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HOW THE HOSPITALITY  
MANAGEMENT DEGREE IN VAASA  
UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES  
CORRESPONDS TO WORKING LIFE

Business Economics and Tourism

2011

# VAASA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Tourism

## ABSTRACT

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Title	How the Hospitality Management Degree in Vaasa University of Applied Sciences Corresponds to Working Life
Year	2011
Language	English
Pages	57 + 3 Appendices
Name of Supervisor	Peter Smeds

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The aim of this thesis was to examine how the hospitality management degree in Vaasa University of Applied Sciences corresponds to working life from the students' point of view. The opinions and experiences of both the content of the degree and actual working life were researched.

The theory part of the thesis presents tourism as a business; in addition it gives a presentation of studies at Vaasa University of Applied Sciences and discusses how working life appears to the people in the business. Therefore the theory and the empiric part corresponds each other.

In the research a qualitative method was used, and the data was collected with semi-structured interviews. There were altogether six interviewees of who half were studying at the moment and half had already graduated in 2010.

The hospitality management degree was criticized not being comprehensive enough. It can be said that the degree corresponds well to working life, but the graduate's own motivation and activity have a great impact when moving to working life. The extent of tourism business and the many job opportunities create challenges.

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Keywords	Hospitality management, tourism, Vaasa University of Applied Sciences, VAMK, working life
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# VAASAN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU

Matkailu

## TIIVISTELMÄ

Tekijä	Petra Ilona Päivärinta
Opinnäytetyön nimi	How the Hospitality Management Degree in Vaasa University of Applied Sciences Corresponds to Working Life
Vuosi	2011
Kieli	englanti
Sivumäärä	57 + 3 liitettä
Ohjaaja	Peter Smeds

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Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena on tutkia kuinka hyvin restonomitutkinto Vaasan ammattikorkeakoulussa vastaa työelämää opiskelijoiden näkökulmasta. Mielipiteet ja kokemukset sekä tutkinnon sisällöstä että itse työelämästä sisällytettiin tähän tutkimukseen.

Teoriaosassa on käsitelty matkailua toimialana, opintoja Vaasan ammattikorkeakoulussa, sekä sitä miten työelämä näyttäytyy alalla työskenteleville. Näin ollen teoria ja empiria ovat vuorovaikutuksessa keskenään.

Tämän työn päätutkimusmetodi empiriaosuudessa on kvalitatiivinen, eli laadullinen tutkimusmenetelmä. Tutkimusaineisto kerättiin käyttäen teemahaastatteluja. Haastatteluja oli yhteensä kuusi. Haastatelluista puolet olivat jo valmistuneita ja puolet edelleen opiskelevia. Jo restonomeiksi valmistuneet haastateltavat olivat suorittaneet tutkinnon vuonna 2010.

Restonomitutkinnon kattavuutta kritisoitiin. Tutkinnon voidaan sanoa vastaavan työelämää hyvin, mutta valmistuneen omalla motivaatiolla ja aktiivisuudella on työnhaussa suuri merkitys. Alan laajuus ja moninaiset työmahdollisuudet luovat haasteita.

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Avainsanat ammattikorkeakoulu, VAMK, matkailuala, työelämä

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Semi-structured questionnaire in Finnish

Semi-structured questionnaire in English

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Tourism, accommodation and restaurant business (hospitality business) is a labor-intensive and trend sensitive service sector, which is in connection with the success of tourism and from a domestic point of view also with the economic industry of Finland. Seasonal variation and international disturbances affect this sector at a fast rate.

The academy level education in Finland consists of two side by side sectors; universities of applied sciences (or AMK institutions) and universities. In universities of applied sciences theoretical education is typically in close relation to practice. In universities scientific research that is based on high level of education is one of the common principles. Academy level education is highly popular in Finland, especially when universities of applied sciences came along. Finland's system of universities of applied sciences was built in the early 1990's to be the lower part of the academy level education.

Bachelor degree in hospitality management is the higher level education that aims to produce professionals that are able to work as specialists, planners, in development or as managers. The main principle of the education is to provide the student with opportunities where they can transfer the learned theory into practice and test their know-how. The education and training provided by the polytechnics respond to labor market needs.

In this research the interaction between the education system and working life is examined. The parallel is studied from the point of view of students and graduates; the current or future employees of the field. The research was conducted by using a qualitative research method, which in this case means semi-structured personal interviews.

## **1.1 Aim of the thesis**

The aim of the thesis is to analyze the degree program of tourism and hospitality management, which is the bachelor level education that gives the basis for working in the different sectors of tourism industry. The aim of the thesis is to find out how the hospitality management degree in Vaasa University of Applied Sciences corresponds to working life, if it gives the right expertise and readiness and if the content of the degree is useful enough. One of the aims is to find out if the degree gives a good base for future career development. The research will be based on answers collected from hospitality management graduates and also those who are still studying. The research is based on the expectations and experiences of the people interviewed. Collecting the data is based on the common assumptions the bachelor of hospitality degree has and also the expectations and point of views the society has on the tourism business. A secondary objective is to examine the overall appreciation of tourism business.

The aim of the thesis is to examine the things mentioned above, and use the gained information when analyzing the hospitality management degree. The results can also be used for developing the degree program in Vaasa University of Applied Sciences.

A common preconception of tourism business graduates is that they are exceptionally good in mastering different languages and/or that language studies are a big part of their education. Good language skills are an advantage in tourism business, but not necessarily a must. Usually people working in tourism sector in Finland are assumed to master three languages; Finnish, Swedish and English. Everything else is a plus. Mastering the Swedish language varies a lot depending on the person and also the region. For example in Eastern Finland it would be more useful to speak fluent Russian than Swedish. On the other hand on the Western coast Swedish is used side-by-side with Finnish.

In the bachelor level degree in Vaasa polytechnic students are required to study professional French or German, or professional Finnish for foreigners. The course is however only worth four credits so it does not give fluent language skills.

Practical training and good connections with tourism companies are an important part of studies as they help the transfer into working life after graduation. Working beside studies is also a common way to both earn extra money and familiarize with the business.

Tourism is an international business and graduates will often use the opportunity to work abroad at least for a while. As a hypothesis it can be said that the job opportunities in Finland are sometimes found to be insufficient in tourism sector.

Appreciation of tourism business is often low, and bachelor level graduates might find it irritating and disrespectful that a common assumption is that they are trained to be tour guides. Working as a tour guide is one option, but almost anyone can train themselves to be a tour guide with a course that lasts a few weeks. The bachelor level degree qualifies for much more.

## **1.2 Restrictions**

This research is limited to discuss the description and content the Vaasa University of Applied Sciences has set for the bachelor level hospitality management degree. Tourism as a business is dealt with by the common definitions and policies that there are on an international level. With legislation and trade unions the focus point is on Finnish labor market. The actual research is based on the opinions and attitudes of students currently studying or recently graduated. The sample group is divided into two different segments in order to get a larger point of view

My own personal interest and the fact that I am studying the above mentioned degree myself had a great impact when choosing this topic. Also the fact that many times the content and usefulness of this degree are studied from the point of view of the employers encouraged me to focus on how the students themselves feel.



