

## **Customer Experience in Tourist Information Office – Case: Porvoo Summer Info**

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<p>This thesis studies the customer experience in Porvoo Summer Info in the city of Porvoo, Finland. The main purpose is to find how regular tourists finds Porvoo Summer Info's services, how their general habits related to tourist information offices look like, and how factors such as location affect their image of the info.</p> <p>The theoretical frame of the research introduces the theory of customer experience and tourist information offices. In order to get a deeper understanding of the journey and experience of a customer, a survey was conducted to the visitors of Porvoo Summer Info.</p> <p>The empirical part begins with describing qualitative method which is used in this research. It also includes a description of questionnaire and how the data was collected. Validity and reliability are explained and discussed from the point of this research.</p> <p>Finally, the results, conclusions and suggestions for development and further research are presented in detail. The results were analysed by using Webropol online survey tool. Most important findings of the research were that most of the tourists still want to visit tourist information offices even a lot of information is provided on the internet. It was discovered that an info without staff would not be a good info. Indeed, tourists look for customer service, tips, maps, and local knowledge. It was also discovered that Porvoo Summer Info is easy to reach, tourists find what they are looking for from there and the location is good as well. Finally, suggestions for improvement are provided to the commissioner.</p> <p>The research was conducted in Porvoo Summer Tourist Info by interviewing tourists face-to-face at the info. The questionnaire received 34 responses. Data collection was done in August and September in 2016.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> Customer experience, tourist information office, customer service, customer journey	

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# 1 Introduction

The City of Porvoo is the second oldest city in Finland and a popular tourist destination especially during the summer time. In fact, there are two information offices in Porvoo. Tourist Information inside the Art Factory is operated throughout the year and Tourist Information under the Mannerheiminkatu Bridge as known as Porvoo Summer Info was open for the 4th time in the summer of 2016. Porvoo Summer Info offers information for travelers face to face and online, rents out bicycles and SUP-boards, updates Visit Porvoo's Facebook, Instagram and Snap Chat accounts as well as VisitPorvoo.fi itself. As a new service in 2016 the info staff was helping out travelers in the streets of Old Porvoo.

The amount of travelers visiting the info has been some between 50 and 350 people on daily basis. There are 5 workers at the info and most of the information is provided face to face. In the summer of 2016 Porvoo Summer Info was open from June 6th till September 11th seven days a week and got about 14 000 visitors.

The objective of this thesis is to investigate customer experience in Porvoo Summer Info. The thesis is commissioned by Tourism and Marketing unit of the city of Porvoo. The main idea was to find out what tourists expect to get from the info, do tourists still visit tourist information offices, how they end up there, how do they like Porvoo Summer Info's location and is there anything that could be improved.

The survey was conducted in Porvoo Summer Info. In addition, based on the results of the questionnaire, some suggestions are provided on how to improve customer experience in the info.

The theoretical frame of the research introduces the theory of customer experience and tourist information office. The main source of this thesis is interviews done during the opening hours of the info.

There is no research done about Porvoo Summer Info earlier. As Porvoo city as a tourist destination has got attention in international media and as the info represents the city for the travelers it is important to find out if development at the info is needed. Results are addition to commissioner's knowledge.

## 2 Customer experience

Customers are important and the most valuable asset that a company can have. Customers come and go and the best situation is of course when the same customer wants to return and purchase again and tell about the positive experience to others as well. Therefore, company should be structured and managed to fill customers' needs. Indeed, customer satisfaction is believed to create customer loyalty. (Schmitt 2003a, 1.)

Customer satisfaction is often compared to customer experience. Nevertheless, in many cases these two terms don't mean the same thing. Concept of satisfaction is more outcome-oriented while experience is process-oriented. The experience includes more than the actual buying or visiting part. It includes the environment, staff, how staff speaks to the customer, how customer has felt before, during and the after the buying. (Schmitt 2003b, 10.)

Nowadays companies have a choice of competing either on price or compete on experience. If the company decides to compete on price they will attract only customers who are looking for the best deal. If a company competes on experience it will cut down a big share of competitors who are just trying to be the cheapest. As customers are pickier and more demanding than ever, the company should try to create an experience which will make the customer to return. Even if there happens some mistakes, then the mistakes can be handled well in order to provide a good experience on mistake handling. (DiJilius 2011a, 39.)

As Martin Zwillig (Forbes 2014) states in his article, "Customer experience is the cumulative impact of multiple touch points over time, which result in a real relationship feeling, or lack of it.", it shows that customer experience is a chain of things happening to the customer. It includes everything that has happened pre, during and post purchase.

Wilburn (2006) suggests customer experience to be conceptualized into these factors: product quality, service at each channel, price, the shopping environment and brand image. He states that these components influence purchasing behaviour. Additionally, brand image is said to influence the quality. (Wilburn 2006, 19.)

In other words, customer satisfaction cannot be fully measured when the customer is interacting with the company or organization face-to-face even it is an important moment for both of the parties. Companies trying to maximize the satisfaction in those moments can

lead to a wrong picture where they do not take in count what has happened before the actual interaction and how the customer will feel afterwards. For example a call from customer to a company is routine for the company but it can be a big deal for the customer. (Harvard Business Review, 2013a.)

DiJilius (2011) presents a formula for experience:  $\text{Reality} - \text{Expectations} = \text{Customer Experience}$ . He gives an example where a customer has never been too satisfied with the company and his expectations are 5 on a scale from 1 to 10. Your own company which is of course delivering a great experience would give him an 8 (reality). This makes your customer experience to be  $8-5=3$ . As DiJilius says, any positive number is really good. By using this scale it is possible to help employees to understand how important fast reactions are and how every single move, was it before or right now, makes a difference. (DiJilius 2011b, 38.)

Proper way of managing customer experience can lead to good results within the company itself and within customers. It will enhance customer and employee satisfaction and most likely create more revenue. As said, it is important for all the parties to understand what happens before, during and after the journey of the customer. (Harvard Business Review, 2013b.) This leads us to end-to-end journey.

## **2.1 End-to-end journey**

Customers tend to experience the service or product offered by a company or an organization differently than how the selling party anticipates and some of this has something to do with customer's end-to-end journey. The experience customer gets is more than what the customer does after purchase. It is good to understand that by knowing customer's journey it is easier to help the brand to innovate around the experience. For instance, a flight journey for a customer definitely starts earlier and ends later than the actual flight's take-off and landing. Indeed, the journey starts already when the customer is considering the flight and weighing options even before actually searching for anything. (Walters 21 January 2015.)

For companies it would be the best to identify the most common customer journeys. Harvard Business Review (2013c) is recommending companies to identify customers' needs to maximize the customer experience: "They must identify the journeys in which they need to excel, understand how they are currently performing in each, build cross-functional processes to redesign and support those journeys, and institute cultural change and continuous improvement to sustain the initiatives at scale."

## **2.2 Customer experience in tourism**

The meaning of customer experience in tourism is comparable to customer experience in business. There also is considered to be before, during and after experience. Different stakeholders such as communities will play a role when designing all the stages. It is important to get a good picture of tourists' spatial practices, such as where do they move and when. A research on tourists' actions before, during and after is important to understand to give them even a better experience. (Visit Helsinki 2008a, 19.)

In research "Experience design in city tourism" conducted by Visit Helsinki (2008b) main focus aiming at to find out "how tourists design their experiences before, during and after their holidays in 14 Nordic and Baltic cities". They discovered that the internet is a huge inspiration when deciding where to travel. Tourism brochures can also be a great inspiration. In addition, "big cities were considered as alternatives more often".

The main motivations to experience were history of the place and famous attractions. Yet, only 29% of all the respondents told they visit tourist information office in order to decide what to do. Tourists mostly visit there to pick up a map or some other brochure. It was also found out that cities are doing a lot better in the eyes of tourists than what the cities think of. Atmosphere and architecture are the most important things. (Visit Finland 2008c, 34-63.)

