

THE CHALLENGE OF OVERTOURISM IN FINNISH
LAPLAND

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The aim of this thesis research was to find out the current situation and the perspective of DMOs in Finnish Lapland about the challenges concerning the influx of tourists coming to Lapland in recent years. The research purpose was created and developed for an ongoing project called Arctic Smart Growth.

The study consists of a theory section and an empirical section that deals with the current situation in Finish Lapland. The theory section discusses the development of tourism in Lapland, the overtourism concept in general and other theme-related issues, as well as the structure of Destination Management Organizations.

In order to achieve the goal and receive a tourism expert's perspective, the qualitative method was chosen as the most suitable one. In this thesis semi-structured interviews are the primary source of information, which brought more in-depth knowledge of the theme-related issues. Four representants of local destination management organizations and a Regional Council of Lapland have been interviewed during the winter season 2018/2019. All the discussions were conducted online via Skype and Google meeting.

As a result, the research findings indicted that at the moment there is no overtourism happening in Finnish Lapland, even though the preliminary analysis showed that the number of tourists is only growing with each year. However, other problems have been discovered. The answers of the respondents specified that there is a big challenge with sharing accommodation platforms, like Airbnb. Furthermore, the problem of seasonality dispersion (crowded winters, low number of tourists during other seasons) proposes that year-round tourism is the main aim for tourism development in Lapland.

Key words

DMO, overtourism, overcrowding, Lapland, destination management

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1 INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry has grown rapidly during the past few years. Over the past six decades, tourism has experienced continued expansion and diversification to become one of the largest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world (UNWTO 2017). In total, Travel & Tourism generated US \$7.6 trillion (10.2% of global GDP) and 292 million jobs in 2016, equivalent to 1 in 10 jobs in the global economy (World Travel & Tourism Council 2017, 14).

Obviously, this development has shown its particular outcomes not only on the economical side but also in the social and environmental factors. Nowadays, most of the attractive destinations, in terms of tourism, are dealing with an overload of incoming visitors. This kind of congestion made up a new phenomenon, called overtourism. In other words, overtourism occurs when more tourists are coming to a place than ever before.

However, most of the places worldwide have not experienced overcrowding yet. Thus, for the majority of destinations, including Finnish Lapland, the possible trouble can be prevented by understanding the origins of overcrowding. It can be done by analysing the existing experiences of other countries, which already have faced with the problem. Some actions against crowding could be and need to be done already now, before facing any greater challenges.

The main question in this research was to find out the current situation and perspective of local Destination Management Organizations about the challenges concerning the influx of tourists coming to Finnish Lapland in recent years. The link between the destination's success and the outcomes of it were analysed as well.

The commissioner for this thesis is "Arctic Smart Growth" project from the Multidimensional Tourism Institute in Rovaniemi. The aim of the project is to support the internationalization of Lappish companies, especially those which are included in Smart Specialisation Strategy of Lapland. This research brings new insights and gives valuable knowledge in order to support the objectives of the project. Together with a project manager Eija Raasakka, the research goal was created.

In order to obtain the empirical data, during the research, the qualitative methods are used. With the purpose to obtain a profound understanding of overtourism issues, the thesis starts with a theoretical background which includes secondary data such as internet sources, academic journal articles, and specific tourism literature.

Semi-structured interviews were used as a main tool for collecting data from the participants. The interviews were conducted with 5 representants of tourism boards in Finnish Lapland, known to be tourism experts. The interview questions were divided into two parts: Overtourism in Finnish Lapland and the implementation of the experience of the other European destinations which have already faced the problem.

By combining the theoretical framework with the qualitative research method, the thesis project examines the existence of overtourism in Lapland, checks if there are the possible solutions to this problem and bring new insights to the challenges Lapland tourism is experiencing at the moment. However, the research is limited on its scale. Due to the narrow number of interview participants, the research cannot fully represent the tourism situation in Finnish Lapland.

2 LAPLAND AS INTERNATIONAL TOURISM DESTINATION

2.1 Finnish Lapland Geography

The region of Lapland is located in the middle of Barents Euro-Arctic region by being the threshold in the Arctic, shearing the common border with Russian federation, Norway and Sweden. Lapland is the northernmost region of Finland and the European Union. The Arctic Circle runs in the southern part of Lapland (see Picture 1). It can be explored in the capital of Lapland, Rovaniemi, for example, where the Arctic Circle is conveniently located (Lapland Above Ordinary, 2019a).



Picture 1. Map of Finnish Lapland (Lapland Above Ordinary 2019b).

The Lapland district is divided into tourist regions. Tunturi-Lappi (Fell Lapland) comprises the tourist regions of Enontekiö-Kilpisjärvi, Pallas, Olos, Ylläs and Levi. The North Lapland district includes the Saariselkä resort, and the most significant tourist resorts in East Lapland are Pyhä-Luosto, Suomu, Kemijärvi, Salla and Posio. South Lapland has the Tornionjoki River Valley and Meri-Lappi (Sea Lapland). (Lapland Above Ordinary 2019c.)

Lapland makes up about one third of Finland's total area. However, only 3.6% of the Finnish population lives in Lapland (Lapland Finland 2019). The Sami originated in the Sapmi region of Lapland - a far-northern area comprising parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia - making them Europe's northernmost indigenous people (Brennan 2019).

2.2 History of Tourism Development in Finnish Lapland

Tourism in Lapland began to develop relatively recently. Travelling to Lapland remained a hobby for few, and mainly wealthy people, up until the 1950s. Since the 1960s, tourism has grown into a substantial industry; during the past few decades the largest fell resorts have grown more or less into towns (My Helsinki 2019).