## **2 TOURISM BUSINESS AS AN INDUSTRY**

The significance of service trade in the economy of developed countries is increasing rapidly. Tourism is a notable and growing part of this field of business sector also in Finland. (Havas, Jaakonaho, Rantanen & Sievers. 2006 : 4) Tourism business can be divided roughly into three sectors: tourism services, accommodation sector and food services sector. Tourism services include for example travel agencies and tour operator services, tourist guide services and other related services. Accommodation sector includes hotels and other forms of lodging. Immense restaurant food service industry is also in a close relation to the previous ones when discussing the tourism industry as a whole. Accommodation and food sector are a vital part of tourism business, but rarely the reason or motive to travel.

The whole worlds' employment 6-8 per cent has something to do with tourism. In 2004 tourism covered about 30 per cent of the international service sector. (WTO 2005) Tourism business is a significant employer especially when regarding the national economies of some developing countries, where tourism forms a big part of the country's GNP. Tourism business is on constant growth worldwide. The speed of growth depends on the region, in Europe being about 3% last year (2010) and for example in Asia 13%. (World Tourism Organization, [unwto.org](http://unwto.org)) In Finland the economic crisis led the amount of incoming travelers to decrease, but in 2010 the numbers were already rising. (Finnish tourist board, [mek.fi](http://mek.fi))

Tourism business is one of the most rapidly growing industries in the world. It is also one of a kind as an employer, as the variety of jobs is so wide. Tourism organizations, transporting companies, lodging and catering services, program services and different incidental services employ more and more people in the world. The increase in the employment and overall growth of tourism industry has to do with larger changes in the working society. In the Western societies a transfer into postindustrial production and culture happened in the 1990's. This means new kinds of jobs, working conditions and occupations. Researchers call

this kind of work *new work*. Features of new work are for example that it is disconnected from time and place, job description might be unclear and it is hard to separate work from social life on the whole. Work in the tourism business is a good example of this; it is often seasonal, part time, freelance-based, not very appreciated and often with low income. Still it requires a lot of skills, responsibility and commitment. The work is usually highly independent. (Venäläinen 2009: pkamk.fi/monni) (Valkonen & Veijola 2008 : 10)

Tourism business also includes different forms of transportation, such as airline, rail and cruise industry. “Tourism and transportation are inextricably linked together. Looking at the position occupied by the various modes of passenger transportation, one finds that air travel dominates long-distance and middle-distance tourism.” (Goeldner & Ritchie 2006 : 120) Flying indeed is nowadays a common way of transport, and usually the first that comes into mind when discussing tourism. Flying is fast and easy, but not environmentally friendly. Low-cost airlines are also probably facing problems in the future due to increase in oil price.

Private cars are used in shorter trips and it is the most popular way of travel in domestic traveling. Rail travel is not as important nowadays as it was in the past. People are however encouraged to use trains as a form of transport, as it is more environmental friendly than a private car. The development of high-speed trains will probably increase the popularity of train transport sector in the future.

As Havas et al. (2006) argue accessibility is an absolute requirement for tourism to develop. From international point of view of tourism, Finland can be compared to an island.

## **2.1 Tourism services sector**

Tourism services include the basic services like travel agencies, tour operator and tourists guide services. The tourism channel of distribution is an operating structure, system or linkage of various combinations of organizations through

which a producer of travel products describes, sells, or confirms travel arrangements to the buyer.

A travel agency is a business or a person that sells the travel industry's individual parts or a combination of them to a consumer. A travel agency is an agent middleman, acting on behalf of the client, making arrangements with suppliers of travel.

Tour operator or a tour wholesaler is a company that puts together a tour and all of its components. In the most basic packages this means flights and a hotel. A tour operator sells the tour through his or her own company or through approved travel agencies. Often tour operators can offer vacation packages to public at lower prices than an individual traveler can arrange because tour operators can buy services such as transportation and hotel rooms in large quantities at discounted prices. (Goeldner & Ritchie 2006 : 181-197)

Nowadays the case however is that consumers do not always find the need to hire services of a tour operator or a travel agency. Independent traveling has become constantly more popular because people might find the services of a tour operator too expensive or not personal enough. Consumers can do bookings easily online directly from airlines and hotels, which have their own booking sites and systems.

Travel agencies are slowly dying out because of this development. Tour operators can however operate online and sell their vacation packages just as easily as before, because consumers still want easy access and ready-made holiday packages. However the negative development of travel agency business has reduced employment in tourism business in general.

## **2.2 Accommodation sector**

Accommodation sector is the world's oldest commercial business, as a place to sleep and rest is the one of the two most basic needs for tourists traveling away from their home. Today, lodging and food service are enormous in economic importance. Many lodging places provide other activities and facilities too, making them a tourism destination in a miniature size.

Hotel is the most basic form of accommodation. The reason why people need hotel accommodation varies, but according to Goeldner & Ritchie (2006 : 156) the division is that 24 per cent are on vacation, 29 per cent are transient business travelers, 25 per cent are attending a conference or event, and 22 are traveling for other reason such as family or special event. Business travelers is one of the biggest target groups of hotels situated in cities and close to airports, secondary target group is leisure travelers especially on holiday periods and weekends. In Finland summer time is the biggest season for leisure accommodation, and families are one of the big target groups. Hotel types vary a lot, from modern business hotels with compact two person rooms to luxury hotels with also bigger suites. A motel is not a typical type of accommodation in Finland, but here low budget hotels have also become more common, e.g. the Omena hotel chain.

Hotel accommodations are heavily concentrated in Europe and North America. Recent rapid growth in the tourism business however has caused the amount of hotel rooms to increase for example in the Middle East. In 2010 World Tourism Barometer marked the Middle East as one of the globe's stronger performers, with a 20 percent growth in inbound tourism flows. This kind of growth requires increase in accommodation abilities, and in the most popular destinations like Dubai, the city is in constant construction.

### **2.3 Food service sector**

Along with the accommodation sector, food service sector fulfills a basic need, to eat. When people are on holiday they use more restaurant services than in their everyday life. The food service sector includes all the restaurant services from fast-food restaurants to cafeterias and traditional restaurants. Eating and drinking places are a big business. Even though much of this is local and not especially aimed for tourists, eating and drinking are favorite pastimes of travelers, and the food service industry would face difficult times without the tourist market. Travelers, including foreign visitors spend more money on food than anything else, only exception to this is transportation. Travelers are responsible for about one-third of the whole sales in the food service sector.

Besides restaurants, food service industry consists of travel food service and vending and contract institutional food services. Travel food services consist of food operations in hotels, roadside services, and all food served on airplanes, trains and ships. Institutional food service in companies, hospitals etc. is not considered to be a part of the tourism industry. (Goeldner & Ritchie 2006 : 168-170)

Most restaurants are not specialized in getting tourists as customers, therefore sometimes restaurant business is not considered to be a part of tourism business, but a part of service business in general. In service business there are however different sectors that intersect and overlap depending on the point of view, and tourism and food services are one of them.

Restaurant sales are growing rapidly as the economy improves. In Finland this can be seen in the growing amount of meals eaten in different kinds of restaurants.