Additionally, it is also good to remember that customer experience will never be controllable neither measurable. Customers are, after all, people with their own emotions, needs and personnel. Everyone is different and values their experiences in different ways. (i-scoop, 2016b)

## **2.3 Stakeholders designing the experience**

When we take a look at customer experience, various organisations take a part in it.

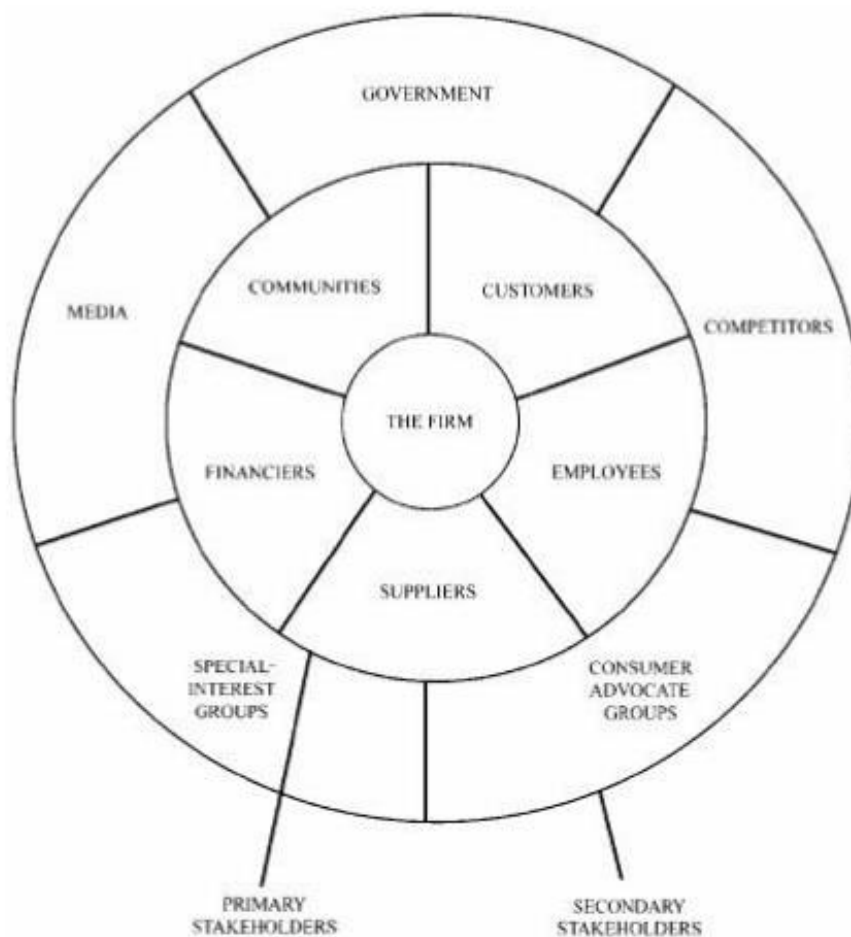


Figure 1 Stakeholder map (Freeman, Harrison & Wicks, 2007a)

As in any business, the stakeholders design the experience. As Freeman, Harrison & Wicks (2007b, 3) explain: “Business can be understood as a set of relationships among groups that have a stake in the activities that make up the business. Business is about how customers, suppliers, employees, financiers (stockholders, bondholders, banks, and so on), communities, and managers interact and create value.” When a business is understood then it is easier to know and understand more about the relationship between groups mentioned above.

The process of identifying who the company’s stakeholders are is an important process. It will help to identify which stakeholders are affected directly or indirectly by the project. When talking about planning a tourism product the stakeholders are often employees, local businesses, residents, activist groups, tourists, national business chains, competitors and government. (Meadows 2012, 3.)

The primary stake holders for Porvoo Summer Info according to figure 1 are its customers, employees meaning 5 people working at the info, suppliers such as Visit Finland who



delivers maps of Finland to the info, financiers meaning the city of Porvoo from whom all the money and rules comes from and communities meaning for example local shop keepers who are partly dependent on tourism.

### **3 Porvoo Marketing and Tourism Unit**

The commissioner for the research is Porvoo Marketing and Tourism Unit which was also the employer of the author when this research was conducted.

The marketing and tourism related issues of the city of Porvoo is controlled by Porvoo Marketing and Tourism unit. This unit has got about 240 000 euros budget per year to spend on marketing tourism. Porvoo Marketing and Tourism Unit spends money on digital campaigns, Facebook advertising, Google search word advertising, V Kontakte advertising, advertising on posters and leaflets, fairs and pr-events, Visit Helsinki collaboration, annual Porvoo City Guide and different researches. The list is long yet carefully analysed. The aim is to be in contact and support local businesses and give a welcoming picture of the city for incoming tourists. (Tid, 2016.)

Porvoo Marketing and Tourism Unit commissioned a research about the summer of 2016 in Porvoo. Tutkimus- ja Analysointikeskus TAK Oy discovered that there were about 354 000 tourists visiting Porvoo in the summer of 2016 and most of them liked especially Old Porvoo and wished for example to have more public toilets. Most of the people visited Porvoo with their own car for one day together with their friends and family. Tourists checked for information from internet before their trip. (Tutkimus- ja Analysointikeskus TAK Oy, 2016.)

#### **3.1 Porvoo Summer Info**

Tourist information offices provide information for tourists ideally from the planning stage till the actual visit. The first stage is to provide information through channels like internet, social media and email. During the second stage tourist arrives to the destination and an actual physical information office can be visited. The office should provide accurate information about the destination and its services. Service is supposed to be friendly and staff should have local knowledge about the area. Tourist information offices also bring information to places where tourists are moving daily. This means for instance different leaflets, signs, notice boards and hotel receptions. In addition information can be provided on the streets by assigning staff to walk around and help tourists in need. Additionally, tourist information offices can provide wifi, bike rental, luggage storage or sell for instance souvenirs. (WTO 2007, 120-121.)



Figure 2 Porvoo Summer Info provides city guide in 5 languages. (Roininen, 2016.)



Figure 3 Porvoo Summer Info rents bicycles and SUP-boards. (Roininen, 2016.)

There are two information offices in Porvoo. Tourist Information inside the Art Factory is operated throughout the year and Tourist Information under the Mannerheiminkatu Bridge as known as Porvoo Summer Info was open for the 4th time in the summer of 2016. Porvoo Summer Info offers information for travelers face to face and online, rents out bicy-

cles and SUP-boards, updates Visit Porvoo's Facebook, Instagram and Snap Chat accounts as well as VisitPorvoo.fi itself. As a new service in 2016 the info had staff in the streets of Old Porvoo helping out travelers.

