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**JAPANESE SCHOOL EXCURSIONS IN OULU AREA – RESEARCH OF THE  
POSSIBILITIES FOR A HOMESTAY ACCOMMODATION**

Case: Suomen Keskusvaraamo Oy

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## ABSTRACT

Oulu University of Applied Sciences  
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The commissioner of the thesis is an accommodation and service booking company Suomen Keskusvaraamo Oy. Company is piloting a new service concept which aims to arrange a school excursion programs for foreign student groups in Oulu area. The objectives of the thesis are to find out possibilities to recruit a host families in Oulu area and which method would be the most suitable way to recruit the host families.

Background knowledge considers educational tourism and how it appears in Finland. Sustainable tourism and different accommodation choices are also introduced. Main principals for the host family recruitment are reviewed for the better understanding of the topic. Last part of the theoretical background concentrates on different customer profiles, Japanese customers and two Japanese student trip concept Shugakuryoko and Kenshuryoko. Research of the thesis is executed by applying literary sources, e-books, articles, websites and reports. The empirical part is conducted by using qualitative and quantitative research methods in semi-structured webropol survey.

This research give concrete information to the commissioner on markets and which channels to use when recruiting host families. Results are illustrating possibilities in Oulu area and what kind of families are potential target group for their new service model. Based on the research, the most useful marketing channels for recruiting are introduced.

Overall, commissioner should take the potential markets into account by focusing on marketing and increasing the awareness via different marketing channels. In addition, it will be valuable to find co-operating schools to execute school excursion service concept in a best possible way.

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Keywords: homestay, educational tourism, shugakuryoko, kenshuryoko, Japanese school excursion, Oulu area, host family

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism in Finland has increased over the past few years. Visitors are seeking new experiences and ways to spend their holidays (Fredman & Tyrväinen 2014, cited 26.2.2018). Business trips and school excursions are becoming more popular and business models must be developed to respond the demand.

Asian tourists are seeking locations from Finland to visit, study and experience the Finnish nature especially (VisitFinland 2017, cited 26.2.2018). For these kind of trips businesses must respond by designing packages and offering the mix of everything. Customization is an important part of these trips so that customers can choose what kind of activities they would like to try. Therefore, business models and research must be done well. By finding the right co-operation partners company will be able to differentiate from the competitors and achieve the customers' loyalty.

As the commissioner of this thesis is a Finnish service reservation company Suomen Keskusvaraamo. The Company is based on Kalajoki but it operates in Northern-Ostrobothnia. The company is piloting a service concept for bringing the Japanese school excursion groups to Finland. They are designing everything to the groups from housing accommodation to activities. Excursions can be customized according to customers wishes. The Company is seeking for co-operation partners to this service concept for example international schools, host families, Finnish companies and activities. The aim of this new service concept is to increase tourism in Oulu area, create experiences to the international and Finnish students and possibility for companies, schools and families to gain profit and visibility. Homestay is a very common choice for these kinds of school excursion trips but customers can choose according their needs the right accommodation.

The aim of this thesis is to help the company with the new service concept by doing a research of homestay possibilities in Oulu area. Company wants to get relevant data how to enter the markets in Oulu. From this research problem, the research questions were formulated to be as follows:

1. Is there potential host families in Oulu area?
2. What are the right methods to recruit host families?

As a research methods, empirical data from possibilities and interest towards homestay will be collected by a survey executed to the Finnish families with the help of word of mouth and other

connections. Possibilities for executing the new service concept in Oulu area will be analyzed based on the interviews and survey answers.

In the first chapter of this thesis the company and its new service concept will be introduced. Then the theoretical background of this thesis will be evaluated and analyzed. Thirdly, used research methods will be specified and introduced. Based on the research findings, the possibilities for homestay will be evaluated. The last chapter of this thesis is concerned with all the findings and further proposals for the new service concept.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

In this chapter the case company and its piloting service concept will be introduced. Challenges of executing the service concept in Oulu area will be pointed out for the better understanding the topic. Information has been gathered based on the conversations and emails made with company representative.

### **2.1 Case company introduction**

Suomen Keskusvaraamo Oy is an accommodation and service reservation company founded in 2014. Company has full rights to operate as an international tour operator. Thus, company's vision is to be trusted tour operator for international groups. Their head office is based on Kalajoki, Finland in Northern-Ostrobothnia and it also operates in Syöte, Raahe, Oulu and Rokua areas. Currently the company has 10 employees and two owners. In addition, Suomen Keskusvaraamo Oy employs agency workers as seasonal employees for example to the maintenance and catering services. (Palola, Email, 17.4.2018.)

The growth of the business has been rapid over the past few years, since company has bought existing rental companies in Northern-Ostrobothnia. Although company mainly works with cottage rental business, they are aiming to renew their business model to be more versatile and offer holiday packages. Company's operating area contains many important tourism destinations around Northern-Ostrobothnia, therefore it is possible to grow tourism business versatile. To maximize level of customer satisfaction, company offers wide range of services for every season of the year over the province borders according to customers wishes. (Hankesuunnitelma, Suomen Keskusvaraamon liiketoiminnan uudistaminen ja kansainvälistäminen, 2017.)

## 2.2 Service concept for school excursions

As a part of company's mission to renew their business model, case company is planning to pilot new service concept for school excursions. For the better understanding of the company's structure, figure 1 below illustrates the main service concepts of Suomen Keskusvaraamo Oy. This research aims to find out the possibilities for executing school excursions in Oulu area. First group of Japanese students visited in Kalajoki in the Spring 2018. Company arranged a homestay accommodation in the host families for the visitors. With the co-operation of the local school, visitors had their weekly program. Also, other activities such as company visits and natural experiences were added to their travel program according to visitors wishes. (Palola, Conversation 25.01.2018.)

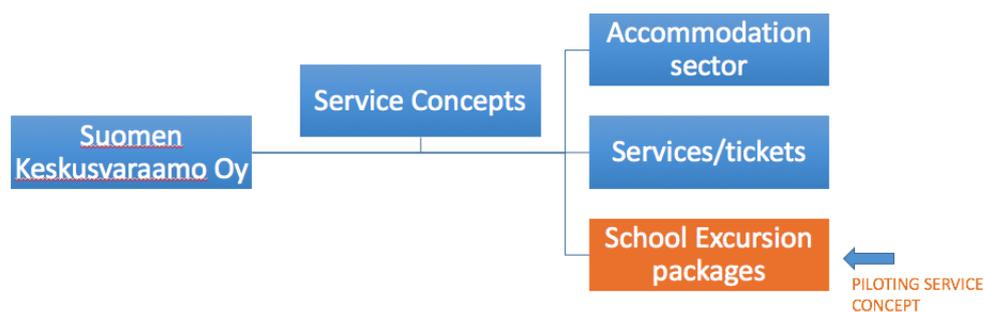


FIGURE 1. Service concepts (Suomen Keskusvaraamo Oy, Service concepts, Cited 22.10.2018)

The idea behind the service concept is to offer visitors the customized package in a one price. Company aims to collaborate with local businesses, host families, activity providers and schools to execute these school excursions. This service concept will provide benefits to the local players such as increasing international knowledge, possibilities to collaborate internationally and opportunity to extra profits. (Palola, Conversation 25.01.2018.)

Oulu has huge potential for these school group markets because of its nature, innovation and education system. Furthermore, Oulu has wide range of accommodation choices and capacity. (Haiko Consulting, 2018.) However, there is also challenges with this new service concept. In a small town like Kalajoki with around 13000 citizens, recruiting of the host families and collaborating with the schools or businesses is easier because of the large scale of existing contacts. Whereas

in Oulu area the scale of contacts could be smaller and recruiting the responsible host families is more time consuming and challenging. Although, Oulu area offers wide range of possibilities to its visitors and businesses. (Palola, Conversation 25.01.2018.)

