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**Lake Saimaa as A Potential Geopark – Cruising  
Companies' Impressions on Geopark Water**

Thesis 2016

## **Abstract**

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Lake Saimaa as A Potential Geopark – Cruising Companies' Impressions on Geopark Water, 55 pages, 1 appendix

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The purpose of the thesis was to scan opinions from Lake Saimaa cruising companies how they feel about Saimaa Geopark project. The partner of the thesis was Imatra Region Development Company Ltd. (Kehy). Kehy is managing Saimaa Geopark project and the thesis is a part of the application work.

Thesis theory includes statements of Imatra Region Development Company Ltd and its work as a tourism developer. Other theory parts were about European Geopark Network, tourism strategies, tourism target groups and especially special interest tourism. Research method was qualitative research and it was executed by a semi-structured interview. Questions were set in five different themes. The questions were only guidelines to control the interview and its aims.

Based on the findings, cruising companies were interested in to take part in the education about geosites and act as geopark guides. Respondents gave also a lot of data about harbours in Lake Saimaa. Also development suggestion for regional tourism marketing was written down. Further study is required to guiding announcements to cruising companies.

Interesting would be a thesis about Lake Saimaa's stories, its heritage, wars and people living by the lake. Small tourism companies could also benefit from geopark products which are realistic to implement.

Keywords: Geopark, geotourism, sustainable tourism, ecotourism, cruising business, Lake Saimaa

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Justification for thesis research

Finland's biggest lake and Europe's fourth biggest lake, Lake Saimaa, is a unique lake formation with a labyrinthine water view. Lake Saimaa's surface area is 4,460 km<sup>2</sup> and it is a multiform lake, where Salpausselkä ridges, rocks, islets, sandy beaches and even wilderness views can be seen. The lake contains 13,710 islands and Saimaa's total shoreline is 14,850 km. Its average depth is 17 meters. Exceptional and endangered Saimaa ringed seal appears every now and then to lake's visitors. The current number of Saimaa ringed seals is approximately 300. (Kuusisto 1999,7; Saimaa Geopark project 1 2015.)

The major step to build Lake Saimaa as a tourism attraction was taken only a few years ago. Joint tourism marketing organiser goSaimaa created a marketing concept about Lake Saimaa with the idea "Saimaa - North Europe's Lake Garda". (Kehy 1.)

The beauty of the lake has been noticed also internationally. In year 2014 the respectable American newspaper Wall Street Journal nominated Lake Saimaa to be the fourth of the greatest lakes in the world. (WSJ 2015). Also international guiding book brand Lonely Planet made their own chapter about Finnish lakeside and mentioned also Lake Saimaa and River Vuoksi. (Lonely Planet Publications 2015, 152.)

Lake Saimaa has also gotten a new upswing from the Finnish movie production company Matila Röhr Production. The company is publishing a new documentary "Järven tarina - Tale of a Lake" in January 2016. Most of the material has been shot in Saimaa and River Vuoksi. (Matila & Röhr production).

All international and domestic interest has shown that Lake Saimaa has potential to become a new Lapland, one of Finland's top tourism destinations.

Around Lake Saimaa area there are nine municipalities that are aspiring to become a geopark. European Geopark Network (EGN) will get Saimaa

Geopark – project application in the end of 2016. The town of Imatra is administering the project by Imatra Region Development Company Ltd (Kehy). Kehy is also this thesis' partner. This thesis will help Kehy in building the application for European Geopark Network (EGN). EGN expects geopark candidates to connect local companies and ask their opinions about geopark idea. Thesis represents a concrete connection to entrepreneurs and can be posted straight into application.

The geopark idea is familiar to the author. The author did her professional placement at Copper Coast Geopark in Ireland in summer 2015. On her leisure time the author also sails on Lake Saimaa and likes to walk in nature. Sustainable tourism and ecotourism interest her a lot.

## **1.2 Aims and objectives of the thesis**

Main themes in Saimaa Geopark application are Geopark water and Geopark land. The thesis topic concentrates mainly on Geopark water. Geopark water's main idea is to build up a harbour network for areas with existing harbours. Lammassaari-Ukonniemi guest harbour in Imatra will be one of the ports of departure to geopark destinations, which are situated at Lake Saimaa. From Lammassaari-Ukonniemi Lake Saimaa's main water routes will be easy to reach from Imatra. Geopark water is shown in different harbour, guiding and cruising services.

When Lake Saimaa gets the geopark status it connects tourism services and attractions closer together. Companies' interests in being a part of the geopark idea have not yet been scanned. The aim of the thesis is to collect data from cruising companies, how they feel about the geopark idea, what their interests are to be a part of the geopark services, will they be interested in tourist guiding and what kind of education they will need to be able to do geological cruises. (Kähtävä-Marttinen 2015.)

Kehy is building a new, smaller project called Georoute for 2016. The project's aim is to produce georoutes for Lake Saimaa cruising companies and recreational boaters. The georoute will give information about geological

attractions at Lake Saimaa. The project will also educate cruising companies on how to use geology as a new tourism attraction on South Lake Saimaa. The thesis will also help the new project to collect data on what kind of education cruising companies need and give ideas education needed. The georoute will be launched in spring or summer 2016. (Kähtävä-Marttinen 2015.)

### **1.3 Data collection and analysis**

The thesis research method is a qualitative semi-structured interview. The respondent group is cruise companies/entrepreneurs, who are operating in the southern Lake Saimaa and in River Vuoksi. The research question is "How cruising companies see Lake Saimaa's geopark idea?"

## **2 Imatra Region Development Company Ltd Kehy**

Finland is divided to 43 different regional development companies. The main purposes for the regional development companies are business consultation services, financing and guidance for establishing enterprises. Also they take care of regional development e.g. marketing and tourism. (Sekes; Kunnat.) This chapter concentrates on introducing the thesis partner Imatra Region Development Company Ltd Kehy.

### **2.1 Organization and economy**

In the area of Imatra, Ruokolahti and Rautjärvi the regional business developer is Imatra Region Development Company Ltd. (Kehy). It was established in 1982 and the company's shareholders are overall 33 companies and communities. Kehy is responsible for the area's local business and tourism organization, implementation and financing of industrial policy projects, as well as organizing other services in accordance with the articles of association of the company domain. In addition it offers also risk financial services. The services are free and will be planned individually for the needs of the business. (Kehy 2)

Imatra Region Development Ltd's board has 11 members. The members are representatives from member municipalities and big industrial companies

(Metsä Board Ltd. and Stora Enso Corporation), representatives from South Karelia education universities (Lappeenranta University of Technology and Saimaa University of Applied Sciences) and three representatives from Imatra, Rautjärvi and Ruokolahti local entrepreneur associations. The company has one subsidiary company, Imatran Seudun Aluekehitys. (Kehy 2.)

In an annual report from year 2014 Imatra Region Development Company's group's turnover was 1,963,000 euros and profit 74,000 euros. The parent company's turnover was 1,965,000 euros and profit 84,000 euros. The group's balance sheet was 5,536,000 and parent company's balance sheet was 1,886,000 euros. (Kehy 2.)

## **2.2 Tourism in Kehy**

Tourism services' basic mission in Kehy is to give information in all tourism aspects, coordinate tourism development in Imatra region and be an essential partner with the joint marketing organiser goSaimaa. (Kehy 2).

Almost ten years Imatra region's tourism had fast growing years. The main tourist group was Russian and their overnight stays were increasing from 2004 to 2013 every year. In 2004 the Russians' overnight stays were 28,910 people and in 2013 the number was 156,592 people (growth 442 percent). One exception was year 2009, when the overnight stays decreased by 6.8 percent from the previous year. Russia's economic situation influenced also the Russians' overnight stays in Imatra region since the beginning of year 2014. In Imatra region the decrease was overall 27.6 percent from previous year's overnight stays. Year 2015 has not brought any light to the situation. In the seven first months Russians' overnight stays in South Karelia have decreased 49 percent from the previous year. Total number of tourists has decreased to year 2008 level. In the year 2016 the number of tourists is expected to stay on the same level as in the previous year. (Kehy 3; Kotiharju 2015.)



### **2.3 New thinking in region's tourism administration**

Kehy's tourism services in Imatra region had a new start in 2014. Earlier tourism information was done mainly by face to face customer service and different printed brochures, flyers and one's own website. In December 2014 Imatra tourism customer service office was closed down. Now Imatra region's tourism information model is based on multipolar tourism and pop-up info points, touch screen panel nets, using social media as a customer service channel and traditional info boards. Info points' locations have been selected by results on where the biggest customer flows in different tourism attractions and visiting places are in Imatra region. (Kehy 4.)

Imatra Base Camp – brand was launched in 2014. The Imatra Base Camp's idea is to take care of the tourist through the whole service chain. From Imatra Base Camp's internet sites tourists find information about all services from accommodation, events, food & shopping, wellness, sports, nature and chilling to information for families. The Imatra Base Camp is hopefully seen as a signpost, port and gate to Imatra. (Kehy 5; Imatra Base Camp.)

Kehy launched also in 2014 a new service model, Imatra Events, for companies and event producers. Imatra Event's aim is to connect events, event producers, event actors and actions under the same umbrella. Its mission is to improve the quality of events and to diversify event productions to cover all year. The idea is that Imatra Events will increase region's tourism income, new events will arise and new partners will be found. (Kehy 6.)

### **2.4 Aspiring to become a geopark**

Imatra Region Development Company is managing different tourism projects in the area. In years 2013-2016 the main project is to get the Lake Saimaa area the membership of European Geoparks' Network (EGN). Saimaa geopark project develops geotourism in the southern part of Lake Saimaa and in River Vuoksi area. Together southern Saimaa and River Vuoksi area form a unique and remarkable entirety, which can be benefitted from as a tourism attraction. (Kehy 7.)