#### **2.4 Tourism phenomenon and the Finnish tourism cluster**

In the Goldner's tourism phenomenon figure (appendix 2) (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006 : 14) tourism business has been divided into nine different sectors: travel trade, accommodation, tourism services, transportation, entertainment, food services, adventure & outdoor recreation, attractions and events. The figure shows that after the tourism services sector, there is the built environment that gives some of the basis for the services. With the built environment the advantage is that the forming of it can be influenced. After that there are natural resources and the environment that both gives excellent base for tourism and has to be protected and used wisely.

The figure explains tourism phenomenon from a point of view of a tourist and the travel experiences he or she seeks when visiting a tourism destination. When tourism service providers fully understand the needs of a tourist, they can develop the facilities, events and activities and programs, making a destination uniquely attractive.

“A cluster is a geographical concentration of businesses and companies operating on a certain field in connection with each other. Their mutual interaction creates synergy benefits. Clusters are networking wholes where more important than the borders between companies and industries are their mutual connections.” (Havas et al. 2006 : 20)

In the Finnish tourism cluster the division of tourism business has been presented in a more simple way, separating it only into four sectors: accommodation, food services, transportation and program services, events and attractions. The cluster however examines tourism business not only as a separate sector but as a part of the whole society's structure. Wider point of view shows how tourism is related to other businesses as well as marketing communication and –sale. The cluster is used when estimating the future of tourism in Finland. In the new Finnish tourism cluster (appendix 1) creative industries are seen as a crucial part of new innovative tourism industry, in addition to health and wellness services.

These two figures complement each other's when understanding and analyzing the tourism business as a whole.

## **2.5 Labor force and employment**

Measuring the volume of tourism is difficult. Different ways and arguments of complete statistics make it difficult for both defining the amount of work and types of tourism business works in general. Parts of the statistics are based on estimated information and part for example on official databases. The differences in statistics can be explained on the classification of tourism business and also the seasonal nature of it, which makes counting yearly employment even more difficult. (Valkonen & Veijola 2008 : 18)

Working in tourism business is working in order to make someone else's free time special and worth it. Tourism is traveling for predominantly recreational or leisure purposes, but it can also be work. Tourism is a part of service sector in general and an interesting form of work. Tourism work differs from other types of work especially because in it different sides of cultural, sociological and economic life

are linked together. It is exceptional that some are on holiday and the others are working; they are paying for the services. Someone else's free time is linked to others' living and everyday life. This might be one of the reasons why working in tourism business is not considered to be valuable or respected. The same kind of conceit can be seen in service business in general. Only the customer's free time is important and weighty, the ones that make it happen are not worth respecting. (Valkonen & Veijola 2008 : 23-36)

Usually when tourism is examined, the focus point is in business activities, and the experience of a tourist. Tourism as work is more rarely taken into consideration. However, tourism as a business is still surely dependent on the employees; otherwise it would not succeed or even exist. Understanding the value of tourism requires that we know what it is like, in what kind of surroundings the work is done and what kind of practices and policies there are. Also the expectations, requirements and conditions this type of work gives to the employees have to be examined in order to understand how working in the tourism business differs from other businesses. (Valkonen & Veijola, 2008 : 24)

## **2.6 Rules and legislation**

There are several different laws and regulations that monitor and influence businesses in tourism. Especially when regarding the restaurant sector, the legislation in Finland is strict. Consumer protection law protects the customer as a weaker side from inappropriate ways of selling and marketing. In tourism business there is a specific package tour law, which is prescribed in order to make tourism business clearer for both the seller and buyer of tourism services.

When tourism business is examined from the employee's and employer's point of view, there are different kinds of rules and legislations. Labor codes and collective labor agreements have to be followed. In tourism business small companies and seasonality of the work sometimes cause problems in proper following of the law, caused by ignorance, disregard or even grey economy.

The content and terms of an individual employment relationship is determined by the labor code and made agreements. Labor code in Finland is determined by the laws set in the parliament, different settlements and edicts. These are supplemented by labor agreements and also the individual contract of employment. (Huovinen, 2002 : 143)

There are different collective labor agreements used in tourism business, depending on the sector. PAM (the trade union of service business) has negotiated seven different collective agreements in the Finnish tourism business:

- Collective agreement of train service staff
- Collective agreement of golf sector
- Collective agreement of ski resort sector
- Collective agreement of amusement and theme parks
- Collective agreement of tourism, restaurant and free time services (different versions for managers and employees)
- Collective agreement of program services sector

(PAM, pam.fi)

For example when comparing the collective agreements of traditional trade sector, which is not a part of tourism business, and the highly seasonal sector of amusement and theme park, there are differences. In trade sector there is an extra pay for the work done on Saturdays, and also the basic hourly wages are higher.

### **2.6.1 PAM and MaRa**

The trade union of service business (palvelualojen ammattiliitto), registered association PAM is the trade union for employees working in the private sector. It is an expert of working life and aims to improve the subsistence, employment security and quality of life of those working in the service business. PAM aims to achieve these goals by “negotiating the collective agreements in service business,



increasing the opportunities to affect work, work community and safety of work, and also development of business by increasing democracy, justice, equality and social security both nationally and internationally.” (PAM’s vision, strategy and target program 2011-2015)

MaRa is the guardian and labor market organization of tourism, hotel, restaurant and free time service business, and also wellness service business. MaRa is an independent labor market organization and therefore is responsible for both industrial and labor policy lobbying. MaRa’s members are the companies in the tourism business. (Matkailu- ja ravintolapalvelut MaRa ry, mara.fi)

### **3 STUDIES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES**

Studying in a university of applied sciences (AMK) is theory based but practical oriented and in close relation with working life. The purpose is to give a base for working as a specialist, planner, in development or as a manager. The main principle of the education is to provide the student with opportunities where they can move the learned theory into practice and test their know-how. The education and training provided by the polytechnics respond to labor market needs.

General eligibility for universities is provided by the matriculation examination or a vocational qualification with a scope of at least three years. The majority of new students have completed the matriculation examination. Eligibility for AMK studies is gained through upper secondary education – either the general education completed in an upper secondary school or an upper secondary vocational qualification. (Finnish national board of education, oph.fi)

The old system of study weeks as a measurement system of academic and other studies was relinquished gradually in 2005-2010. One study week corresponded to an estimated amount of 40 hours of work. The system was renewed when academy policies were standardized in the European Union. In the new system one study credit corresponds to 27.5 hours of work.

#### **3.1 Legislation**

Education business and learning institution have their own legislation and also the universities of applied sciences (AMK) must operate based on this. AMK institutions are a part of upper level education system, which is formed together with universities. There are following kind of clauses concerning studies in the University of Applied Sciences:

Common regulations:

2§ Bachelor degree is an academy level degree as more precisely decreed with an edict. The purpose of polytechnic studies is to give academy level education based on requirements of working life and its development and support

individual's professional growth and also to practice research and development taking into consideration the surrounding business activities. Bachelor level degree is supposed to give theoretical and practical prerequisites to the individual to be competent in development and specialist businesses.

7§ Educational purpose: In the educational purpose of polytechnics is regulated the industry of polytechnic, the amount of study places, language used in teaching and locations. The permit that gives permission to change educational purposes concerning the number of students and locations is granted by the ministry of education.