### **3 EDUCATIONAL TOURISM**

In this thesis, the main purpose is to research the possibilities of the homestay accommodation in Oulu area for the Japanese school excursion visitors. Theoretical part of this thesis is focusing on educational tourism and its different concepts which will help the reader to understand the topic further.

This chapter provides information about educational tourism – what is educational tourism and why the interest towards educational tourism is increasing. Educational travel to Finland has gained attention around the world, but what different nationalities are especially seeking? Oulu area and concept of technical visits are also introduced.

#### **3.1 Definition of educational tourism**

Educational tourism has been growing rapidly over the past decades. The definition of the educational tourism is varying in different research fields such as educational tourism, international education and experiential learning. One way to explain educational tourism is to refer it as a process of travelling to learn something new. (Mcgladdery & Lubbe 2017, 319-320.)

Interest towards tourism and education is increasing by the people's desire to explore and educate themselves. Figure 2 reflects the increasing number of tourists. In 2016 there were 616 million international tourist arrivals to Europe which is 50% of worlds 1235 million international tourist arrivals in 2016. As a comparison in 2000 the total number of tourist arrivals was 674 million. (World Tourism Organization, Tourism Highlights 2017. Cited 8.5.2018.) Tourism can be defined different ways from organizations or individuals point of view. Different factors have an impact to the definition of tourism. The tourist, destination or the industry are all bringing different aspects to the definition. For example, international tourism is defined as a person who stays out from his/her home country. Whereas, the tourist who is travelling within his/her home country is a domestic tourist. (Brent & Ritchie 2003, 1.) According to World Tourism Organization, the growth of tourism industry is essential for service industry and increases its position as a main income source for especially developing countries (2017. Cited 8.5.2018).



FIGURE 2. International tourism 2016 (World Tourism Organization, *Tourism Highlights 2017*, Cited 8.5.2018)

Education is defined as a process where learning can occur. Learning objectives and learning strategies are part of the education. The process of learning can include basic theory part and experience part where the gained knowledge is mastered. Lifelong learning beyond schools is improving and developing knowledge and skills of people. As with definition of tourism, definition of education has also many different aspects and ways of defining. This is one reason why the educational tourism is complicated topic for academic studies. (Brent & Ritchie 2003, 1.)

### 3.2 Educational travelling to Finland

Finnish education system has gained international attention over the past years. Finland is attracting country to travel and learn. Educational travel to Finland attracts many kinds of travelers from education professionals to school groups. Visitors are interested in different parts of educational traveling: China is seeking sister schools from Finland, in South Korea digitalization and creativity are generating interest, Japan is willing to do school excursions and India wants to learn more about Finnish education system. (VisitFinland 2018, Cited 29.10.2018.)

Furthermore, educational traveling has several benefits for the public sector, for society and for travel companies and business. For public sector, educational traveling increases value of education export and collaboration. Society will gain more awareness, strength Finland's position as a leader of education, add more brand value, get new work possibilities, tourism will grow economic well-being increases and effect positively on domestic tourism. Lastly, for the companies and business educational traveling offers new possibilities, increase in turnover and profitability and huge amount of new skills and experience. (VisitFinland 2018, Cited 29.10.2018.)

One example of Finnish company who has organized nature visits for the Chinese school groups is Oivanki Outdoor Education center in Kuusamo. Every visit will be designed according to groups wishes together with the group leader. The aim of the exploring the nature is to offer visitors chance to experience the Finnish lifestyle and nature. (VisitFinland 2018, Cited 29.10.2018.)

### **3.3 Technical visits**

Technical visits are defined as special visits to experience different fields of business such as ICT, Healthcare or Cleantech. Visits could be designed for groups of professionals, students or Individuals. (BusinessOulu 2018, Cited 22.5.2018.)

Technical visits are giving an opportunity to experience and see the interesting technologies and industries from the scenes. Variety of technical visit fields is wide and depends on the destination. Oulu region offers many different fields to experience because of the well-done co-operation with the local companies, schools and organizations. Besides Oulu area, visitors have also possibility to do technical visits in Kalajoki and Pudasjärvi which are located about one hour drive from Oulu town. (BusinessOulu 2018, Cited 4.6.2018.)

### **3.4 Oulu Region**

Oulu Region is located in Northern Finland in the Gulf of Bothnia. Oulu has more than 200 000 citizens and provides lots to see and experience to its visitors. Area is easy to access because of its second busiest airport in Finland which has airlines flying to domestic and international flights

daily. Other transportation possibilities such as train or busses are also available from different parts of Finland. (VisitOulu 2018, Cited 4.5.2018.)

Finland is known its high-quality education system and Oulu is known as one of the popular cities to study in Finland. Oulu University and Oulu University of Applied Sciences have all in all about 25 000 students and they are providing studies from different fields. (City of Oulu 2018, Cited 4.6.2018.) Schools have great international connections which enables incoming and out coming exchange student programs.

One reason to make school excursions, educational visits and technical visits to Oulu is its reputation as a city of high technology. Innovative and revolutionary industries include ICT-based industries such as cleantech, health technology, printed intelligence and game scene. Recently Oulu has been introducing its 5G development as a pioneer in the world and is aiming to build and design the future 5G hospital. (BusinessOulu 2018, Cited 4.5.2018.)

## **4 SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND ACCOMMODATION CHOICES**

Structure of the accommodation sector enables significant impact on micro and macro levels. Visitors are seeking accommodation choices near of the historical sites and cultural experiences which could damage the fragile natural environments. (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill 2005, Cited 18.7.2018.)

In this chapter, areas of sustainable tourism are examined briefly for the better understanding of the context. Focus area of this chapter will be in an accommodation sector: accommodation capacity, what impacts tourism industry has in that sector and closer introduction about homestay accommodation choice. Lastly, chapter provides useful information about principles for recruiting host families.

### **4.1 Sustainable tourism**

Decision making, global regulating, doing business and people's responsibilities are all based on the sustainable development in today's world. However, the discussion about sustainable development is often focused on environmental issues but there are also other areas which are affecting to the big picture of sustainable development. As in the figure 3 below, the key areas of sustainable development are as follows: socio-cultural, economic and environmental issues. All three areas should be balanced to achieve sustainable development. (Verhelä 2014, 144.)

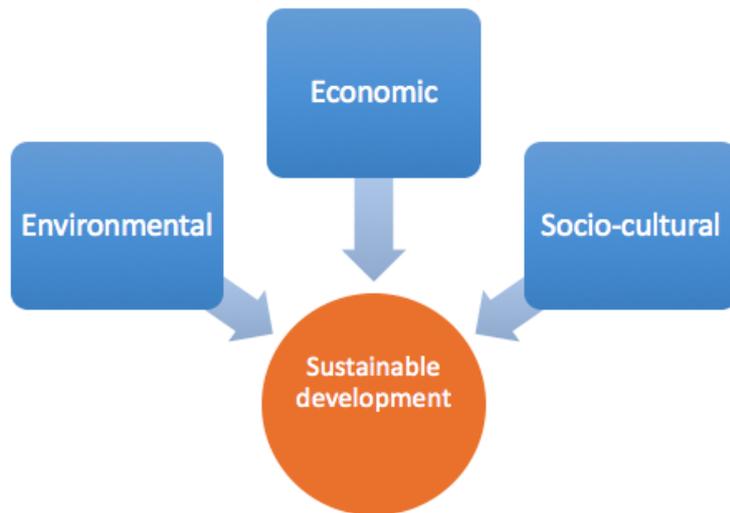


FIGURE 3. Key areas of sustainable development (Verhelä 2014, 145)

Economic development is not formed without developing environmental, social and cultural factors. Economically sustainable development allows equitable and powerful economic development. From the tourism industry perspective, economic development has several impacts to the local people. Examples about positive impacts are new jobs to the area which are increasing the level of tax income. On the other hand, seasons could be affecting to the number of incoming visitors which makes working positions seasonal. Sparsely populated areas are easily dependent of the tourism industry and its benefits. (Verhelä 2014, 146.)