As a potential geopark the Lake Saimaa project elaborates a geological report. The results will give material for new tourism products. Geosites are selected by the project. The financing and operating model is decided by municipalities involved in the project. Figure 1 represents participating municipalities and cities, which are Imatra, Lappeenranta, Mikkeli, Juva, Puumala, Ruokolahti, Sulkava and Taipalsaari. Saimaa as a potential geopark will apply to be a member of EGN in 2016. (Kehy 7.)

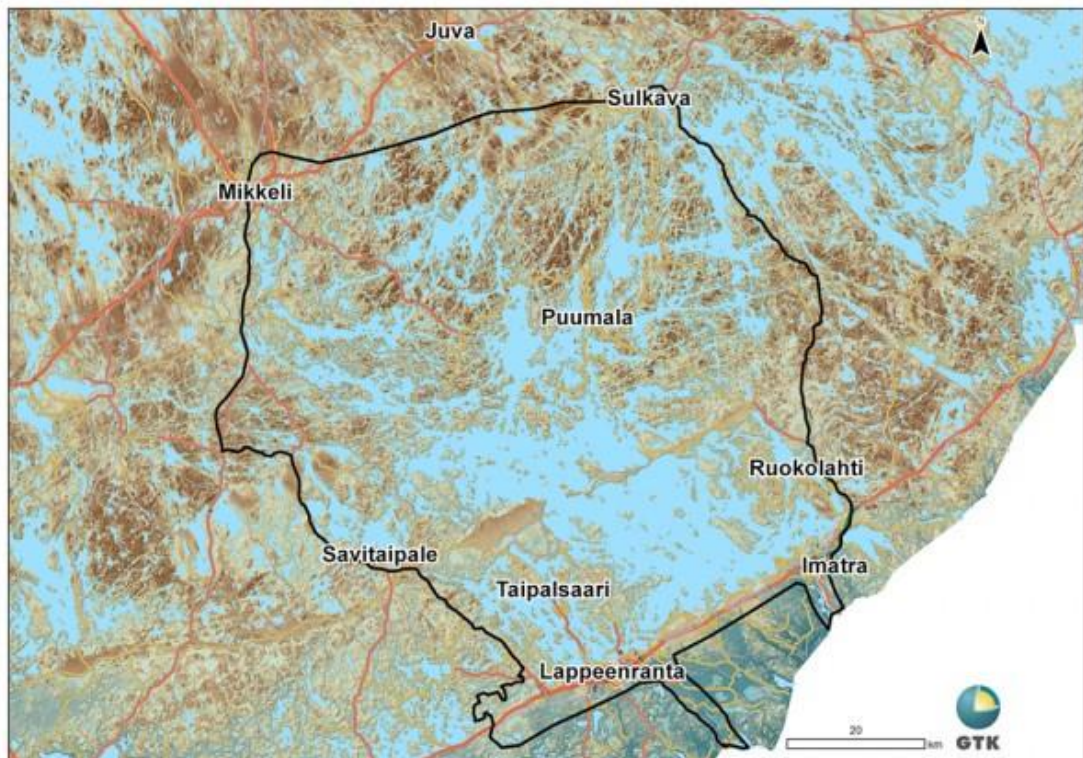


Figure 1 Saimaa Geopark project area

The geopark idea is based on the territories' geology, so it is important to introduce Lake Saimaa's geology shortly in the thesis. Lake Saimaa's bedrock was born around 1,900 million years ago. It is a part of the Eurasia continental shelf and by the time the lake was formed, the continental shelf was situated near the Equator. When South-East Finland's igneous rocks were born 1,600 million years ago, Finland's bedrock was created. Around 900 million years ago Fennoscandia started to move up north. (Kuusisto 1999, 10.)

Lake Saimaa has experienced about ten ice ages. A two kilometre height ice cover shaped the rocks and the shaping tracks can still be seen. Around 12,000 years ago Salpausselkä ridges were born. Ice started to retreat 11,000 years ago. The earth started to rise and from Yoldia ocean came the Saimaa ringed seal. Saimaa became its own body of water around 8,000 years ago, and because of that separation, Saimaa ringed seal was trapped to the lake's area. First humans arrived 11,000 years ago. (Kuusisto 1999, 15; Saimaa geopark project 2.)

When the earth was free from the ice sheet, the ground rose several meters in a hundred years. Combined rising and tilting separated lake pools, and 6,000 years ago Lake Saimaa's biggest part called Suur-Saimaa was born. River Vuoksi was born around 5,700 years ago, when water started to flow through the Salpausselkä ridge. (Kuusisto 1999, 15, 17.)

Saimaa Geopark project has already listed geopark sites in South Karelia and South Savonia. The geopark sites are defined from Lake Saimaa's recreation areas managed by South Karelian Foundation for Recreation Areas and Recreation Area Association in South Savonia (appendix 1). The geopark sites are: Ilkonsaari, Kylmäsaari, Hiekkaniemi, Rastiniemi, Ruunansaari, Ruhansaari, Rokansaari and Satamosaari. Geosites can be reached by boat or enjoyed from the shoreline. In recreation areas there are places for facilities e.g. composting toilets, places for barbecue and picnic, piers or docks and open fire places. (Saimaa geopark project 2.)

### **3 European Geopark Network**

#### **3.1 EGN's development work**

To become a member of European Geopark Network (EGN) means fulfilling criteria set by the organisation. This chapter introduces EGN's and UNESCO's aims.

European Geopark Network was established in June 2000 by four geopark areas. Four years earlier all four partners from France, Germany, Greece and Spain understood that without a strong connection and contribution of local communities, it is almost impossible to achieve sustainable management of geological heritage. All four partners were situated in rural areas, had important geological sites, natural beauty and a rich cultural heritage. Each region's economic potential had not been understood earlier. Also the partners had the same kind of socio-economic characteristics and problems e.g. unemployment, slow economic growth and high level emigration. The partners decided to strengthen their cooperation to make each area stronger. This collaboration (meetings, field visits, sharing information etc.) led into a longer period of defining a strategy focused on sustainable geological tourism as geotourism. (European Geoparks 2008, 15.)

A member of EGN has to be active in the territory's economic development. It has to connect the geological heritage and geotourism development. A geopark also has to have cooperation with local businesses and promote and support designing of products linked to geological heritage. (European Geoparks 2008, 17.)

The members of EGN have to apply membership from the network and fulfil criteria. Before making a decision the network evaluates the candidate's aptitude as a geopark. Membership is not permanent and revalidation is done every 4<sup>th</sup> year. This procedure keeps the quality of standard high in geoparks. In Europe there are 69 geoparks in 23 different countries. Overall in the world there are 120 geoparks. (European Geoparks 2008, 24; European Geoparks)

Number of visitors varies between different geoparks. In Ireland The Burren and Cliff of Moher Geopark had 1,08 million visitors in 2014. In 2013 was estimated around 20,000 visitors in Finland's only geopark in Rokua. (Failte Ireland; Sivonen 2013).

### 3.2 UNESCO's role in the network

The United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Division of Earth Sciences works with close collaboration with EGN. A contract about cooperation was signed in 2001. Three years later UNESCO established the GGN (Global Network of National Geoparks). GGN's aims are of the same kind:

*To promote the healthy environment, educating the public in Earth Science at large and fostering sustainable local economic development.* (European Geoparks 2008, 1, 16.)

UNESCO's role is to assist geoparks in both of the networks, and it has a veto-right when the network is making decisions.

EGN's aim is to be more than just a name in one of the UNESCO's programs' member lists. EGN focuses on networking and collaboration between different territories. Members have regular meetings to share ideas, experiences etc. to reach their goals. (Farsani et al. 2012, 28-29.)

For a few years UNESCO considered formalizing the relationship with geopark networks. Formalizing would create stronger cooperation, networking, clear the administration and build up more resources. After the formalizing a high quality of standards still remains and ongoing growth by new network members is under control. (UNESCO 1.)

UNESCO published that from 2015 Global Geoparks become UNESCO sites and a part of the International Geosciences and Geoparks Programme (IGGP). The decision was made at UNESCO's general assembly. IGGP's aim is:

*"to raise awareness of geodiversity and promote protection, education and tourism best practices".* (UNESCO 2.)

In cooperation with World Heritage sites and Biosphere Reserves, IGGP arrange:

*"A complete variety of sustainable development tools and make an invaluable contribution to the realisation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals by combining global and local perspectives".* (UNESCO 2.)

IGGP's new branding: *"formalizes a relationship with Geoparks first established in 2001".* (UNESCO 2.)

The news was happily received in geoparks. In the geoparks' social media pages and web pages news was launched with joy. Finland's only geopark, Rokua Geopark, mentioned in their website that the decision is recognition to the Geopark network, its meaning in global aims and activities and value of the Geoparks nationally and internationally. (Rokua Geopark.)

New formalization means at least the permission to use UNESCO's logo while advertising geoparks.

## **4 New tourism strategy in South Karelia**

Globally tourism is seen as a growing industry. Tourism development is based on governmental and regional strategies. The strategies are important visions of how tourism will be improved. The chapter explains how strategies are connected to Saimaa Geopark's application.

### **4.1 Roadmap of tourism 2015-2025**

World Tourism & Travel Council (WTT) estimated in their annual World Economic and Tourism impact report for years 2014 and 2015 that by 2025 travel and tourism industry will contribute 357 million jobs, which are 73 million jobs more than in year 2014. Expected growth will be 4.2 % by 2024. In WTT's opinion growth will be reached from middle-classed international travellers from Latin America and Asian markets. Tourism and travel industry grow faster than the global economy and most other major industries. (WTT 1; WTT 2.)