Edict 1§: The operations of the polytechnic sector are regulated by using the following fields of education:

- 1) Humanistic and education field
- 2) Cultural field
- 3) Field of business economics, social sciences and administration
- 4) Natural sciences
- 5) Communication and technology
- 6) Natural resources and the environment
- 7) Social and health care
- 8) Tourism and restaurant business

4§ Structure of studies: Studies leading towards a polytechnic degree include:

- 1) Common core basic and professional studies
- 2) Free choice studies
- 3) Practical training improving professional skills

#### 4) Final thesis

5§ Extent of studies: The basis of studies is an academic credit. Study modules are assessed according to the work load they require. The contribution that responds to one study year is 1600 hours which corresponds to 60 credits. The extent of studies that lead to a bachelor level degree is 180, 210 or 240 credits. (Finnish law: educational legislation 2007) (Ammattikorkeakoululaki 9.5.2003/351, finlex.fi)

### **3.2 Vaasa University of Applied Sciences**

Vaasa university of applied sciences (VAMK) offers education in the following fields: economic and tourism business, social and health care and technology and communication. The number of students is about 4000. The school invests in high level technology, international business and advanced health and wellness services. VAMK's international character can be seen in the number of international degree students, which is about 300 and also in the 80 yearly exchange students. About 150 students also take the opportunity to go as an exchange student themselves or carry out their practical training abroad.

VAMK offers education in three languages; Finnish, Swedish and English. Some of the degree programs are bilingual, combining the two national languages of Finland. Vaasa is a bilingual city, so this is a natural way to emphasize that and increase students' language skills.

### **3.3 Unit of business economics and tourism**

The degree program in hospitality management educates bachelors of hospitality management that are skilled in languages and qualified to work as an entrepreneur or for someone else. All-round degree is a competitive advantage because working life needs professionals that master both theoretical and practical skills of their field. A professional in tourism has to know a lot, because diverse skills are emphasized in this business and job descriptions often cover several different tasks. The objective of the degree program is to provide the skills required to work within the different operating sectors such as event, attraction, activity,

accommodation, transportation, restaurant, travel trade and information. The essential goal is that the student gets the readiness to operate widely as a specialist, developer and manager. A graduate can work in tourism organizations, accommodation and restaurant businesses and in food service sector both in domestic and international market areas. (puv.fi)

In the unit of business economics and tourism the degree of hospitality management can be carried out in Finnish, Swedish and English. The Finnish speaking program is partly carried out in Swedish. Many of the students choose VAMK specifically for this reason. The bilingual study program has also been in favor of the staff. It has been easier to also implement the English study program as bilingualism is something already traditional in Vaasa. Providing the study programs in several languages brings challenges also to the staff, as the level of teaching has to be maintained even though one's own mother tongue is not used. (puv.fi)

The unit of business economics and tourism values co-operation with several local companies and projects and theses made with them are part of the studies. Hospitality management students specialize in their studies either in tourism or restaurant business. Students specialized in restaurant get employed for example in accommodation sector and in different companies in the food sector. Students specialized in tourism work in different national and international tourism organizations, travel agencies, tour operators and authority organizations. There is no specialization in hotel business in VAMK. The basics of accommodation business are however introduced as a part of basic professional studies, and as the hospitality management degree gives the competence to work in all areas of tourism business, hotel business makes no exception to this.

In 2010 the number of hospitality management graduates was 45, including five adult education students. The number was higher than the previous year 2009, when there were 36 degrees completed.

Further education is also possible in tourism field. A master level degree can be completed after graduating from a university of applied sciences. The degree was

first introduced in 2006. It provides a new opportunity to develop one's professional skills. The master's degree produces professionals that are profiled in practical development functions. It gives qualification to public positions and tasks. (restonomiylempiämki.fi) The master level degree in tourism is not yet available in Vaasa. Tourism can also be studied in a university, but as a major only in the University of Lapland.

### **DEGREE PROGRAM OF TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT 210 CR**

Common core basic studies	110 cr
Special professional studies: tourism/restaurant specialization	30 cr
Optional studies	10 cr
Specialized optional module	15 cr
Practical training	30 cr
Thesis	15 cr

**Figure 1.** The structure of hospitality management study program (puv.fi)

#### **3.4 Study structure of hospitality management**

In Vaasa polytechnic the bachelor degree in hospitality management is 210 study credits and it is completed in 3.5 years. The degree contains 110 credits of common core basic studies, 45 credits of specialized professional studies, 10 credits of optional studies, 20 credits of practical training and 15 credits comes from the thesis. All of these are so called modules that form a whole. (Figure 1)

According to the time schedule set for hospitality management degree, in the first year the student is a beginner, whose studies include study skills (23 cr), basics of tourism (20 cr) and basics of restaurant service (24 cr). In the second year the student is a trainee, studying how to establish a company (14 cr), production of tourism or restaurant experiences (24 cr). Third year is the professional year when research and development skills (28 cr), management of a tourism or restaurant company (19 cr) are studied. Free choice optional studies, specialized optional module and practical training are usually completed during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year but that is up to the student to decide.

Studies include following subjects:

**-Introductory studies**, aim to familiarize the student into studies in a polytechnic and ethical way of thinking.

**-Society and entrepreneurship studies**, aim to creating a positive attitude for intra and entrepreneurship. Student will also learn to know entrepreneurship and the procedures of the enterprise world, as well as the basics of quality control and human resources.

**-Languages and communication studies**, which give the student the skills to communicate orally and in writing both with their own mother tongue and in foreign languages in community and business life. The student is obliged to choose between professional German, professional French or advanced Finnish for foreigners.

**-Data processing studies**, aim to give the student the knowledge of the basics of a computer system, necessary programs and the polytechnic's network and their opportunities as a support for studies.

**-Mathematics and natural science studies** aim to get the student to masters the basic calculation methods in economy and financial mathematics and knows how to apply them. The student also knows the basics of statistic mathematics. In addition the importance of environmental issues and sustainable development is also included in these studies.

-**Professional basic studies** include **restaurant service, food production, tourism service, hotel, marketing services and business and economic administration** studies. These extensive studies give the general base for tourism and restaurant business. The aims are to master the basics of for example alcohol and labor legislation, operations in a restaurant, tourism as an industry, structure of accommodation business and financial management. Professional basic studies are for everyone and they do not depend on the specialization, and they continue through the whole 3.5 year study period.

-**Specialized professional studies** that are determined by the students' own choice, depending whether they specialize in tourism or restaurant business. Both include 45 study credits. These studies give more deep and specific information of the field chosen. The specialization is chosen during the first year of studies.

-**Specialized optional module** can be for example Asian tourism and hospitality management which is a module the Vaasa University of Applied Sciences offers in co-operation with Rangsit University in Thailand.

-**Optional studies** can be anything the school has to offer and it is possible to complete them throughout the study year. It is recommended though, that optional studies would support the actual degree program.

-**Practical training** is meant for the student to get familiar with the work tasks relevant to the studies and to apply their skills into reality in different working surroundings. The aim of practical training is to increase the student's readiness and motivation in studying a degree and to develop professional skills. At the same time the student gets to know the operating ways of a work place, organizational culture, work distribution and social relations. Work tasks should correspond to the specialization chosen by the student. Seven study credits of practical training can be carried out in any kind of tourism related company, as a basic practical training but the rest 13 study credits are professional practical training based on the specialization. The student is responsible for finding the place for practical training. After that, it must be approved by a teacher.



