

Saimaa University of Applied Sciences
Tourism and Hospitality Faculty, Imatra
Tourism and Hospitality Management Degree Program

Hong-Minh Le

The Influences of Student Club Events on Students Studying in Linnala Campus

Thesis 2019

Abstract

Hong-Minh Le

The Influences of Student Club Events on Students Studying in Linnala Campus,
47 pages, 3 appendices

Saimaa University of Applied Sciences, Imatra

Tourism and Hospitality Management Degree Programme

Bachelor's Thesis 2019

Instructor: Senior Lecturer Ms. Marja Antikainen, Saimaa University of Applied
Sciences

The purpose of the study is to understand how organizing events as a student club's member influences the hospitality management studies and experience of students in Linnala campus. Its aim is to create a truthful, objective view on the club's role in Saimaa University of Applied Sciences. Hence, new students studying here would understand the pros and cons of being a member of this club.

Data used for this study was collected by interviewing students who have been members of the student club and who are the current members. The information and theory are collected from literature of hospitality management, event management and on internet.

Based on the findings of this study, related parties like the university, local organization or the club themselves can understand the importance of the club with students and enhance their collaboration by supporting the club in their future activities. Also, the club itself might have a review on its actual influences on their members to self-adjust their strategy, vision and policies within the club. However, similar or even further studies should be conducted in the future annually to improve the accuracy and keep a sustainable level of awareness on this topic.

Keywords: student club, University of Applied Sciences, hospitality management.

Table of contents

Abstract.....	2
1 Introduction	4
1.1 Justifications for researching the topic.....	4
1.2 Aims and delimitations of the topic	6
1.3 Empirical process	8
1.4 Thesis report content	9
2 Importance of the clubs for university and students.....	9
2.1 Goals of university	10
2.2 Finnish University of Applied Sciences (UAS)	10
2.3 Benefits of participating in the club for students.....	11
2.3.1 Clubs boost students' academic record.....	11
2.3.2 Clubs help students become better employees.....	12
2.3.3 Clubs inspire students to learn more skills	12
2.4 Hospitality-related skillsets.....	13
2.4.1 Event planning	14
2.4.2 Marketing	15
2.4.3 Networking	16
3 Execution of the empirical part.....	16
3.1 Presentation of the Saimia Event Club	17
3.2 Data collection and data handling process	21
3.2.1 The formation of interview questions.....	21
3.2.2 Research population and sampling method	22
3.2.3 Invitation process	23
3.2.4 Interview and data analysis process.....	24
4 Results and summary of the results.....	25
4.1 Overview of the interviews	25
4.2 Result of the interviews.....	26
4.2.1 SEC's operating model.....	26
4.2.2 Influences on academic records.....	28
4.2.3 Influences on career advancement	29
4.2.4 Influences on hospitality skill-gains	31
5 Conclusions and recommendations.....	35
5.1 Final conclusions	36
5.1.1 Students' academic performance	36
5.1.2 Students' career path	37
5.1.3 Students' personal skillsets	38
5.1.4 Sub research questions.....	39
5.2 Recommendations.....	40
6 Evaluation of the research	41
List of figures.....	44
References.....	45
Appendices	
Appendix 1: Interview structure	
Appendix 2: Interview invitation	
Appendix 3: Google form	

1 Introduction

This chapter introduces basic elements of the thesis including the topic that the thesis is addressing, which is the influences of a student club on the author's university study environment; its purpose and delimitations. Secondly, the research method used for conducting research about topic will also be mentioned. And lastly will be the thesis content and the author's plan on how to conduct the research for this thesis.

1.1 Justifications for researching the topic

In Finland, there is one model of university providing realistic approach of knowledge which combine two of the four intertwining goals of university which are *“Dissemination of knowledge”* and *“Training of people, aimed at the production of the man power needed for the preservation and progress of the nation and society”* (Mohanen 2005).

That is the University of Applied Sciences model. According to studyinfo.fi, webpage of Finnish National Agency for Education,

“Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS), have the mission to train professionals with emphasis on labour market needs and conduct research and development which supports instruction and promotes regional development in particular”.

(Finnish National Agency for Education n.d.)

This model of university puts heavy concern on the collaboration with companies and businesses within the region (Finnish National Agency for Education n.d.). Therefore, the students studying in this university model have extra opportunities on gaining practical experiences that in the traditional model of university lacks.

Within the ground of the university, however, there is also a factor that can be also considered a tool for the university to elevate the students' gain in practical experiences if used and utilized the right way. They are student clubs and organizations. According to Foubert and Grainger (2006, p. 169), Cooper (1994) has done research to prove that *“involvement in clubs and organizations shows correlate positively with several areas of psychosocial development”* in university

context representing by such factors as “*educational involvement, career planning, lifestyle planning, cultural participation, and academic autonomy*” (Foubert & Grainger 2006, p. 169).

For Tourism and Hospitality Management students, practical experiences are extremely important because of the nature of the service industry where one must deal with people. And a good number of experiences will help the workers to have an easier time with any customers and situations they might face. When students studying this industry become club members, participating in event organizing, some activities, happenings, provides them with extra opportunities to learn and apply their theories into practice and get the necessary experiences from that. Also, while doing so, it is preferable to be in a managerial position because the effort during the journey from ordinary member to managerial position would be the thing that future employer needs in you. (Karrera 2016.)

Additionally, working and participating in events require and also inspire members to learn the necessary skillsets and mindsets. As Getz and Page (2016) have described various requirements to study the management of event: leadership, organizational and inter-organizational behaviour, strategic planning, ...etc. The complexity, the depth and the width of this particular field of knowledge, therefore, are understandable. This fact emphasizes the role of experiences in the industry even further. Hence, the experience gained through the participation of the club's events and activities, even though in small scale, contributes to the students' experiences and study program about event and hospitality management.

The author is studying bachelor's degree in Tourism and Hospitality Management in Linnala campus of Saimaa University of Applied Sciences. In this campus, there is one student club called Saimia Event Club (this will be abbreviated as SEC). The club has operated for more than two years. They have held multiple successful events which are well-known among Saimaa UAS students in both Linnala, Skinnarila campus and local communities. The club is active on social medias interacting with the university's page and real-life student gathering, members meetings and music activities. The author used to be in the manage-

ment board of the club and directly involved in organizing these events. Therefore, the concern about the exact influence of the club on students as members in the campus has motivated the author to study the issue.

1.2 Aims and delimitations of the topic

The purpose of this thesis is to study the influence on students in Linnala campus and on hospitality management studies and hospitality experiences that SEC's events have created. For a more significant result, the author aims to study the students who have spent a considerable amount of time working and experiencing with the club and its activities. Therefore, those students are preferably members or used to be members of Saimia Event Club. The result of this thesis will provide thoughtful insights of the club's activities and the actual experiences, gains and thoughts of the members.

The outcomes benefit several parties: the club themselves, the students, the University and some local organizations.

The result of the thesis brings out the opinion and experience of the members. Therefore, the club can review their activities, their operation in perspective of the student members. Personnel is one important aspect that successful organizations underscore. As Nayar (2012) answers in one interview:

“(...) If you do not put the employee first – if the business of management and managers is not to put employee first – there is no way you can get the customer first. (...)” (Moore 2012)

This proves that the club would benefit greatly from listening to their members' responses to a third party about their experience with the club. New strategies, new approaches or even ideas for new activities can be devised from the process.

Another party is the students studying at Linnala campus themselves. While in America, Bentley University website promotes the benefits of joining a student club or organization (Bentley University 2016), it is still unclear how that applies to different universities all over the world. The differences in culture or university size may affect the actual benefits that the students would gain. The result of this thesis can show students specifically from Linnala campus, and maybe from

Saimaa University of Applied Sciences the actual benefits from experience of the club members. When they understand the positive acquisitions when participating in the club's activities, they will be motivated and reassured to join.

The third party who would benefit from the outcomes of the thesis is the university management. Initially, the mental wellbeing and the potential of the students will be taken care by a helpful partner. The perk of this partner is that the club creates activities outside study schedule. Therefore, if the students are participating in SEC events and activities, the university would be reassured about them being less likely to get temporary depression due to culture shock (International Student Insurance). Moreover, having an active and young club with all the happenings in the campus has a huge positive impact on the university's corporate image. It increases the university's attractiveness to potential applicants, which certainly would improve the university's reputation in general

According to Saimaa University of Applied Sciences' webpage, the university has in total 3,000 students with approximately 450 international students in two campuses: Skinnarila and Linnala (Saimaa UAS n.d. a). In Linnala campus, there are about 250 students in faculty of Tourism and Hospitality and 150 students in faculty of Fine Arts every year (Pesonen 2019). The club has organized only one event in Skinnarila campus, so the author decides to limit the target of the research to students in Linnala campus. It is because the influences on students in Skinnarila campus would not be as vibrant. The research collects opinions from students and analyse the collected data. Therefore, there is chance that expressions and opinions of the students would be misinterpreted. To prevent the situation, the author would always request explanation for any indistinct implications.