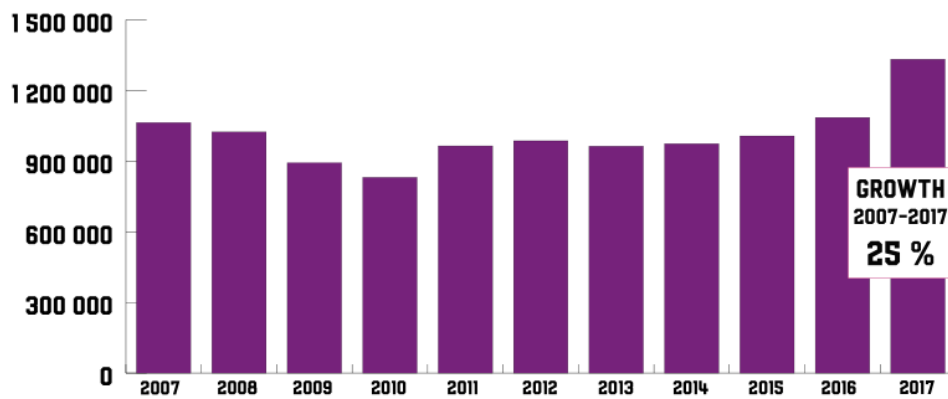
The growing trend of Christmas tourism is relatively new. Until 1980s Christmas time and Santa Claus actually represented rather negative elements in Nordic tourism's markets by keeping people home or creating 'visiting friends and relatives' (VFR) mobility which was not regarded as providing wider economic opportunities for the tourism industry. Finland was one of the first Nordic countries to develop the Christmas tourism season. In the 1980s, Finnish tourist authorities launched a new tourism strategy based on the idea of 'Santa Claus Land'. It included new kind of marketing and the development of Santa Claus Village in the Rural Municipality of Rovaniemi. (Hall, Müller & Saarinen 2009, 240.) According to Pretes (1994, 8), the remoteness of Santa Claus has particular benefits not only for Lapland tourism, but for Finland in general. When passing through Helsinki, foreign visitors have more chances to visit other parts of the country, rather than just staying in Lapland. Pretes (1994, 14) also believes that the history of Santa Claus industry in northern Finland is the history of the commodification of Christmas.

2.3 Finnish Lapland Now

At the moment tourism in Lapland is booming. The number of incoming tourists is only growing with each winter season, beating the records of the previous year. Overall, there were 2.9 million overnight stays in Lapland in 2017, with a 9% growth from 2016. In total, the tourism demand in Lapland reached 1 billion euros in 2017 and employed 7,000 people. However, only 181,000 people permanently live in Lapland. In other words, every fourth local is involved in the industry. (Lapland Above Ordinary 2018.)

Lappish tourism is based on sustainable Arctic nature and experience tourism, which is currently one of the hottest trends in global tourism (Lapland Above Ordinary 2017). Lapland has six airports: Enontekiö, Ivalo, Kemi-Tornio, Kuusamo, Kittilä and Rovaniemi. Altogether they accommodate almost 1.5 million passengers. Figure 1 illustrates that for the 10-year period (2007-2017) a passenger traffic at Lapland airports has grown by 25%, meaning that it is plausible that in the next 10 years, the expected numbers will double and reach a new high point (Lapland Material Bank 2019).

PASSENGER TRAFFIC AT LAPLAND AIRPORTS 2007-2017



SOURCE: FINAVIA, LAPLAND AIRPORTS

Figure 1. Passenger Traffic at Lapland airports 2007-2017 (Lapland Material Bank 2019)

According to Lapland Above Ordinary (2018), from 2016, international overnight stays grew by 22%, overtaking domestic overnight stays, meaning that the number of visitors has increased from 1.43 million to 1.48 (Figure 2). Three leading areas, Rovaniemi, Kittilä and Inari-Utsjoki, have experienced almost a million (938 thousands) overnight stays, including both official and unofficial numbers.

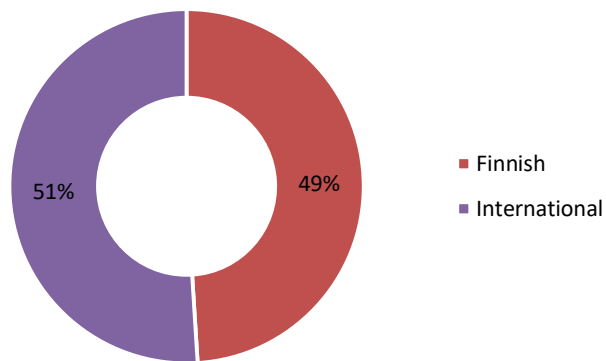


Figure 2. Registered Overnight Stays (Lapland Above Ordinary 2018)

With only a difference of one percent, 51% of the overnight stays are from international tourists, whereas 49% is coming from the domestic side. Concerning the nationalities itself, British travellers remained in the top spot, representing 19% of all international overnight stays, as it can be seen in the figure 3. After the UK, comes Germany, France Netherland and Norway. 49% represent all other nationalities, showing 750,000 people. (Lapland Above Ordinary 2018.)

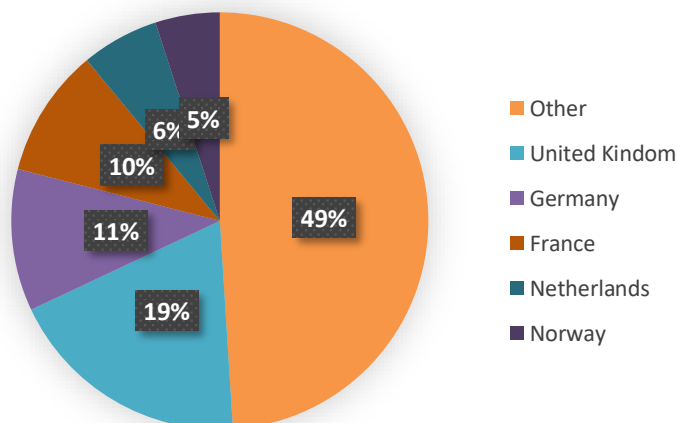


Figure 3: International Travellers' Registered Overnight Stays in Finnish Lapland 2017 (Lapland Above Ordinary 2018)

Summing up all above-mentioned information, it is clear to see that tourism in Lapland has only started to expand and will likely continue to grow more with every year.

3 CHALLENGE OF OVERCROWDING

3.1 Definition of Overtourism

Over the past few years, popular destinations in Europe are experiencing a tourism boom. Even though, economically the industry is making a positive contribution, there have been rising concerns surrounding the impact mass tourism has on the environment and the need to curb so called 'overtourism'. (Statista 2019.)

The word "overtourism" is relatively new, therefore no official definitions have been created yet. However, there are numbers of self-described meaning of this phenomenon all over the internet. For example, The Conversation (2018) defines it as follows:

the excessive growth of visitors leading to overcrowding in areas where residents suffer the consequences of temporary and seasonal tourism peaks, which have enforced permanent changes to their lifestyles, access to amenities and general well-being.

At the same time Harold Goodwin (2018) claims that 'overtourism' describes destinations where hosts or guests, locals or visitors, feel that there are too many visitors and that the quality of life in the area or the quality of the experience has deteriorated unacceptably.

Nevertheless, no matter what the official definition of overtourism is, the impacts of overcrowding remain the same with different places all over the world. The World Travel & Tourism Council partnered with McKinsey & Company have launched a study about the effects of overtourism. On the basis of the research, and after extensive interviews with sector leaders, together they have identified five major difficulties associated with tourist overcrowding. Those problems are alienated local residents, degraded tourist experiences, overloaded infrastructure, damage to nature, and threats to culture and heritage. (McKinsey & Company and World Travel & Tourism Council 2017.)