Likewise, in every other key area of sustainable development tourism industry has its positive and negative impacts in social and cultural factors. Service production and development should be focused on the positive impacts and aspire to decrease negative effects. These effects are different in developing areas where lack of education and level of income are making a gap between visitors and locals. However, improvements to the social and cultural factors such as better infrastructure and interaction between cultures are affecting to the local society positively. (Verhelä 2014, 146.)

Nature, its landscapes, species, scenery and water features have always been reasons why nature tourism interests people who will enjoy the wildlife natural areas. Natural resources and nature must be utilized in a way that its ability to reform will not suffer. Although, tourism decreases non-renewable natural resources, pollutes and has negative effect to the historical sites. (Fennel 2015, Cited 18.7.2018.)

## **4.2 Accommodation capacity and impacts**

Accommodation capacity is telling the truth about the level of the areas attraction. Different kinds of accommodation choices and their usage has compile statistics. The most important accommodation choices are the ones which are chargeable therefore the economy of the area is getting benefit. These chargeable accommodations are: hotels, hostels, holiday resorts, camping sites, B&B, rental cottages and other chargeable accommodations. Moreover, there is free of charge accommodations such as owned cottages, holiday homes and visiting friends and relatives. Which are also belonging to the area of tourism. (Vuoristo 2002, 103.)

The accommodation sector and its environmental impacts is wide and complex concept (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill 2005, Cited 18.7.2018). Following subheadings will briefly examine the key areas of accommodation sector's environmental impacts and clarifying examples.

### **4.2.1 Water and energy usage**

During their visits, tourists are using water in many ways; for showers and baths, swimming pool, green area maintenance, golf courses and laundry. Unregularly use of water in tourist areas could have serious impacts on areas economic activities. (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill 2005, Cited 23.7.2018.)

Furthermore, accommodation sector has a huge energy consumption levels. Energy consumption activities for example in hotels include: heating and cooling rooms, lightning, hot water use, preparing meals and the list goes on. Space conditioning remains to be the largest single end-user of energy in hotels, with about 50 per cent of total energy usage. Although, accommodation sector uses lots of energy, hotels have significant energy saving potential. (Hotel Energy Solutions, 2011, Cited 23.7.2018.) According to research of the Hotel Energy Solutions, hotels energy usage could be reduced at least 10-15 per cent depending on the age and size of the hotel. Most important areas to reduce energy consumption are space conditioning and lightning, which should be turned off when not used. (2011, Cited 23.7.2018.)

#### **4.2.2 Waste disposal & recycling**

Liquid waste disposed to the sea and rivers is damaging to the health and environment. (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill 2005, Cited 23.7.2018.) In the past, communities over the world used sea for waste disposal, thus dumping polluted several areas of the ocean (United States Environmental Protecting Agency, Cited 23.7.2018).

Accommodation sector is one of the major contributors to packaging waste such as plastics and metals and the amount of the waste varies seasonally. In fact, plastic waste in the oceans is a threat to the sea animals like dolphins, whales and turtles. To protect nature and health, businesses must implement the working waste management handling program. Staff should receive recycling instructions about what kind of waste need to be sorted and how. It is also very important that management is monitoring waste quantities so that recycling rate can be benchmarked to possible improvements. (European Commission 2017, Cited 23.7.2018.)

#### **4.2.3 Fragile nature**

Accommodation choices in rural area locations are huge threat for the fauna and flora. More specifically, visitors themselves could damage the experience that they have come to experience. Tourist and accommodation companies must be sensitive and environmental friendly to retain these beautiful locations for the next generations. (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill 2005, Cited 23.7.2018.)

One example about Finnish accommodation choice which has kept strain of the fragile nature in minimum by building the accommodation units indoors, is Arctic Treehouse in Lapland. This luxurious hotel locates only 2 kilometers from the airport and about 7 kilometers from the Rovaniemi city center. Pillars of the buildings have been installed straight from the truck and only the big cinematic windows have been installed on site. Architecture of arctic treehouse hotel is designed to blend in the arctic nature with all the wooden details (see the figure 4 below). (Studio Puisto 2016, Cited 23.7.2018.)



*FIGURE 4. Arctic TreeHouse Hotel (Studio Puisto 2016, Cited 23.7.2018)*

### **4.3 Homestay definition**

A Homestay is defined as term for a commercial home accommodation which include different types of homestay accommodations, for example farmstays and bed & breakfast accommodation. In this type of accommodation guest pays to stay in host family's home and their premises. (Lynch, McIntosh & Tucker 2009, 25-26.) There are many ways to define homestay because of its different forms depending on cultures and parts of the world (Lynch etc. 2009, 26). In addition, areas where accommodation capacity is limited will benefit from the homestay accommodation – economically, socially and environmentally. In these cases, tourists can function as a financing tool for poor and rural areas. (Gutel 2008, cited 5.6.2018.)

However, students who are studying abroad often choose homestays which means that person is staying with the local family outside of his or her home country. This form of homestay is often linked to the learning a language and exposure the foreign culture. (Gutel 2008, cited 5.6.2018.) At its best, homestay creates life-long friendships between the student and a host family (Karelia Ammattikorkeakoulu 2013, cited 5.6.2018).

#### **4.4 Principles for the host family recruitment**

A reliable and safe host family is very important factor for the incoming students who are going abroad to learn foreign culture and language (AFS 2018, cited 5.6.2018). Process of recruiting host families takes time and resources. Networking is the key to find the best possible host families for the guests and the host families could be; young couples, retirees, single parents, same sex couples, couples whose children have left home... (AIFS Foundation 2018, cited 5.6.2018.) When talking about non-profit organizations, the host families are volunteers who are not getting paid (AIFS Foundation 2018, cited 5.6.2018). Whereas, travel agencies and tour operators are seeking profit for their company and partners.

Karelia University of Applied Sciences has released a Homestay Handbook for the Finnish host Families which combines the values and principles of being a host family. According to Homestay Handbook, the home should be non-smoking, hospitable and respect guest's privacy. Furthermore, the host family need to be available during the whole stay. Asking about guest's allergies and special diet is a must to ensure that all the embarrassing moments will be avoided. Family should be able to give recommendations about local services and places where guest could visit and get the most out of his or her visit. (2018, cited 5.6.2018.) Although, there is lots of things from laws and regulations to principles and values that host family should be concerned before becoming a host family, the guest should also respect the norms and maintain as agreed. A good visitor pays his or her stay as agreed and commits to compensate any damages caused by he or she. (Karelia University of Applied Sciences 2018, cited 5.6.2018.)

Homestay could include different kinds of things in different situations but price should at least cover; linen, possibility to wash up, good accommodation conditions with privacy and breakfast. On the other hand, being a host family has additional costs which should be considered when setting a price. For example; water and electricity usage is increasing when having guests, breakfast preparations cost more and possible taxes must be paid. (Karelia University of Applied Sciences 2018, cited 5.6.2018.) Being a host family gives an opportunity to meet new people and learn from different cultures even though it requires a little extra work and ability to be hospitably.

## 5 CUSTOMER PROFILE

When targeting the services to one special group of people, it is important to know their characteristics and preferences as the travelers. When seeking information about consumer habits, year of publication needs to be considered, because of the changes. When companies are having up-to-date information about their visitors, they can provide the best possible service and products for the customers.