On a final note, the author was in SEC as co-founder and member of board of directors, expertise in marketing from March 2017 until May 2018. Therefore, some claims made from the thesis might not be objectives when speaking about the club's performance in general. However, the author is clearly aware of this possible hindrance and would consider all flows of ideas and opinions as objectively as possible so as that the result would not be influenced because of author's past relationship with the club.

1.3 Empirical process

The empirical process started immediately after the thesis seminar in Saimaa UAS and lasted from January 2019 until the middle of April 2019. Since the title of the thesis clearly states the purpose of the research, the method used in this thesis is qualitative research which includes semi-structured interview. It is because this research method reveals more personal insights of the interviewees through deep conversations. The interviews are conducted with the help of online software, recorded with interviewee's consent and then transcribed into Word files for analysis.

And by understanding those influences of SEC's events on the student, accordingly, the conducted research aims to answer the question:

- What kind of influences does a student club such as SEC have towards its student members in Linnala campus, especially regarding hospitality experiences and hospitality skills?

Arising from the main research questions, there are three sub questions clarifying those influences' origin and future applications:

- What is the relation between university courses' knowledge to real experience in organizing events in members' perspective?
- How does the club create those influences on members?
- What gains from participating in SEC can be beneficial to student's career path?

While the sub questions come up during the research steps, the main research question arises from the time when the author was still in the management board of Saimia Event Club. In the pursuit of creating the best events and activities for the students, the management board filled with passion would want the students to have their best memories during the university years. In the process of reflection and improvement, the board received many positive feedbacks. However, since most of the feedback is concise and unclear, it is difficult to really fully understand how the audience perceive about the activities: which parts they liked the best, what can be improved and how they feel about the club and the study

atmosphere of the university in detail. The hospitable and curious spirit of each individual in the management board, which once encouraged them to study the industry, wanted to know the answer. The audience in the campus is most likely to stay the same and change slowly over the year. Therefore, immediate analysis of each period is necessary to be conducted every two years.

1.4 Thesis report content

The thesis report includes the abstract, the introduction, the theory part, the research methodology, the results, the analysis and findings, and the conclusion and recommendation. In the abstract, the author will represent the objectives, main findings, final conclusions, and recommendations towards topic of the thesis. Furthermore, limitations or background of the research are also be mentioned in this part.

In the introduction, the justifications for the chosen topic will be given clearly and together with the introduction of the participants of the thesis. The empirical part is about the relationships of education, club and students' wellbeing. During the research methodology, the researcher explains the choices of method. Moreover, the data collection instruments will also be mentioned. In the analysis part of the thesis, the collected data will be presented along with the interpretation and conclusion of the author about each interview.

The result on the collected data will help related parties such as Saimaa UAS, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Imatra, Regional Council of South Karelia (these two organizations are highly concerned about foreign students' welfare in the area) and even Saimia Event Club themselves, understand the importance of the existence of the club. Then, the conclusion regarding the topic and recommendations for the parties to devise appropriate course of actions and strategies will be produced.

2 Importance of the clubs for university and students

This chapter explains the role that student clubs and organizations occupy regarding university and students. The author finds literature information to prove

that student club is assisting university in fulfilling their basic goals of education, and also provides students with extra advantages both in their study path and their future career path, especially students who are studying hospitality management.

2.1 Goals of university

In his study in 2005, Mohanan mentioned that, there are at least four intertwining goals for university education:

- A. Dissemination of knowledge (such that the knowledge of the older generation is preserved in the younger generation).;*
- B. Training of people, aimed at the production of the man power needed for the preservation and progress of the nation and society (engineers, architects, bankers, doctors, lawyers, accountants, teachers, administrators, cabinet ministers, ...);*
- C. Training of researchers needed for the preservation and expansion of human knowledge;*
- D. The development and enhancement of the inner potential of individuals (intellectual, moral, emotional, physical, social, cultural, spiritual, ...).*

Understanding these goals, students attend university to achieve self-development, self-exploration and career advancement in order to pursue happiness and success in life. In other words, university provides knowledge and the one common method to raise beneficial attributes for the students (Mohanan 2005)

2.2 Finnish University of Applied Sciences (UAS)

From part 2.1 page 10 earlier, it is mentioned that the two first goals of the University are the spreading of knowledge and training the necessary man power for the society and nation (Mohanan 2005). There is one special model of university that exists to carry through these two intertwining goals in a same role. It is University of Applied Sciences. On webpage of Finnish National Agency for Education studyinfo.fi, it is stated that

“Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS), have the mission to train professionals with emphasis on labour market needs and conduct research and development which supports instruction and promotes

regional development. The education in UAS emphasises co-operation with the business, industry and service sectors at the regional level in particular” (Finnish National Agency for Education n.d.)

These core values of this model gave Finnish education a good reason to be one of the best education systems in the world (Colagrossi 2018).

2.3 Benefits of participating in the club for students

According to Friedman (2014, p.11), students are easily tackled by academic obstacles, which was referred to *“overload, anxiety, lack of information regarding 12 tasks, attending classes, writing exams, poor planning, insufficient access to materials, searching for employment, and over involvement in extra-curricular activities”* (Salanova et al. 2010). These obstacles *“can possibly hinder or impede academic performance and productivity”*. (Friedman 2014, p. 11.)

For these reasons, studying in a practical model of university may not guarantee the gaining of adequate knowledge and practical experiences due to the basic nature of university in general. Fortunately, there are still student clubs and organizations as additional options that can also help the students to elevate their know-hows as well as industry experiences. According to the Salanova et al. (2010), students clubs and organizations within the university can be considered as the *“academic facilitators”* which *“can possibly enhance academic performance and productivity”* (Friedman 2014, p.12). It could be because while official study program and planned university-scale activities are designed to benefit to the students during school time, the student club or student organizations provide gains for participants outside the normal school time.

In this section, the author discusses the benefits of student clubs to the students participating as three aspects: academic performance, career advancement and personal skillsets improvement.

2.3.1 Clubs boost students’ academic record

Cooper (1994) in Foubert and Grainger (2006, p. 169) proposes that more involved students show greater development in academic performance and career

planning. Furthermore, the sophomore students are reported to have more noteworthy development than the seniors. The finding suggests that deep involvement in student club and organization from early year of university has much more influential effect on students.

This theory is well-known among educators around the world. However, each university in each country with diverse cultures and different students' backgrounds deeply distinguish from others. But one certain thing is that a better result in academic record which is resulted from the participation in club's activities, would be a motivation booster for the students to continue their study path.

2.3.2 Clubs help students become better employees

Journalist Karrera (2016) says in her article that student should stay with one society, club or organization only until graduation. Because this represents and practices the loyalty and dedication traits, which are highly wanted in millennials by the employer. Hence, it increases the opportunities for the students to be recruited in the competitive job market. Furthermore, the ideal self-motivation skill found in someone who initiates to involve in activities even after classes is also a critical criterion for their future employer.

Once students involve with a club, they are certain to receive valuable work experiences. Therefore, choosing the right club to join is an important decision and it can increase the chance of getting a job in the desired industry. Not last in importance, she also mentions the eminence of acquiring higher ranking in the club, managerial positions. It is because the journey to acquire that position proves the student's abilities and efforts. Transferable skills are also motivated to be learned during those periods. Those are key factors of becoming the best employee that any employer can hope to recruit. (Karrera 2016.)

2.3.3 Clubs inspire students to learn more skills

As mentioned earlier, choosing the correct club or organization is important because it also affects which skillset the members are going to possess. Correct choice of club can be considered as a reliable mean to develop "*soft skills*". University of Bentley also embraces the idea that "*soft skills*" development is one in

the 12 benefits of joining a student organization in one article on their website. There, they mention “*soft skills*” as “*essentially “people skills” — they’re the skills that allow us to effectively interact with others, like communication, attitude, and work ethic* “. (Bentley University 2016.) In another article, Alyson Doyle (2019) describes “*soft skills*” as “*personal attributes, personality traits, inherent social cues, and communication abilities needed for success on the job. Soft skills characterize how a person interacts in his or her relationships with others. Soft skills include attitude, communication, creative thinking, work ethic, teamwork, networking, decision making, positivity, time management, motivation, flexibility, problem-solving, critical thinking, and conflict resolution*”.