3.2 Overtourism and Carrying Capacity

A key insight studied in carrying capacity is the perception of crowding. The United World Tourism Organisation (1981, 4) defines carrying capacity as ‘the maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic, socio-cultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors’ satisfaction’.

Carrying capacity is an essential part of sustainable growth of a destination. Ritchie and Crouch (2003, 76) assume that a destination’s carrying capacity can make a limit on a further development or competitiveness of the destination if demand is close to or above its sustainable maximum.

Almost every well-liked destination can become a great example of this theory. Venice, for example, is clearly an extremely popular destination that is under control of its carrying capacity. It remains very popular but struggles to cope with visitors at certain time of the year. (Ritchie & Crouch 2003, 76.)

Most researchers and tourism planners distinguish between four different types of carrying capacity: physical, biological/ ecological, psychological and social carrying capacity (Robinson, Lück, & Smith, 2013, 419). Overcrowding is usually dealing with the last two.

It is important to understand carrying capacity in order to provide the best possible experience, and to limit deterioration, damage and dissatisfaction. Exceeding capacities may result in physical damage to the natural environment, but also to the built environment, especially the historic sites and buildings. Exceeding the social and psychological capacities may result in dissatisfaction of tourists, and resentment and even antagonism of residents in the host communities. (Robinson, Lück & Smith 2013, 421.)

When a destination experiences too many people at the same time, it influences both residents and tourists. This influence is usually is not expected to have a positive effect. The behaviour towards tourists here become hostile, whereas the attitude of tourists is also on a crucial point due to the crowded areas, endangering the loss of ability to truly feel and enjoy the beauty of a place. Below, this phenomenon is explained in detail.

3.3 Doxey's Irritation Index

As mentioned earlier, going beyond the social and psychological dimensions may have its particular impact on both tourists and host community sides. Doxey (1975) investigated the social carrying capacity of a destination and suggested an index of irritation, commonly referred to as Doxey's Irritation Index. This index (Figure 4) measures how the residents and tourists interact with each other based on the number of tourists that a destination attracts.

According to Doxey's theory (1976, 195–197), when there is no touristic activity in the region, hosts are curious and interested in tourists. This happens in the Euphoria stage. Here tourists are welcome, and hosts are delighted and excited about tourists' presence. However, when the number of tourists increases, they are taken for granted, contact between tourists and hosts becomes more formal and locals become indifferent towards tourists, they do not know whether to welcome tourists or not. It is an Apathy stage. (Reisinger 2009, 221.)

When the number of tourists reaches the maximum level, the Irritation stage starts. Tourism development reaches the saturation stage and the rate of tourism growth is expected to be even higher, hosts become concerned over price rises, crime, and tourist rudeness. The cultural rules being broken and eventually irritated by tourists' presence, and tourists are perceived as an annoyance. Afterwards, the antagonism stage comes. It happens when tourists are blamed for all wrongdoings in the host society, and are seen as lacking human values, hosts become hostile towards them. At this point hosts start to believe tourists can be exploited. Eventually, hosts call for actions which would offset the negative impacts of tourism development. (Reisinger 2009, 221.)

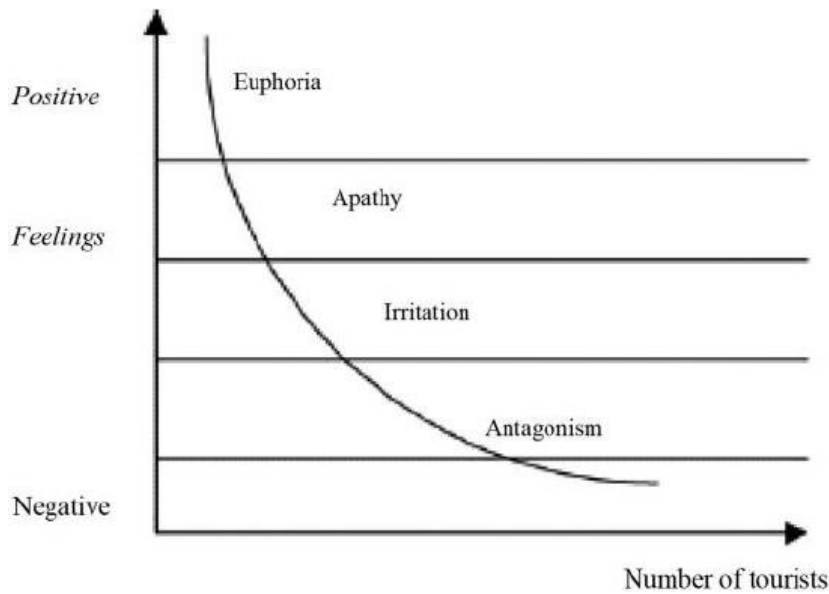


Figure 4. Doxey's Irritation Index (Doxey 1976).

According to above-mentioned information, the destinations, which now are dealing with overtourism, are somewhere between Irritation and Antagonism stages. The level of incoming tourists reaches its highest level and the local communities start being hostile against it.

In order to avoid the same situation in Finnish Lapland, it is crucial to understand the origins of the overtourism issue. The experience of already overcrowded destinations should be taken into consideration and analysed in future actions against the overtourism problem.

3.4 Overcrowded Places Around World

Now more and more destinations are suffering from overcrowding and certain solutions are implementing consequently. One of the most popular cases of overtourism is Barcelona – the Catalanian capital. Barcelona with a population of 1.5 million inhabitants received more than 8 million tourists in its hotels in 2017 (Bonfiglio 2019). When more and more millions start visiting the city, the possibility of losing a balance between local residents and tourists is only growing, and that is exactly what happened in Barcelona. With tourism development having got out of hand, the local government has taken steps to control the supply of places to stay. There is a moratorium on new licences for tourist accommodation. Short-term rentals have also come under close scrutiny, with licences required to rent out rooms for less than 30 days. The local

government also banned the change of use permits necessary for short-term lets and enforced a minimum stay in Airbnb. (Euromonitor International 2018.)

Another popular example is Amsterdam. At the moment the Dutch capital is also having problems with visitor management. In order to prevent further worsening of the situation Amsterdam's government has banned new hotels from opening within the canal belt and has also imposed restrictions on sites such as Airbnb. City hall has also proposed a new tourist tax which will disproportionately impact budget travellers. (The Telegraph 2018.)