Possibilities in tourism industry have also been seen in Finland. In Finland tourism is also a substantial industry. It is an important export sector and it develops employment. Ministry of Employment and the Economic (MEE) has calculated that tourism consumption can grow from the annual 13 billion euros to 20 billion euros by 2025. According to the ministry's estimations, tourism industry will hire 180,000 people in 2025. Over a decade, tourism has also

become more international. In 2013 revenue that foreign tourists left to Finland was 4.3 billion euros. Tourism will also affect other industries too, e.g. trade, transport and construction. (MEE 1.)

In the beginning of 2015, MEE published a new national report about tourism strategies in Finland. A roadmap of tourism 2015-2025 sets a vision to year 2025. By that time Finland will be Northern Europe's number one tourist attraction - the tourist's first choice. Finland attracts tourists because it is original and a curiosity provoking country. To reach MEE's calculations Finland has to rely on its strengths: pure nature, contribution to wellbeing conditions, an original culture and a functional infrastructure. (MEE 2.)

#### **4.2 South Karelia tourism strategy 2015-2020**

Ministry of Employment and Economy report predicts that tourism will grow by five percent a year by 2025 (MEE). Regional development councils have also taken tourism industry more and more into account. In South-East Finland tourism is one of the regional rural development plan priorities. Tourism is seen as a developing industry especially in the countryside. Other centres of gravities are leisure housing and landscape infrastructure. The objects of South Karelia's municipalities' own strategies are focused on utilization of location, increasing amounts of servicing and tourism and development of tourism infrastructure. Especially in the countryside municipalities' strategies are to take into account the leisure residents. (Ekarjala 1.)

In October 2015 Regional Council of South Karelia published a new tourism strategy for years 2015-2020. The regional tourism strategy has the same kind of themes, centre of gravities, strengths and actions connected to the national tourism roadmap. Also region's economic development strategy points out environment, internationality and technology to which tourism is connected strongly. The regional development plan is for years 2014-2017 and its objectives are green welfare, nature, wellness, development of sports and culture tourism paying attention to natural values and utilizing experimental development. (Ekarjala 2.)

The strategy's vision is that in year 2020 the Saimaa region belongs to the top 3 of Finland's main tourism regions after Lapland and Helsinki. The target is going to be reached by strong cooperation within South Karelia, between its neighbour provinces and business partners. (Ekarjala 2.)

The strategy points out that accessibility is one of the main themes on how the vision is achieved. Accessibility connections are very essential to provinces' internal traffic. Moving between accommodations and tourism and nature attractions is difficult if tourists do not have their own car, rental car or boat. All development which supports the traveller's access to Lake Saimaa is needed. Development is required in shipping traffic, networking in boat and excursion harbours, shipping lanes and marine services. (Ekarjala 2.)

#### **4.3 Lake Saimaa easier to reach**

Even though Lake Saimaa's image is the most well-known tourist attraction in the area, it is not very easy for tourists to access. However, one of the goSaimaa's primary products in marketing is activities in Lake Saimaa. It is important to develop tourists' possibilities to experience Saimaa and buy services which connect to it. The geopark project's aim is to increase awareness and accessibility to Lake Saimaa. The project finds out whether Lake Saimaa could be a geopark and at the same time develops Saimaa area's tourism development work. (Ekarjala 1.)

The geopark offers network base for productization of Lake Saimaa, increasing cooperation, service packages and takeover of new markets. The target is also to build up a wider Saimaa region's joint marketing organisation with goSaimaa approach to market Saimaa Geopark. One aim is as well to make tight cooperation with Visit Finland when marketing Saimaa region. Strengthening cooperation is important especially in tourism marketing and the implementation of tourism packages. (Ekarjala 2.)



## 5 Tourism target group

Tourism is based on motives why tourists want to travel. Attractions are the reasons for spending a vacation in certain destinations. In Lake Saimaa the attractions could be pure nature, unique views of labyrinth shoreline, rock paintings, geological heritage and old waterways. The chapter explains tourism and attractions and what kinds of tourists are expected nationally and internationally to the Lake Saimaa area. Lake Saimaa also chains geo-, eco-, sustainable- and cruising tourism together.

### 5.1 Definition of tourism and attractions

World Tourism Organisation UNTWO defines tourism as:

*“A social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes”.* (UNTWO.)

By UNTWO's definition people who are involved in tourism are called visitors, tourists, excursionists, residents or non-residents. Tourism will provide activities for visitors, and activities indicate tourism expenditure. Tourism has wide side effects. As it is known, tourism affects the economy, built and natural environment, to the local population and of course the tourists themselves. (UNTWO.)

Attractions pull or push tourists to certain destinations. Cook & Yale & Marqua (1999) defined tourist attractions to be natural places, targets or built amenities which have special charm for both local people and tourists. Natural places can be seen as a heritage attraction, which in the case of Saimaa Geopark project means protection of natural resources. (Cook et al. 1999,148, 150.)

Page (2011) considers attractions with three dimensions:

1. Natural or man-made attractions. By Page's opinion natural attractions can be in addition separated to managed or left in a natural state.

2. In Page (2011) Holloway (2001) specifies attractions to be nodal or linear in character. An example about nodal character is London, where the city is the focus of the visit and has attraction of its own. Linear character attraction is e.g. coastal resort, which is an attraction in its own.

3. Attractions' differentiation between sites such as locations, permanent attractions and special events. (Page 2011, 221-222.)

The physical environment is also vital. The physical environment attractions are defined as wooded area, mountains and other natural surroundings. Built environment e.g. workplaces or historic houses, which have been taken to visitor use or built and designed for visitors. (Page 2011, 222.)

All definitions above are well known and suit well for the geopark idea and for reasons why tourists might be interested in Lake Saimaa area. In any case Cooper's (2012) definition is the simplest and easiest to transfer to any destinations. Cooper thinks that an attraction is:

*“anything that has sufficient appeal to “attract” a visit.”*

Attractions and destination have a close link together. (Cooper 2012, 148.)

Cooper goes into it more deeply and identifies visitor attractions' characteristics into five different categories:

1. Cultural evaluation. All tourists are not fascinated by the same attractions. Attraction has to have a position before it can become an attraction and pull a visit. The core product of attraction has to be seen to have value for the visitor and be worth to visit.

2. Various uses. Tourism is not the only user in attractions. Especially in national parks tourism is not the dominant user. Sometimes multiple users can lead to a conflict between tourism industry and other local use.

3. Perishability. Tourist attractions can agonise too demanding use, daily and seasonally peaking and resulting in pressure upon the attraction. To make the

most of the attractions it has led to differential pricing, timed tickets and to unusual opening hours e.g. museums open overnight.

4. Economic importance. Attractions are in an important part in regional development. Rarely attractions get all the income that tourists bring. Visitors leave money to the attraction and the surrounding area. Using money produces workplaces and competitiveness to the destination.

5. Ownership. Big corporations (e.g. Disney) are not major owners among attractions. In most countries, public sector is dominating the ownership of attractions. Historic, cultural and natural heritage attractions are often owned or guarded by public sector. Other ownership organisations are private sector and voluntary organisations (e.g. charities). Small attractions' limitation is the lack of resources and development. (Cooper 2012, 148-149.)

Cooper (2012) develops Clawson's idea to have two main ways of thinking: Attractions are reproducible and non-reproducible. Reproducible attractions are replaceable e.g. theme parks. Non-reproducible attractions are indispensable if they are destroyed, e.g. natural and cultural heritage attractions. (Cooper 2012, 152.)

## **5.2 National and regional target marketing group**

Visit Finland/Finland Convention Bureau have selected modern humanists as Finland's main marketing activities' target group including both domestic and foreign tourists. 15 percent of all tourists are modern humanists (MoHu). They are people who have already seen world's biggest metropolises and are pursuing new experiences and self-development. Quality of life and responsibility are important to this target group. Modern humanists want to introduce themselves to Finnish nature, culture and way of life. For them secure adventure activity is a way to break from the daily grind. During their stay at Finland, modern humanists want to see and experience many different things. They also appreciate holistic well-being. (Visit Finland.)

In South Karelia's tourism strategy modern humanists are also the main marketing group. Modern humanists are very likely to be tourists who are interested in the Lake Saimaa and the geopark idea. Modern humanists as a group suit very well to be nature-, sports- and well-being tourists. Modern humanists can be e.g. tourists who like secure adventures, active families, people needing short breaks, young nature tourists or different age groups and race- or amateur athletic groups. (Ekarjala 2.)

### **5.3 Special interest tourism**

Saimaa Geopark tourist segments are most likely special interest tourists. Special interest tourism has several definitions. Weiler and Hall (1992) made pioneering work and their definition is still essential. Special interest tourists want to experience on their vacation. Experience can be e.g. cow milking or rafting rapids. Special interest tourism is active tourism. (Weiler & Hall 1992, 2, 5)

Even though a special interest tourist wants to be active, Douglas, Douglas and Derret (2001) argument that special interest tourism is not an obsession to the target group and every minute is not full of activity. For special interest tourists traveling is seeking for authentic and real experiences. They travel for purpose. Special interest tourists are also seen rather as a larger group than only a handful of people. Douglas et al. (2001) is giving a clarifying example about bicycle touring. Cycling enthusiast tourists might take part in a small group's tours with other devoted people or join mass events around Australia through countryside and special nature. Both examples can be seen as special interest tourism. (Douglas et al. 2001, xvii, 4, 8.)