For the better understanding to this field, following chapter will introduce the information about the categorization of the visitors and typologies. Target groups for this thesis are Japanese school groups therefore, Japanese travel habits are examined in the end of this chapter. This thesis aims to research possibilities for homestay accommodation in Oulu area for Japanese school excursion groups and therefore, Japanese school excursion programs *shugakuryoku* and *kenshuryoko* are also introduced in this chapter.

### 5.1 Visitors typologies

According to Verhelä (2014, 24) traveler is defined as a person who travels from one place to another and travelers have been categorized based on the many different characteristics. By categorizing the travelers based on consumer behavior, marketing the right services to right target group will be easier.

However, travelers and the way how they travel can be illustrated with hard factors as follows; demographical factors such as age and gender, geographical factors, socioeconomic factors which are education and level of income and hobbies. Since the variety of the factors is wide, it is possible to formulate several different combinations. Besides the hard factors, detailed understanding needs social and psychological factors known as soft factors. (Verhelä 2014, 25.)

By analyzing travelers needs and motivation many scientists have been developing different kinds of groupings and classifications (Vuoristo 2002, 41). One of those is Stanley Plog's psychographic personality types (1974) which are dividing people into psychocentrics, allocentrics and mid-centrics as the figure 5 below illustrates. As a traveler, psychocentric person is preferring package

holidays and well-known tourist destinations without any deeper connection with local life or places. Whereas, allocentric person is looking for unique experiences and is often organizing everything independently. The most of the travelers are however mid-centric travelers with the mix of features from allocentric and psychocentric personality types. (Verhelä 2014, 25.) This theory has gained criticism from the scientists because of its validity in different situations. People are acting differently in different situations, for example allocentric person could act psychocentric way during the short vacations and weekend trips. (Vuoristo 2002, 47.)

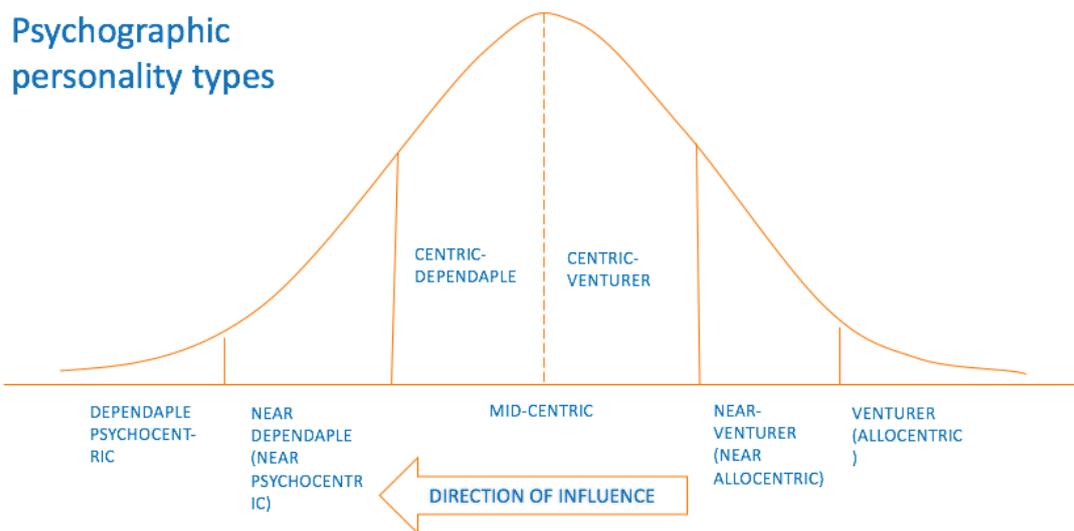


FIGURE 5. Stanley Plog's psychographic personality types (An Introduction to Tourism, Cited 5.7.2018)

## 5.2 Japanese customers

Finland is popular travel destination for Japanese tourists because of its two peak seasons; winter and summer. Incoming Japanese tourists are mainly divided into three target groups which are travelling older couples, young ladies and people who are interested to see northern lights. Northern light safari is one of the most popular travel themes along Japanese tourists and due to that, competition between northern lights travel destination is tough. (VisitFinland 2018, Cited 24.7.2018.)

Because of the long travelling distance, Japanese customers are expecting premium quality from the activities and services during their holidays. These expectations should be considered by offering separate beds in their hotel rooms and preparing at least some marketing material in Japanese language. (VisitFinland 2018, Cited 24.7.2018.)

Figure 6 below reflects the increasing number of monthly foreign overnights in Finland between year 2016 and 2017. As said earlier, Finland has two peak seasons and that is seen from the statistics as the most popular months to visit Finland are July, August and December. Furthermore, spent overnights by Japanese tourist have increased by 11 per cent in a one year. (VisitFinland 2017, Cited 24.7.2018.)

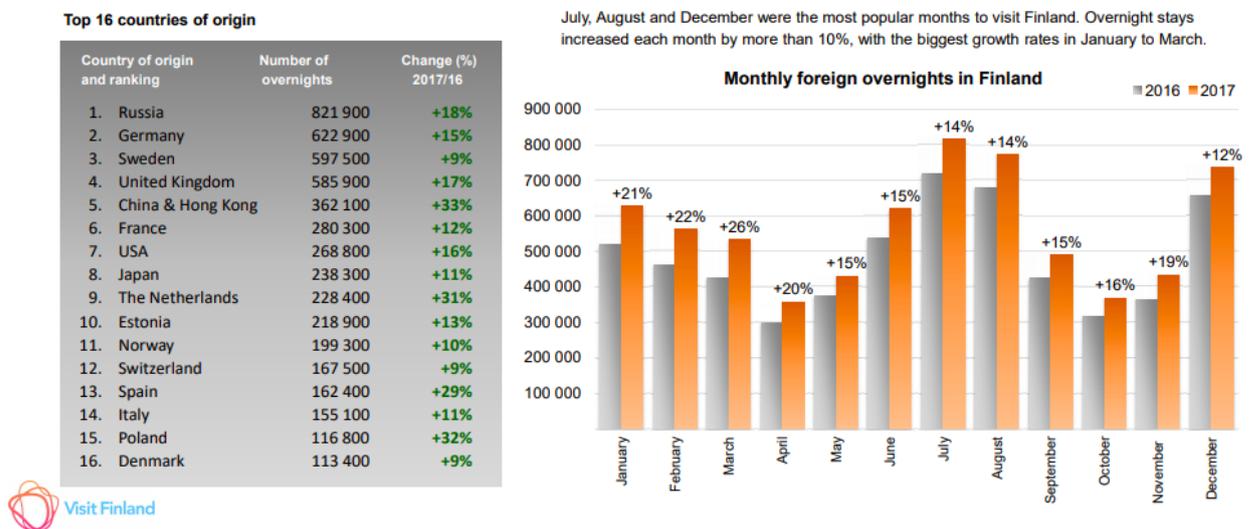


FIGURE 6. Monthly foreign overnights in Finland 2017 (VisitFinland, Cited 24.7.2018)

Nowadays, Japanese travelers are more interested about rural tourism and experiences in nature than cities which affects increasingly to the amount of incoming tourism in Lapland and Lakeland. Shigeyoshi Noto writes in Japan Market Report 2017 that growth of tourism is seen also in Oulu area because of its Attractive Oulu Project, which contributes to the growth in fields of education tourism and technical visits (2017. Cited 24.7.2018).

Japanese travelers have been considered as high-end consumers with expensive taste, yet Japanese consumers are changing their consumer habits. They are seeking for lower-price products and buying products more online than in physical shops. New generation with willingness

to pay for services and technology is setting challenges to the marketers. (McKinsey & Company 2010, Cited 24.7.2018.)