Iceland also had become a victim of its own success. In June 2015, the number of visitors to Iceland increased by 78 percent compared to the previous year. But there is more. By the end of the year 2017, it was reported that on that year they had received no less than up to eight tourists for each resident. The country's infrastructure, which comfortably serves a population of 350,000, has entered a kind of collapse. Afterwards, new regulations have been introduced. For instance, with an Airbnb service you can only rent your rooms up to 90 days a year. An infrastructure plan has also been addressed to meet the demand. While they are not against tourism, the Icelanders are already taking precautions to not become a new Venice. (Bonfiglio 2019.)

Interestingly that even the extreme tourists' destinations, like the world's highest mountain Everest become 'a victim of its own success'. Joe Minihane (Minihane 2018) in his article describes the most popular places around the world and share the alternatives to already crowded ones. Now the one of the most dangerous destination – a mountain Everest is experiencing a boom of tourists who want to conquer the world's highest point. After the limitations made in 2015, Nepal now has made more restrictions, which ban blind people, double amputees and solo climbers (unless accompanied by a guide) from attempting to conquer Everest or any other mountains in the central Himalayan country.

4 DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION (DMO)

4.1 Definition, Structure, Goals and Challenges for DMO

DMO or Destination Marketing Organization is a leading organizational entity which may encompass the various authorities, stakeholders and professionals and facilitates tourism sector partnerships towards a collective destination vision. The functions of the DMOs may vary from national to regional and local levels depending on the current and potential needs as well as on the decentralization level of public administration. Not every tourism destination has a DMO (UNWTO 2019).

Kelly and Nankervis (2001) categorised a number of DMOs functions under the headings of external focus, supply management, environmental protection and community welfare (Table 1).

<p>External Focus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Market research Raising awareness Increasing visitor numbers and dwell time Addressing seasonality Partnership and network development Forecasting and planning for tourism Marketing and HR Supporting tourism development 	<p>Supply management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning inputs Managing resources Product development Attraction development Facilities provision and management Visitor information Provision of advice and training Industry networking and development Internal PR
<p>Environmental protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing visitor numbers Managing sustainability Managing quality Conserving and protecting resources 	<p>Community welfare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community consultation Community-based tourism development Supporting the creating of employment Supporting tourism training and professionalization Protecting cultural identities

Table 1. Destination Organizations' Functions (Kelly & Nankervis, 2001).

Destination Management Organizations play a key role in the long-term development of a destination, by formulating an effective travel and tourism strategy. According to Ritchie and Crouch (2005, 73) the concept of DMO, where 'M' emphasizes total management rather than marketing, is a somewhat recent centralization of the organization function for destination management. This broader view sees management as responsible for the well-being of all aspects of the destination. In other words, destination marketing is no longer the only goal for DMO.

Being a destination expert, the Destination Management Organizations still face a lot of challenges. Those are government policy favours centralized management, businesses and individuals favour fragmentation and lack of sustainable financial support (Solimar International 2018).

One of the potential problems of destination management has been the extent to which the contribution of DMO efforts to the overall success of the destination can be measured. Pike (2004, 636) believes that isolating and measuring a DMO's contribution to a destination competitiveness is currently an impossible task. Ultimately the success of a destination will be a result of a combination of factors, many of which will be exogenous to the DMO (Pike, 2004, 190).

4.2 DMOs in Finnish Lapland

Destination Management Organizations in Finland work on three levels: local, regional, national. There are also about 30 regional tourism organizations in Finland that have varied objectives, tasks and ownership structures (Figure 5). Locally, tourism issues are handled by municipalities and local tourist information offices. (OECD 2014, 165.)

On the regional level, specifically in Lapland, the Lapland Tourism strategy defines fundamental directions for tourism development within the region. Current formulated vision of Lapland as a tourism destination emphasizes its accessibility, sustainability and internationalization. As such, main objectives of Lapland Tourism Strategy include ensuring that the region offers and deliver high-quality all-year-round versatile tourism products and services. From the strategical perspective, it emphasizes the need for identifying and targeting new customers group as well as establishing powerful partnerships within a sector. Furthermore, the Lapland Tourism strategy recognizes the importance of enhancing visibility of the destination, in particular by digital marketing and distribution channels. (Luiro 2015.)

On the national level, The Ministry of Employment and the Economy is the main actor, in terms of framing directions for tourism development on the country's level. The Finnish Tourist Board, known as Visit Finland, is operating under the Ministry. Its central functions are promoting Finland's country brand in tourism, supporting product marketing with businesses and coordinating product development. (OECD 2014, 164–165.)

Finland: Organisational chart of tourism bodies

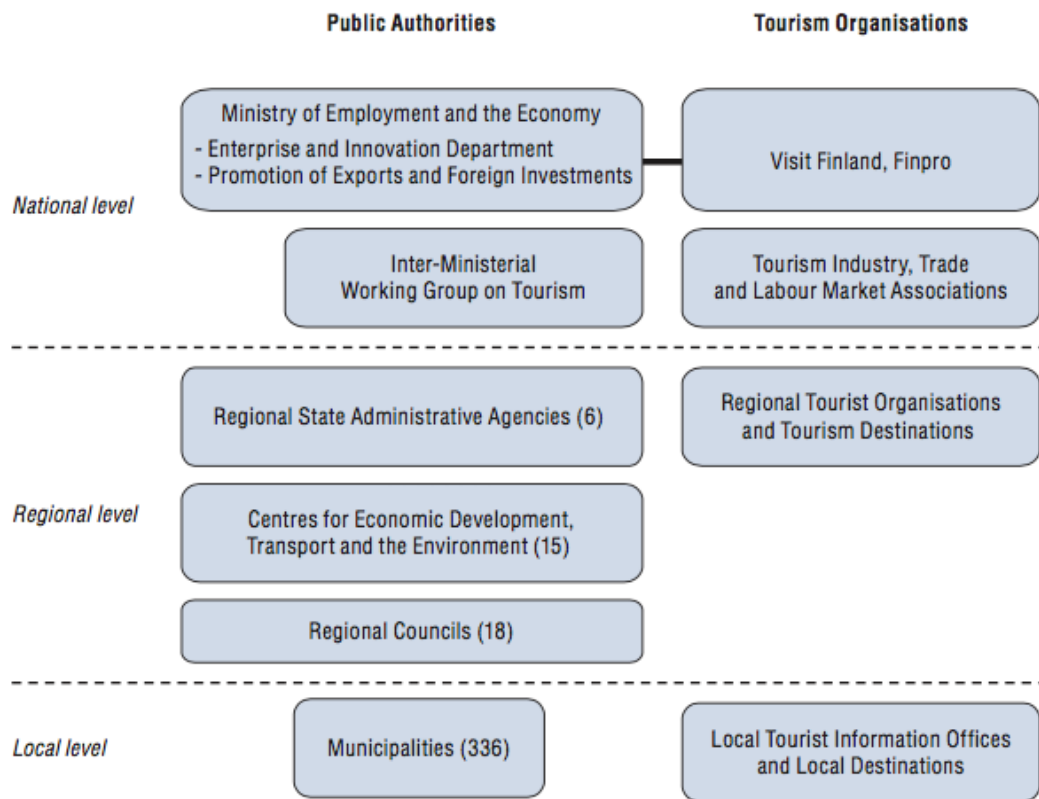


Figure 5: Finland: Organizational Chart of Tourism Bodies (OECD, adapted from the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, 2016.)