Those traits, characteristics and skills are important to any future job candidates to stand out from the rest of the crowd, and to adapt to new colleagues, new workplace (Doyle 2019). As a result, students have more encouraging reasons to join club or to attend their event as audience or volunteer.

2.4 Hospitality-related skillsets

As mentioned earlier, involvement in student club’s activities inspires students to pick up soft skills on their own. Those soft skills will have these future employees stand out from other job applicants and increase adaptability (Doyle 2019). However, to stand in the managerial position that the student should aim for, leadership is inseparable.

Leadership ability is essential, but leadership skills come before it and these skills need to be learned in the process of becoming managers from worker’s position. As stated by Getz and Page (2016) “leadership in events requires the setting of a vision, developing strategies and goals, and inspiring everyone to work together towards those goals”. An example of a good leader would be someone who empowers their workers but also takes responsibility for decisions made by workers according to Oakley and Krug (1991). (Getz & Page 2016, p. 314.)

But that is only one style of leadership, Boella (1992) in Getz and Page (2016, p. 315) discussed that

“many generic leadership styles have been found in event contexts but have not been studied about. They are charismatic, autocratic, democratic, bureaucratic, inspirational, artistic, technocratic, entrepreneurial and visionary”.

While some event managers use a vision and give good examples to lead people, some others always command and give orders to their people. Although it is hard to say which approach is better, also in Getz and Page (2016, p. 315), Van der Wagen (2006: 152) stated “(...) *leadership for an event requires flexibility more than in a typical business company. Sometimes, autocratic when in a crisis and sometimes, collaborative and appreciative*”.

Not only leadership traits, successfully organizing one event, or at least, witnessing the execution of one gives the students an operational, managerial understanding of event organizing. Getz and Page (2016) collect from other studies that various required skills to study the management of event, including, but not limited to, are leadership, organizational and inter-organizational behaviour, strategic planning, operations and logistics, human resources, finance management and control, marketing and communication. They believe that method is aimed to prevent and ameliorate unwanted impacts and maximize the last outcome of the activities. Hence, it is practical to divide the traits into three main categories: event planning, event management and finally, networking.

2.4.1 Event planning

About event planning, this thesis discusses the strategic planning aspect. In the book “Event studies”, Getz and Page (2016) discussed that

“one-time events also need goals and a plan, and if the planning period is measured in years, it will have the strategic elements built in”. There is the first relation of Strategic in the work of organizing an event of any types. A strategy in event organization is ‘defined as an integrated set of policies, programmes and actions intended to fulfil the organizations’ mandate, realize its vision and achieve its goals.’ (Getz & Page 2016.)

In the author’s case of a club, the strategy and vision are still necessary for the club to create suitable events for their purpose, also to maintain their reputation

for a sustainable future. Upon the explanation of the club goals and visions, participants of the club subconsciously learn about the strategic movements and activities of a small organization.

Event management has two factors that the author would like to highlight: leadership, and marketing communication. Getz and Page (2016) stated:

“leadership ability is essential for owners and founders of events, but leadership skills come to the fore, and have to be learned, as workers become supervisors and progress to become managers. Technical skills and hands-on operations have to give way to people skills such as motivating and problem-solving. At the highest management levels, conceptual knowledge (theory) is needed as well as the ability to formulate visions, goals and strategies, alongside research and evaluation skills.”

During the process of organizing events, students inevitably learn about unofficial knowledge of power. *“Power and leadership go together. Owners of companies and events typically have the legal power to compel obedience, just as in the military”* (Getz & Page 2016). Mintzberg (1983) also in Getz and Page (2016) identified kinds of power by using five terms:

- *legitimate – by virtue of manager position to direct or coerce the actions of subordinates;*
- *reward power – the ability to bestow or withhold tangible and intangible rewards;*
- *expert power – people follow because of superior knowledge or ability;*
- *information power – obtained through control of vital information;*
- *referent power – stemming from loyalty and admiration.*

(Getz & Page 2016, p. 315.)

2.4.2 Marketing

Marketing communication in event management is

“often reduced to, or confused with, advertising and sales”.

(Getz & Page 2016, p. 335)

However, it is defined as the administrating of the communication between the club or the organization and its stakeholders, to aim for the specific goals. With

deep basis from psychology and economics, marketing of an event requires the organizers to study about the need, motive and choices and selection of communication tools of the audience, of the customers and of other stakeholders' as well. Event in this case has three key purposes: as an experience to enjoy; a product to give to the customers; and lastly, the tool for the communication with the stakeholders. (Getz & Page 2016.) When working for a student club's marketing team, the scale of the stakeholders in term of quantity and size would be rather small. But the requirement for meaningful and relevant content, as well as the flexible use of marketing communication tools stays the same.

2.4.3 Networking

Last in the section about skills related to hospitality industry is networking. Jones-Kaminski (2009) quotes the explanation from the Oxford Dictionary: *"network - A group of people who exchange information, contacts and experience for professional or social purpose"* (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries). Networking can be defined as the efforts to create that group (Jones - Kaminski 2009, p. 11). Another study by Vermeiren (2007) discussed the importance of Networking as 'tremendous'. He argues that networking skill is not only beneficial for salesperson, but also everyone else. When struggling in this ever rapidly changing world, the networking skill will be the preventive measure. He also mentioned Donna Fisher's work in "Professional Networking for Dummies" with the statistic that 70% of people in the USA find jobs from their networks, and 70% of small businesses come from their network as well. That was written almost two decades ago and the role of networking in an organization and company has increased greatly since then. (Vermeiren 2007, p. 10-13.)

3 Execution of the empirical part

The execution of the empirical part of this thesis took place from early January 2019 until the end of April 2019 but the actual planning phase for the research happened since winter 2018. In this chapter, the author introduces the student club SEC and the detailed information of the research process from the planning phase to the data analysis phase.

3.1 Presentation of the Saimia Event Club

Having been founded on 25th of January 2017, Saimia Event Club has worked tirelessly in order to bring the best event experiences for all the students in Linnala campus. The core values that SEC puts emphasis on are creating a fun and beneficial place for every student to hang out and share their interests; bringing opportunities to escape from daily routines for students of Saimaa UAS; connecting everyone studying Saimaa UAS together with a variety of activities and event (Saimia Event Club 2017). The participation with the club can greatly benefit any students in this campus. Because the extra time they spend with the activities is the extra time they spend to learn, to gain practical experience in the Hospitality industry and normal work life as well. The club, therefore, became an interesting second place, beside normal courses, for students to study without draining from them too much either mental or physical energy.

Figure 1 is taken from their brochure to recruit new members in the university's orientation session in autumn 2017. The brochure briefly explains the club's goals and some of their past events, including the contact information to apply for membership. All the participation was free of charge for all students since their activities were sponsored by the university in the early stage.



Figure 1: Saimia Event Club brochure 2017/2018 (Saimia Event Club 2017)

Some events were very popular to students in Linnala campus such as: Music Night, Saimia Masterchef, Saimia Eat Together: Suomi 100, Lunar New Year Celebration and Saimia In Me campaign. Although the scale of those events was only small with under hundred participants, some of them actually attracted honourable guests like: The President of the Finnish Chef Association, The Mayor of Imatra town, members of the Regional Council of South Karelia. The club has established a strong network and built its own reputation within the short two years. At the time the research was conducted, from January to the middle of April of 2019, the club is still operating and attracting many students to join each year.

Following are some pictures from the club's events that are published on the club's page on their Facebook page.

Figure 2 is the group photo taken in the conclusion of their event Saimia Masterchef in Spring 2017. In this event, the students studying hospitality management

in Linnala campus registered to compete as duo to create the best dishes for the judges and win the title of Saimia Masterchef. In this competition, the duo exchange students from Czech Republic won the title.



Figure 2: Saimia Masterchef (Saimia Event Club 2017)

Figure 3 is the wrap up of the event Saimia Eat Together: Suomi 100. In the happening of the celebration of the 100th year of Finnish Independence, along with the national theme “Living Together”, SEC organized a meaningful event in November 2017. In this event, volunteered students and the elderly from the local elderly house met and had an afternoon break together to share stories, enjoy drinks, food and some music performance. The event was successful and received positive responses from the local. It appeared in the local newspapers like Uutisvuoksi and Etelä-Saimaa and also on their online platforms with the title “Suomalainen rehellisyys viehättää vaihto-opiskelijoita: Vietnamilaisopiskelijat haluavat olla osa Imatraa ja ystävystyä paikallisten vanhustenkin kanssa” which can be roughly translated to “Finnish honesty attracts exchange students: Vietnamese students want to be part of Imatra and make friends with local seniors”. (Beltran 2017; Ojalainen 2017.)