Douglas et al. (2001) bring up a few side effects of special interest tourism. It is true that in special interest tourism tourists can have closer interaction with locals. Special interest tourists will benefit the area and in some cases the definition between locals and tourists can blur. Special interest tourists' intention is to experience wild and attractive, even exotic places. The problem is that a large number of same kind of tourists travels to the same places. How to

manage the area's tourism to keep it sustainable? Douglas et al. (2001) even mention that special interest tourists are destroying places they appreciate. For example huge numbers of special interest tourists in Antarctica are radically changing the place. Human impact, modern devices and development are, as Douglas et al. (2001) say, "loving places to death." (Douglas et al. 2001, 21.)

Even though Douglas et al. (2001) present their ideas quite pessimistically, special interest tourism is seen also as very beneficial for the tourist attraction area. Weiler & Hall (1992) state that special interest tourists are likely to become visitors who help to put forward the well-being of the host and destination, and are in many cases welcome to return (Weiler & Hall 1992, 11).

Special interest tourism will follow the trends of worldwide tourism. Nationwide people are worried about safety and health. The feeling of being safe is demanding when planning vacations. Terrorism, war and conflicts are avoided and will affect tourist flows negatively in heated areas. Short term holidays e.g. long weekends will become more popular. Cruise, adventure travel and health tourism demand will grow. Over 60 years old senior tourists' sector is also increasing. Tourists are also more conscious about laws and regulations and expect them to be followed. Tourists will seek for more authentic places and have more contact with locals than before. (Douglas et al. 2001, 21.)

Sustainable development, ageing and economic crises are challenging tourism and may increase tourism to nearby areas. Reasons might have positive impact on Finland's tourism and increase it. (Puhakka 2011, 5.)

Asia's significance as outbound area increases from year 2015 and further. Chinese will also replace Japanese to be the biggest nationality to travel. By the year 2020 outbound Chinese travellers' number will arise to 95 million people. It is estimated that in year 2020 arrive 300,000-500,000 Chinese tourists to Finland. From other developing countries (Russia, India and Brazil) tourism demand will grow strongly. Economy in developing countries will rise and because of that people will travel more. Finland's tourism base is however still

in domestic tourists. Domestic demand is currently 60 percent of all tourism in Finland. (Puhakka 2011, 5, 6.)

Matkalehti (2011) commissioned a research with Kuoni Travel and this research shows that sustainable tourism and ecotourism will be even more important within ten years. Travelers are more responsible and take account into more than ever how tourism will affect the destination where they visit. Top five future tourism trends are: experiencing the new places (45% of answers from all respondents), sustainable tourism (37%), social responsibility (26%), luxuries (20%) and ecotourism (19%). Except one trend, all other mentioned trends are connected in a way or another to protection of the Earth and organizing tourism responsibly. (Matkalehti 2011.)

Tourism trends and customer flows might be a positive sign to Saimaa Geopark project. In China exists the biggest number of geoparks in the world. If Chinese discover Finland, it is possible that Finland's geoparks will benefit from Chinese tourists. China is not Finland's nearby country, but a flight from Beijing to Helsinki takes less than 9 hours. In theory it is possible to reach Saimaa Geopark from Beijing in around 11 hours.

#### **5.4 Geo-, eco- and sustainable tourism**

In the last chapter Douglas et al. (2001) painted quite a dark meaning over special interest tourists' shoulders. One answer to their fears of spoiled nature and community could be sustainable tourism and its subspecies.

If Lake Saimaa gets the geopark status, it will combine geo-, eco-, sustainable- and cruising tourism together. Geo-, eco- and sustainable tourism have similar kind of definitions. Differentiation comes from the angle from where the topic is seen. A common idea in every definition is to respect the area's natural and cultural heritage, and well-being from tourism should benefit the local people. Farsani, Coelho & Costa and de Carvalho (2012) think that geotourism should help tourists to increase their data about natural resources, the cultural uniqueness of host communities, and ways of retaining them. Farsani et al.

(2012) connect geotourism, geoparks and sustainable tourism together. In their opinion geotourism is still operating in niche markets and commercial development is on its way to become of larger awareness. In protected areas geoparks are creators of expansion of geotourism promotion. (Farsani et al. 2012, 1.)

Tourtellot (2002) reminds also, that a place's geographical character should suit and improve the place and especially its culture, environment, aesthetics, legacy and the well-being of its inhabitants.

National Geographic (2009) defined geotourism with sustainability values. Important is that in this definition, local people and tourists are connected together. National Geographic sees geotourism as synergism to create with geographical experience to visitors. It involves the community's local businesses and groups to provide unique experiences to tourists. When information about a destination is given both to tourists and hosts, the local society starts to understand its value and pride of their heritage arises. Pride starts to show to visitors and they will get more out of it. (Farsani et al. 2012, 15.)

Geotourism benefits the local area economically: transportation, services, products etc. When the local region recognises economic growth, they start to take care of it. Tourists seek out companies and businesses where destination's character is seen and by the time local companies realise that, they start to appreciate and protect their properties. If tourists are satisfied, they will spread good word-of-mouth. Stories and experiences about a destination will spread and more visitors will flow to the destination. It will continue business in the area also. (Farsani et al. 2012, 15-16.)

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) (1990) points out that ecotourism is responsible tourism to natural regions that conserves the environment and increases the well-being of local publics and encompasses understanding and learning (TIES).

Cooper (2012) characterizes ecotourism to have three parts. A demand for region's generation in ecotourism is that it has to be purposeful and requires personal experience or connection with nature/culture. It is also tempered by the need to consume tourism responsibility and offset carbon releases. An important demand is also that it has to have different ways for segmentation. Segmentations can be e.g. motives, level of commitment and the level of physical effort. Tourists who are interested in ecotourism are in Cooper's mind a little bit older than tourists on average are, they have higher education and better income. (Cooper 2012, 22.)

As the second character Cooper defines destination's region by ecotourism needs. Destinations are in regions, where nature is still undisturbed or clean. Area's attractions are based on scenery, plants, wildlife and original culture. Local people should get the benefits from economy e.g. employment and encourage residents' ownership of amenities. All tourism elements in destination should relate to environmental influence. (Cooper 2012, 23.)

As the third part the target is in transportation. Transportation in ecotourism should naturally screen environmental influences and emissions. The destination should try to be carbon free. Emissions of noise, carbon, traffic jam, energy consumption and waste should be on as low level as possible. Favour should be on public transportation and locally retained transport firms. (Cooper 2012, 23.)

## **5.5 Cruising tourism**

To get to see Lake Saimaa's geological targets, tourists need transportation. At Lake Saimaa cruises' duration is usually from 2 to 3 hours. Cruising ships are in some cases more boats than vessels. The theoretical definition of cruising is not in every aspect suitable for Lake Saimaa. The definitions usually see cruising as luxurious vacations, where the ships are the size of block of houses and the duration of the cruise is several days, even weeks. Still a definition is needed to clarify what cruising is all about.



Mancini's (2011) definition is short, but explains all needed elements. Mancini thinks cruising is a vacation trip done by ship. It is a leisure experience and the ship's staff does all the work. (Mancini 2011, 3.)

Cooper (2012) states that transportation can "make or break" a tourist attraction. Tourism and transportation have developed at the same time. When transportation has amended, it has stimulated tourism. Tourism requests have influenced transport development. Transport can in Cooper's mind be also a tourism attraction e.g. cruising. In these cases cruising can be seen as a tourism product. Transport can be a tourist experience as well as any tourist attraction. On the environmental side of thinking transportation has a huge impact. Transportation affects the level of carbon emissions and in Cooper's mind tourists should understand how their transportation choices affect environment. (Cooper 2012, 219-220.)

## **6 Research method**

### **6.1 Research methods and research question**

The thesis research method was qualitative. Research was done by semi-structure interview. Collected data was verbal and answered to questions why, how and what kind. (Mirola 2015, 3.)

Robson (2007) sees that semi-structured interview gives large freedom to the interviewer. Interviewer does not have to stick to certain questions. Plans can be changed depending on the respondent's answers and thoughts that come to his/her mind. More important is to follow the respondent's feeling and ask later on questions/topics what were missed. Questions do not have to be in exact wording, like in a fully structured interview. A semi-structured interview can be like a discussion between two people. Natural discussion will most likely get more helpful and informative answers. In any case, the interview has to be a controlled interaction, where there is a beforehand planned schema and it should be followed. The semi-structured interview is demanding for the interviewer. In some cases interviewing needs to be practised beforehand.

Questions have to be set so that replies will answer to the research question. (Robson 2007, 74-75.)

The respondent group was ship companies/entrepreneurs, who are operating at South Lake Saimaa and on River Vuoksi. Ships were M/s Brahe, m/s Camilla, m/s Carelia, m/s Christina, m/s El Faro, m/s Emma, m/s Heidi, and m/s Vuoksetar. The interviews were done in Finnish and recorded. The answers were translated to English, analyzed and commented in the thesis. The research question was "How cruising companies see Lake Saimaa's geopark idea?"

## **6.2 Interview themes**

In this research the semi-structured interview included selected questions that were asked from every company representative. The questions were set in themes, because themes structured the interview and research. Mainly themes and questions were discovered by author who is a former journalist. It was natural to ask questions about topics that author thought could benefit research and Kehy's application.