There is no separate budget for tourism development in the Ministry of Employment and the Economy. However, support for tourism is also provided, directly or indirectly, through the budgets and activities of other ministries, development agencies, and the various regional bodies identified above. Finland also has a possibility to receive EU co-funding for tourism-related projects which can be obtained from the Regional Councils. (OECD 2014, 165–166.)

4.3 Destination Planning

Another task of Destination Management Organisation is a destination planning. Planning for tourism is increasingly important for long-term success (Robinson, Lück, & Smith, 2013, 300). Godfey and Clarke (2007) suggest that destination planning should take place at three distinct levels (regional, destination, business levels) and specially involve each and every business in the destination.

Foresight plays an important role in Finland too, and duties related to it are laid down in the Act on Regional Development (1651/2009). Lapland is engaged in multipurpose, systematic foresight cooperation with education providers, businesses and local authorities. Regional foresight co-ordination is a constitutional responsibility of regional councils. In Lapland, this task is performed by the Regional Council of Lapland. (Lapin Luotsi 2019.)

As a part of a foresight work, between 2015 and 2016, the Northern Cooperation of Foresight-Project (ESF) was done. As a result of three workshops and a survey done, the project has come up with Northern Outlook 2040. It consists of three different scenarios for Finnish Lapland and its potential industries in the future. Those scenarios are Striving from the North, Arctic luxury and The Gran Canaria of the Arctic Circle. (Northern Outlook 2040.)

And according to one of the plots, some prerequisites for the consequences of overtourism were discussed and predicted already at that time. For instance, the main outline of The Gran Canaria of the Arctic Circle scenario is "Quantity has won over quality, and the North is being exhausted". Overtourism now follows the same slogan. As for tourism in particular, it is expected that the huge growth in tourism starting from the late 2010s has turned the area into a mass tourism destination. It has been necessary to restrict the number of tourists to the region based on what nature can take. Summer has become the main season. (Northern Outlook 2040.)

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Qualitative Research

The main question of this thesis project is to find out the current situation and perspective of local DMOs about the challenges concerning the influx of tourists coming to Finnish Lapland in recent years. In order to reach the aim of the research, the qualitative method was chosen as the most suitable one.

As stated by Richards and Munsters (2010, 34) qualitative research can be defined as research that aims to obtain in-depth insight into the social reality on the basis of a relatively small number of respondents or observations. The distinction between qualitative research and quantitative research is concerned mainly with the type of data required. Goodson and Phillimore (2004, as cited in Weaver & Lawton 2014, 208) argue that qualitative research can be ‘negatively’ defined as a mode of research that does not place its emphasis on statistics or statistical analysis; that is, on the objective measurement and analysis of the data collected. In terms of subject matter, it usually involves a small number of respondents or observations but considers these in depth. It is for this reason that qualitative research methods are sometimes referred to as ‘data enhancers’ that allow crucial elements of a problem or phenomenon to be seen more clearly and in greater depth. Qualitative research is suited for situations where little is known about the subject matter, since the associated methodology is intended to gain insight into the phenomenon in question. (Weaver et al. 2014, 360.)

During the research, in order to get empirical data, the qualitative methods were used. The main purpose is to find out and analyse the Destination Management Organizations’ prescription on the over tourism in Finnish Lapland and to find out the possible solutions for the current situation. Since the qualitative method is exploratory, there will be “What?” or “How?” question with no predictable answer (Jennings 2013).

5.2 Commissioner

The commissioner for this thesis is “Arctic Smart Growth” (ASG) project. The goal of ASG project is to increase the SMEs’ research, development and innovation activities and improve companies’ opportunities to utilize EU funding and international networks more effectively. The project is closely linked to the regional business services as well as other business networks. (Arctic Smartness 2019.) In addition, the aim of the project is to support the internationalisation of Lappish companies, especially those which are included in the Smart Specialization Strategy of Lapland.

One of the representors of the ASG project is Eija Raasakka, who was a leading contact person for this thesis. Eija Raasakka is a project Manager, who has a degree in Hotel and Tourism Management and in Vocational Teacher Education. Since 1997, she has worked at the Lapland University of Applied Sciences, first as a lecturer and then as a Project Manager in the RDI department. She is an expert in project management, tourism and hotel management, and in tourism safety. She is the contact person of the Lapland region in the S3 Thematic network of Digitalization and Safety for Tourism. She leads the sub-theme of Tourism Safety in the University of Arctic and the Arctic Tourism Safety Cluster in Lapland. (Europe 2019.)

5.3 Reliability and Validity

Addressing the trustworthiness issue is important in helping to make the qualitative and interpretive tourism studies more rigorous (Phillimore & Goodson 2004, as cited in Weaver & Lawton 2014,167). Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four basic criteria of trustworthiness – credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability – which parallel positivist’ reliability and validity constructs.

When conducting this qualitative research, reliability and validity are used to ensure the honesty of the thesis project. Reliability is a matter of whether a particular technique, applied repeatedly to the same object, would yield the same result each time. Validity or Credibility refers to the extent of which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration. (Jennings 2013.)

The aim of this research is to define the perspective and readiness of Lappish DMO for upcoming/already existing 'overtourism' problem. The credibility of this research can be ensured by the well-defined research question, consistent and appropriate methodology, and appropriate data collection plus its analysis. The variety in answers and coincidental similarities between the interview participants create better awareness and knowledge of a more general population, rather than only of the individual informants that are contributing the data. (Stake 1994, as cited in Shenton 2004.)

5.4 Semi-structured interviews

There are several ways of collecting empirical material for qualitative methods, such as: interviews, participant, content analysis, focus groups, case studies and Delphi techniques. Interviews are conversation-like exchanges between study participants and researcher(s). (Jennings 2013.)

In this thesis semi-structured interviews are considered to be the main source of information. Semi-structured interviews involve a prompt list which focuses the interview. It also includes transcription and recording, with textual analysis afterwards. The order of the issues discussed may change depending on participant responses. Interviews are considered to elicit 'rich' materials as well as 'thick' descriptions from study participants. Nevertheless, interpretations of interview generated empirical materials are specific to study participants. In addition, documentary analysis was used as a secondary empirical material source. It includes systematic interpretation of various sources of written texts relevant to research. The main advantage is that non-intrusive method, include past and present in scope of research. However, there is separation from text authors and inability to clarify meaning with authors, an ethic, and outsider view. (Jennings 2013.)