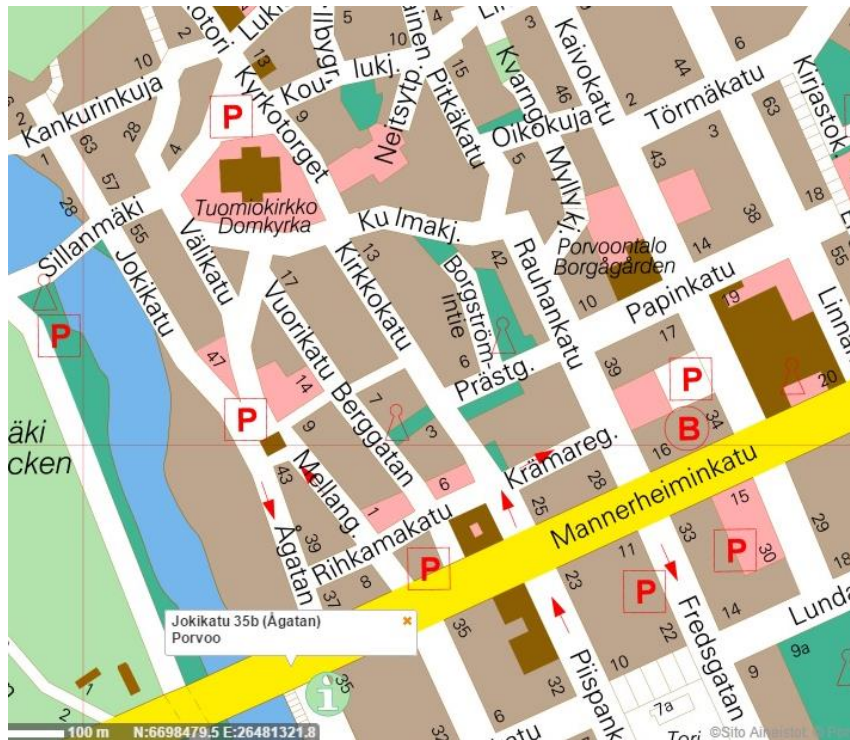


Figure 4 Porvoo Summer Info is located right next to Old Porvoo. (Porvoon karttapalvelu, 2016.)

The amount of travelers visiting the info has been some between 50 and 350 people on daily basis. There are 5 workers at the info and most of the information is provided face to face. In the summer of 2016 Porvoo Summer Info was open from June 6th till September 11th seven days a week and got about 14 000 visitors which is smaller number compared to 2015 when the info got about 19 000 visitors. The change is due to more happenings and events held in 2015.

### 3.2 Future of tourist information offices

The needs of tourists have changed but tourist information offices in many cases are not. Some ideas to enhance the experience at the info are to get local connections, wifi, provide computer or tablets for customer use, get rid of the service desk, empower staff and get social on different media platforms. Tourist Information Offices in the future are tech-focused and people-powered. (Thompson 2012.)

Finding the correct way of providing information to tourists is important. Was it then at the office or online some methods can be used to attract visitors to offices. For example by

providing toilet facilities and that way getting them attract to the information provided inside the office. Whatever is chosen to be done is should not compete with local businesses. (Daily Post, 2013.)

Tourist information offices are often ran by the city or city council. Money to the offices comes from the city as well and everything is dependant of the funding. Locals would be really keen on keeping their tourist information offices since offices may sell local made products and give work for locals as well. Not to forget that many tourists come to look for help from the offices. The difficulty is that even locals have strong emotional and financial connections with tourist information offices, is the internet getting stronger and stronger. Online information seems to be the future. (The Guardian, 2011a.)

Many tourists still want to visit a tourist information office when in situ in a smaller town. They are still looking for customer service. Of course internet makes traveling easier because it is possible to look for all the information before hand and book accommodation and transportation, too. Having a tourist information office and information provided on internet makes traveling and planning balanced. The message from Visit England to smaller towns and local authorities is to find alternatives if they cannot afford a office. Technology is changing yet travellers still want local people and advice from them. Personal touch cannot be underestimated. (The Guardian, 2011b.)

## **4 Research implementation**

This chapter explains more about the research method, designing the questionnaire, data collection, data analysis, and at last validity and reliability of the work. The results of the research will be presented in the next chapter.

### **4.1 Research method**

While following the wishes of the commissioner party and by using information gained from the theory of customer experience and tourist information offices, this research examined how visitors of Porvoo Summer Info found the accessibility, atmosphere and facilities of the office. Additionally, traveling and information collecting habits and the likability of the location were examined. The research was conducted at Porvoo Summer Info in Porvoo, Finland during its opening hours in August and September 2016.

This research was conducted by doing face to face interviews. The research was made by using Webropol online survey tool and the questionnaire had only open-ended questions next to general questions such as questions about interviewees' age, gender and nationality. Thus, the questionnaire was semi-structured. It was told to the interviewees that the results are used for bachelor's thesis and to enhance the experience at Porvoo Summer Info.

The respondents were picked up randomly to get reliable results. The author was working as a travel consultant at the info while conducting the research, thus sometimes there were no time for interviewing or the possible interviewee did not have common language with the author. All the questions were designed so that the wanted answer would be based on interviewees own habits, preferences and experience.

#### **4.1.1 Qualitative research**

Research means a systematic process by which there is a chance of knowing more about something than we did before the research. Qualitative research often consists of interviewing, observing and analysing. Qualitative research aims to uncover the meaning of a phenomenon. It aims to know more about one's experiences, such as in education, at work or other areas of everyday concerns of people's lives. This leads the researcher to ask researchable questions where the aim is to find how and why something is happening. A research focused on understanding different perspectives and experiences of these people offers a great chance of making a difference. (Merriam 2009, 1-5.)

Qualitative data is distinguished from quantitative data in terms of the difference between qualitative data dealing with meanings and quantitative dealing with numbers. Meanings are analysed through conceptualization whereas numbers are analysed through statistics. (Dey 1993, 3.)

## **4.2 Questionnaire**

Questionnaire should be designed to obtain the best and most accurate answers thus it must be constructed and used as a help for respondents to get the best information out from them. A poorly written questionnaire may provide data that are incorrect. Questionnaire is used to ask questions always in the same order and is described as a conversation between respondent and researcher. Questionnaire should be designed so that all the questions have the same meaning to all respondents. The first task is to define the objectives, what data need to be collected and how. Lastly, before asking any questions “the sample questionnaire must be defined and the sampling method and the data collection medium must be determined.” (Brace 2008, 3-9.)

This thesis questionnaire started with a meeting with the commissioner. The commissioner knew already quite well what kind of questions they want to be asked in the questionnaire. In order to get the best results, the author created the final questionnaire also in Finnish. She also met up with the thesis coordinator to check up for the grammar part of English the questions. After the questionnaire was edited it was tested within a couple of author’s friends and colleagues. After further improvements the final version was ready to be used and can be find as an attachment at the end of this thesis.

## **4.3 Data collection**

This research was conducted by one graduating tourism student from Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences and it was commissioned by Tourism and Marketing Unit of the City of Porvoo. The aim was to get as many answers as possible and the final amount of answered gathered was 34. Data was collected via face to face interviews.

The research took in place in Porvoo in Finland at the Summer Porvoo Info in Jokikatu 35b. The collection of date started in August 2016 and finished in September 2016. The interviews were done during the opening hours of the info which were during the week days between 10am and 6pm and during the weekends between 11am and 5pm. On interview took time between 10 minutes to 20 minutes depending on how much the interviewee had things to say. The questionnaire was told to be easy to answer to.

While doing the interviews the biggest challenge was to find people who spoke English well enough to answer the questions. Also, weather made a big difference – on days when it was cloudy or rainy there were hardly anyone visiting Porvoo Summer Info. Additionally, most of the visitors told they have come to Porvoo from Helsinki for just a couple of hours so the timing for them wasn't the best. Nevertheless, collecting those 34 answers felt quite easy and as all the answers were typed straight to the questionnaire on Webropol the interviewees didn't need to write down anything by themselves or even see the actual questionnaire. All the interviewees got a small gift after the interview. The gift consisted of a Visit Porvoo bag and four Visit Porvoo coasters.

One question appeared to be a bit tricky, "is there an info office you would remember as the best one", as almost no one had an opinion to give at the point about it. All in all respondents didn't seem to mind to answer the questions especially when they knew they would be handed a gift after the interview.



## 5 Results

In this chapter the results of the research are presented. First the general information of the respondents and then analysed results of the questionnaire.

### 5.1 General information

The first part of this chapter includes general information of the interviewees. General information includes gender, age, nationality, travel companion and information if their trip to Porvoo was part of an organized tour.

