview Questions for Saga Travel

1. Please introduce yourself and your business (location, type, etc.).
2. What services and products do you provide? And what are their purposes?
3. What are the core values and themes behind your business?
4. What is your target group?

5. How would you define storytelling?
6. Do you use storytelling in your business? How? What forms and channels?
7. Do you use different ways of storytelling in different stages (pre, on-site, post) of experience creation? How do they differ? Why?
8. Which channels do you feel are the most useful for creating pre-experience for your target group? Why?
9. What is the role of your customers in the experience creation process?
10. Has the storytelling based actions for experience creation changed along the time? How? Why?
11. How storytelling could be used in the future? / What are the possibilities of storytelling in future? Please tell an example.

12. Who is telling the stories? How are these people educated?
13. Are the stories created "ad hoc" or is everything more or less planned? Do you control storytelling?
14. How do you create the stories? What is the creation process like?
15. Have you collected feedback, related to the use of storytelling, from your customers? How have the customers experienced the use of storytelling in your products/services?
16. Do you feel that the use of storytelling has affected your business? How?