-**Final thesis** is a showing of the skills learned during studies. It is a proof of maturity where the student shows that he/she is able to adapt the learned theory into practical problem solving. (puv.fi)

### **3.5. Expectations**

In the MATKA 2020 research completed by Havas et al. (2006 : 51) the students themselves set following expectations concerning tourism and hospitality management degree:

- Good basic knowledge of the field
- Competence for several sectors
- Gaining strong and diverse practical expertise
- Knowledge about different countries and cultures and also tourism in different areas
- Good language skills
- Good customer service and performing skills
- Basics of economy business
- Marketing expertise
- Ability to maintain personal level of knowledge in the future
- Readiness to work as a manager
- Readiness to work within international issues or abroad
- Readiness to perceive the development of tourism business from and international perspective
- Good basic skills to work as an entrepreneur
- Updating of personal know-how

- Forming relationships with tourism companies
- Understanding of tourism business as a comprehensive influence and ability to perceive how it should be developed
- Ability to understand the influences of tourism (environmental, economic and political)
- Up-to-date knowledge of the field and future trends
- Professional and skilled teaching

This list of expectations gives a good base when the research about the experiences and expectations of students and graduates is started. These expectations apply for all the hospitality management degree programs, therefore also the one in Vaasa University of Applied Sciences.

## **4 WORKING LIFE**

Tourism business is very trend sensitive when it comes to employment. The business is instantly affected by changes in the national economy and development. Employed workforce in 2009 was 77.9/100 and the average monthly salary was 1949 € for an employee, and for a manager 2559 €. (MaRa, mara.fi) Online trade brings new opportunities and possibilities to those working in tourism business. It is easy to get employed part-time but the supply of full-time jobs varies within regions.

Tourism is export industry, and jobs cannot be transferred elsewhere, like in other industries is sometimes done on order to save money. Working life in tourism business has a seasonal nature and outsourcing is common in e.g. cleaning services. In addition to traditional extra and part time workers, renting employees has also increased in recent years. Along with staff leasing outsourcing the whole restaurant operation decreases the need of permanent employees in the accommodation sector, especially in bigger companies. Workforce moves from Southern Finland into the tourist resorts in the north for the winter season. Travel resorts are aiming towards more year round operations and the business is searching for new workforce solutions. (Havas et al. 2006 : 25)

### **4.1 Working beside studies**

Working beside studies is nowadays common especially among students in the academic level. Sometimes it might lead the student not to graduate in time as the studies lengthen. The number of working young students has increased within the last few years, and at the same time unemployment has decreased. Employment rate in the age group of 15-24 was 20 per cent in 2003 and 26 per cent in 2008.

Many Finnish students study and work at the same time. Working is often necessary in order to maintain the wanted standard of living, but also gaining work experience is considered to be important. Standard of living has to do with consumption habits and socialization concerning living habits. Students want to travel and

spend time outside their home and for achieving this more money is needed than just the study grant. According to a labor force research over 70 per cent of young people aged 15-24 were studying a degree in 2008 and almost one in three was employed at the same time. (Statistic Finland 2009)

Working beside studies helps the transformation into working life after graduation. Work experience is valuable when searching for a full time job. Other positive influences are that a student loan is not necessarily required when working beside studies. Negative influences of working beside studies might be the difficulty to combine work and studies, and the time spent working might also decrease the motivation to study. Sometimes this might lead to the student to drop out. Working also affects the amount of study grant.

#### **4.2 Placement in working life**

In 2004, 83.4 per cent of people with hospitality management degree were in employment relationship. Overall employment rate among polytechnic graduates is good, but still about 3 per cent lower when compared to university graduates. When compared to lower second degree graduates their employment rate is again significantly lower. (Statistic Finland 2007)

According to the statistics of the current situation of Vaasa University of Applied Sciences graduates, 69.3 per cent of the hospitality management graduates are in an employment relationship. The number might at first seem to be low, but it is explained by the high number of emigration of international degree students. Also the number of working students is high, 9.7 %. The number of unemployed people is low, only 2.3 %. (VAMK)

Entrepreneurship is a considerable option for a hospitality management graduate. The threshold for starting as an entrepreneur is relatively low. The business is quite young and especially program service operators are a new sector in tourism business. Even though entrepreneurship in Finland is not active enough, for example Finnish Lapland is a pioneer compared to Sweden, where there are much less program service companies.

### **4.3 Level of education compared to working life**

In the MATKA 2020 research done by Havas et al. (2006 : 46-50) several tourism business experts were interviewed in order to find out how well tourism education corresponds to working life. The aim was to survey their opinions of the future of tourism in Finland. In addition the purpose was to examine the future views, forms of co-operation and finding answers for how tourism education could be a part of the development of the whole industry. In the interviews education was discussed as a whole, not concentrating only on the bachelor degree.

The results that came up were for example that the education field was experienced to be complicated and overlapping. Tourism business usually described itself as a special kind of business, but this is not necessarily true. Depending on the job description, there is a lot of know-how needed that is not actually limited to the tourism field per se.

A clear result was that the study places in tourism and hospitality management should be decreased as soon as possible. Quality control should be the key issue. Tourism business is unable to employ even now all the graduates and provide meaningful places for practical training for everyone. In addition people that do not have any degree in tourism are competing for the same jobs. The whole industry suffers if an excessive amount of many experts are educated. The image of academy level degrees also was that they are too concentrated on working as a manager and too high level of education was considered to be unnecessary. The truth is however that without the experts and developers the industry would not go forward, but it would revert.

A bachelor level degree gives a good base for working in any kind of working tasks in the tourism business. In reality, the case however is that after graduation it is important to gain work experience of the right quality that supports the wanted career development. In some companies the job description might require extensive familiarization on issues and practices that the employee does not know beforehand, despite what degree they have. A new graduate also does not have enough experience to work for example as a manager. This of course is at some

level a matter of personality; someone might even start their own business very early.

Simply according to the education an individual has, it is hard to define how he/she will be employed. It is rather a sum of education, work experience and personality. In tourism business it is still also very common that the workforce is relatively uneducated and autodidact.

## **5 RESEARCH METHOD**

When conducting a research there are two ways of approaching; there is the qualitative and the quantitative research method. Quantitative research is used with big sample groups in order to get a board point of view. With quantitative method different kind of questionnaires are used. Qualitative research is used in order to get specific and detailed information, usually by interviewing people.