### **5.3 Shugakuryoku and Kenshuryoko**

Japanese “shugaku ryoko” means a trip for learning which are longer student trips including few overnight stays. Shugakuryoko groups tend to be big, sometimes over 300 students. Usually, trips are made to the historical sites like Kyoto, Hiroshima or Nara but recently some high school student groups have been doing international shugakuryokos. In Japan, these excursions have been added to the students’ curriculum and the aim is to increase students’ perspective and awareness. (Brent & Ritchie 2003, 4, Demand for Schools’ tourism.) During these excursions, students are also aiming to raise their global competence by visiting local businesses and having natural experiences (British Columbia Council for International Education 2015, Cited 24.8.2018).

As can be seen from the figure 7 below, duration of these school excursions is typically less than a week. In Japan, schools are either public or private and this is setting differences between shugaryokos in private and public sector. Private schools are more flexible about the price and duration of the shugakuryokos. Compared to public schools, private school students are also traveling overseas more often. ( Haiko Consulting, 2018.) Figure 7 below illustrates that private schools are more likely to have over 10 days shugakuryokos, which would be the most suitable period for having a shugaryoko in Finland because of the long distance.

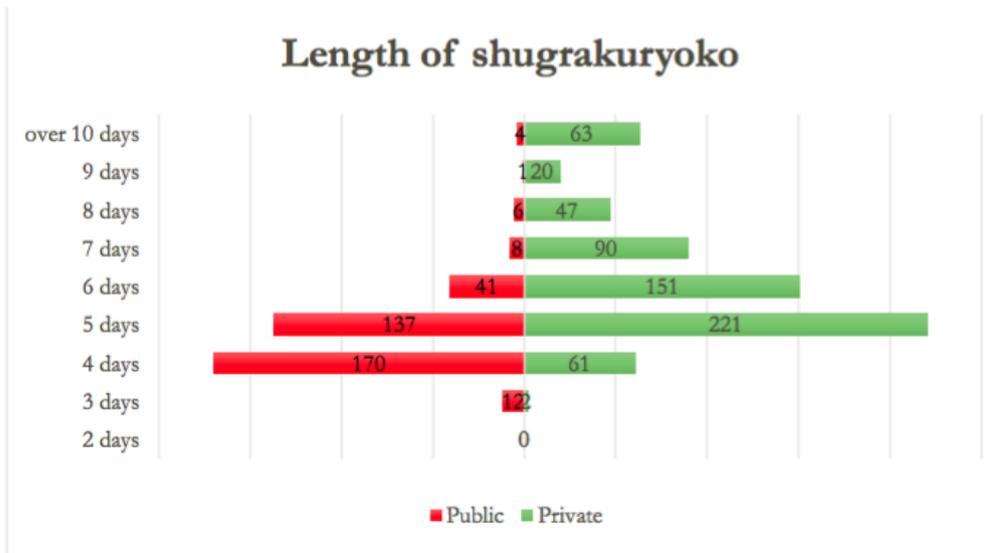


FIGURE 7. Length of shugrakuryoko 2016. (Haiko Consulting, 2018)

However, Japanese schools are offering another school excursion program to their students called kenshuryoko. Kenshuryoko visit tends to be longer, usually about 2-3 weeks, and groups are smaller than in shugakuryokos. These school excursions include educational program as well as tourism activities and have often homestay as an accommodation choice. Figure 8 below point out that most popular destinations for kenshuryoko are English speaking areas Oceania and North America for both public and private school. This is because of the most popular themes of the kenshuryoko which are English language improvement, cultural experiences and homestay. Nevertheless, Europe is also one of the most popular destinations for kenshuryuoko. (Haiko Consulting, 2018.)

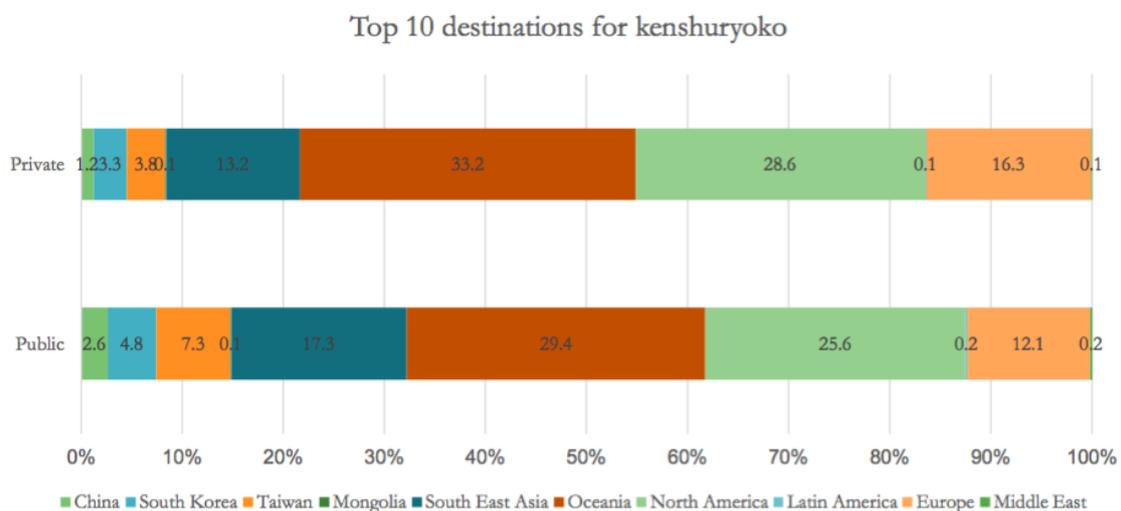


FIGURE 8. Top 10 destinations for kenshuryoko 2016. (Haiko Consulting, 2018)

## 6 RESEARCH METHODS

Both quantitative research and qualitative research are very commonly used when approaching research problems in academic studies. Quantitative research aims to find out solution to the research problem in numerical and monetary terms. Data collection in this approach can be done for example with surveys or by observing. Researcher will be using many statistical tools while working with quantitative research, which helps to analyze correlation between variables. Whereas, qualitative research aims to comprehensive understand quality, features and meaning of the target. Data acquisition is mainly done by interviews and discussion, which enables usage of qualitative research in quantitative research for the better understanding of the relationship between variables. (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad 2010, Cited 18.9.2018.)

Empirical research of this thesis contained quantitative research methods as well as qualitative research methods, which helps to understand and analyze data better. Research problem was approached by executing a semi-structured survey via Webropol. Survey was formed of multiple-choice questions, open-ended multiple-choice questions and open questions with moderate amount of maximum characters to ensure brief answers. Online survey tool Webropol was chosen as a platform for the survey because of its easy usage and analyzing tool.

### 6.1 Data collection and sample size

Sampling was made with probability sampling method and more specific by using area sampling technique. Area sampling is a form of cluster sampling and aims to make research along chosen geographical cluster. Probability sampling methods aims to find out answers for the research which have generalization as objectives of the study. (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad 2010, Cited 24.9.2018.)

Goal of the survey was to get considerably over 100 responses to ensure that results will give realistic picture about the markets. However, there were difficulties in survey distribution because of the GDPR and school procedures. I applied permission for survey from OAMK and OSAO, and I was willing to carry out this survey by sending the webropol link via e-mail to get more visibility for my research. Unfortunately, permission to execute this survey via email was denied by OAMK and OSAO. OSAO wasn't willing to do co-operation since the new GDPR, although this research didn't

concern any personal data. These constraints may have affected negatively to the learning and research process. Nevertheless, survey was managed to add our school student intranet Oiva as well as staff intranet Heimo. OAMK permission for executing the survey in Heimo and Oiva will be added to the appendixes in the end of this thesis.

The aim of this thesis was to find out, if the people in Oulu area are interested in becoming host families for possible incoming school excursion groups. Therefore, the best possible sample for this survey were families in Oulu area. Distribution of the survey was also done by sending it to existing contacts and families in this specific area.