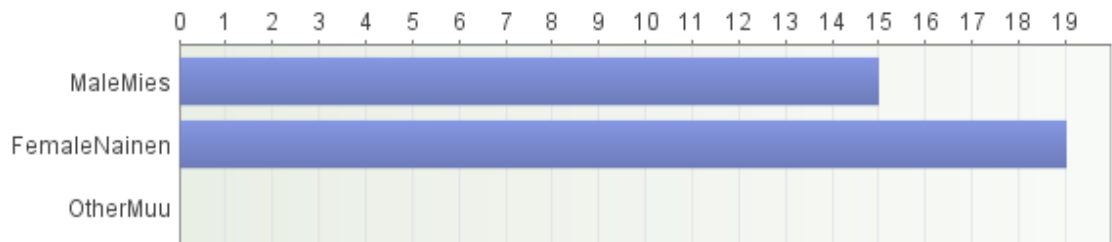


Figure 5 Gender

As it can be seen from figure 5 majority of the respondents were female. There were in total 19 female (56%) and 15 male (44%) interviewees. This result came up by interviewing randomly and there is no proper reason why the female share is a bit bigger.

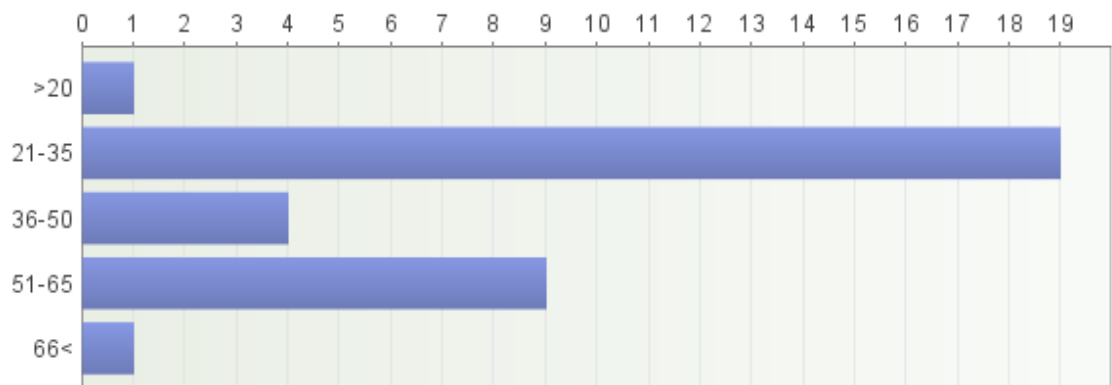


Figure 6 Age

From figure 6 it can be seen that from the respondents only 3% (1) were less than 20 years old, 55% (19) were between 21 and 35 years old, 12% (4) were between 36 and 50 years old, 27% (9) were between 51 and 65 years old while respondents over 66 years old had only 3% (1) share. This shows that students and retired people were the biggest

groups during the interviews which also tells about their leisure time activities and possibilities to travel.

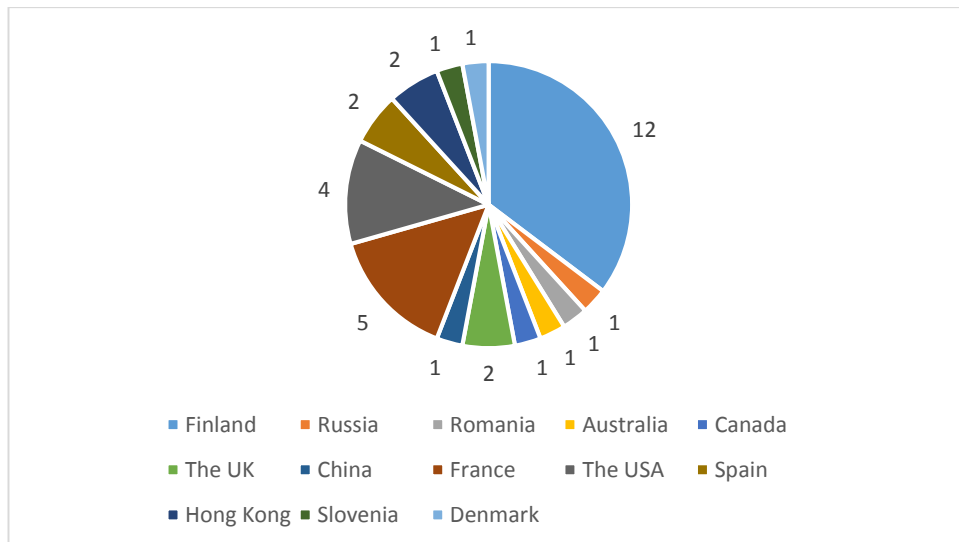


Figure 7 Nationality

According to the figure 7 the nationalities of the respondents can be seen. From 34 respondents 12 people, making it 35%, were from Finland, 15% (5) from France, 11% (4) from the USA, equal 6% (2) from Hong Kong, The UK and Spain and then 3% (1) from Russia, Romania, Australia, Canada, China, Slovenia and Denmark. The big percentage of Finnish people makes sense because approximately 50% of daily visitors at the Porvoo Summer Info are from Finland. In the summer of 2016 the second biggest visitor country was Germany and third one Russia.



Figure 8 Who are you traveling with?

In the figure 8 it can be seen that partner was the most popular travel companion. Indeed, 26% (11) was traveling with partner and a couple of people with their boyfriend, husband or wife which would also mean partner and rises the percentage up to 44% (15). Yet, 21% (7) were traveling alone and 35% (4) with family or friends. The numbers are telling that partner was the most common travel companion even though other options were not too different either. Maybe this tells that Porvoo is popular among different kinds of travel companions.

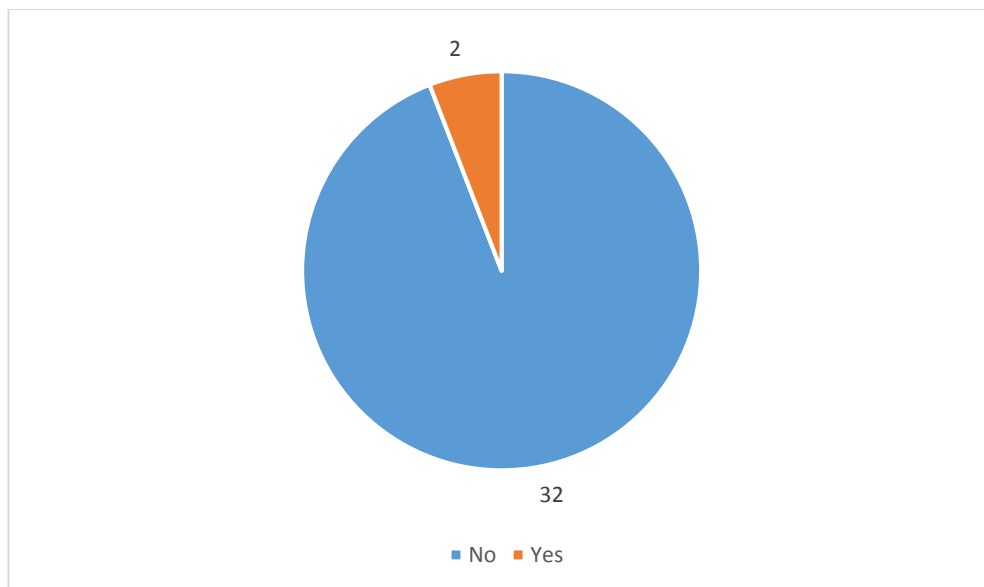


Figure 9 Is this trip part of an organized tour?