Figure 3: Saimia Eat Together: Suomi 100 (Saimia Event Club 2017)

Figure 4 is from one of their signature events called Music Night Volume 2. It was held in March 2018. This event was the gathering of students and for all students of Saimaa UAS to come and enjoy the music performances prepared by the club's members. The first season of this event is also the first event of the club from the founding date in February 2017. The theme for it was MileS. It was also a successful event for Valentine's Day celebration.



Figure 4: Music Night Volume 2 (Saimia Event Club 2018)

Lastly, figure 5 was taken during the event Celebration of Lunar New Year 2018 with the theme the Year of the Dog. This event took place in Lappeenranta town, which was closer to the main campus of Saimaa UAS. In this event, the club organized a celebration including food, drinks, Vietnamese music and traditional Lunar New Year games for students and guests from all background. The event was a major success since the reservation for the celebration was full only after two days of sales. The event also appeared on Regional Council of South Karelia's webpage. (Etelä-Karjalan liitto 2018.)



Figure 5: Lunar New Year Celebration (Saimia Event Club 2018)

3.2 Data collection and data handling process

3.2.1 The formation of interview questions

The interview questions came up since the author first thought about the topic and gradually changed and finalized as the Appendix 1.

Initially, the interview questions were off topic and closer to different study fields, which are education and psychology, since the issue itself is huge enough if it is looked closer at human feeling and students' experience in university. However,

with the support from the supervisor, the author chose the slice of the topic which related to hospitality management study program and form up the questions from the main research questions. Focusing on the main research questions, the author divided the interview questions into smaller topics. This helps the author stay focused on the interview goals and avoid being too distracted and being carried away by the stories of the interviewees. Additionally, although most of the questions are general, there are a few of them are directed to interviewees from different positions in the club: managerial position and normal member position. In the appendix 1, these questions are the third and the fourth ones in the “Club-relatable questions” topic. This is because those questions aim to answer how managerial members operated the club in the normal members’ opinions. Therefore, those questions are crossed out during the interview with the person from managerial perspective.

3.2.2 Research population and sampling method

Lecture notes in Research Method course held by Mr. Khan in Heilbronn University quote:

Research population is the entire group under study as specified by the objectives of the research projects (Burns & Bush 2003, p. 334).

Sample is a subset of the population that should represent that entire group (Burns & Bush 2003, p. 334).

(Khan 2016.)

In the research for this thesis, the population of the research is all the students who were or who are members of Saimia Event Club at the moment of the research. At the time the research was being conducted, there were more than 30 students participating as members from the founding date of the club.

The sampling method is the way to choose the sample out from the population. The sampling method used here is availability and quotas mixed sampling. The availability sampling means the author “chooses subjects who are available and easy to find”. While the quotas sampling means “set quotas” when choosing the subjects. (Khan 2016). The method of mixing these two means the author set

quotas on the number of interviewees with sufficient characteristics and choose enough people who are available and easy to find matching those characteristics.

In this case, there were the characteristics that the author set when choosing whom to recruit: nationality, study group, gender, club position during active time, study faculty. With these different characteristics, the author set a quota of at least 1-2 students per characteristics. However, there could be one student satisfying many criteria, so the number of interviewees would decrease eventually. With the population of 30, the author believed the sample of 5-7 students would be sufficient, depending on the findings from the interview. The chosen participants were both Finnish and Vietnamese (two most common nationalities in the club); from study group of 2016 and 2017; with both male and female students; from both managerial position and members positions; and lastly, from both Fine Arts faculty and Tourism and Hospitality faculty.

3.2.3 Invitation process

After having chosen the suitable people to satisfy the sampling method, the interview invitation (see Appendix 2) was sent out in the beginning of January. The invitation included a brief information about the thesis, the author; the research topic and its purpose. The invitation was supposed to only check recipients' interests in the thesis topic. There were six invitations sent out in total, all of them were replied but only five students could participate in the interview. The remaining one, unfortunately, was not available due to tight study schedule. The author initiated the contact with the chosen interviewees via private messages on social media. After receiving agreement, interests from the interviewees, a Google form (see Appendix 3), including the full information of the thesis, the interview's estimated length; the confidentiality and anonymity of responses as well as a copy of the thesis plan was created. It was then sent to the chosen interviewees to collect their basic contacts and their available schedules for the interview. The most important information was their preferred communication software (i.e: Facebook Messenger, Whatsapps, Skype, Google Hangouts) along with their account name and their available schedules. With that information, the author set up the interview and sent the final confirmation emails to the those, confirming time, dates of the interview.

3.2.4 Interview and data analysis process

The interviews were conducted via online communication software: Facebook Messenger, Google Hangouts and Skype. According to the available schedule that the participants provided earlier, an interview appointment was set for each interviewee. Each session was expected to last 30 minutes. There was always a small technical check before each interview to make sure that the connection was qualified, and the author and the participant were available to connect on the communication means. Then the author initiated the call to reach the interviewees.

Still, there were a few unexpected situations. First, one of the participants could not find the matching available schedule in the given period. But then eventually, the schedule was set during weekend because of their tight schedule during weekdays. Second, there was a request of a double interviewing because of the sudden change in the participants' schedule. Therefore, there was one interview was done like group interview when both participants joined the interview together and answered one by one. That interview was like group interview, but it turned out to be a good choice. When they were listening to each other answering same questions, ideas come unexpectedly. It was because they were tended to remember more about their experience when they had heard of other's.

The author decided to record and transcribe the interview because this method helped the analysis process. Harvard University writes in their guide for qualitative guide about the advantages of recording and transcribing interviews:

- *It helps to correct the natural limitations of our memories and of the intuitive glosses that we might place on what people say in interviews*
- *It allows more thorough examination of what people say*
- *It permits repeated examinations of the interviewees' answers (...)*
- *It therefore helps to counter accusations that an analysis might have been influenced by a researcher's values or biases.*

(Harvard University n.d.)

The interviews were recorded by a separated phone and the recording starts with the consent of both sides in the interview. After each interview, the author named the recording after the abbreviation of the interviewee's name as well as the interview date. The recordings were matched together with the information gather on the Google Form and then transcribed into Word file by the author. With the conversation transcribed into Word files, further analysis on the interviewees' languages and attitudes could proceed. From the information gathered from each interview, the author summarized the result of the interview.

4 Results and summary of the results

This chapter presents the result of the research. The result was the summary of from the analysis of the transcribed interviews with the students affiliated with SEC.

4.1 Overview of the interviews

A total of five students participated in the interviews. Two of them were Finnish students, one studying in Tourism and Hospitality faculty and one studying in Fine Arts faculty. The remaining three students were Vietnamese, studying in Tourism and Hospitality faculty. Two of them were interviewed together as a small group discussion interview. The remaining Vietnamese was from the managerial position, and also, they (the Vietnamese student) was still participating in the club at the time this research was conducted. Other students aside from them, had already left the club for personal reasons. Therefore, the influences of SEC on them, or how they applied what they had learned from SEC to other projects, businesses or studies would be more vibrant and recognizable.

In the result chapter, the author keeps most of their speaking languages and mistakes in grammar, spelling in English to ensure the objectivity of the research result. From their own language, some might have other ideas about what they really indicated. The author also mentions the participants with abbreviation of their name to make the flow easier to follow but also to make their names stay anonymous. The five students participating in the interviews were

- T. V., a Vietnamese member, currently in the Board of Director of SEC during the time of the research.
- M. V., a Finnish member, left the club.
- J. K., a Finnish member, left the club.
- D. Q., a Vietnamese member, remaining in the club during the time of the research.
- A. T., a Vietnamese member, left the club.

4.2 Result of the interviews

To present the result more clearly, the author divides the summaries into small topics based on the theory and the structure of the interview.

4.2.1 SEC's operating model

The author would like to emphasize this topic first because it accounts for a lot of what the students gain during their participation. According to T. V., an interviewee who is still working in Board of Directors of the club,

“(...) There were only 5 people. We were both team members and co-founders. We were also close friends, so we usually set up meeting at home, sharing food & even playing games during meetings (...) on the second year that we, second year of SEC, we have recruited more members, and the 5 members from last year became the BOD (...) we divide our members into teams: marketing, program, logistics, media. Each team has different training program with different content to the team that they were assigned to.”