The main difference between these methods is the procedure. The basic distinction between these methods is that quantitative research measures something and qualitative research tries to understand the phenomena. (Tomas Sabel. Marketing research. 2009)

When collecting the primary data with qualitative methods understanding is emphasized, and the focus is on the respondent's own point of views. Data is collected through interviews, where the respondent has time to tell and explain his/her opinions and point of views. The approach is rational and psychological. Observations and measurements are done in natural settings. With qualitative methods it is possible to get a subjective 'insider' view. Different types of data collection in qualitative research are interviews, observations, focus groups, case studies and documentary method. Interviews are the most basic type of qualitative research. Because qualitative interviews are so detailed, 3-12 interviews are enough per one research. The amount depends on the implementation and if several methods are used in the same research or not. (Malhotra & Birks 2000 : 133-135)

In quantitative methods the collection of primary data focuses on testing and verification. The focus point is on facts and/or reasons. The approach is logical and critical. Contrary to qualitative research, the point of view is an objective 'outsider'. A survey is the most basic type of collecting the data in quantitative research. The minimum amount of respondents in quantitative research is about

50. Quantitative research can be implemented by telephone, e-mail, traditional mail or personal interviews.

Sometimes quantitative and qualitative methods can be combined. The use of multiple methods increases the reliability of the research. This can be done by for example adding open questions into a quantitative research questionnaire. (Katriina Broman. Methodology for studies and research. 2009) Qualitative method can also be used as provider of better understanding of issues that have remained unclear in quantitative studies. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008 : 5)

### **5.1 Qualitative research**

The qualitative research method was chosen for collecting the primary data. The methodology is unstructured and it is based on small sample groups, intended to provide insight and understanding. In this case where the research problem is to find out if the hospitality degree corresponds to working life well enough, qualitative method by using interviews is the best option. With a quantitative method a broader point of view could be reached, but the gained information would not be detailed enough. With qualitative interviews the point of views and personal opinions of the respondent are discovered.

Qualitative method is a more flexible way of researching feelings and experiences. With a quantitative method and ready answer options this would not be possible as deeply as wanted. In a qualitative interview respondents can express themselves with their own terms, and also additional information can be obtained, which would not be possible with a traditional quantitative questionnaire.

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008 : 5) state that often research project advisors easily accept that a student performs a purely quantitative research project and the option for choosing a qualitative method would require more justification. More than half of the theses are done by using quantitative research method and the method is also emphasized during the studies more than the qualitative one. However, the choice of the method depends on the research and it has to be justified in



both quantitative and qualitative cases. The justification should always be based on what you want to know on the basis of your research.

In this research an emotionalist (also called subjectivist) interview research approach will be used. In this approach interviews are considered to be a pathway to the respondent's authentic experiences. In this style of approach, the interview questions will not focus on information that much, but on people's perceptions, conceptions, understandings, viewpoints and emotions. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008 : 79)

The qualitative research method was chosen because it matches the aim of the research well. The aim is to get detailed information, opinions and find out the attitudes towards tourism business and the degree program of hospitality management. Therefore qualitative method is better than quantitative, which would give too broad information.

## **5.2 Sample group**

When defining a target population the nature of the research has to be taken into consideration. For exploratory research designs the sample size is usually small. These researches are often done using a qualitative research method. In quantitative researches the sample groups are bigger, the data is collected numerically and it is interpreted verbally. In qualitative research method, which is used in this case, the data is both collected and interpreted verbally, getting a deeper point of view even though with a smaller sample group. (Malhotra & Birks 2000 : 361)

The sample group consists of six individual interviewees. The first three interviewees are studying tourism and hospitality management at the moment and the rest are graduates that have already worked in the business for some time. The ones that are currently studying are at a different phase of their studies. This is important in order to get a broad range of opinions and experiences.

All the chosen respondents are either studying in Vaasa University of Applied Sciences at the moment or have already graduated from there. Because overall in

the tourism and hospitality business there are more women than men in the workforce, also in this research the division between gender is going to be uneven. The gender of the respondent is rather irrelevant considering the research, but in order to gain as diverse data as possible the respondents should not be a too homogeneous group of people. However, in order to get information that is current enough, respondents graduated earlier than 3-5 years ago will not be used. All the respondents should be in their 20's, which equals the common age a bachelor degree is completed.

### **5.3 Preparing the interviews**

There are two ways of conducting a personal interview. There are the unstructured and the semi-structured interviews. An unstructured interview is an informal interview on a certain topic. The researcher does not determine the respondent's thinking and so called schemas. The topic changes usually from the suggestion of the respondent. This kind of interview requires a lot of time and usually several different interviews with the same respondent. The interviews are recorded and later transcribed. Open unstructured interview is a good method when respondents' experiences of the topic vary a lot or when the topic of the research is highly sensitive.

A theme interview or semi-structured interview can be used in similar kind of situations as an open interview. The interview is focused on certain themes, which means that several topics have been determined, but the questions within the themes do not have a specific form. Certain themes are discussed, but discussion under these themes is relatively free.

Different aspects have to be taken into consideration before conducting the interview. How well the respondent is reached is the first issue. The aim should be that the respondent is reached within favorable circumstances, where the interview is easy and comfortable to conduct. One-on-one conversation is aimed in the interview; because in that case the respondent will express his/her point of views more freely. It is important to gain the respondent's trust and to find the ice-breaker in the beginning of the conversation. Interviews can be rather casual conversations

and it is also desirable in order to gain diverse information. Because it can be hard to take notes in a sprawling conversation, recording the interview is advisable. (Niskanen 2005: [mm.helsinki.fi/users/niskanen/kotu](http://mm.helsinki.fi/users/niskanen/kotu))

Group interviews could be a possibility when implementing this research, but personal interviews are estimated to be more effective in this case.

### **5.3.1 Semi-structured questionnaire**

A semi-structured questionnaire was chosen to be used as it corresponds to the aim of the research well. The same semi-structured questionnaire can be used for both sample groups; students and graduates. In order to gain useful and essential information a questionnaire has to be used, otherwise the conversation might get too sprawling. By deciding the themes and questions beforehand it can be made sure that essential information according to the research problem is collected.

The specialization of the respondents is found out before starting the interview, as it affects the point of views on some level. It would be beneficial to find respondents that have different life and work situations in order to get a diverse point of view.

The interview is divided into six different themes; life situation, work & education, studies, motivation, language and future. Life situation theme summarizes briefly the basic information of the interviewee. Work and education theme aims to examine the current situation of the interviewee's work and/or study life. In the studies theme the focus point is on the bachelor level studies, how the interviewee would evaluate the content and what is his/her experience of the professional skills the school should prepare graduates to have. The same theme continues when examining motivation and career development, but in this part also overall respect of tourism business is discussed. The next theme focuses on language skills more specifically, because mastering several languages is one of the most common preconceptions of tourism business. The final theme about future summaries what future plans the interviewees have, do they feel that the bachelor degree gives a good base for career development, or have they considered continu-

ing studies or even a change of field. This section also briefly examines the topic of the whole tourism business' future scenarios.

The questionnaire was formed partly based on the list of expectations concerning tourism and hospitality management degree set in the MATKA 2020 research completed by Havas et al. (2006 : 51) and partly based on the hypothesis which was represented together with the aim of the thesis.

#### **5.4 Implementing the research**

Social media and word of mouth were in a vital part when finding respondents to this research. Most of the respondents were contacted by e-mail or a form of social media (Facebook). A former co-worker of mine was a great help when I was looking for respondents that had already graduated.

The covering letter was only in Finnish, as I knew beforehand the respondents were Finnish speaking. Most of the potential respondents who I contacted with answered within a few days and an interviewing date could be set. With most of the cases the interviewee did not see the questionnaire beforehand, but the purpose and themes of the research were explained in the covering letter. This was not considered to be a problem among the respondents. Only one of them asked me to send the questionnaire before the interview.