According to the figure 9 it is really clearly seen that most of the visitors, 94% (32) to be exact, were not part of an organized tour. The left 6% (2) told they were taking part of an organized work trip. This result can be a bit misleading because during the summer months like June and July Porvoo Summer Info gets lots of visitors from organized bus and boat tours. According to the results almost everyone was traveling on their own.

## 5.2 Before traveling

This chapter presents do tourists visit information offices in general, what do they expect from those, where do they look for information before they travel and is the an information office they would remember as the best one they have ever visited.

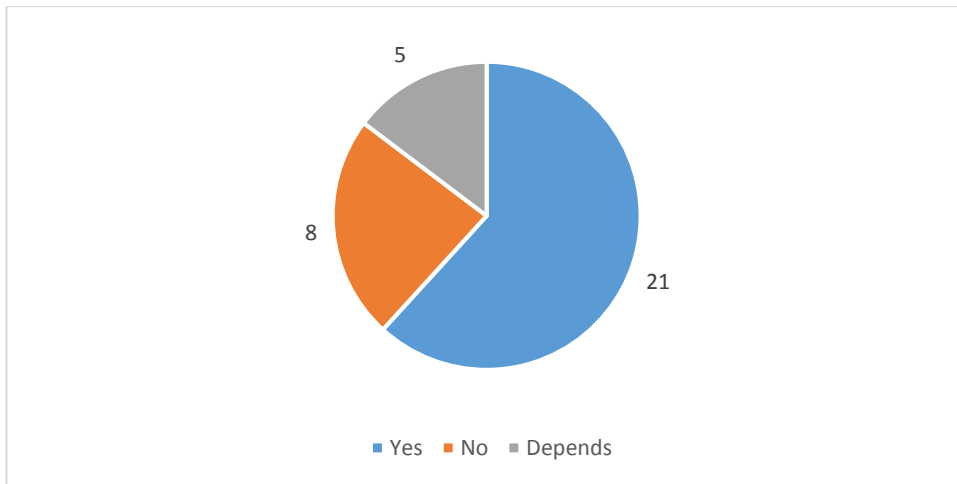


Figure 10 Do you visit tourist information offices when you travel?

Figure 10 presents that most of the respondents visit tourist information offices when they travel, to be accurate 62% (21). The most common reason for visiting tourist information was to get tips and maps. Many interviewees also told how they haven't planned their visit beforehand and want to get info from locals and many questions were related to restaurant recommendations. Additionally, the info received from actual info office was said to be better than the one on internet. This proves that tourist information offices are still needed.

24% (8) told they do not visit tourist information offices. Common reasons were already clear plans for their travels and easy access to all kinds of information on the internet. It was also said that they want to do things on their own will and don't get obvious tips from the info. This tells that there are individual travellers who rely on internet.

The last group, 14% (6) didn't give a clear answer. They said they visit tourist information offices sometimes depending on what do to they know about the destination and if they need more information, or if they happen to pass by an office. On author's opinion this group is closer not to visit an info office because this group seems to know what they are doing but rely on tourist information offices in case they get lost or need more info which they cannot see from the internet.



Figure 11 What kind of services do you expect to get from a tourist information office?

Figure 11 gives more specific information about tourists' preferences. Tourists are looking for maps, recommendations, general information, directions and tips from tourist information offices. They wanted more info about restaurant, events, history sights and what to do and see within one day. Additionally, the service provided at the info was wished to be customer first oriented, friendly and a little bit smart, little less obvious. A capability to talk English language was also mentioned.

Everything mentioned above makes sense since visitors can get that service from an actual office which you can't get from internet. Face to face contact and service seems to be wanted.



Figure 12 Where do you look for information before your travel?

One of the important objectives of this thesis was to find from where tourists look for information before their travel. On figure 12 it is clearly seen from the answers that internet is the most popular reference of information – indeed, 33 respondents out of 34 mentioned internet. The most popular sites to find information were Google, Lonely Planet and TripAdvisor. Next to internet as a source were mentioned also different blogs, travel guides, magazines, friends, travel shows and Visit Porvoo. This tells the importance of paying attention on the information provided on the internet and about the importance of keeping it updated. Nevertheless, it is good to have travel guides like Lonely Planet updated as well.

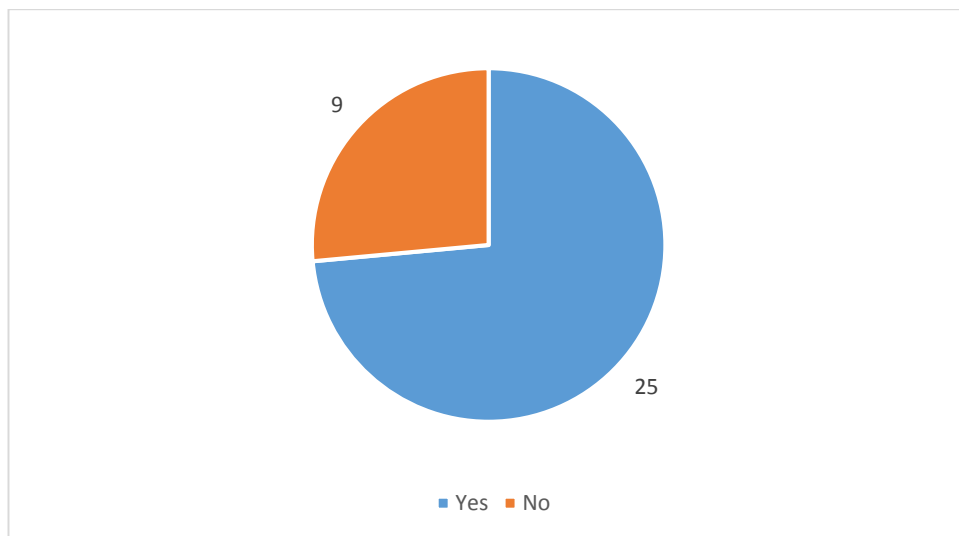


Figure 13 Is there an information desk that you would remember as the best info you have ever visited?

Figure 13 shows the interviewees hadn't really thought of which tourist information offices would have been really good. Indeed, 74% (25) didn't really know which info would have been the best one, yet some told that best one should be filled with the criteria of having an easy access, filled with brochures and a good attitude owning the staff. All this tells that tourist information offices tend to be forgotten easily. This could be fixed with even better, customer friendly and informative solutions such as adding some interaction to the info office, like a map on the wall where you could pin your home country or by getting some refreshments.

Left 26% (9) told about their different experiences around the world. Specific locations mentioned were Japan, Andorra, Spain, Reykjavik in Iceland, Hamina in Finland, Belfast in Ireland and Porvoo Summer Info. These were the best information offices because they were told to be big, informative, friendly and helpful. Porvoo Summer Info was mentioned three times and the info was told to be nice and having relaxed atmosphere.

### 5.3 During and after travel

In this chapter it can be seen how tourists found about Porvoo Summer Info, how did they get to the information office and was it easy, what do they think of the office, what they were looking for and did they find it, would it be ok not to have staff at the office and is there anything they would change in the office. Additionally, what do they think of the city as there is no tourist information office during winter in Old Porvoo. Lastly, additional comments were welcome.