From the answer of T. V., it is clear to conclude that on their first year of operating, the club started with five initial members. And these five students organized the events by themselves and most of the tasks were shared evenly between the five of them. On the second year, they recruited 12 more students into the club. Therefore, the structure of the club widened, and a different operating model was needed to help the club run smoothly. They operated with a Board of Directors (BOD) including all the members from the first year, and the new members were separated into four teams in charge of four different aspects in organizing an

event: marketing, program, logistics and media. Hence, the club had a clear pyramid of authority in the operating systems. It made some of the members feel the differences between the BOD members and new recruits,

“(...) Like in every single group, it’s like an orchestra. There need to be one person leading the orchestra. It’s that kind of a big role. Supervisor that you have to keeps things in good form, moving towards the target (...) They have big challenge to keep the big group in harmony. So, leadership is the supervisor’s required skills”

Interviewee J. K.

“(...) yeah, they (BOD) have done things, know things and they gave instructions (...) they have more experience in organizing (...)”

Interviewee M. V.

On the other hand, the others felt like there was no barrier between them, and they even just organized events together like friends.

“I think it wasn’t actually supervisor, we made everything together, so there are no hierarchy like boss, manager. Actually, we did things together, we just apply what we know, basically, share to each other who don’t know about it. It’s quite fair.”

Interviewee D. Q.

“Like we are like friends, it’s fun as well. Just friends. No superior person.”

Interviewee A. T.

The surprising fact is that the two interviewees who were Finnish stated that they felt the differences, while the two interviewees who had no feeling of barriers between BOD and members were Vietnamese. According to Hofstede Insights, a professional analyzing services in organizational culture, Vietnam scores 70 in Power Distance, *“which means that people accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification”* while Finland scores 33 in the similar aspect meaning *“that the following characterises the Finnish style: Being independent, hierarchy for convenience only, equal rights, supe-*

riors accessible, coaching leader, management facilitates and empowers” (Hofstede Insights.) This finding is unexpected and will be discussed later in the conclusion of the thesis.

4.2.2 Influences on academic records

The students did not have special impressions related to the academic records. But they mentioned the knowledge and the skills they learned more from the extracurricular activities that actually helped them during the courses in class. Following is part of J. K.’s interview.

“(...) Marketing, writing and scheduling are about what I have learned (...) During the project or lesson, if new information comes, something unexpected comes and everybody has not thought about it earlier, so scheduling is very important (...)”

Interviewee J. K.

And not just J. K., other students shared the same thought on what they had learned during the participation in the club; it had helped them in the normal courses, in the class and in their faculty as well.

“(...) Fine Art is really international department, so just translating thing quickly and speaks English well will be good for me in the future. So that was a really nice experience, talking to so many people in English (...)”

Interviewee M. V.

“(...) Yeah, I know it’s strange, normally we learned about theories in the class and apply it to the club. But to me, it feels vice versa (...)”

Interviewee A. T.

Unpredictably, of all the interviewees, A. T. even criticized the content of the university’s normal courses being not useful when they (A.T.) was working with events. Most of their knowledge came from experience from high school with student events.

“I don’t want to say that the class at school did not help me or anything. But at the moment, I don’t remember any skills that I have learned before and during the class that help me with the event

things. Most of the time, I just applied my own experience when I was in high school and tremendous help from other member and their experience (...) after the course, I only feel like I have filled my brain with bunch of theories that I don't know how to reapply (...) I don't feel like I have learned as much as what I have learned when I was working with events from Event Club (...)"

Interviewee A. T.

Although the other interviewees did not mention any similar experiences as A. T., this comment could be a valuable feedback for the teachers and university to look back on their course's content.

4.2.3 Influences on career advancement

Career advancement is said to be one reason why students join the clubs and student organization the most since the experience gives some the edge on what would really happens in the real world. And participating in SEC is believed to provide the members with many essentials for the future career. Also, most of the interviewees expressed their ambitions on climbing to the top managerial positions and building their own businesses. They were confident that what they have learned from the events with the club would be beneficial in the future.

"I think for me, in any industry, there will have to be any events of launching products, or to promote a business essential. Thanks to the club I have experiences how to program an appropriate event, so I might apply those experience into my own business in the future"

Interviewee A. T.

"(...) now I think I have the experience with event management, and I would say that I like it and It suits me very well, and a lot of skills I learned from the club and I can apply it into any other field that I am going to work in."

Interviewee T. V.

"In my career, maybe I will work in hotel in some top positions, so I can use the skills I have from school and also the clubs. (...) Like a participant (of the club SEC) is already a gain. So, the schedule and the marketing could be beneficial."

Interviewee J. K.

Not only career-related advancement, interviewee M. V. also expressed her development in mindsets and her understanding of the world.

“(...) I have more International ways of seeing things, because I used to always just work with Finnish people.”

Interviewee M. V.

Additionally, because most of the interviewees were not working with SEC anymore, so some of them had even created their own business or pursued their own projects elsewhere. And they said that the skills and knowledge they learned in the club were still helping them a lot.

“(...) I used to work in Sheraton hotel Hanoi, where I applied many knowledges gained from the club: planning event, making timeline, agenda, communicate with other departments. (...) I learned about customer service, with food, attend relationships (...) catch up with audiences (...)”

Interviewee T. V.

“(...) I became more active, so it helps me a lot with putting myself out there and do a lot of things I have never done before (...)”

Interviewee M. V.

Aside from the usual works, internships that the students usually have, interviewees D.Q. and A. T. took it further. They applied their experience from the club to their own project and business.

“(...) I applied to the prom 2018, the prom was much bigger than eat together and SEC event. So, I would say, I applied to Prom of our school. Yeah, I was in charge of the marketing of the prom. Basically, they were quite similar, I honed my skills there. (...)”

Interviewee D. Q.

“(...) I apply that to the class, maybe even when during my placement, talking with other employees confidently. So mostly soft skills (...) I remember, earlier, I did establish my own little business. So thanks to the marketing experience I have it with SEC, as well as programming, that kind of thing general. I know how to apply my knowledge into my business and make it successful (...)”

Interviewee A. T.

Lastly, the interviewees also said that they learned about networking and created a lot of contacts that might be useful for them in the future. Although, networking was stated in the theory as one of the hospitality skills they can gain during their participation, it is more meaningful to discuss this skill regarding career advancement because of its realistic applications and its value in students' minds.

“(...) contact the news, told them about our event that it was meaningful, interesting and also, it was about the elderly in Finland from the local area (...) It was Uutisvuoksi newspaper (...) the connection and relationship are the most important thing when we do business, especially for small business. Because we are international students. We are living in Finland, other country, so it's hard to establish anything alone, so I would say networking and relationship.”

Interviewee D. Q.

“(...) About networking: I came out with more friends, I learned how to contact with teachers for permissions. It is really important when we have to contact to get judges, people from further place than the university like the Mayor, the President of Chef association, (...)”

Interviewee T. V.

“(...) I hope I made some connections, they may be helpful in the future (...)”

Interviewee M. V.

It can easily be seen that the students had a clear understanding of the value of relationships and contacts. Therefore, they also emphasized their expectation with the contacts they have made during their time with the club when they were discussing their future career.

4.2.4 Influences on hospitality skill-gains

This topic was most discussed with the interviewees. They seemed to find it easier to talk about their gains with the club in terms of skills and know-how. As it was stated in the theory part, students are inspired to gain hospitality-related skill-sets during their time spending with the clubs. Those skillsets differ when the interviewees stay in different positions or having different responsibilities in the

club. This is due to SEC's operating system as it was mentioned above. Some of them gained more of event planning skillsets because they were more related to managerial position and program team. Some of them gained insights on marketing procedure because they were assigned with more marketing-related tasks.

"(...) Well, basically, how to plan for the event most effectively. I can imagine exactly what a program looks like, instead of having this in general mindset of the program. I know it included time, what happened, what's gonna happen, what need to prepare, what action to be perform. That kind of things. Corporate with other departments as well"

Interviewee A. T.

"(...) Learn about marketing skills and also about press relation skills and talk to the elderly and then how to run event. I also asked for satisfaction of participants and elderly, that was quite my interested part (...)"

Interviewee D. Q.

"(...) And it was completely new things for me. I have never done this before, talking in front of many people. Even translating. I had to translating one story from Fin to English, that was tough. (...) I learned about public speech and translation (...)"