The interviews are supposed to give new insights for crowding issues and answer the other topic-related questions. All topic-related questions consist of two parts: the questions about the existence of overtourism in Finnish Lapland and questions about the experience of European destinations which have faced this problem already. A list with questions was sent in advance, so that the interviewee could have a look on it beforehand. The interview list consists of 15

questions, including both open-ended and close-ended questions. It was done with a purpose to make the interview deeper and more informative. Due to the remoteness of the participants, all interviews were done online, via video conferencing app, such as Skype or Google Meeting. In addition, after the interviewee's agreement, all the interviews were recorded and transcribed into a word documents, which can be presented on a request.

It was preliminary agreed with a commissioner that there would be seven Destination Management Organizations and Lappish Tourism Coordinator which are going to take part in the discussions. The chosen DMOs are Salla, Rovaniemi, Pyhä-Luosto, Inari, Sea Lapland, Levi and Ylläs. According to commissioner's view, the selected destinations can represent the full overview of Finnish Lapland. However, during the research only 5 people were interviewed, those are Salla, Visit Rovaniemi, Levi, Regional Council of Lapland and Ylläs. This and the other limitations are explained below.

5.5 Limitations

When conducting this research, the author has faced herself with a number of limitations, which need to be discussed before presenting the results. It is done to frame the importance of the circumstances under which the research carried out was explained. It also shows the researcher's complete understanding of a study conducted.

The first limitation to be mentioned is the conduction time of the research. Most of the interviews were organized during winter, when Finnish Lapland is experiencing its high season. Therefore, it was difficult to reach the selected people, since all of them are working in and for tourism. This obstacle also has led to the refusal of the participation in further surveys due to the busyness of the people. Thus, the original number of the participants was reduced from eight to five.

The second gap is about the geographical matters of research. Even though the study research is supposed to represent the overall situation with overtourism in Finnish Lapland, the interviews were conducted only with a few members of local

DMOs. Therefore, the results of another research with more participants could be different from this one.

The other limitation was the language barrier. Due to the reason that the researcher is lacking Finnish skills, all the interviews and pre-survey discussions were conducted in English. In most of the interviews it did not lead to any problems, but occasionally it was noticeable that a person would have better talked in his/her mother tongue. Therefore, some of the answers were affected by it.

6 RESEARCH FINDINGS

6.1 Finnish Lapland and Overtourism

For convenient reading and better understanding of the research results, all the interviewees have been given abbreviations and numbers. The abbreviations begin with R (Respondent) and numbers (see table 2). The time and place of the discussion is also shown below.

Table 2. The Interviewee List

Abbreviation	Name of DMO	Type of the Interview
Respondent 1	Ylläs	via Google Meeting 23.11.2018
Respondent 2	Levi	via Skype 28.11.2018
Respondent 3	Salla	via Google Meeting 30.01.2019
Respondent 4	Regional Council of Lapland	via Skype 7.12.2018
Respondent 5	Visit Rovaniemi	via Google Meeting 24.01.2019

All the interviews started with a short explanation of the overtourism phenomena. Even though, all the participants are known as tourism professionals, the small introduction was still needed in order to ensure that the respondent is aware of the research's main subject. Afterwards, the questions concerning the existence of overtourism in Finnish Lapland and its seasonality were asked.

When replying to the first question “Do you think that Finnish Lapland is currently overcrowded?” most of the responders declined the existence of overtourism phenomena in Finnish Lapland and stated that their destination is not experiencing it.

[...] in Ylläs we cannot really talk about over tourism (R1)

[...] I don't think so. Maybe some centres are quite busy for high, peak seasons, but actually there is so much land and so much still to be discovered. (R2)

[...] if you think about overall Lapland, then we are not overcrowded. There is no overtourism yet. (R4)

Interestingly, one participant also declined the idea overtourism in Lapland, but at the same time, mentioned that Rovaniemi city definitely has problems with it, whereas Rovaniemi itself refused any possibility to this phenomenon happening at the moment.

I don't think so. I don't know the exact situation in the whole Lapland, so better know things happening in Rovaniemi. I would say that Rovaniemi is not definitely overtourism destination, at least yet. (R5)

Right after the first question, the seasonality was discussed, and crowding was considered here with a less sceptic view. Now, the tourism experts altogether agreed that seasonality is a key factor in Lapland tourism.

[...] very strong seasonality. (R4)

Definitely yes. Winter is a certain time of the year, which is more crowded than the other. (R2)

Few years ago, we have 80% of tourists coming in the winter and 20% in the summer. But now it's more equal. (R2)

In addition to that, December was marked as being the busiest month of the year, when most of the tourists tend to come.

[...] there are huge numbers of tourists, especially during the weekends during the winter, in December. (R4)

December is a biggest month, because many charter flights are coming and there are a lot of people coming for one day, not even staying a night, and then lots of people are renting Airbnb apartments and other apartments [...] So that way there are more tourists in December, but still it's not overtourism. (R5)

6.2 Growing Number of Incoming Tourists and Its Influence

Changes always cause the reactions, including both positive and negative. Popular destinations experience the same tendency when the number of tourists is increasing. In order to find out what influences the flow of tourists causes, the respondents had to think about the impact firstly on a destination and then on local people. The aim of this question was to measure how the residents and travelers interact with each other based on the number of tourists that a destination attracts.

Concerning the influence on the destination, the answers varied. On one hand, tourists bring no inconvenience for the destination, showing only the positive side, like the growing employment rate and development of a destination as a tourism center.

Levi has changed, became bigger as a center. More alpine building has been built. (R2)

[...] we don't get that much negative comments about the tourists. (R1)

On the other hand, the tourism services became worse. It, in turn, influences on the overall satisfaction of visitors coming to a place, having effect on the destination image as well.

There is a challenge when a lot of customers are coming at the same time that the customer service and all the other services stay on a good level. (R5)

Based on the responders' opinions and feelings, it can be seen that at the moment tourists do not bring much inconvenience to the local population, even though the influx of incoming visitors is growing with every year. In spite of it, some actions still need to be introduced with an intension of avoiding the worsening a current situation in the tourism industry. And when talking about the solution for the problem, the responsibility on the actions done also needs to be considered.