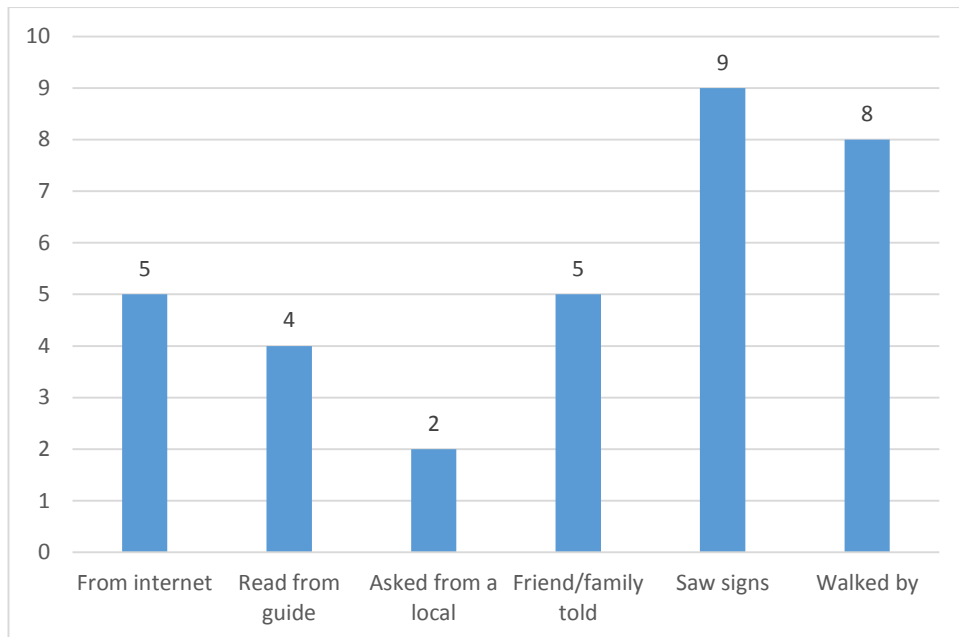


Figure 14 How did you hear/find out about Porvoo summer tourist information office?

According to figure 14 half of the tourists hadn't heard about Porvoo Summer Info before they saw the signs or walked by the office. Signs were seen on walls of the bridge and next to Porvoo Bus Station.

This makes the other 50% (17) knowable of the office before their trip. A couple of people, 12% (4) to be exact, had read about the office from a guide. These guides were for example the Porvoo City Guide and Lonely Planet. 15% (5) of the visitors had read about the office on internet. On internet VisitPorvoo.fi was the most mentioned reference, yet Facebook and Instagram were also mentioned. Last 6% (2) asked from a local person the whereabouts of the info.

Figure 13 tells about the importance of good marketing on internet and the importance of good signs on the streets. The result could be better, meaning more people would have known about the office before coming to Porvoo, by better advertising on internet.

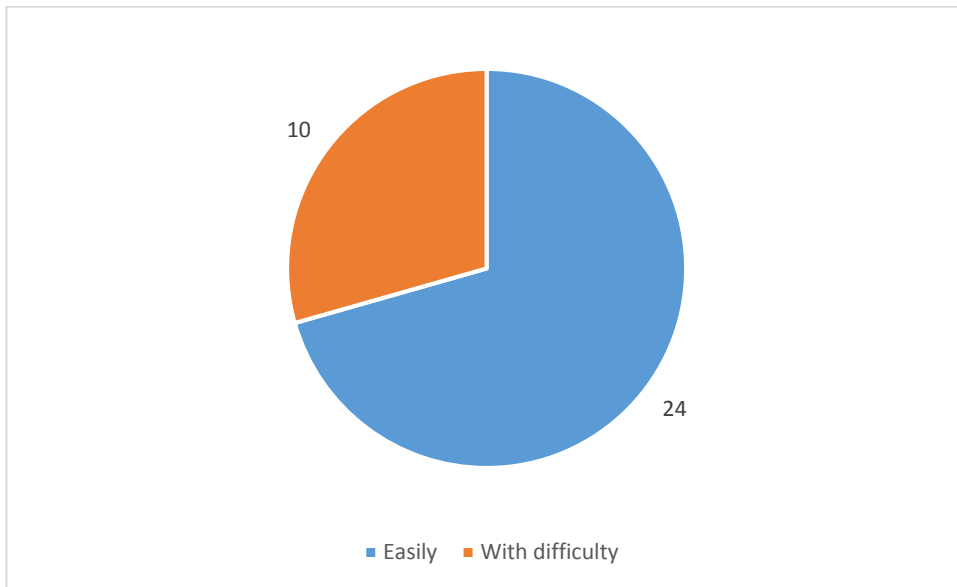


Figure 15 How did you get here to the info desk? How easy/difficult was it to find us?

Figure 15 shows that Porvoo Summer Info is relatively easy to find. In fact, 71% (24) of the respondents told they found the office easily because of the signs and because of the rental bikes in front of the office. Additionally, some tourists told that the info is easy to reach by car since the parking area just right next to the info and how the location is easy to reach if coming to Porvoo by bus, too. The accessibility of the office seems to be quite good.

Nevertheless, 29% (10) told finding Porvoo Summer Info was difficult. The interviewees said there should be more signs in Old Porvoo and next to the bus station leading to the info. A tourist map could be placed next to the bus station.

It was told that GPS couldn't find the location as well. Indeed, if the address of the info is written like this, Jokikatu 35 b, GPS will find it but if that letter b is written in capital letter then GPS will show wrong location.





Figure 16 What do you think of our info office?

The appearance of tourist information office is of course important. The info needs to be clean and easy to navigate inside. From figure 16 it can be seen that Porvoo Summer Info is definitely a great place. All of the interviewees, 100% (34) gave only positive adjectives to describe the info. Especially words cozy, great, different and cool were popular. Additionally, it was said that staff was excellent, decoration is great and free wi-fi and music a great plus. As the info is partly an open space it was said that enclosed one would make the visitors to feel like they have to do something while now they can just walk in and leave whenever. No suggestions for development were given.

Porvoo Summer Info has been said many times by visitors that it is really different compared to other tourist information centers. This must be due to Porvoo Summer Info's location under a bridge, its colourful decoration with a lot of photographs and the fact that it is an open space.

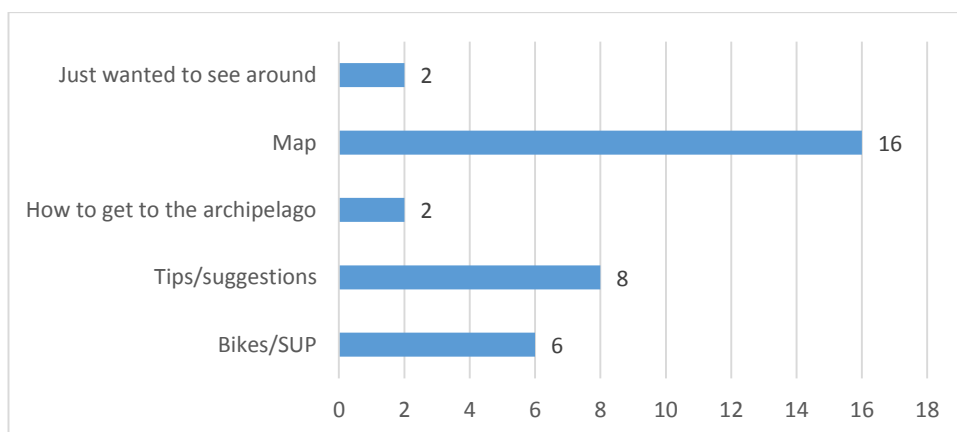


Figure 17 Did you find what you were looking for? What was it?

Everyone said yes when the author asked did they find what they came to look for from the info. To be more exact, figure 17 presents that 47% (16) came to look for maps. Maps

were wanted especially in French, Spanish and in English. After maps the most wanted thing were tips and suggestions. In total 24% (8) were asking for different kinds of information, tips for restaurants, recommendations for eating lunch and suggestions in general.

The chart shows that 18% (6) of the respondents came after to bike and stand-up paddling rentals. Porvoo Summer Info is the only place in the city of Porvoo where SUP boards are rent and there is no other place in the city either from where one could rent two different kinds of bikes – mountain bike Focuses and city bike Jopos.

A small share, 6% (2) came to ask information about Porvoo archipelago and another 6% (2) just popped in to see how the information office looks like.