Period for executing the survey was from 15<sup>th</sup> of October to 9<sup>th</sup> of November 2018. During those three weeks, survey got total of 34 answers. Despite that survey was added to student intranet and staff intranet, the number of answers was quite low and goal for over 100 answers wasn't fulfilled. However, answers were informative and common preferences could be drawn from the survey answers.

## **6.2 Survey**

Objective for the survey was to gather relevant information to the commissioner about the possibilities to enter markets in Oulu area. By researching the possibilities and interest amongst families to become a host family for international students.

Survey was done by using online survey tool Webropol. Survey was aimed to keep rather short, respondents were asked to answer total of 12 questions and leave their contact information if wanted. Together with the commissioner, we decided to add section for contact information, if respondents would like to hear more about the services. Questions were designed to be easy to answer by using multiple-choice questions, open-ended multiple-choice questions and open questions.

Survey questions were formulated to meet the needs and goal of the research. Furthermore, design of the questions was checked to support the theoretical framework of the thesis. Since research is considering families, survey questions are concentrating on families features not individuals. Family features are dealing with their life circumstances in general, language skills, motivation, family size, expectations and suggestions how to recruit host families. Survey language was chosen to be

Finnish because the target group can be assumed to have Finnish language skills. English as a survey language could have narrowed the respondents or quality of the answers. Survey form is attached to the appendixes in the end of this thesis report.

### **6.3 Validity and reliability**

Reliability and validity are commonly used terms in research. The core idea of reliability is behind reproducing the research under a similar methodology, if the results are stable it increases reliability of the research. Whereas validity refers the research results truthfulness and accuracy of the research. (Golafshani 2003, Cited 29.10.2018.)

As to get reliable picture of the market, survey was chosen as a data collection method. Survey aims to gather answers from all kinds of families in Oulu area, unlike possible interview method would have done. There was no existing contacts to interview for this research in Oulu area, although interview method would have been more qualitative way to this research.

Altogether survey collected 34 answers which may not give the perfect picture about markets. Survey questions were designed to be valid and valuable for the commissioner. Content of the theoretical background and research survey were supporting one another which increases the validity of the research. Nevertheless, it is challenging to be sure if the survey questions were understood right or if the answers were truthfully.

## 7 RESULTS

In this chapter, conclusions from the survey answers will be evaluated and introduced. Common features and conclusions are drawn from the survey which will most likely to be beneficial for the commissioner. Potential for the host family accommodation in Oulu area will be evaluated and families' motives and expectations are also introduced. To support recruiting process, respondent's concrete examples for recruiting channels are listed. Finally, the most important findings of the survey are drawn together.

### 7.1 Family features

In this research about potential host families, it was necessary to concentrate on families such as their features, situation in life and language skills rather than individual respondents or their background information. 16 out of 34 respondents answered nuclear family as their family type. As seen from the figure 9 below, surprisingly 11 respondents out of 34 were considering themselves as other. These answers were composed of domestic relationship, couple, rainbow family, single and blended family with two homes. From this it can be concluded that in Oulu area, there is various kinds of families who may be interested of becoming a host family.

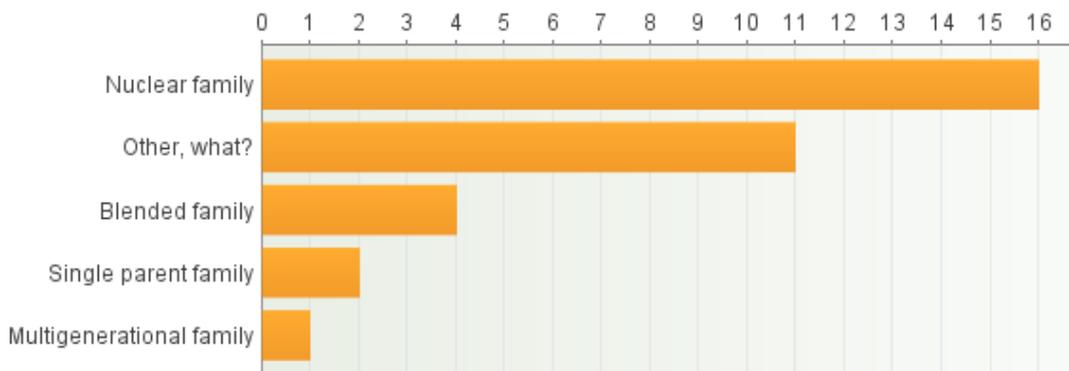


FIGURE 9. Family type.

Respondents were asked to describe their family's life situation briefly. The maximum length for the answer was set as 150 letters to get clear and concise data. The most used keywords were work life, school, studying, kids and parents. Keywords are supporting the theoretical framework of

Oulu region and its features about high quality education system. Which enables best possible base for future professionals to the different fields. Based on the answers, respondent's life situations were stable. It can also be assumed that target group for the potential host families consists of different age groups, since respondent's life situations were varying.

According to family features, figure 10 below illustrates that 50% of the respondents didn't have kids and only one respondent had a big family with over 5 kids. In all families age of the kids were varying between 8 months and 27 years, some of them were already moved away from their parents. Incoming school excursion groups are mostly between age 15 - 20 and 9 respondent families had kids older than 15 years. Which proves that about 25% of the families had same aged children than incoming students.

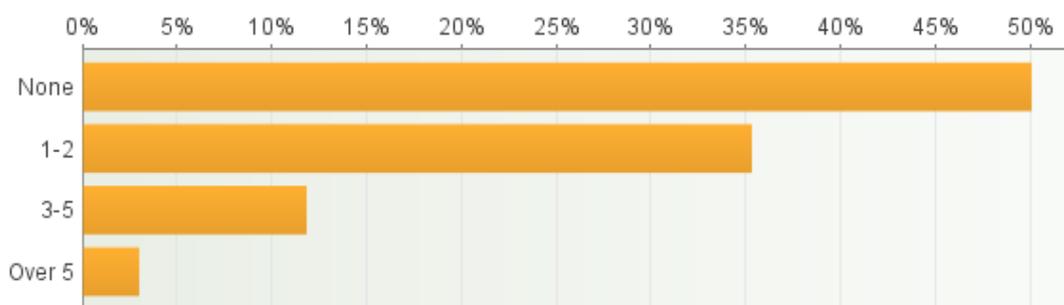


FIGURE 10. Kids.

When recruiting host families, it is important to know about possible pets and allergies. 14 respondents out of 34 had animals in their family and 9 of them were the families with kids. Commonly mentioned pets were dogs and cats.

Being a host family can be eye-opening experience in many ways and being able to communicate with the visitors is extremely important. Becoming a host family would be a great opportunity to improve language skills. Therefore, respondents were asked to evaluate their language skills in open-ended multiple-choice question. There were 6 language alternatives and one of them was "other" which collected 8 answers. Languages were chosen by the most commonly studied languages in Finland which were English, Swedish, German, French and Russian.

Again, respondents could choose multiple alternatives and 33 answers out of 34 respondents chose English. 25 out of 34 families had ability for Swedish. 10 families had skills for German,

surprisingly no one had French skills and only one family chose Russian. Answers in section “other” are listed below:

1. A little bit German, French and Russian.
2. Finnish
3. Spanish
4. Bahasa Indonesia
5. Norwegian
6. Nothing
7. Basics of Spanish
8. Estonian

This suggests that English skills are quite common in Oulu area which will help the commissioner to find suitable families for the incoming students. In Oulu area school excursion groups, can improve their English skills, which was important to kenshuryoko groups based on the findings in the theoretical framework. Because of this question, it can be assumed that some of the respondents may not have understood the question right, which may have slightly affected to the data analysis.