For that reason, the questions about destination's stakeholders were asked at first. "Who do you consider to be the most important stakeholders of a destination? How have stakeholders prepared and adapted to the current situation? Have they prepared/adapted? Have the stakeholders made any steps to prevent the upcoming/already existing "over tourism" issue?" Since, one of the interviewees was a Senior Council of Lapland, not a DMO, these questions were changed a bit, but the main goal of enquiry remained the same.

As a result, all the five responders mentioned a very good level of cooperation within local tourism companies and with other Destination Management Organizations located in Lapland. There were no 'the most important' players, everyone is counted as vital.

[...] We all work together. We all in the same boat. We collaborate with almost all the tourism companies. (R2)

The Lapland Tourism is organized in a way that if you think about tourism destination, like Levi or Ylläs, most of the companies in the area, are members of the local DMO. [...] then together we are trying to solve these things and develop tourism in a way that we could avoid all the risks. (R4)

We really work with everybody... (R5)

As stated in the beginning, Destination Management Organizations refused that overtourism is happening in Lapland. However, the question regarding the readiness or adaptation for the overcrowding was still raised. The end result here was the holistic understanding of the situation happening nowadays at Rovaniemi, whereas Lapland as a region is on the phase to reconsider the total denial for the crowding which might come later.

[...] yes, we really know what is happening in Rovaniemi and tourism business, and we are preparing for that. (R5)

I think that we don't have such a big problem yet, we are on a stage that we should be prepared to the future and really think what might come and happen. (R4)

Before heading to the final part of the interview, the open-ended question "How do you think, how close is the tourism industry of Finnish Lapland to become a victim of its own success?" was raised. Now, after discussion about the overcrowding aspect, possible solutions and stakeholders' role in the problem, the query on the challenge of overtourism was set up. At this point, the respondent was supposed to sum up and examine the possibility of becoming one of the victims of its success that was caused mainly by the uncontrolled flow of tourists coming to the place.

The group of answers varied from the total disagreement to a hope for the better. For example, Levi (R2) was pretty sure that "It is probably not happening". On the contrary, Regional Council of Lapland (R4) admitted that "we are not a victim yet, but there is a risk that we might become one". And another interviewee stated that Finnish Lapland is close.

It's very near [...] There is a side that everything is not working, because there is too much grow. (R3)

Despite the diversity of answers, the majority stated the wisdom of Finnish citizens in terms of actions and the ability to "do things beforehand". (R1).

Moreover, a good cooperation within tourism companies and with other destination management organisations was mentioned another time.

We also have a high standard cooperation within Finnish Lapland. (R1)

6.3 Reaction on Other Destinations' Examples

The second part of the semi-structured interview consists of questions regarding examples of the 'crowded out' European destinations and the response on its

connection to Finnish Lapland. The main point here was to identify if the selected examples could be relevant in terms of overloaded Finnish Lapland.

As a result, the responders found these examples thought-provoking, although consider Lapland region to be in different position from all the cities selected. Contrast comes both with the overall development of a country and the location of the area itself.

[...] I think that Lapland is in the different position when you compare to Iceland, for instance. In Iceland they don't really have that much infrastructure. (R4)

If we look on the world map, we are quite away from the whole Europe. We are [Lapland] in the end of the world. I think we will never be compared to those destination because of the location. (R1)

One of the examples of other destinations' experiences included fees and restrictions concerning the sharing accommodation platforms. In relation to implementing the same ideas and actions in the region, interviewees found it possible, and were especially interested in Airbnb taxation.

There are some things that could be also considered in Lapland. For instance, tourism taxation. (R4)

We need to have some laws or restrictions in the whole Finland, not only in Rovaniemi and it's about taxation or laws, or then making the limits, which renting is private or which one is already company or hotel. (R5)

6.4 Future Prospects

Even though, every participant declined that overtourism is happening in Finnish Lapland, the problem of seasonality remained. Therefore, questions about crowding were still asked, but now with a different aim: not about how to deal with overtourism, but how to avoid the worst consequences of this trend and develop the off seasons. By changing the objective, the new thoughts about year-round tourism strategy appeared in the responses:

[...] now we are doing the three years strategy for the destination 2019-2021. The strategy will focus on the year around tourism in here. (R1)

[...] our strategic thinking is that we need to work for low seasons, so we need more like year-round tourism. (R5)

It needs to be mentioned that there was a separate question regarding the strategic plan and the increasing number of tourists coming to Finnish Lapland. However, in most of the answers it was mentioned before the actual request.

Another interesting point is the idea about attracting tourists during low seasons by means of the nature that is also charming during other times of the year.

What we're working on now is trying to make people understand how beautiful this place is in summer. So, people may want to come here in winter, but they may decide in future if they will also come here in summer or in autumn. There's still plenty to do and lots of beauty to admire. (R3)

When talking about overtourism, the main problem was not about the big influx of tourists, but the rising conflict with various rental companies. The main difficulty with companies like Airbnb is that the government have no control of it, and the leading tourism companies, like DMOs, cannot implement any limits to this accommodation trend by themselves. Thus, the initiative about creating more restrictions towards the renting business is now in a high demand.

We need to have some laws or restrictions in the whole Finland, not only in Rovaniemi and it's about taxation or laws, or then making the limits, which renting is private or which one is already company or hotel [...] Authorities in Finland should do some regulations for Airbnb hosting and Airbnb renting, all that kind of private renting business. There should be some limits and some regulations. (R5)

I think, the cities and municipalities are the ones to decide how they control the Airbnb in the area. It's same in Finland, like Rovaniemi will decide what they do. But of course, they can't do anything over the national legislation. I think the national legislation is also coming at some point, I don't know, maybe in few years. (R4)

Furthermore, the initiative about tourist tax was introduced. The main idea of it would be that a visitor will decide for him/herself if the tax needs to be paid. Money would be collected at the accommodation services and will be directed to sustainability issues.

[..] “Voluntary tourist” payment, that could be collected in the accommodation services and so on. Maybe we would have this kind of voluntary payment, it could be directed to the sustainability or to develop sustainable tourism in Lapland. I think we will discuss about it a lot during next year. And if it’s connected to the sustainability, I think many tourists are happy to pay for that. We need to solve in the future – how can we control individual tourists, so that they can move around Lapland and not to cause negative impacts. (R4)

To sum up, rental accommodation and year-round tourism are the biggest challenges now. Companies like Airbnb have almost vanished the difference between private and public accommodation, ending up with delivering more sleeping places for tourists, but providing no control from the government. Therefore, some legislation concerning the limits on rental business needs to be introduced in Lapland. Concerning the year-round tourism, the strategic plan for 2019-2021 is supposed to solve this problem and help to avoid the problem of seasonality in the future. In order to check how both challenges would be prevented and managed, the other research is needed.