The first theme was background questions. Respondents answered to questions about their ship, their business idea and home harbour. The second theme was collecting data about Saimaa Geopark project. The questions tried to find out if the respondent is familiar with the subject and what is their basic knowledge about geological uniqueness of Lake Saimaa. The third theme was about harbours. Thesis partner Kehy was interested to know cruising companies' interest in area's harbours - why they prefer certain harbours and have they considered using any other harbour. The fourth theme was cruising companies' interest to take part in geological education and are they interested in becoming geological guides. The partner's idea was to make a list about topics which might interest cruising companies. The fifth theme collected data about the area's tourism development and what tourism requires in the Lake Saimaa area. Author chose the theme, because South Karelia has done a lot of development work in tourism during recent years. Joint marketing organization

goSaimaa has operated for several years. Cruising companies have been able to tell their point of view and share their opinions about any issues. Entrepreneurs meet tourists every week, so they have valuable firsthand knowledge of how effective development work has been.

The idea was to make all the interviews face-to-face, but in two cases it was not possible. The entrepreneur of ship M/s Vuoksetar Taisto Kainulainen, was interviewed by phone and the phone call was recorded. Ms Kirsti Line CEO of Saimaa’s Matkaverkko (ships M/s Brahe and M/s Carelia) was too busy to give an interview and Ms Laine answered by email shortly. M/S Camilla’s entrepreneur Saku Hyttinen was not reached.

## 7 Research results

In this chapter every theme is processed under its own topic.

### 7.1 Background questions

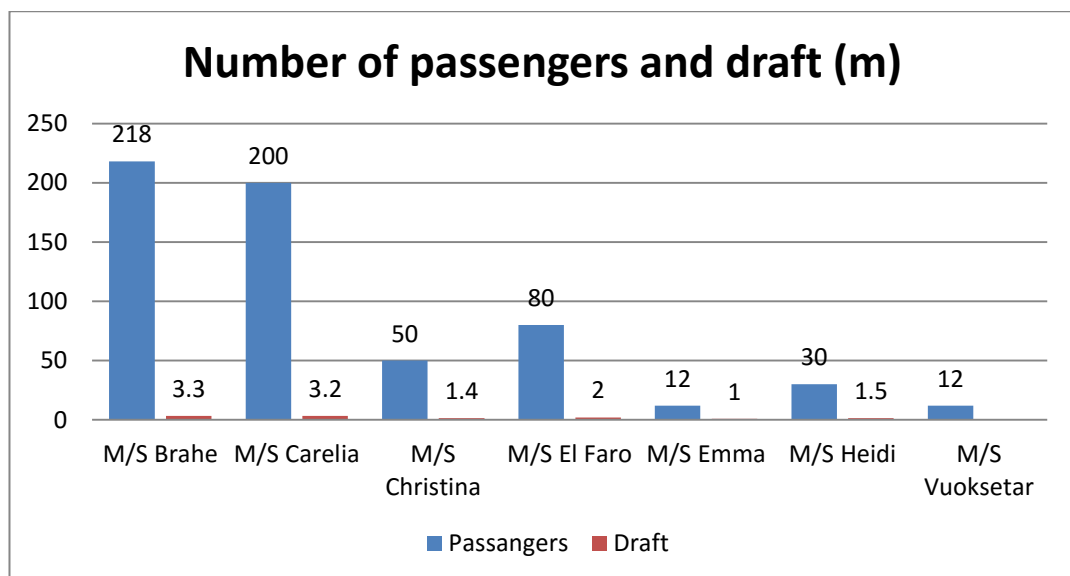


Figure 2 Number of vessels passengers and draft in meters

Every vessel's passenger numbers and draft are presented in table 1. M/S Emma is owned by Niina and Marko Kiuru. The boat does charter cruises all over Lake Saimaa. Ship's speciality is a sauna and a bathroom. Its home harbour is in Lammassaari/Ukonniemi which is Imatra's passengers' port.

M/S Christina is owned by Chrisline Ltd. The shareholders are Imatra Region Development Company, Imatra Spa and Etelä-Karjalan Kuntoutumissäätiö and Vesa Tuomikoski, who is also the CEO and captain of the ship. The vessel does only landscape charter cruises. It needs piers when entering a harbour. The home harbour is in Lammassaari/Ukonniemi Imatra's passengers' port.

M/S Vuoksetar is owned by Vuoksen Lautturi Ltd. Ltd is owned by family members Taisto, Toni and Teemu Kainulainen. M/S Vuoksetar cruises only on River Vuoksi. The company has also fishing boat business and summer cottage renting at Lake Saimaa, so Lammassaari/Ukonniemi area is familiar to them.

In autumn 2015 M/S El Faro was sold to Pekka Torri and Pasi Heikkinen. They were not interviewed in the thesis, because it was more informative to have a conversation with the former company owner, CEO and captain Pentti Kokki. Mr. Kokki worked on El Faro for 11 years. M/S El Faro cruises to Saimaa canal and in Lake Saimaa's archipelago. The ship can also be rented for charter cruises. It needs piers when entering a harbour. Only a few nature harbours are possible for M/S El Faro to enter, because the ship's edge is two meters high. Its home harbour is Lappeenranta harbour.

M/S Heidi is owned by Seppo Salpakari. M/S Heidi does charter cruises all over Lake Saimaa. Ship can enter islands if the pier is suitable. Its home harbour is Lappeenranta harbour. Salpakari has also a smaller ship called Toti, but the thesis is concentrating on M/S Heidi.

M/S Brahe is owned by Saimaan Matkaverkko Ltd. M/S Carelia is owned by Lappeenrannan Laivat Ltd. M/S Brahe makes schedule cruises via Hamina-Lappeenranta-Puumala-Savonlinna, and after high season it can be rented for charter cruises. The ship can only sail via deep waterways and needs a good pier when entering the shore.

M/S Carelia is owned by Lappeenrannan Laivat Ltd. The ship cruises only between Lappeenranta – Vyborg. Both ships are managed by Saimaan Matkaverkko Ltd's CEO Kirsti Laine and the home harbour is Lappeenranta harbour.

## 7.2 Geopark theme

The Saimaa geopark project was quite familiar to all respondents. Information about the geopark was gotten from media and because the idea is close to their business, entrepreneurs were interested in knowing more about the geopark. M/S Heidi's entrepreneur Seppo Salpakari was planning to take part in European Geopark Conference in Rokua last September. M/S El Faro's former CEO Pentti Kokki is Saimaa geopark project's member of the board. Marko Kiuru and Taisto Kainulainen thought the name geopark was quite hard for outsiders to understand. The name is too close to the word "geocatching" and gives the wrong first impression.

Cruising companies were very keen on the geopark idea. Lake Saimaa is unique fresh water pool where people can swim, use the water and even drink it. Nature based tourism is seen as the right kind of development and something that the area needs. Saimaa Geopark's right production and storytelling will be very important when area gets the geopark status.

*"The geopark is absolutely the best that has ever been planned in this area! It is supporting a project, not any artificial thing. It is as old as Earth is. The story about Lake Saimaa is staggering. It is unreal that we can cruise in fresh water and see huge geological formations. Before this project, Saimaa has not been utilised enough."*

Pentti Kokki, M/S El Faro

*"I think the geopark means productization of Lake Saimaa's existing targets, sites. And Saimaa definitely has various kinds of views and landscapes. In South-Saimaa we have sand beaches and after Puumala really rugged, rocky views. The sand beaches start again after Savonlinna."*

Marko Kiuru, M/S Emma

*“Productization is the key element. We have outstanding views, but we need more flesh on the bones. Stories and storytelling connected to e.g. ancient habitation will flame the tourists’ interest! The package is ready when there is available cruising, story, sauna and eating by the bonfire. I think cruising is not enough to get a good experience from Saimaa. “South Karelian Foundation for Recreation Area’s Satamosaari is a well productized place.”*

Taisto Kainulainen, M/S Vuoksetar

Cruising companies see opportunities for new business via the geopark. Plentiful customer flows awaken more demand. UNESCO’s commitment to the geopark network is through connecting special interest tourism to Lake Saimaa.

*“There are hundreds of thousands of people, who plan their holidays by UNESCO’s world heritage destinations. People seek places which have UNESCO’s stamp and want to spend their vacations there. That stamp raises the geopark’s value highly.”*

Pentti Korkki, M/S El Faro

Entrepreneurs are however afraid that application to EGN is only a project which will be forgotten after a few years.

*“I wish Saimaa Geopark is not another project, which will be buried under papers. I have sat enough in different meetings and realised the meeting is organised just because it is somebody’s job to set up a meeting. I decided not to take part anymore in that kind of projects and meetings. Next time I will be involved in something, it has to be totally different. Maybe geopark is.”*

Marko Kiuru, M/S Emma

### **7.2.1 Well-known geosites**

For Saimaa geopark application geosites have been scanned by Geological Survey of Finland. Geosites are already familiar with cruising companies. M/S Emma and M/S Heidi visit different geotargets with their customers. M/S Christina cruises mainly to Satamosaari and to other smaller islands. M/S El Faro cruises either to the Saimaa canal or around the South Saimaa area. Cruising customers get information about the lake’s geology from recorded guiding announcements or by listening to the captain’s talk.