## **7.2 Potential host families, their motives and expectations**

Main purpose of this study was to find out if there are potential host families in Oulu area for incoming Student Excursion groups. The knowledge part of this thesis supports the fact that visitors should always get the best possible host family. Therefore, respondents were asked to specify their motives for becoming a host family. Respondents had an opportunity to choose one or more out of 5 alternatives: Willingness to share knowledge about Finland, Experience, Willingness to meet new people, Financial benefits and Interest towards culture.

As the figure 11 below illustrates, there were altogether 73 answers which shows that some of the respondents have chosen more than one option. Overall, Experience (23 answers) and Willingness to meet new people are (17 answers) the top motives whereas Willingness to share knowledge about Finland (7 answers) and Interest towards culture (12 answers) were the least chosen motives.

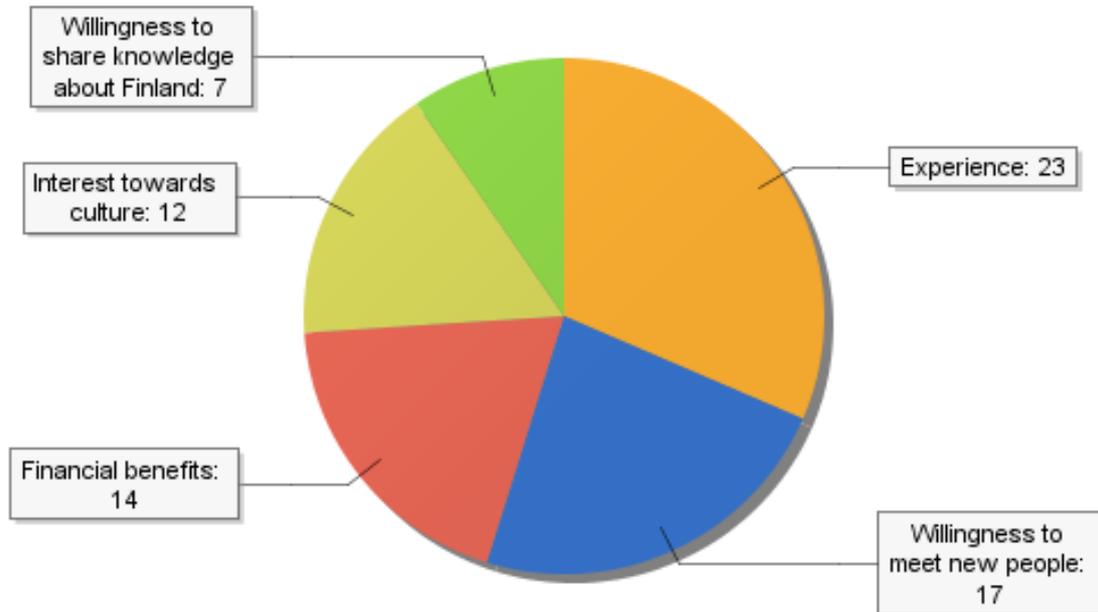


FIGURE 11. Motives for becoming a host family.

This shows that potential host families in Oulu area are interested in Experiencing the host family concept, but they would also like to benefit financially. Commissioner should adjust the host family compensation carefully, to avoid unpleasant surprises during visitor stay. However, theoretical framework shows, that a host family experiences could create life-long relationship between the student and the host family.

In question number 8, respondents were asked to list briefly their expectations for the visitors. Question was designed as an open-ended question with the 150 letters limit to get brief answers. Answers were very informative and common preferences could be drawn from the survey. 3 out of the 34 respondents didn't have any special expectations for the visitors, but most of the respondents were expecting the visitors to be:

1. Open-minded and well-behaved
2. Interest towards Finnish culture
3. Normal people with a common sense
4. Honest and social
5. Ability to be a part of the family

From the answers, it can be concluded that visitors are expected to respect the norms and be polite, which supports the findings in the theoretical framework. Some of the answers were very specific with detailed expectations for the visitor, however these specifications will be helpful for the commissioner when recruiting host families.

### 7.3 Host family recruitment and interest towards becoming a host family

Next, respondents were asked to tell about their previous experiences as a host family and only 5 respondents out of 34 had previous experience as being the host family before (see the figure 12 below). 4 who have had home stay visitors previously in their home, they all perceived it as a positive experience. One of the respondents told his/her positive experience about authentic home visit, which was held as a part of Japanese tourist program. This finding is comparable with the theoretical framework of Japanese travelling preferences nowadays.



FIGURE 12. Previous host family experience.

Based on the answers, rather few respondents had previous experience as being a host family. However, results are showing that respondents previous experiences have been positive and there was nothing bad to say. It can be assumed that commissioner should concern to arrange home visits to the local homes for the international groups, as a part of their activity selection.

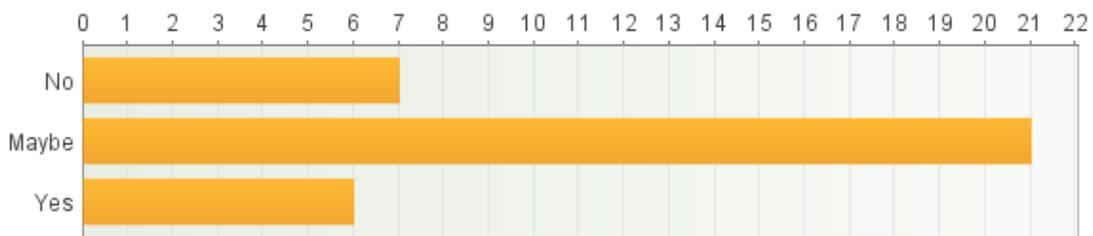
Second objective of the study was to find out the most suitable ways to recruit host families. As a 11<sup>th</sup> question of the survey we had open-question “What would be the most suitable way to recruit host families?”. Answers are listed below:

1. Webpage (opportunity to register as a host family, write/read previous experiences, requirements for the host family ...)
2. Video advertisement
3. In co-operation with schools and students

4. Social Media (Facebook, word of mouth)
5. Short interviews
6. Newspaper advertisement
7. Exhibitions

Most of the answers were suggesting official webpage, register where to enroll as a host family, social media and co-operation with local schools. This was one of the most important information for the commissioner as finding suitable host families is the key when arranging school excursions. From the results, it can be concluded that commissioner should open official webpage and Facebook page for the host family accommodation recruiting process. Short interviews with registered families should be hold before recruiting. To improve the visibility, commissioner could implement short video advertisement.

As a last question was chosen to be straight multiple-choice question about willingness to become a host family. Figure 13 below illustrates that 7 out of 34 respondents would not want to be a host family, 21 would maybe like to become a host family and 6 respondents would like to start being a host family.



*FIGURE 13. Interest towards becoming a host family.*

Overall, results are presenting that 27 out of the 34 respondents are showing their interest towards host family accommodation operations. Despite the rather small sample, it can be expected that there are possibilities for recruiting suitable host families from Oulu area.

It can be concluded that in Oulu area there is potential for the host family accommodation service model. Based on the survey answers families have interest towards becoming a host family, but commissioner must find the right marketing channels to increase visibility and awareness about the possibilities. Respondents had stable life situations, even though their family features were varying from nuclear families to couples at different age and families considered as “other”. Moreover,

respondents language skills are good and communication with the visitors would be easy. Previous experiences of being a host family were quite rare but positive. Main reasons for becoming a host family were experience and financial benefit. As a consequence, commissioner should pay attention to their recruiting process, it could be hard to differentiate families actual motive.

## 8 CONCLUSION

Increase in tourism has been rapid during the past years. Visitors are seeking natural experiences and are willing to educate themselves during their travels. Digitalization and new generations are setting challenges to the companies. Therefore, companies must develop their services according to the visitors wishes to response the needs.