Interviewee M. V.

"(...) I learned how to manage and how to manage organizing processes, what kind of timetable, because I have to schedule that when stories to be published in time, another will be published until some times, date, and the organizing and schedule was really important and very good also. I learned lots of things about organizing schedule (...) I learned like what kind of tool have to used. Its own time schedule, how other done these kind of things (...) Well, in the class it's not possible to learn that kind of skills to work in a big group. Of course in class we have some assignment, exercise we have to form group, but mostly they are working in pair, pair group or working in 3-4 persons but actually even in SEC, there were me and another as an marketing group, but still everyone in the club helped each other, also Logistics department, they also work with us there are like connection to each other, each department. I would like to say working in the group, teamwork, group communication (...)"

Interviewee J. K.

And this is also the part that highlights the differences along their gains and their position. The amount of knowledge and know-how that a managerial position like interviewee T. V. possessed is much more comprehensive than other interviewees. This could be due to the club structure that made BOD members have to involve in most of the tasks in organizing the event, leading to the fact that the gain they have is much more significant compared to regular members.

“I learned programming (event programming), planning, making timeline, agenda, make clear plan. I used to have experience in volunteering as well, so it helps me to team with others and got involved in tell ideas, breaking things down. I also learned how to organize, put clear plan to easier keeping track. Also, marketing and networking, there were lots of works. I learned to be more professional, how to work more effective, how to do marketing on social media, networking with teacher, students and the presses. In marketing, I learned from others’ work. I got involved the most with logistic: we planed the food, the amount of food. It was our first hands-on experience. (...) I also got involved in the planning phase, more with technical stuffs, know how to work with Google form (...) giving public speech. I also experience the process of the event management, planning from beginning ‘til the end. Learn giving speech from others.”

Interviewee T. V.

When it is about a freshman student, they usually seem confused between many choices appearing during their time in university. Interviewee A. T. experienced the same thing but when they (A. T.) participated in SEC, they was inspired to experience new things to find out what they like to do the most.

“(...) When I first enrolled in SEC, I did not really know what I am really good at. So, after reading the description of each group, I found that I might be able to cope with the work of the program team because I have experience and things like creating some kind of schedule for my active class when I was in high school, kind of making the scripts kind of things. So, I might think it would be a suitable work (...) Because I want to do things that I want to do before, and experience something new, because as I mentioned before, all members of SEC has said that the team is just like part of the procedure, but

we were able to experience all of the segment as well, it's good that I can experience new things (...) worked at the right department (...)"

Interviewee A. T.

Not only learning skills from doing tasks, the students were also looking at their peers, their BOD to learn from. The rich experience made the BOD work better and able to give instructions and share their knowledge through the organizing process and through the training that BOD organize for the club members.

"(...) they (BOD) were extremely supportive. They even have the intensive courses that they provide us with a lot of knowledge and skills that they have learn through pass experience holding event like how to call for support, how to set goals, and steps to create an event (...) I don't think I can remember everything. But it was def effective and useful. Especially the reason why we do certain thing, this Golden circle. I feel a little bit regret about the call for support. We was shown the complete invitation for support, but then we don't have the documents to ask the company. But I wasn't taught how to do it myself properly. So I just know merely how it is. So it's kind of a pity."

Interviewee A. T.

"we learned how to work together, create a friendly environment, we can cooperate together more effective"

Interviewee D. Q.

"(...) I learned about exact deadlines. (...) that kind of type, I saw one type of leadership, there are many types in the course I learned. So it was one type of leadership. There was a lot of form how to do and lead. But there are some hybrid, partly hybrid, it was very good, a ready role leadership (in the club) (...)"

Interviewee J. K.

"(...) organized and communication (...) We meet up for the training. There we talked about media department (team) and they (BOD) gave us some instructions. (...) Yes, they were effective, with that, we did not feel lost anymore during the event, they gave us directions on our work"

Interviewee M. V.

While on the perspective of a BOD, who organized the training and share the knowledge all the time during their process, interviewee T. V. stated

“On the second year, 5 members from last year become large. Reflecting is important. Yeah, not only the training and supervising, but I think the most important thing of those two is to giving feedback on their performance and tell them how to improve their knowledge, their skills, in the end of each other that our members can actually become better in the next event. (...) Actually, I learned from our friend from first year, but second year, I got involved in the phase of planning and training, I got to share my knowledge with other members, but also learn from them during the process of the event, I learned from them not directly from the training but from observing and actual work. On the second year, we divide our members into teams, marketing, program, logistics, media, each team has different training program with different content to the team that they were assigned to. I cannot say that they are all effective, but we did our best to create the content, I think our members got benefits from some of those training, then we have more professionals in that field to make the planning more effective.”

As mentioned, again the interviewee T. V. gave a comprehensive comment on the training and the learning progress of the regular members in the club.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

Hospitality industry is becoming increasingly more intense when the competition has become worldwide with the means of modern technology and globalization. From the author's own experience coming to the work life from the student life, any advantages regarding experiences and skills would help the students greatly during this transition. At University of Applied Sciences like Saimaa UAS, students are prepared with both knowledge and hands-on know-how to improve their competence when joining the workforce after graduation. However, sometimes, they must compete with their own school mate or someone with even higher education or richer experience in work. Student club like Saimia Event Club, as discussed in this thesis, provides students with extra competitive advantages in terms of experiences in hospitality event and skillsets when working in an organ-

ization. For this reason, this thesis is in search to reveal those competitive advantages and show them to the parties that can benefit from this knowledge: students, universities, clubs, student-support organizations, ...etc.

5.1 Final conclusions

During the theory formation phase, the author understands well the difficulties in breaking down the experiences that the students who worked with SEC have in order to discuss their gains or maybe even loss during their participation. Therefore, the author introduces the theory path that leads from the goals of university to the affiliation of student club with that goal and the reasons the students should join student club. But no matter what, the main purpose of university or student club is the completion of the student as a valuable workforce after graduation. The thesis topic aims to answer the role of student club in this process.

From the result of the research, it is reasonable to answer the research question about the influences of SEC towards student members. In general, the actual influences can be complicated and related more about psychology science and education aspects. But since the thesis delimits and focuses the topic on hospitality management, those influences become classifiable. Participating in a student club like Saimia Event Club has three main influences on students of Linnala campus:

5.1.1 Students' academic performance

Participating with the club activities enables the students to perform better in academic aspect. Although more careful research is needed to be conducted to really estimated the differences, the sharing knowledge that the members gain during their participation is closely related to their academic content and activities. *"While we teach, we learn"* – said the Roman philosopher Seneca. Knowing about the knowledge and explaining it to other members elevate the comprehension of both the learner and the teacher about the topic. Furthermore, the regular activities provide opportunities for the members to apply those knowledges learned from the others into real work tasks. The proficiency of the knowledge helps the students to become more confident if there is any academic content related to that knowledge. Especially to hospitality management students, experience in

event organizing all-round is surely handy when they study about marketing, services design or organization culture in the future. When the students are familiar with the topic, they are more likely to receive and more likely to understand it better. In addition, the teamwork happening in the club also resembles group-work, group tasks in the normal course. The students when they learn how to work in the club as a team, they are as well learning teamwork skills, which is valuable not only to daily group work in the course, but also for further study, project, business in the future. *“Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships”*, said Michael Jordan, iconic basketball player. With the combination of familiarization of the knowledge and the efficiency in teamwork, the students find them useful in the normal class they are having at the university.

5.1.2 Students’ career path

After graduation, beside the degree, the future employers are interested also in the new recruits’ performance during university years. Extracurricular activities and organization participation are some of the other criteria that will be considered by the employers. However, students participating in club usually possess higher ambitions. They aim for managerial positions or building their own business and working as entrepreneurs. In this case, their extracurricular activity portfolio is working as their first experience with the hands-on operation in the business. The experiences during their participation is their first career capital for the future. The author believes this is a striving mindset coming from the student club members. This also proves their increased in confidence and career planning ability, as it is mentioned in the justification for the thesis topic (page 5): *“involvement in clubs and organizations shows correlate positively with several areas of psychosocial development”* in university context represented by such factors as *“educational involvement, career planning, lifestyle planning, cultural participation, and academic autonomy”* (Foubert & Grainger 2006). Conclusively, it is surprising for the author to know that all the interviewees have a clear goal of networking and creating valuable contacts for the future. In the harsh market environment, creating long lasting relationships and contacts are becoming the key to every successful business. Therefore, it is worth rejoicing when the students have a clear plan ahead regarding this issue.