*“Lake Saimaa’s history, birth, formation of islands – all this we present in our program in guiding announcements. When the ship enters the lake, customers can immediately see geosites: sandy and rocky islands. There are a lot of different things to see.”*

Vesa Tuomikoski, M/S Christina

*“Customers are interested in the lake’s history and they are listening to our guiding announcements. The guiding announcement is done in three different languages. Geosites are of course familiar to me. In Small Lake Saimaa side we also tell how people have been living by the lake.”*

Pentti Kokki, M/S El Faro

*“I usually tell my basic knowledge to customers, how ridges have been shaped. And I show from the map that the mouths of the island are opened in the same direction. Every time customers are surprised”.*

Marko Kiuru, M/S EMMA

*“I have read a lot of literature about Lake Saimaa, so I know quite a lot about it. Sometimes customers are interested in listening, sometimes they wish that I shut my mouth, because they want to discuss their own things. It would be easy, if guiding was recorded.”*

Seppo Salpakari, M/S Heidi

*“In Small Lake Saimaa side we are cruising by the rock paintings. There are no piers so we cannot enter and we have to watch the rock paintings from the ship. Nearby there are also ospreys’ nests, so customers see them also. The nature is so near.”*

Seppo Salpakari, M/S Heidi

*“We do not use geological sites as a target yet. But we have plans for cooperation with smaller boats and building tourism products on it.”*

Kirsti Laine, M/S Brahe and M/S Carelia

Big vessels e.g. M/S Brahe and M/S Carelia need deep waterways, so it is impossible to access places where water is lower than these ships’ drafts are.

## 7.2.2 Easy access to Lake Saimaa

In South Karelian tourism strategy it was noted that it is important to make Lake Saimaa available to tourists and to local people. Improvement in access is one of the main strategies for following years. In cruising entrepreneurs' eyes the problem is the same.

*"Lake Saimaa is not overloaded yet! I would almost say it is the opposite. A minimum number of people stay overnight at the lake. Last summer I spoke with a sailing group who were from the sea. They were so surprised because there were so few people. They called Saimaa a paradise and gave special thanks to South Karelian Foundation for Recreation Area's work."*

Marko Kiuru, M/S Emma

*"We have an awesome area near Lappeenranta and Imatra. Problem is to get our local people to go to the Lake Saimaa. It is absurd that a huge amount of natives have not been in Saimaa! Some complain that it is difficult to access – well, when we offer, they do not come!"*

Seppo Salpakari, M/S Heidi

*"Lake Saimaa is not full. Last summer there were only a few boaters at the same time at the lake when I was. But at the harbour boat docks are full of boats even in the middle of the summer! Are they there only as status symbols? It is nice to say to fellows "I own a boat"."*

Seppo Salpakari, M/S Heidi

Access to Lake Saimaa is not only possible with cruising companies. There are a lot of activities which should be offered to tourists and to local people. But first these services should be found. Tourist will find the way to Lake Saimaa when marketing is done properly. Also small companies need marketing cooperation with local hotels. Nice talk about area's uniqueness is not enough.

*"There is one thing I have not understood. Everyone in town council is talking about how Lake Saimaa is our first jewellery. Well - I would like to know how hotel guests are available to go to the Lake Saimaa. For example we have not got any possibility to give information to Holiday Club Saimaa's guests about our services (and we have been negotiating with the hotel about this matter). I would like to know, how many guests have had the possibility to even row with a rowing boat. It is totally different to look at Lake Saimaa from the shoreline*



*than to be at the lake. So it is really important to guarantee availability to tourists.”*

Marko Kiuru, M/S Emma

*“I specifically think that the geopark should be as versatile as possible and tourists could get right into the core product. That experience would be genuine. The offered services should be many-sided. From scenic cruises could arise a need to see some island better, and on their next visit the tourist might want to rent a rowing boat, canoe, kayak etc. It is what the geopark idea might really be.”*

Marko Kiuru, M/S Emma

A nice way to reach Lake Saimaa could be e.g. renting a canoe or a boat. Usually renting a canoe or a boat is quite cheap for customers, but building up a business to only canoe or boat renting keeps costs high. Establishing a business, with insurances and maintenance, is just eating money. Entrepreneurs are also pointing out that business purpose is to make profit. Tourism services have to bring money back to businesses.

### **7.3 Harbour theme**

One of the main themes of this thesis was to find out the cruising companies' interests in the area's harbours. Kehy's wish was to have some special information of the reasons they prefer certain harbours over others. In the planned Saimaa geopark area there are three main harbours: Lappeenranta, Rauha and Imatra. In this chapter and its footnotes the author clarifies respondents' opinions about new plans for Lammassaari/Ukonniemi harbour, Lappeenranta harbour's difficult location and specific problems of Rauha harbour.

From the interview it came out that cruising companies use mainly home harbours. The reasons are usually the customer flows, the suitable pier for the ship and water routes. Generally all entrepreneurs are satisfied with their own harbour. It is possible to use any other harbour for business purposes, but usually one's own harbour is seen to be the best starting and ending place.

### **7.3.1 New geopark harbour**

New plans for Lammassaari/Ukonniemi harbour are looked forward to eagerly. Development work in Imatra Lammassaari/Ukonniemi harbour is seen to be necessary, but the price that comes for more services is a concern.

*“I am happy that finally in the Lammassaari/Ukonniemi area development is happening! But of course the price for the new services is a little bit frightening. If the price is too hard for us, we have to find a new place for our ship.”*

Marko Kiuru, M/S Emma

*“When services are getting better, the price also rises and it is hard for small companies like we are.”*

Taisto Kainulainen, M/S Vuoksetar

The plan is to transfer boat piers to the end of the Ukonniemi bay, beside the dam road. The change is not greeted only with applause.

*“The plans also seem to be quite awkward. The dam is the windiest place in Ukonniemi. In the new plan boats are also very close together. What happens when the storm winds blow hard? And the calmest beach is without boats. I cannot understand what is more important than safety.”*

Marko Kiuru, M/S Emma

Lammassaari/Ukonniemi harbour is called to be a geopark harbour. The name confuses cruising companies. In marketing it is really important to send right message to users and tourists about what geopark harbour really means.

### **7.3.2 Lappeenranta’s difficult location**

For Lammassaari/Ukonniemi harbour to be a geopark harbour is understood because of the harbour’s location. Entrepreneurs from Imatra praise Imatra harbour’s easy access to every water route. From Imatra harbour there is no reason to cruise to the Lappeenranta harbour. Lappeenranta’s location is a problem. It is at the end of the water routes.

*“From Imatra’s passengers’ port it is very easy to select either the lake’s big back or narrow routes to Kaukopää. Depending on the customer demand, we can choose routes that are the best for different situations. The location is much*

*better than from Lappeenranta harbour, where the distance to the main water route is quite long, and the ship has to sail past the UPM –Kymmene Corporation’s factory”.*

Vesa Tuomikoski, M/S Christina

*“If there was the Kutila’s canal from Lappeenranta to Big Saimaa’s side, it would be a remarkably profitable and attractive factor. Now we have to sail through Päihänniemi and it takes three hours to get to bigger Saimaa’s side and as long a time back. Customers are aware of time, and not ready to spend too much time with one activity. Kutila’s canal would be an important part to in utilising geosites better for cruising companies.”*

Pentti Kokki, M/S El Faro

In Lappeenranta harbour competition is also tough. It is difficult to start a new business among traditional and already well-known ships.

*“I cannot see possibility of business in Lappeenranta harbour. From Imatra it takes three hours to get to Lappeenranta, the boat has to sail beside a factory and in the harbour competition is hard.”*

Marko Kiuru, M/S Emma

*“It is the same with Lappeenranta and Savonlinna – competition is tough! It is almost impossible to start a new business in those harbours.”*

Vesa Tuomikoski, M/S Christina

The opinion is similar from Lappeenranta towards Imatra. There are only a few free dock places and it is not guaranteed that they are always available when needed.

*“Imatra harbour’s dock places are minimum. There might be one place for a bigger ship, but we cannot be sure that it is always free. Based on that, cruising business is impossible to build.”*

Pentti Kokki, M/S El Faro

### 7.3.3 Problems in Rauha harbour

Rauha harbour's pier is suitable for small boats' and ships' entrance. M/S Emma and Taisto Kainulainen with a small boat have used it for collecting customers. But for bigger ships, the pier is quite complicated and felt even dangerous.

*"The pier is not very good, it is narrow and without railings. We have to almost escort joyful customers back to the shore. But we have to live with it."*

Vesa Tuomikoski, M/S Christina

*"Rauha's pier is not a proper pier! It is a rotten dock and the Blue White Eagle takes all the space. The chains are connected wrong and if there are waves, it is really hard to enter and dangerous. The pier is too narrow and it is difficult for customers to land from the ship's deck onto it. We have told Holiday Club Saimaa's management that it is impossible to do cooperation with them, because the pier is so poor. It has to be wide and high enough, side fastening and it cannot be full of pleasure boaters."*

Pentti Kokki, M/S El Faro

There is a fear that cruising companies' advices on pier building is not listened to when geopark harbours are planned and built.

*"We cruising companies advised Holiday Club Saimaa on how to build a good pier. Well, now it is not what it should be. It is the same with all Saimaa Geopark project area. If companies are not listened to, when piers are planned and built, the whole geopark idea is in danger not to succeed. Not every geosite needs a big, floating pier, but main targets do. At small sites minor docks are enough."*

Pentti Kokki, M/S El Faro

Small cruising boats are very pleased with Ilkonsaari and its pier. Pier is good, stable and wide enough. South Karelian Foundation for Recreation Areas has also got greetings about good work they have done before and especially now in Ilkonsaari. Ilkonsaari has a few orthodox chapels and wide paths to walk around island.

## 7.4 Education theme

The thesis partner's wish was to ask from the cruising entrepreneurs their interest to take part in education about Lake Saimaa's geological heritage. The geological sites were well known, but all respondents wanted still to take part in education. All but one respondent were interested in being geopark guides.

Education themes were: the birth of Lake Saimaa and River Vuoksi, Lake Saimaa's bedrock, Salpausselkä, the birth of the ridge islands, ancient beaches, rock paintings and the ancient historical places of residence. Respondents could also tell about subjects that interest them and they emphasized they wanted to know. Topics which rose from the respondents were important and would benefit the Lake Saimaa's geopark.