The objective of this research was to gather relevant information for the commissioner, of the possibilities to execute their new service concept in Oulu area. From this research problem, the research questions were formulated to be as follows:

1. Is there potential host families in Oulu area?
2. What are the right methods to recruit host families?

Based on the empirical research for this thesis, in Oulu area there is potential host families for the commissioners new service model. Comparing to theoretical background, results are showing that Oulu area is suitable destination for the Japanese school excursion groups. For the visitors, area is easily accessible and offers many different kinds of experiences; nature activities, educational visits and much more.

According to results, right methods to recruit host families are: to open a webpage, create social media pages and find co-operation schools. In addition, digital marketing and newspaper advertisements are also working. One thing is setting challenges to recruiting process, it could be hard to evaluate, if the family is reliable and suitable. Due to the survey answers where 14 out of 34 respondents chose financial benefit as their motive for becoming a host family. New generations are setting challenges for the marketers because of their changing preferences as consumers. They are aware of digitalization and global climate change, willing to pay services and experience rural areas.

The most important channel for recruiting host families would be webpage, where families could register themselves as a host family. Page should consist information about: incoming groups, previous experiences and recruitments for the host families. Which supports the theoretical background of this thesis, as it is important to find safe and reliable host families for the incoming visitors. Co-operation schools must be found, because based on the theoretical framework

Japanese school excursion groups (during their Kenshuryokos and Shugrakuryokos) have educational part in their weekly program. Moreover, through possible co-operation schools finding the host families would be easier. Research results are showing that potential host families in Oulu area are from different age groups. Young families, couples and also the older generation are nowadays using social media daily. It is important to market new service concept for incoming groups and potential host families in social media. This suggest, that by creating a Facebook page and an Instagram account there is a change to increase awareness. Without forgetting the digital marketing tools and newspaper commercials.

Nevertheless, the results are showing that commissioner should be considering the marketing channels. Oulu area has potential for home stay accommodation service concept. Since only 5 respondents had previous host family experience and 27 out of 34 respondents were showing their interest towards becoming a host family, it seems that there would be a niche for this kind of service.

Well-designed webpage and Facebook page would be a great start. For boosting the visibility commissioner should create a digital marketing strategy and familiarize themselves with the digital marketing tools. Figure 14 below illustrates examples of the content in different channels. Facebook and Instagram has both their own users, so the content should be designed to meet the audience. Facebook and Instagram are both quite easy channels to ask further questions from the page owner, whereas the webpage could be hard to find without other marketing channels. Facebook and Instagram are great channels to share the content from the webpage and get the potential host families register themselves as the host family.



Figure 14. Channels.

Overall, the goal of this research was met and main objectives were reached. Time frame for this study was flexible, which decreased pressures of the author. Research questions were answered based on the empirical data and theoretical framework, which were supporting one another. This increases the validity of the research. Despite the rather small sample common preferences and concrete data could be drawn from the survey answers.

Some things during the study may have affected negatively to the research and learning process. Research was supposed to distribute via email to get more respondents. Target group was first chosen to be OSAO students and their parents. However, OSAO wasn't willing to do co-operation appealing to new GDPR. Despite the fact that this research was done anonymously and didn't handled any personal data. Likewise, OAMK declined my application to deliver this survey via student email groups. Finally distributing the survey was managed to carry out by adding it to OAMK student and staff intranet, but unfortunately the goal for the 100 respondents wasn't met.

Commissioner was very satisfied with the survey questions and a template. According to their wishes, possibility to leave contact information was added. Contact information included respondents name and e-mail address and leaving the information was voluntary. More importantly, contacts were given to commissioner right after the survey was closed. Referring to things that may

have affected negatively to the research, only few respondents left they contact information which was a disappointment.

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**Tutkimus mahdollisuuksista rekrytoida isäntäperheitä Oulun alueelta****1. Millainen perhe sinulla on? \***

- Ydinperhe
- Yksinhuoltajaperhe
- Uusperhe
- Useamman sukupolven perhe
- Muu, mikä?

**2. Millainen on perheesi elämäntilanne? Kuvaile lyhyesti. \***

150 merkkiä jäljellä

**3. Onko perheessä lapsia, kuinka monta? \***

- Ei yhtään
- 1-2
- 3-5
- yli 5

**4. Mikäli perheeseen kuuluu lapsia, minkä ikäisiä he ovat?**

150 merkkiä jäljellä

**5. Millaisista asioista perheesi arki koostuu? \***

250 merkkiä jäljellä

**6. Onko teillä kotieläimiä? \***

- Ei
- Kyllä, mitä eläimiä?

**7. Mikä seuraavista saisi teidät todennäköisemmin alkamaan isäntäperheeksi? \***

- Kiinnostus kulttuuria kohtaan
- Halu tutustua uusiin ihmisiin
- Kokemus
- Halu jakaa tietoutta kotimaastamme
- Taloudellinen hyöty

**8. Mitä odotuksia teillä on vierailijoiden suhteen? \***

250 merkkiä jäljellä

**9. Mitä kieliä perheessänne osataan? \***

- Englanti  
 Ruotsi  
 Saksa  
 Ranska  
 Venäjä  
 Muu, mikä?

**10. Onko perheelläsi aiempaa kokemusta isäntäperheenä toimimisesta? \***

- Ei  
 Kyllä, millainen kokemus  
oli?

**11. Mikä olisi mielestäsi paras tapa rekrytoida isäntäperheitä? \***

250 merkkiä jäljellä

**12. Jos tulisi mahdollisuus, olisiko perheesi kiinnostunut lähtemään mukaan isäntäperhe toimintaan? \***

- Ei  
 Ehkä  
 Kyllä

**13. Haluatko, että Suomen Keskusvaraamo Oy on sinuun yhteydessä isäntäperhe rekrytointiin tai muihin palveluihin liittyen? Jätä yhteystietosi!**

Etunimi

Sukunimi

Sähköposti

**OAMK** OULUN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU

### Tutkimuslupahakemus

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<b>TUTKIMUKSEN TOIMEKSIANTAJA</b>	Toimeksiantaja Suomen Keskusosuustoimisto oy	
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<b>PÄIVÄYS JA ALLEKIRJOITUS</b>	Paikka ja päivämäärä Oulussa 4.10.2018	Allekirjoitus Heena Tahuonen
<b>Päättäjä täyttää</b>	Tutkimusluvan myöntäminen <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tutkimuslupa myönnetään <input type="checkbox"/> Tutkimuslupaa ei myönnetä	
	Myöntämisen ehdot / Perustelut myöntämättä jättämiselle KYSELY OIVASSA / HEIMOSSA, EI SÄHKÖPOSTIJAKE- LUVA.	
	Päättäjän nimi JYRKI LAITINEN	
<b>PÄIVÄYS JA ALLEKIRJOITUS</b>	Paikka ja päivämäärä OULU 11/10/2018	Allekirjoitus [Signature]
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Liitteenä tutkimussuunnitelma	

OULUN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU :: PL 222, 90101 OULU :: 010 272 1030 :: oamk.fi

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Olen 4. vuoden kansainvälisen liiketalouden opiskelija ja teen opinnäytetyötä mahdollisuuksista rekrytoida isäntäperheitä Oulun alueelta.

Olisi mahtavaa jos voisit auttaa minua opinnäytetyössäni vastaamalla tähän kyselyyn. Vastaamiseen menee aikaa noin 5 minuuttia ja vastaukset tallennetaan anonyymisti.

Kyselyyn pääset tästä: <https://www.webpolsurveys.com/S/F1575C6773FFB2C9.par>  
Kiitos!

Ystävällisin terveisin,  
Henna Tahvonen  
DIB15SP