7 CONCLUSION

The main aim of this thesis research was to find out the current situation and the perspective of local DMOs about the challenges concerning the influx of tourists coming to Finnish Lapland in recent years. The research was also supposed to define the overtourism phenomena in general, and by analyzing it from various angles, the problem of crowding and its possible solutions for Finnish Lapland were introduced. The research aimed to bring new insights for Arctic Smart Growth project. The objectives of the thesis were set up together with a project manager from Multidimensional Tourism Institute, Eija Raasakka.

During the research, in order to get empirical data, the qualitative method was chosen as the most suitable method and was used consequently. In order to collect data from the participants, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Due to the remoteness of the participants, all the interviews were done online via conversation platforms. Most of the online interviews were conducted during winter season 2018-2019. The goal was to gain information on several aspects: the existence of overtourism in Finnish Lapland and seasonality of crowding, its influence on a destination and the inhabitants, the role of stakeholders when dealing with a problem, and the other counties examples and its implementation in Lapland. The interview itself consists of fifteen questions and was designed with a result purpose to gain all the needed information concerning the crowding issue in Lapland. The discussions were conducted with a tourism field professional: four local DMOs and a Regional Council of Lapland.

The credibility of this research can be ensured by well-defined research question, consistent and appropriate methodology, and appropriate data collection plus its analysis. The theoretical background was collected before preparing the interview questions and therefore the answers on it were able to fulfil the research goal.

As a result, all the set-up objectives have been achieved during the research. In general, now tourism in Finnish Lapland is truly experiencing a big influx of international travels coming and, according to the statistics, the numbers are only growing with each year. However, there is no overtourism yet. During winter, especially in December, Lapland is full of tourists and most of the services are

fully booked, but still people can enjoy their holidays and do not interrupt residents that much.

According to the interview results, on the Doxey's Irritation Index (see subchapter 3.3), Finnish Lapland could be placed somewhere between the Euphoria and Apathy stage. The incoming visitors are still welcomed, but in winter, when a high season starts, tourists are taken for granted; contact between tourists and hosts becomes more formal and locals become indifferent towards tourists. Nevertheless, the situation it is still fine and cannot be called overtourism.

As stated in subchapter 3.2, it is significant to be familiar with the concept of a destination's carrying capacity in order to provide the best possible experience, and to limit deterioration, damage and dissatisfaction of the visitors. When having the interviews with tourism experts, most of the respondents said that even though there is no overtourism happening in Lapland, the problem of crowding might be connected to strong seasonality and could be prevented by developing year-round tourism.

At the moment, the influx of tourists coming in winter is still under control, but the and the problem of seasonality remained and could transform into worse consequences. And in order to prevent those, the strategic plan is being developed. The strategic plan for 2019-2021 is supposed to develop the year-round tourism in Finnish Lapland and spread the flow of visitors all over the year. The upcoming strategical plan and the strong cooperation between tourism players are expecting to avoid the situation in tourism now to get worse.

The other problem, found during a research, was a rising conflict with sharing accommodation companies, like Airbnb. Now the difference between private and public accommodation is almost vanished, ending up with delivering more sleeping places for tourists, but providing no control from the government. Thus, some legislation concerning the limits on rental business needs to be introduced in Lapland.

In addition to that, the initiation concerning the tourist tax was introduced. Voluntary payment would be collected in the accommodation services and directed to the development of sustainability and sustainable tourism in Lapland.

This method is also supposed to help tourism in Lapland not to become a new overtourism spot.

In conclusion, based on the conducted research, the key results indicate that there is no overtourism happening in Finnish Lapland now. Nevertheless, the other challenges, like rising issue with rental platforms and the problem of seasonality, have been discovered. And in order to prevent those challenges and the possible additional ones, both tourism stakeholders and DMOs should keep on working together.

With a personal interest on the research theme, the time and effort put in and the motivation to proceed further on the long study progress, the author has wider her knowledge in the destination management issues and have seen a great potential in Lapland tourism development. And eventually the new insights on overcrowding issues and its challenges in Lapland have been discovered.

The further study could focus on the outcomes of the strategic plan 2019-2021 and the future restrictions concerning the sharing accommodation companies. The further development of Lapland as a tourism destination could be investigated too.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Interview Questions

Appendix 1 1(2). Interview Questions

Overtourism is a new phenomenon in tourism industry, when a destination is suffering with a big number of tourists coming. Overtourism is having a negative impact on many popular destinations around the world, such as Venice, Amsterdam, Dubrovnik etc. In order to prevent this problem, governments worldwide are implementing rules and limiting the number of visitors to combat overcrowding.

1. Do you think that Finnish Lapland is currently overcrowded?
2. Do you consider over tourism as a seasonal factor?
3. What influence does the influx of tourists have on the destination?
4. What is the impact on local people, when tourism has increased? (From the both positive and negative sides)
5. How can you, as a DMO, deal with over tourism problem?
6. With whom do you think the problem of increasing numbers of tourists should be solved?
7. Who do you consider to be the most important stakeholders of a destination?
8. How have stakeholders prepared and adapted to the current situation? Have they prepared/adapted?
9. Have the stakeholders made any steps to prevent the *upcoming/already existing* "overtourism" issue?
10. Have you already made a new strategic plan connected to over tourism?
11. How do you think, how close is the tourism industry of Finnish Lapland to become a victim of its own success?

Before answering the questions below, please check the information on the other page.

12. What do you think about those undertaken solutions?
13. Would those examples be a relevant in terms of Finnish Lapland?

Appendix 1 2(2). Interview Questions

14. Could one of those solutions be implemented in Finnish Lapland?

15. What could be a possible solution to overtourism problem in Finnish Lapland from your point of view?

Examples of steps already taken to prevent existing “over tourism” problems in European destinations:

[Amsterdam, Netherlands](#)

Banned new hotels from opening *within the canal belt*

Imposed restrictions on sites such as Airbnb

New tourist tax which will disproportionately impact budget travellers

[Dubrovnik, Croatia](#)

Limitation of daily visitors is up to 4,000

The mayor of Dubrovnik **asked cruise lines to help him** hit this target

[Venice, Italy](#)

Large cruise ships have been banned from sailing through the city

Strict **new penalties** for tourists (littering, dawdling and jumping in the canals will now invite fines of **between €25 and €500**)

[Balearic Islands, Spain](#)

Holiday rentals fees up to €40,000

Flat owners on the islands of Majorca, Ibiza, Menorca and Formentera **face fines** of up to **€40,000** (£36,000) if they are **caught renting their properties to tourists**

[Barcelona, Spain](#)

Strict new controls on holiday rentals - anyone wishing to let their property must first register through the city hall

Barcelona fined Airbnb €600,000 for continuing to advertise unlicensed flats on its platform