*"Fishing is a fascinating subject to know more about. Fishing's history might interest tourists too. Not only summer fishing but at winter time too. And how water routes were used in the old days. We know long church boats but what else was used. Steam boats and so on."*

Taisto Kainulainen, M/S Vuoksetar

*"History is good to know, but also information about present living on Lake Saimaa is interesting. Factories, industries etc. And especially how to enjoy nature so that it is not spoiled. Sustainability is not obvious to every visitor"*

Marko Kiuru, M/S Emma

*"Storytelling about wars, sheltering and transportation makes tourist destinations interesting. Stories create more flesh over the bones. And stories we really have from all over the Lake Saimaa."*

Pentti Kokki, M/S El Faro

Cruising companies' proposals to education themes (e.g. storytelling, fishing history and present living in Lake Saimaa) are worth to take a notice. Topics have risen from entrepreneurs' own interests and could not have been noticed without a good interaction between the author and the respondents.

## **7.5 Tourism development theme**

Author thought it was important to hear cruising companies' ideas about South Karelian tourism development. Entrepreneurs are cutting the harvest that tourism strategies and regional development companies have planted.

One of the geopark's ideas is to take care of the nature. It is why one of the topics was Lake Saimaa's condition and concern of how nature will handle the growing number of tourist. Cooperation between municipalities and companies is also an important aim in geopark idea. Entrepreneurs' thoughts about cooperation are valuable to hear. When marketing is done well, tourists are able to find offered services and places where to visit. Joint marketing organization goSaimaa has taken care of areas' marketing and similar organization is going to be established around Saimaa Geopark. Cruising companies however doubt its effectiveness. Currently South Karelia's tourism season is concentrating mainly on summer. Winter tourism is taking small steps and in the last chapter entrepreneurs told ideas how it should be developed.

### **7.5.1 Lake Saimaa's condition**

Every respondent simply loves Lake Saimaa. Loving also makes entrepreneurs concerned about the lake's future. How to develop tourism in the area so that nature is not spoiled? Respondents felt ecotourism and sustainability to be near their visions and actions. In M/S Christina's actions sustainability and taking care of nature are top priorities.

*"We do not leave trash behind us on the islands. Also we have implemented the changes and acts before they became obligatory."*

Vesa Tuomikoski, M/S Christina

*"Our slogan is to take more rubbish from nature than we leave behind. It means that we clean up our own rubbish and carry away also what other people have left there. When our customers see we are carrying more crap away, they are starting to do the same."*

Marko Kiuru, M/S Emma

Sustainability is more than taking care of rubbish. It covers also recreational boaters' facilities on boats. Nowadays a big amount of boats have all the comfortable facilities inside e.g. toilets and showers. Septic tanks are available in bigger harbours for toilet flushing. One growing problem is the grey waters from showers and saunas.

*“To make peace with our own minds, we installed grey water filtering on our boat, even though it is not obligatory. It is quite weird, that for summer cottages wastewater setting also for grey water is compulsory, but in boats it is not. Anyone can build a dock with sauna and an outboard motor. Then grey water can be poured straight into the lake.”*

Marko Kiuru, M/S Emma

Also growing tourist number can harm nature. Crowds are causing erosion on the ground. Especially places, where there are no trash bins.

*“I think South Karelian Foundation for Recreation Area does good work. There are islands, which are under their control and free for everyone to enjoy. Nature is near, the views are stunning but there are also trash bins etc. And then there are islands and places which are not in everybody's use. Places stay clean and nature is not spoiled.”*

Vesa Tuomikoksi, M/S Christina

Many of the cruising companies have already done ecotourism related trips with their customers. The common denominator has been enjoying and respecting nature.

*“As a matter of fact I do ecotourism all the time. View cruises in River Vuoksi show nature on its sides. In our place Temoniemi at Lake Saimaa customers have been picking berries and mushrooms, even hugging the trees is ecotourism! I think very positively about ecotourism.”*

Taisto Kainulainen, M/S Vuoksetar

*“Ecotourism shakes hands with geopark! Especially when Lake Saimaa gets benefit from ecotourism.”*

Pentti Kokki, M/S El Faro

Work with Lake Saimaa ringed seal is noticed with pleasure. Entrepreneurs hope that someday it is possible to do real seal cruises, where it is guaranteed to see seals on every trip.

### **7.5.2 Co-operation**

Cooperation is one of the key elements in geoparks' actions. In Saimaa geopark project it is essential that all nine municipalities around the lake are taking part in it. Cooperation between companies is welcomed by all respondents – as long as a few guidelines are fulfilled: partnership has to be equal and it should come naturally.

*“Cooperation cannot be forced. Suitable cooperation we do already. Many of the companies have found each other naturally.”*

Kirsti Laine, M/S Brahe and M/S Carelia

*“The most important thing is still e.g. in cruising business, that we get as much customers as possible to this area. Good word-of-mouth brings new customers. After a while there are customers to all.”*

Marko Kiuru, M/S Emma

*“Without cooperation nothing works. There should even be more cooperation. Business networks should be known. All same industry's companies should know what everyone is doing.”*

Taisto Kainulainen, M/S Vuoksetar

### **7.5.3 GoSaimaa and marketing**

Successful marketing is the main element when benchmarking a new tourism area. In Saimaa Geopark project it is considered to have the same kind of joint marketing organization that goSaimaa has had. GoSaimaa's idea is to paint a big picture about the South Karelian area to tourists in Finland and abroad. In the respondents' minds goSaimaa has not been very successful. It is too expensive for small companies to join in. Respondents are wondering if the new joint marketing organization is very functional. If goSaimaa continues and a new organization will do the same kind of work, benefits might get lost.



*“Overlaps are never good. GoSaimaa and the new marketing organization should be connected, together. Otherwise some companies belong to this organization and others to that organization. In that case it is not working properly.”*

Vesa Tuomikoski, M/S Christina

*“GoSaimaa... well, millions have been spent but nothing has happened. Russians gave money to the field of trade. But it did not show in the harbour.”*

Seppo Salpakari, M/S Heidi

*“Region development companies’ task is to create such conditions that it is easy for companies to act and do business. In some cases help could be money e.g. in joint marketing along with goSaimaa and projects.”*

Kirsti Laine, M/S Brahe and M/S Carelia

*“We have a lot of micro companies, which will need marketing tug assistance from municipalities. With goSaimaa all the money was ruthlessly poured to the benefit of Holiday Club Saimaa’s marketing – and I think it does not make any sense! You ask what the results are – well, now it seems to be quiet out there.”*

Pentti Kokki, M/S El Faro

*“In my opinion municipalities have the big money to do the marketing outside. And big money will get the tourists to the area. We small companies should offer the services to the tourists. And municipalities should not shout that we have to pay for the marketing cost – because we do not have resources for it.”*

Seppo Salpakari, M/S Heidi

*“When thinking worldwide, Lake Saimaa should be marketed as one big area. It should be thought of as a whole, including its top waters. Lake Saimaa should be like Lapland or Kainuu, one great area.”*

Taisto Kainulainen, M/S Vuoksetar

*“Were there enough resources in goSaimaa? Not one or two workers can do as much work as the marketing needed. I hope in the geopark there is enough workforce. It is a shame that money is always a problem. Plans are huge and they usually need a lot of money. Development ends when there is a lack of money. But with a small amount of money at least small things can be done. It is better than nothing.”*

Marko Kiuru, M/S Emma

GoSaimaa's marketing has been leaning towards Russians. Cruising entrepreneurs think that something has been forgotten: two good marketing directions – domestic and Central European customers.

*“Central Europe is an old and a good marketing area which should be remembered. As long as the marketing is targeted to Russians, tourism industry is not recovering.”*

Seppo Salpakari, M/S Heidi

*“While marketing has been concentrated on Russians, domestic customers have been forgotten totally at least for the last five years! There is still a big number of Finns, even local people, who have not been on Lake Saimaa yet. But what our council has discovered - they travel to China to make connections and try to get Chinese tourists here. Maybe tourism should be created for Finns this time.”*

Pentti Kokki, M/S El Faro

*“Here we have been building like maniacs, counting on Russians resources. No one can be so stupid and believe that Russians will come here till the end of the world. Now the end has come.”*

Pentti Kokki, M/S El Faro

New tools for marketing are needed. In Imatra area tourism development has been changing recently, but shutting down the tourism information office was not seen only as a good idea. Tourists can get all the information from the touch panel boxes. On the pedestrian street the touch panels have had big problems starting running. It does not please entrepreneurs.

*“It is odd that on Imatra's pedestrian street Lake Saimaa does not show in any way. Saimaa should be seen everywhere and the tourist has to get the information on what it is all about. I do not believe that only mobile apps are enough. They are good when interest has already risen. But how to light the fire? I still think we need posters, brochures or even personal contact to get customers' interest. Now we have touch panel information boxes where only ads and porn scroll. Somehow we have managed to wipe out genuine and direct supply.”*

Marko Kiuru, M/S Emma

A central reservation system could be the answer as a new marketing tool.

*“I have wished to get a central reservation system, where customers can buy e.g. cruising tickets. In the reservation system there should be all program service companies. If we are not found in web, we do not exist.”*

Vesa Tuomikoski, M/S Christina

*“RTG - Ready to go Saimaa, was starting to market the area as a whole. The idea was right. All services could be found in one place. --- Basecamp? What is it? I have tried to understand what it means, but nobody has been able to explain it so that it is clear.”*

Marko Kiuru, M/S Emma

Entrepreneurs' fears are real that same mistakes in marketing are repeated again. If connection fee to new marketing organization is too high, small companies can not afford to join in. Target group should be widened to Finns and to Central Europe. All services should be found in one place, which is easy to access. Imatra Basecamp's name and purpose do not open even to tourism professionals.