5.1.3 Students' personal skillsets

As importantly, students from Tourism and Hospitality faculty benefit the most from picking up soft skills during their participation with student club. Although it also depends on their position, the knowledge and skills as well as the know-how from the event operation and the event management are still well-received by the club members. Some even prefer this approach of learning rather than normal course in the class. Especially the special feature of sharing work tasks and also possibilities to try many positions and work tasks in the event operation of the club is highly appreciated by the students. It helps them discover their suitable tasks, their preferred role in the operation in general and therefore, improves the overall satisfaction of the members and the efficiency of the event operation. Also, their thoughtful approach of creating training programs for members is also one preferred feature within the members. It has strengthened the bond between the members, creating a friendly environment where most members are feeling equal, and all of them did not hesitate to ask for information, know-hows or sharing them. Multiple creative and accurate approaches, as well as the operating model from SEC has created vivid influences on their members in many aspects. But not only students from Tourism and Hospitality faculty, students from Fine Art department, represented by interviewee M. V. also have the opportunities to try new experiences and a different approach to the world around them. Interviewee M. V. may not completely represent every individual studying in Fine Arts faculty, but the result shows that the opportunities are open and not limited to the faculty they are studying.

These are the main conclusions from the result of the thesis. However, during the process, an unexpected small detail has raised curiosity in the author's mind. The differences in the perspective of Finnish members and Vietnamese members about the power distance in the club were quite opposite to the theory when Vietnam is the country scoring higher in power distance aspect according to Hofstede models. Or the special case of the managerial interviewee when they (T.V.) is the only one having trouble setting plans for the future because there were too

many opportunities and capabilities they discover of themselves after the participation of the club. These details can be used as ideas to conduct other researches around the topic related to student club.

5.1.4 Sub research questions

This section of the conclusion answers to three sub research questions following the main one mentioned in part 1.3 Empirical process:

- What do SEC's members think of the relation between university courses' knowledge and real experiences in organizing events?
- How does the club create those influences on members?
- What gains from participating in SEC can be beneficial to student's career path?

For the first question, part 4.2.2 Influences on academic records did follow students' opinions on their normal course's knowledge and their gains from working for SEC's events. Generally, the interviewees agree that they could apply skills they learn from the university to the real events. However, one strong opinion criticized the university courses' content that they were too theoretical, inapplicable and that led to impossibility to memorize the knowledge. The opinion was even harsher when it stated that what can be learned during the class was less useful than what can be learned from working for SEC's event. Since the opinion coming from a student studying in a university model of the combination between theoretical and experiential learning, it is possible to imagine the situation in a normal academic university.

For the second question, part 4.2.1 SEC's operation model presented the way SEC has worked from its founding date. This operating model is an important factor that facilitates the students' experience with the club. Another irreplaceable factor is the people within the club themselves. They have created and maintained a friendly and knowledgeable environment, so the members can feel equal and easy to learn as well as share the experience and know-how together.

The last question can be answered from the result part 4.2.3 Influences on career advancement. It is not only personal skillsets, but also experiences from event

organizing that are valuable to students in their future career. The participation in the club also makes the students to be more confident in themselves and more conscious about the benefit that the club can bring, especially important contacts that can be useful in the future.

5.2 Recommendations

For the current parties benefitting from the SEC's existence and their activities, the author also has ideas about their possible means to support the club.

SEC has been keeping up a healthy environment inside the university, where students can simultaneously learn, work and have good times with their friends. The experience of their members proved that fact. If the situation is going on smoothly, the club soon will face the difficulties in human resources management and organization culture clash because it attracts more and more students from all backgrounds in the university, especially when the campus Linnala is planned to merge together with campus Skinnarila in Lappeenranta. The town of Lappeenranta has a population of more than 72 thousand while the town of Imatra has a population of only more than 26 thousand (Suomen virallinen tilasto). Also, according to Saimaa UAS webpage, Lappeenranta town has over 15 thousand students (Saimaa UAS n.d.b). It is possible that the club will have a wider range of audience as well as potential club members. But they will also be exposed to the difficulty related to human resources management as well as public relation since there are more people in the area knowing about the club. The author advises the club to keep up the authenticity nature and take careful approaches with clear strategies to further improve the image as well as the efficiency of the club's operation. This may be difficult but undoubtedly a great chance for this student club to go further in the future.

For the students from Saimaa University of Applied Sciences, whichever nationality they may be or whatever degrees they are studying, participating in an active, young and professional-like student club, or even other student organization is a must. Depending on future and time schedule, the author suggests them to spend a small amount of time to join and take this experience as an opportunity to both learn and have a good time. Here is high chance that they may learn much

about event management, or about personal skillsets that they need in the future. It is strongly encouraged because this is an easy and fun way to get the knowledge and practical experience without too much worry.

To the university of Applied Sciences, and every university with similar student community and study environment, the gains that the students have from their experience with the club is worth studying and applied along with the normal courses in the university. It is also possible to direct the gains of the students to the target goals if the students and the club get support and accurate collaboration. Learning process is spontaneous and ubiquitous. Also, close collaboration with a student club can also improve the image of the university as a young, active and innovative university with the ultimate goals of teaching students in the most effective ways.

Just as importantly, other local communities like the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Imatra, Lappeenranta, Regional Council of South Karelia, or even future potential organization who concerns about students, foreign students and foreign communities can benefit from the activities of the club to reach their goals. Frequent collaboration with the student club increases their image awareness among the students, and also helps the club to create more and more joyful, meaningful and relevant events and activities. These activities can help tremendously in creating a friendly and youthful vibe to the whole town region, as well as keeping the huge student community in the area happy.

6 Evaluation of the research

The thesis objective was to understand the influences of the student club called Saimia Event Club to the student members in Linnala campus. The result was on point, showing the great benefits that the members have from their participation in SEC. Furthermore, the result also opens up many ideas with possibilities for future research and future discussion regarding a club operating model, the differences of the Hofstede model theory and reality or how the experience of a managerial member opens up multiple opportunities for career path for them. The author, therefore, is satisfied with the result of the research. The answers to the research question were clearly classified as well as combined to answer both the

main research question as well as the sub research questions. The interview was completed without fraud or cheating, with clear recordings and transcription on computer files so the results and the analysis are transparent to all readers.

The interview was conducted in English, so it should be transcribed accurately to prevent first bias impression during the interviews. However, the author suggests that the result can not reach the perfect senses of expressing all the feelings and experiences that the interviewees have. It is because the interviews were not conducted in their mother-tongue. As Nelson Mandela, the first black president of South Africa, said *"If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart."* Therefore, the author believes the result of the research has not reached the perfect goal of exploring their truest feelings, but only sufficient and acceptable.

The thesis mentioned the current issue of the existing club. However, the situation in Linnala campus is changing with all the students moving to Skinnarila campus together in one-year time. The club is supposed to remain with their current members are still studying within the university, but the environment change may make the results be affected by the differences in numbers of possible audiences, and members. Also, it may affect the experience of the members.

During the research process, the theory framework has been changed and modified multiple times due to the maturity in the author's mindset about the topic. The idea was quick to come up but the theory took almost 10 months to develop fully. There was also a gap during the thesis process because of the author's internship during the summer 2018. The interviewing process happened smoothly but the thesis is still late one month according to the original thesis plan also because of the sudden huge changes in the theory approach of the author during March 2019. It was because after the analysis of the interview result, the author realized the earlier theory approach was not suitable and will not bring out the targeted results. But thanks to the help and instructions of the supervisor, the author managed to fix the framework and apply it successfully.

By the end of the thesis, there are remaining ideas on how to further study about the topic since there are many surprising results after the first research which

need a more careful look into them. These ideas can help creating a suitable study and work environment between Finnish and Vietnamese in the same organization, or team; dig deeper into the case of managerial member to discover the reasons make their experience differences from ordinary members of the club. With the current result of this thesis, it is worth being content when the presence of a student club has brought upon much positive changes to their “stakeholder”.

List of figures

Figure 1: Saimia Event Club brochure 2017/2018 (Saimia Event Club 2017)...	18
Figure 2: Saimia Masterchef (Saimia Event Club 2017)	19
Figure 3: Saimia Eat Together: Suomi 100 (Saimia Event Club 2017)	20
Figure 4: Music Night Volume 2 (Saimia Event Club 2018)	20
Figure 5: Lunar New Year Celebration (Saimia Event Club 2018)	21

References

Beltran, K. 2017. Suomalainen rehellisyys viehättää vaihto-opiskelijoita: Vietnamlaisopiskelijat haluavat olla osa Imatraa ja ystävystyä paikallisten vanhustenkin kanssa. (in Finnish) Uutisvuoksi. <https://uutisvuoksi.fi/uutiset/lahella/4749fd37-eb2c-4848-b4a3-3e613162d727>. Accessed date 30 April 2019.