Almost everyone came to look for something from the info what is not so easily approachable on internet. These answers speak for the fact that Porvoo should have Porvoo Summer Info open during the becoming summers as well.

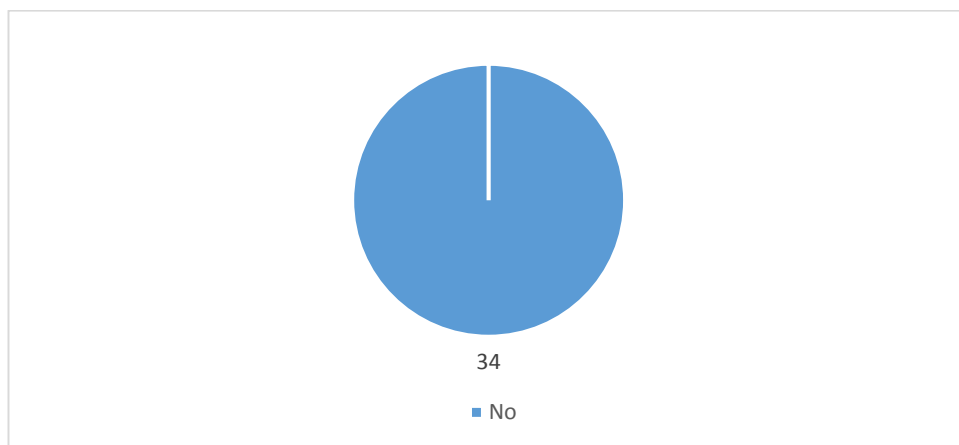


Figure 18 Would it be enough to have only brochures in the info and no staff at all?

A full percentage 100% (34) of the respondents told that Porvoo Summer Info would not be that good if there were no staff working there. The most common reason for this was that if the customer wants to ask something it is not possible without staff. Secondly, human touch, general help and tips and interaction were wanted. Also if the visitor wants to know about activities or needs personal recommendations, or wants to know about local habits, culture and history then brochures are simply not enough.

After all, customer service in general is the needed factor. One answer sums it up effectively: "Information can be found from the internet. It is nice to have an opportunity to get answers and recommendations".

The future of Porvoo Summer Info has been discussed many times publicly and many other cities in Finland are going to make major changes to their tourist information services – Helsinki for example to mention one. Porvoo as a smaller city is following Helsinki’s example. This could mean less staff more brochures.

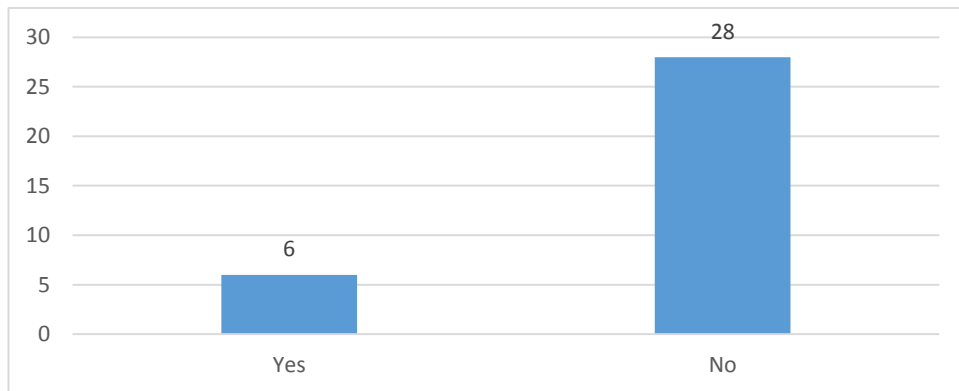


Figure 19 Is there anything you would change in here? What is it?

As figure 19 reveals most of the visitors, 82% (28), would not change anything in Porvoo Summer Info. They justified their opinion by telling how the office is easy to notice from outside, how it is really different compared to other tourist information offices they have visited and how inviting it looks like.

Rest of the tourists, 18% (6), gave some suggestions for improvement. One suggestion was to add computers for visitors. Providing a brochure of Porvoo’s history was also requested. Additionally, something interactive such as a map where to pin point where you come from was suggested.

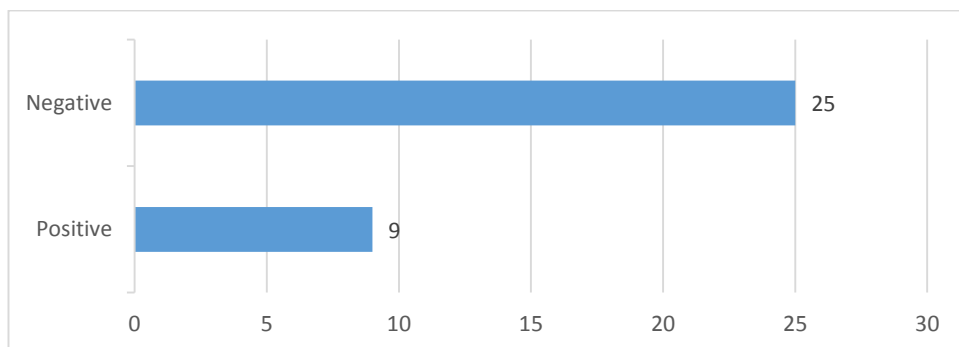


Figure 20 As there is no info at all in Old Porvoo during the winter time what do you think about the city?

As figure 20 shows 76% (25) are not feeling too satisfied about the fact that there is no tourist information in Old Porvoo during the winter time. The author told the main tourist

information office is open all year round on the other side of the river inside the Art Factory. Respondents were surprised and felt weird about it. Art Factory was told to be far from Old Porvoo and bus station was stated to be closer to the old town as well. The general opinion was that not having info in the old town during winter is not a good thing.

Yet, 14% (9) felt differently. Some respondents said that Art Factory is easy to reach by foot or by car and if you really need help then you would just go there. Secondly, many tourists thought that most of the tourist come to visit during the summer time, meaning, winter time must not be as busy as summer and no information office is needed.

### **Other comments are welcome**

Only two of the interviewees gave an extra comment. Another one told he/she felt welcome and told staff to be friendly. Second one suggested to have an occasional stand in the old town.

## 6 Conclusion and development suggestions

This chapter offers conclusion of the subject, its trustworthiness, a glimpse of ethical issues and suggestions for further research. Additionally evaluation of the thesis project and author herself is provided.

This research reached 34 tourists from which 56% (19) were women and 44% (15) were men. Respondents were from many different countries but most of them, 35% (12) were from Finland. Additionally 55% (19) were between 21 and 35 years old. Most of the visitors were traveling with their partners or family, to be accurate 79% (19). Almost everyone was traveling on their own and only 6% (2) visited Porvoo as a part of an organized tour.

Tourists visit tourist information offices because they are looking for more specific information, suggestions, recommendations, tips and customer service. It is important that the information is accurate and professionally given. Before traveling they look for information from internet, guides and internet. Lonely Planet and Trip Advisor are popular platforms.

Almost no one could not point out an excellent tourist information office, yet Porvoo Summer Info was mentioned many times. Porvoo Summer Info was found by seeing the signs outside or by hearing about the info from friends or family or from the internet. Finding Porvoo Summer Info was easy. Additionally, 100% (34) of the respondents really liked the style inside the office and would not change almost anything.

Most of the visitors came to look for a map, tips, and suggestions and to rent bikes and SUP-boards and an info office without a staff would not be satisfactory. Moreover, most of the visitors would want Porvoo Summer Info to be operating during the winter time as well because Art Factory was discovered to be a bit distant.