The interviews were set at places quiet enough for recording to be possible; the school's cafeteria and library. The locations were also easy to find as the respondents were familiar with the school premises. The interviews were transcribed after recording, not more than a day after the interview. Transcribing the whole interview in detail was not considered to be necessary, because the objective wasn't to analyze speech or use of language, but content.

In qualitative research statistical generalizations are not the aim, so therefore the small size of the sample group is not a problem. The research problem was to find out opinions and experiences, so the best persons to ask are those who have a subjective point of view. The fact that I am also studying the field myself, however, affects the research, as my own opinions and understanding might affect the

themes chosen for the interviews. On the other hand the fact that I know the topic well has contributed taking up the essential themes considering the research problem.

### **5.5 Validity and reliability in research**

Reliability means consistency of the results. The less chances or accidents affects the results, the better and more reliable is the research. This usually means the larger the sample is the better is the reliability. The reliability of the research can be determined by repeating the research or by conducting a parallel research. Reliability means that the results would be consistent, even if conducting the research later on or with a different group of respondents.

Validity examines if we measure exactly what we intend to measure. The research problem and the actual research have to match. For the validity to be good it means that reliability has to be good as well. All measurement systems however are to suspect in some degree, because no experiment can be controlled perfectly.

Possible sources of errors with validity are for example poorly defined research problem, wrong target group or badly conducted sampling, poor questionnaire or interviews and poor analyzing skills. Also if the collected information is used for other purposes than intended, the validity is not good. Therefore it is important to specify the aim and purpose of the research before starting it.

When conducting a research with qualitative methods using interviews as a source of information, reliability might suffer because the results are highly dependent on personal opinions and attitudes of the interviewees. Personal factors such as stress, illness, misinterpretation and tiredness can have an effect on the answers. Information based on personal experiences might also change over time. (Tomas Sabel. Marketing research. 2009) (Kirk & Miller, 1987 : 21-40)

When discussing how well the aspects of reliability have been implemented in this research, it can be said that reliability is good. This can be seen in for example how the sample group was chosen. The dispersion of the respondents is good; there were people at different stage of their lives and studies. When conducting a

qualitative research the respondents' personal opinions and experiences affect the results, but still it can be estimated that if the same research were to be done again with the same kind of sample group, the results would be about the same. Possible ways of what could have been done to increase reliability would have been using a bigger sample group. However, when using qualitative research method the sample group cannot be too big in order to maintain the wanted time schedule and to keep the analysis of the results comprehensive enough.

Validity of the research can be examined by comparing the actual research to the research problem, which was to find out how well the hospitality management degree program corresponds to working life. The strong points of this research were that both the expectations of current students and the experiences of graduates could be examined. In addition both the content of the degree and experiences of working life were examined so it can be said that validity in this research is also good.

One way to increase validity would have been testing the semi-structured questionnaire form before starting the actual research. I did not, however, find this necessary and when I started collecting the data the questionnaire worked out well. A weak point considering validity also is that the student respondents were specialized in tourism and graduated respondents had restaurant management as specialization. It would have been more beneficial to divide the specializations in a different way, but as the specialization was not the main criteria when choosing the respondents, this happened inadvertently.

## **6 ANALYSIS**

In this chapter the results of the research are represented and analyzed.

The semi-structured questionnaire, which was used in the interviews, is as an appendix (appendix 3 & 4). The actual questions were formed during the interviews, depending on the interviewee and the discussed topics. Some interviews consisted of some extra questions outside the questionnaire, for example specifying questions about the interviewee's background.

The collected research data gave a relatively good image of how tourism as a business appears to the respondents. The dispersed field of business, as tourism is often described, is an interesting issue and also in this research it was clear that tourism and restaurant business are seen clearly as a two different segments. Hospitality management as a term includes both of them, but tourism is often seen to describe only travelling, even though it includes much more.

In the Finnish language there is no good translation for 'hospitality' in this context, which also partly affects how people see the division between tourism and restaurant business. Hospitality management binds them both together and it is a good term for defining the whole diverse business.

### **6.1 Life situation**

The respondent division was even; half were studying and half had already graduated. One of the respondents had only studied the field for a year, as other students were in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year. The other respondents had graduated in 2010. Even though it would probably have been good to have respondents that have more work experience after graduation, in this research it could be made sure that the respondents have up to date information about the degree program as it was not long ago since they were also students.

Other issues regarding life situation, such as marital status or family background were not considered to be relevant in this research. All the respondents were female, aged between 21 and 25.

## **6.2 Work and education**

### **6.2.1 Educational background**

Background education of all the respondents was upper secondary school with completed matriculation examination. One of the respondents had also a travel counselor degree from a vocational school.

Upper secondary school is the most common degree people have when they apply to universities. It is a general knowledge degree that does not prepare you to any occupation, but gives a good base for continuing studies.

### **6.2.2 Work experience**

None of the respondents had had work experience in the field before starting their studies. Most commonly the work experience was gained in the trade business; stores, supermarkets or other service business such as postal service.

The work experience the respondents had in hospitality business was first gained during the studies. The respondents also found it to be easier to apply for jobs in the business when you can show that you already study the field. To the employers it shows genuine interest and also professional skills of some kind, even though the degree is not yet completed.

### **6.2.3 Current situation**

All the respondents were in working life at the moment. The graduated respondents were working full time and the students part time beside their studies.

The respondents that were still studying did not have as stable a work situation as the others. They were working part time and in short employment relationships. Not everyone had a clear plan where they were going to be working during the oncoming summer season.



The graduated respondents had jobs that correspond well to the degree. As all of them had restaurant management as specialization, they were working for example as a waitress and a deputy manager in a lunch restaurant.

One of the respondents had been working in the same work place for a few years already, even before graduation. Even though the working duties were quite diverse, the original position had stayed the same. Graduation did not bring big changes to this, only the amount of working hours increased as the respondent was able to work full time after graduation.

### **6.3 Studies**

When examining the content of the degree the problematic issue was that with some of the respondents it had already been a few years since they had completed the basic studies when this study was carried out, so they did not necessarily remember them that specifically. When examining the specialization studies, some of the respondents in turn had not started them yet, and in this case the focus point in the interview was to study what their expectations of them were.

#### **6.3.1 Professional basic studies**

When asking opinions about the basic studies, during which the basic skills of both restaurant and tourism business are gained, the division between respondents was clear. The ones that had chosen restaurant management as a specialization considered the basic tourism studies rather useful as a general knowledge, but not something they are interested in. The case was vice versa with the respondents who chose tourism management as a specialization. The issue is interesting; there are two groups within the same study program that are so distinct from each other. All the respondents also mentioned that their choice of specialization was clear ever since they applied to the school. One respondent made an exception to this, and chose restaurant management specialization regardless of having a travel counselor degree from before. The respondent felt that it would not be beneficial to have two tourism degrees, and she would get more out of her overall education by choosing restaurant management as a specialization instead.

Even though the respondents were quite strictly focused on their chosen specialization, some of them had diverse work experience from both fields. Especially some of the tourism management students had worked also for example as a waitress. In those cases even if restaurant business was not something they are planning a career on, they valued the basic knowledge they had gained from their studies.