Bentley University 2016. 12 reasons why you should join a Student Organizations. <https://www.bentley.edu/prepared/12-reasons-why-you-should-join-student-organization>. Accessed on 18 February 2018.

Colagrossi, M. 2018. 10 reasons why Finland's education system is the best. Big think. <https://bigthink.com/mike-colagrossi/no-standardized-tests-no-private-schools-no-stress-10-reasons-why-finlands-education-system-in-the-best-in-the-world>. Accessed on 08 April 2019.

Doyle, A. 2019. "What Are Soft Skills?". The balance careers. <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/what-are-soft-skills-2060852>. Accessed on 14 February 2019.

Etelä-Karjalan liitto 2018. Regional Council of Karelia. 2018. Lunar New Year Celebration 9th of Feb. – The Year of the Dog 2018. Etelä-Karjalan liitto. <https://www.ekarjala.fi/liitto/en/blog/lunar-new-year-celebration-9th-of-feb-the-year-of-the-dog-2018/>. Accessed date 30 April 2019.

Finnish National Agency for Education, EDUFI, n.d. Finnish University of Applied Sciences. Studyinfo.fi. <https://studyinfo.fi/wp2/en/higher-education/polytechnics-universities-of-applied-sciences/>. Accessed on 08 April 2019.

Foubert, J. D. & Grainger, L. U. 2006. Effects of Involvement in Clubs and Organizations on the Psychosocial Development of First-Year and Senior College Students. NASPA journal, 43(1), p166-167.

Friedman, G. 2014. Student Stress, Burnout and Engagement. Master's thesis. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Degree in organizational psychology.

Getz, D. & Page, J. S. 2016. Planning and management of events. Event Studies: Theory, research and policy for planned events. New York: Routledge.

Harvard University. Strategies for Qualitative Interviews, n.d. https://sociology.fas.harvard.edu/files/sociology/files/interview_strategies.pdf. Accessed on 25 March 2018.

Hofstede Insights. Country comparison Finland – Vietnam. <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/finland,vietnam/>. Accessed on 30 April 2019.

International Student Insurance. 5 Tips To Overcome Depression While Studying Abroad. <https://www.internationalstudentinsurance.com/explained/depression-while-studying-abroad.php>. Accessed on 21 April 2019.

Jones-Kaminski, S. 2009. "What is Networking Event?". "I'm at a Networking Event, Now What?". California: HappyAbout.info.

Karrera, M. 2016. How to Gain Work Experience at University. Career Addict. <https://www.careeraddict.com/how-to-gain-work-experience-at-university>. Accessed on 08 April 2019.

Khan, I. 2016. Market Research. Lecture notes. Heilbronn University of Applied Sciences. International Business Faculty.

Mohanan, K. P. 2005. The Goals of University Education. University Education for Career Advancement: The Profile of a Successful Candidate. <http://www.cdttl.nus.edu.sg/publications/career/goals.htm>. Accessed on 20 October 2018.

Moore, K. 2012. Employee First, Customer Second: Why It Really Works In The Market. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/karlmoore/2012/05/14/employees-first-customers-second-why-it-really-works-in-the-market/#6cc3af2812c4>. Accessed on 28 April 2019.

Ojalainen, J. 2017. Suomalainen rehellisyys viehättää vaihto-opiskelijoita: Vietnamlaisopiskelijat haluavat olla osa imatkaa ja ystävystyä paikallisten vanhustenkin kanssa. (in Finnish) Etelä-Saimaa.

<https://esaimaa.fi/uutiset/laHELLa/1256c7fa-c34c-4963-a4f9-71c134387da1>. Accessed date 30 April 2019.

Oxford Learner's Dictionaries. Network. <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/academic/network1>. Accessed date 30 March 2019.

Pesonen, N. 2019. Student Affairs Officer. Saimaa University of Applied Sciences. Linnala campus, Imatra. Email.

Saimia Event Club. 2017. Brochure for school year 2017/2018. Imatra, Finland.

Saimia Event Club. 2017 - 2018. Saimia Event Club Facebook Page. <https://www.facebook.com/saimiaeventclub/>. Accessed on 1 November 2018.

Saimaa UAS n.d.a. Saimaa UAS offers degree programmes in five fields. <https://www.saimia.fi/en-fi/general-information>. Accessed on 20 October 2018.

Saimaa UAS n.d.b. Lappeenranta and Imatra area. <https://www.saimia.fi/en-fi/general-information/lappeenranta-and-imatra-area>. Accessed on 30 April 2019.

Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT): Väestön ennakkotilasto [verkkojulkaisu]. Toukokuu 2019 (in Finnish). Statistics Finland. Accessed on 2 May 2019.

Vermeiren, J. 2007. Let's connect!. A practical guide for Highly Effective Professional Networking. Belgium: Step by Step Publishing.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview structure:

- Self-introduction
 - Identification: Name - group (will be concealed from the result of the thesis)
 - Related to Saimaa UAS (how long have you been studying in Saimaa UAS? Graduated?)
 - Related to Saimaa Event Club (how long have you been the member? Which event did you participate in organizing?)
- Content questions: General picture
 - Can you tell me about one event that you enjoy organizing the most? What exactly happened?
 - What was the purpose of the event?
- Self-relatable and more open questions:
 - What was your role for this event? How did you contribute to the event?
 - Why did you enjoy being in the organizing team for this event the most? What did you learn from this experience?
 - Did you apply any skills you learned from the classes? What are those? How do this application benefit you?
 - Did you also learn any skills besides the ones from the classes in Saimaa UAS? What are those? How do these skills benefit you?

(Seeking for items: Customer Service, Leadership, Management, Event Management, Marketing, Networking, Logistics Event, Networking...)

 - Did you also apply any skills you learned or practiced during your memberships after you leave the club or outside the club activities? How was the experience?
- Club-relatable questions (modify it to different from leadership role and member role)
 - Did the club have supervisors or similar role to members? What are their responsibilities?

- What made them to have the supervisor position, according to your opinion?
- Did they help you during your membership? What did you learn from them? (members)
- Were the job tasks and information given suitable and enough? (members)
- Were you trained or got to learn during your membership? What was the content of the training? Was it effective, in your opinion?
- Future career related
 - How does your future career look like to you? How do you look at yourself in 5 years, 10 years?
 - Do you think your experience, your gains with the club will be benefit to you until then? Why?
- Thanks and also subscribed them to the result of the report.

This is the list of questions and general topics that each question belongs to. By separating questions into groups, the author would like to clarify their intention of each questions, also to balance all the topic to cover as much information as possible.

Appendix 2: Interview invitation

Hi [name],

I am working on a thesis about S.E.C influences on its members and ex-members. Therefore, I would like to invite you to join an interview about your experiences with S.E.C.

If you are interested, please tell me so I will explain my thesis more carefully and send you the invitation form.

Have a nice day [name]

And thank you in advance.

Appendix 3: Google form

Description:

Hi,

You are invited to be THE ANSWER for my research. Your opinions MATTER THE MOST to the result of my thesis.

So let me tell you a bit about my research topic.

"

Once upon a Saimaa story

There was a normal student in our Linnala campus. He was passionate about events and activities so he joined his friends to work for a club that organizes awesome happenings for students there.

He feels that these experiences benefit him immensely: networking, restaurant experience, management skills, ...

But he wonders if HIS FRIENDS also feel the same, and even how exactly did those activities and organizing benefit them.

Therefore, he created a research to study about his questions

...

"

That's the short version of my thesis plan.

You can also check my thesis plan out from this link: <https://bit.ly/2s8yGUL>

Now if you are ready, please help me to have a SHORT-30-MINUTE interview with you by filling the form below. I am urge to discuss with you about your past experience with the club.

Each interview will be recorded individually so that it can be transcribed later.

Your identity and information, on the other hand will NOT BE RECORDED.

If you have any questions regarding the interview and my thesis, please send me email or messages. My contact is below.

Best regards

Hong-Minh Le

Student number: 1501403

HOMA15 - Saimaa University of Applied Sciences

Email: hongminhlexxxxxx@mail.com

Phone number: (+358) xx xxx xxxx