To summarize the conclusion the most important points are presented as bullet points in here:

- Tourists coming to the city of Porvoo visit tourist information offices to receive more specific information, maps, personal suggestions and tips.
- It is important that the information provided is accurate and professionally given.
- Before the trip tourists look for information from internet from Google and Lonely Planet.
- Porvoo Summer Info looks great inside and location is good.

- The info is easy to find and access.

## **6.1 Trustworthiness and ethical issues**

Trustworthiness was aimed to maintain during the whole thesis process. All of the information in the theory part of the thesis is based on references applied. Results of the interviews are reflecting to the theory part and are therefore trustworthy.

Ethical issues were considered as well. Author's supervisor for Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences offered a great help and for instance reviewed the questionnaire and helped modifying questions in grammatical sense. Also, interviewees were told about the aim of the thesis. Participation for interviews was voluntary and no names were asked.

## **6.2 Validity and reliability**

Shuttleworth (2008) explains validity to encompass "the entire experimental concept and establishes whether the results obtained meet all of the requirements of the scientific research method." Reliability means that all the significant results must be repeatable meaning other researchers should also be able to perform the same experiment. If the research contains validity and reliability then the findings are more likely to be accepted. (Shuttleworth 20 October 2008)

There could be a couple of factors which could affect this research negatively. For instance, the interviews were made at the info by the worker of the info, as known as the author, which may have caused interviewees to keep away their negative opinions about Porvoo Summer Info. Additionally, majority of the respondents were not native English speakers which could mean that some questions were misunderstood. Also, the amount of 34 respondents cannot speak for the whole summer's experience at the info since the info got some what 14 000 visitors between June and September 2016.

## **6.3 Suggestions for development**

The biggest change for Porvoo Summer Info would be moving it to another location. The info could be located in the Old Porvoo where all the shopping possibilities, restaurants and history is. Nevertheless, the info was there in the beginning of 2010's and Old Porvoo as a location was found to be too expensive. Thus, Porvoo Summer Info will not most likely be moved back to Old Porvoo even it maybe would be even easier to reach there.

Second suggestion would be to add more signs leading to the info. It is clearly seen from the interview answers that more signs would be needed. There should be clear signs next to the Porvoo bus station, in the Old Porvoo and next to the old bridge. The location under Mannerheiminkatu bridge should also be mentioned because tourists are looking for an actual traditional indoors office and of course have no idea that Porvoo Summer Info is actually an open space under the bridge.

The Porvoo Tourism and Marketing Unit has thought about adding more signs during the earlier years but it seems to take a lot of time and effort to place all the signs and then take them off when the season ends.

Third suggestion is to keep on running the Porvoo Summer Info. There has been some discussion of not having the summer info and just rely on the main tourist information in Taidetehtas (Art Factory). It was clearly seen during the interviews that one information office is needed in Old Porvoo. Also, to run Porvoo Summer Info it needs staff to provide customer service. An office filled with brochures and maps is not enough.

#### **6.4 Future research projects**

The author suggests a further research to be done at the main tourist information office at the Art Factory. The research could be similar to this thesis where the customer experience is examined. Additionally, the informative factor of Visit Porvoo website could be researched – ie. is information provided informative enough and how the site could be improved. Moreover, this research could be conducted as a semester project for Haaga-Heilia University of Applied Sciences.

#### **6.5 Evaluation of the thesis process and self-evaluation**

Writing this thesis was a nice experience. As the author has been working at Porvoo Summer Info for three summers and the topic for the interview was interesting. What made it even better was that the commissioner offered the possibility to write thesis for them. The decision was made in May 2016.

First stage was to have a conversation with the commissioner and later with thesis supervisor. The commissioner knew already quite well what kind of questions should be asked in the questionnaire due to public conversation on local newspapers. Indeed, the info's whereabouts had been discussed publicly many times during the summer. The author thought she would start to write some theory already in June when the info was opened but June and July were so busy at work that there were no time to do the thesis. Then early in August the author wrote some theory and made the questionnaire.

Second stage was to interview tourists at Porvoo Summer Info. This stage was nice and interesting due to happy tourists. The author managed to interview 34 people during August and September. Nevertheless, the author wishes she could have interviewed even more people by starting the interviewing process earlier.

Third stage was to analyse the answers and write the theory. All this was also really nice since the author has done many similar projects at school. Moreover, writing and deciding what is important and what is not was interesting. At the end conclusion, some suggestions and self-evaluation was done.

Writing this thesis gave the author more understanding of customer experience as well as more understanding of the importance of tourist information offices. Before starting this thesis the author was well aware of the past of Porvoo Summer Info and its actions since the author has worked there during three summers. The author had heard during those three years feedback from tourists and knew the overall image of the office itself. Yet, the author had no idea how tourists search for information before their travel, does it really happen only on internet like everyone says, or are more traditional ways, such as travel guides, included. All in all the thesis writing project was educational and showed the author that everything is possible if you plan things well ahead and trust yourself.

The author appreciates every respondent who took part answering the questionnaire and gave a little bit of their time to make Porvoo Summer Info even a better one. It may take a bit of time everyone to be satisfied with the information office and its location but what makes it the best info Porvoo could have is its kind visitors, actively working Porvoo Tourism and Marketing Unit and helpful staff.



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Figure 2:

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Figure 3:

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Figure 4:

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Questionnaire

#### **Customer Experience in Porvoo Summer Tourist Information**

Before you travel

*Ennen matkaa*

**1.** Do you visit tourist information offices when you travel? Why?

*Käytkö yleensä matkailuneuvonnassa matkoillasi? Miksi?*

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**2.** What kind of services do you expect to get from a tourist information office?

*Minkälaisia palveluita odotat saavasi infosta?*

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**3.** Where do you look for information before your travel?

*Mistä hankit infoa ennen matkaasi?*

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4. Is there an information desk that you would remember as the best info you have ever visited? What makes it the best one?

*Onko joku turisti-info jäänyt mieleesi erityisesti parhaana infona? Miksi?*

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**During and after travel**

***Matkan aikana ja jälkeen***

5. How did you hear/find out about us, i.e. Porvoo summer tourist information office?

*Kuinka kuulit Porvoon kesäinfostamme?*

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6. How did you get here to the info desk? How easy/difficult was it to find us?

Why

*Kuinka löysit tänne infoomme? Oliko se helppoa/vaikeaa? Perustele*

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**7. What do you think of our location?**

*Mitä mieltä olet sijainnistamme?*

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**8. What do you think of our info office?**

*Mitä tykkäät infostamme?*

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**9. Did you find what you were looking for? What was it?**

*Löysitkö täältä infosta haluamasi? Mitä se oli?*

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**10. Would it be enough to have only brochures in here and no staff at all? Why**

*Olisiko mielestä infon palvelut riittävät, jos täältä saisi vain esitteitä ja täällä ei olisi henkilökuntaa? Perustele*

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**11. Is there anything you would change in here? What is it?**

*Onko täällä infossa jotain mitä muuttaisit? Mitä?*

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**12.** As there is no info at all in Old Porvoo during the winter time what do you think about the city? Why?

*Vanhassa Porvoossa ei ole infoa talvikaudella - mitä ajattelet tästä? Perustele*

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**13.** Other comments are welcome

*Mahdolliset lisäkommentit*

**General information**

***Haastateltavan tiedot***

**14.** Gender

*Sukupuoli*

Male  
*Mies*

Female  
*Nainen*

Other  
*Muu*

**15. Age**

*Ikä*

- >20
- 21-35
- 36-50
- 51-65
- 66<

**16. Nationality**

*Kansalaisuus*

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**17. Who are you traveling with?**

*Kenen kanssa matkustat?*

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**18. Is this trip to Porvoo a part of an organized tour? If yes, please let us know which tour:**

*Onko matkasi Porvooseen osa järjestettyä matkaa? Jos kyllä, niin mikä yhtiö:*

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