#### **7.5.4 Wintertime**

In high peak season, summer is short in Lake Saimaa area. Cruises end usually at the end of August or the beginning of September. Even though in recent years winters have been coming late and the lake can be free from ice still in December. The weather forecast is difficult and building business up to the late autumn is almost impossible.

*“A fantastic autumn that has not been taken advantage of at all! People speak about the colourful fall and go to Lapland to see it. But in Lake Saimaa autumn colours are very beautiful.”*

Seppo Santakari, M/S Heidi

Some ships have heating systems and they are possible to be used before the lake is covered in ice. Darkness and mist are also problems for cruising business. Winter activities e.g. ice fishing and snowmobile safaris need proper ice and snow coverage.

*“Winter seine bet could be interesting for tourists to experience. But you never know what kind of winter we will have. Maybe it is better that tourists cannot be deep frosted when standing in the windy, cold lake’s back.”*

Taisto Kainulainen, M/S Vuoksetar

*“We made an ice sauna a few years back. But for two winters the weather has been so mild that building it has not been possible. An ice sauna is quite an exotic experience.”*

Marko Kiuru, M/S Emma

*“I do not understand forcing winter tourism into our area. We just cannot predict what the weather is like beforehand. We are not Lapland or Kainuu where there are proper winters. Let’s make summer business so good that we can just relax in wintertime. Take a breath. Develop things for the high peak. The fuss about winter should be stopped!”*

Pentti Kokki, M/S El Faro

## **8 Summary and discussion**

Lake Saimaa area’s nine municipalities are aspiring to become a geopark and the application to European Geopark Network (EGN) will be sent in the end of 2016. Thesis partner Imatra Region Development Company has to be connected to area’s companies to get information on how they feel about the geopark idea. Companies’ feelings are attached to the geopark application. Thesis “Lake Saimaa as a potential geopark – Cruising companies’ impressions on Geopark Water” will be a part of the application. In the application EGN evaluates area’s companies’ involvement in the geopark idea. One of the EGN’s aims is to benefit the geopark region’s companies’ economy with cooperation between the geopark and other companies’.

Thesis qualitative research was done by semi-structured interview of cruising companies in Lappeenranta – Imatra region. Thesis research question was “How do cruising companies see Lake Saimaa’s geopark idea?” The Research gave answers to a set of research questions. Lake Saimaa is warmly welcomed by cruising companies to become a geopark. Entrepreneurs are already aware of what a unique fresh water pool is situated in South Karelia. Many times outsiders have to show local people what benefits there are in this area. In this case, it is remarkable how involved and proud cruising entrepreneurs already are about Lake Saimaa. Entrepreneurs believe they have a possibility to grow their own business through the geopark idea. Some companies have even ideas to make new products around the geopark idea. Products are not mentioned in this thesis as they are business secrets.

Cook et al. (1999) defines tourist attractions to be e.g. natural places, which have special charm for both local people and tourists. Cruising companies see Lake Saimaa as a special attraction place. Lake Saimaa area can be seen as a heritage attraction which also protects natural resources.

In Visit Finland’s and South Karelia’s tourism strategies main marketing target group is defined to be modern humanists (MoHu). MoHu’s are interested in nature, sports and well-being. In Lake Saimaa area the base of the services are in MoHu’s interest area and they fulfil MoHu’s criteria about attractions.

Lake Saimaa area’s tourism target groups are most likely special interest tourists. Douglas et al. (2001) think that special interest tourists want to have authentic and real experiences. Cruising entrepreneurs see that Lake Saimaa’s unusual feeling touches tourists in the moment when the ship releases the pier. Lake Saimaa’s real experience starts immediately.

Special interest tourists want to have more contact with locals. With Lake Saimaa cruising companies it is possible because the vessels are rather small, entrepreneurs are usually the captains and interaction between tourists and ship’s labour is straightforward. Thesis research also showed that it is easy to talk with companies’ representatives. Finns are not shy people at all.

Douglas et al. (2001) also point out that travel has a purpose for special interest tourists. In Lake Saimaa area's unique views and land forms, area's geology, heritage and Saimaa ringed seal could be the reason for travel to Saimaa Geopark. Also UNESCO's label beside geopark's network interests some tourists and raises motivation to travel to the geopark.

Special interest tourism has also side effects. Huge number of special interest tourists can according to Douglas et al. (2001) destroy the area. Taking care of nature is also one of the main concerns that cruising companies' entrepreneurs carry. How to grow tourism so that nature or water is not spoiled? The South Karelian Foundation for Recreation Area's work is considered very important among the cruising entrepreneurs. It is seen very positive that some islands are for all people. In those islands there are trash bins and places for bonfire. Some other islands are not for everybody's use. Also foundation's guidebooks in Finnish, English and Russian are seen necessary.

Sustainable tourism can be the key element when protecting Lake Saimaa area from negative tourism development. As thesis theory part clears out, geo- and ecotourism gives the best benefit for any natural attraction. Sustainable tourism creates synergism, which benefits tourists and local society. Sustainable tourism respects nature and increasing economic prosperity awakens area's local people to understand region's values and to protect it: to keep it pure to attract tourists.

Even though geopark idea is welcomed very warmly by cruising companies, in the air there is also a hint of scepticism. In South Karelia there has been various kinds of tourism projects before, which have been forgotten even before the projects have ended. The fear is that the geopark becomes one of the buried projects.

Another concern is marketing. Saimaa Geopark marketing is planned to be the same kind of joint marketing organization as goSaimaa is. Cruising companies are not satisfied with joint marketing organization goSaimaa's work. Participation fee is too high for small companies, marketing target group is

concentrating too much on Russians while domestic and Central Europe's customers are forgotten. Entrepreneurs wish that same mistakes are not repeated in Saimaa Geopark project. One of the biggest changes should happen in resources: new marketing organization needs money and enough workforce.

Cruising companies wish that membership fees to joint marketing organization could be on a reasonable level so small companies could also be able to take part in it. If goSaimaa continues its work and the new marketing organization does its own marketing, it is not considered very functional. If tourism companies are divided between two marketing organisations, synergy will be lost and even cooperation between companies is in danger.

Entrepreneurs also reminded about Finns which are forgotten when choosing the target marketing group. According to Puhakka (2011) 60 percent of all tourists in Finland are still domestic. Tourism from China and Asia can rise strongly and in year 2020 it is estimated to have 300,000-500,000 Chinese tourists in Finland.

Thesis partner's wish was to get information about cruising companies' interest in education. Education on Lake Saimaa's geological history interests all entrepreneurs. The starting level is quite high, because cruising companies have already guiding announcements where the birth of Lake Saimaa is told. Companies' own wishes for education topics were really interesting: storytelling about the way of living by the lake, fishing now and in older times, living at Lake Saimaa nowadays and sustainability.

Doing the thesis using a qualitative research method was enjoyable. Qualitative research and semi-structured interview were suitable for the author's character. The author enjoys reading, writing, interviewing and thinking.

The semi-structured interview was a very good decision. In the interviews where the author and respondent were speaking face to face, the interview material was wide and various in kind. The respondents told things that could not be known beforehand. Their personality gave an extra impression on the matters. It

was touching how openly entrepreneurs were speaking and wanted to share their thoughts. One interview was done by email, and from the answers it can be seen that without interaction answers are short and formal.

The semi-structured interviews were done in Finnish and translated to English. To listen and translate the research material was the hardest part of the thesis. When the interviews' lengths were at least one hour to an hour and a half, the research material was wide. Selecting relevant information for the thesis took more time than the author had expected. When selecting subjects which were relevant for the research, author had to trust her professional abilities as a former journalist. The author has a wide background information of Lake Saimaa, region's tourism marketing and tourism target groups. For this thesis the author combined her existing knowledge to subjects which rose from the interviews. Answers which felt important, gave a new perspective or were totally new to the author were mostly selected. Interview themes helped the author to keep answers limited.

The theory part was the biggest surprise. It was really hard to made decisions on what kind of theory is needed. Among dozens of books and as many internet sites it is really difficult to know where to start and what to leave away. Making the decision strangled the throat and secondly an actual writing week was lost because of the huge information flow. Overall it was interesting to go through the thesis process. From the first feeling of excitement to choking, from hard work to enjoyment, and in the end running against the clock to have everything ready before the deadline.

The thesis will also have a possibility for new thesis topics. Making stories about Lake Saimaa's geology, habitants, wars and heritage would benefit the whole tourism industry in this area. Even though cruising companies are using guiding announcements, a new thesis could make new versions about it. There should also be language versions at least in Finnish, English, Russian and in German. One thesis topic could be creating new tourism products to the geopark area. The products could be for cruising companies or program service companies. Main point would be to create products which are realistic to accomplish. In the



tourism industry resources are usually very small. One person is the company's owner, worker and developer.

## **Figures**

Figure 1 Saimaa Geopark project area page 10

Figure 2 Number of vessels passengers and draft in meters page 27

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## **Appendix**

### RECREATION AREAS IN LAKE SAIMAA

Recreation areas in Lake Saimaa mentioned in thesis:

Ilkonsaari

Ruuhonsaari

Kylmäsaari

Hiekkaniemi

Rastiniemi

Ruunasaari

Rokansaari

Satamosaari

Reference: Saimaa Geopark project