Entrepreneurship studies adduced different opinions. One of the respondents felt that it is difficult to understand the business from an entrepreneur's point of view when you are starting your studies at a relatively early age. It was estimated that adult education students would get more out of it, as starting your own business might be more realistic for them. On the other hand one of the respondents felt that studying entrepreneurship could have been useful, because the degree aims also for managerial duties, but the courses were too scattered and poorly planned. One suggestion was that for example the budgeting courses could have been combined with the entrepreneurship courses.

### **6.3.2 Professional specialization studies**

Specialization studies did not raise any particularly strong opinions, but some of the courses were criticized for not being advanced enough. One of the respondents felt that for example food production was studied too much in detail, even though there would have been more important things such as managerial skills.

Especially in the restaurant specialization the challenging issue is that the students have different educational background. Some of them might have a chef's degree already, and they are already familiar with the details of food preparation. On the other hand those who do not have experience in the field yet need to gain the basic information and skills.

Most of the respondents said that with the specialization studies there were courses they considered quite useless and not something they can profit from later in working life. However, it was acknowledged that it is important to understand the field from many different aspects.

### **6.3.3 Practical training**

Practical training was found to be a useful overall and a natural part of the studies. All the respondents, except for one, had already completed their practical training. The implementation of the training varied among respondents. Some of them had done all or parts of it abroad, some had done the whole training in Finland and in the same company they already had a workplace in, and some had had the opportunity to continue as a regular employee after the training. The way the practical training is completed is highly dependent on the student's own interest and his/her work and life situation at the moment.

Some of the respondents criticized the training for being too general and not fulfilling the aims set for it. In some cases the student was used only as free laborer, not enough responsibility was given and the employer was not interested in teaching the work tasks or the organizational culture more deeply. In these cases better co-operation with the school would help; the quality and content of the practical training could be specified more. Even though by signing the practical training agreement also the employer is committed to fulfill the objectives set for the training, in some cases it might still be difficult to change some employers' attitudes.

Practical training is only one small part of the students' work experience and even though it might open some doors, the respondents still felt the other work experience to be more important.

### **6.3.4 Working beside studies**

All the respondents had or had had a job at the same time they were studying. Not all of them were tourism related jobs. Especially during the first year or two of their studies the respondents considered more important to have a job of some kind, than specifically a job from the same field they were studying. Later the issue of right kind of work experience became more important. However, most of the overall work experience the respondents have is from service business, so in this case all kinds of customer service related jobs support one's professional skills also when discussing hospitality management.

Working beside studies was considered to be a positive thing overall, but also necessary in order for one to be financially stable. One of the respondents also mentioned that working supports the studies, as you get to know what the business is in practice.

Even though working beside studies was common among respondents, they still give studies priority. None of them found that working had affected in a negative way or delayed their studies. This was possible as the respondents intentionally restricted the working shifts for a maximum of three per week while studying. All the respondents were able to utilize better holiday periods as there was more time for work. The respondents also mentioned that their employers had always been supportive and understood that the school takes time.

An issue worth mentioning is also that one of the most important positive effects working beside studies has is the gained work experience. None of the respondents had work experience in hospitality management before starting their studies so it was considered to be important to gain it during studies. The respondents also felt that working beside studies helps the move into working life after graduation.

### **6.3.5 Readiness for working life**

When examined if the student has the proper readiness and professional skills for working life after graduation, none of the respondents could give a straight 'yes' answer. The issue is more complicated. One of the respondents felt strongly that she had graduated just to be a waitress and criticized the degree for not being comprehensive enough.

One aim of the bachelor degree is to prepare the student also for managerial duties. All the respondents however acknowledged that applying for those kinds of jobs is not realistic right after graduation. The degree gives you a good base, but working as a manager in any kind of company requires several years of work experience. With the work experience credibility and belief in your own skills will increase.

With all of the respondents it was clear that the completed degree was seen as a good base, but the rest is up to your own interest, skills, personality and how you are able to 'sell yourself' to the employers. Professional skills are not only something you learn at school, but a bigger picture that reinforces in time.

#### **6.4 Motivation**

Motivation can be understood as overall motivation or work motivation. According to Silvennoinen & Kauppinen (2006 : 26) motivation can mean a system of different factors that activate and guide one's behavior, and determines how a person is aiming for his/her goals. Motivation can be divided into internal and external motivation. Internal motivation has to do with a person's values and psychological needs, whereas external motivation is about the rewards and punishments.

In this section the reasons behind motivation were examined assuming that the overall respect of the field might have an effect on the students' and/or the employees' motivation.

Even though the respondents themselves had a good image of the field in general and felt secure about finding work also in the future, the overall respect of tourism and hospitality business was estimated to be low. The biggest reason for this is lack of information, ignorance and common prejudices. The respondents had not felt or heard straight underestimations of their choice of field, but they expressed that it brought neither admiration nor deference, as some e.g. academic field might.

Also restaurant- but especially tourism business is so extensive that for outsiders it is easy just to assume the easiest. Tourism business workers are seen only as tour guides and travel agency attendants. Restaurant business is run by waitresses and cooks. Also the fact that in hospitality management in general some people do not have any education in the field, they have just learned it all through work experience, affects the attitudes towards the bachelor's degree. The respondents also mentioned this as a challenging issue, it might be frustrating to have a degree

that took 3.5 years to complete and still do the same jobs as the others who do not have any degree. One of the respondents however felt that the degree gives you more and you have a larger view than the others.

It might be questioned what is the point of a bachelor's degree graduate to be working as a waitress, when they could have completed waitress' vocational examination that takes only two years. In these cases you have to however take into consideration the possibilities for promotion and other kind of moving forward in your career, as it is much easier with a bachelor's degree. The respondents that were working as waitresses at the moment also considered their current job to be just an interphase in their life.

Even though the respondents' motivation is high, some kind of insecurity was there too. This could be seen especially among the respondents that were still studying. They felt that they did not understand the field well enough yet, and therefore were not sure where they are going to end up after graduation. Despite the slight insecurity, the overall belief in the future was strong.

#### **6.4.1 Career development**

Career development was something that the respondents did not have a clear idea or plan of. The graduated respondents all said that they are not planning to stay in their current work place for long. Nowadays it is common in working life, and especially in this business, that people do not necessarily stay in the same workplace for several years. At this point of their life the respondents seemed to be happy for just having a job and promotions or aiming for managerial duties was not something they plan at the moment.

The essential goal of the hospitality management degree is that the student gets the readiness to operate widely as a specialist, developer and manager. All the respondents felt that the readiness for managerial duties is maybe exaggerated a bit; they were realistic about their opportunities and understood that working as a high level manager or a specialist is not realistic at this point. Not it is something that everyone wants. Higher salary is not always worth all the stress, responsibility and long hours. The respondents felt that more important than

aiming for managerial duties is to get a steady job after graduation. It would bring financial security and an opportunity to gain valuable work experience.

Since the business is so extensive it is important to know for yourself what your interests and skills are and then plan your career according to them. As one of the respondents said, a restaurant management specialization graduate has roughly three professions they are educated for; a cook, a waitress and a bartender. If there is a specific work status you are aiming for, it is essential to gain the right kind of work experience and work your way up from there.

Some of the respondents expressed doubts and worries about how they are going to find a job after graduation. Especially tourism related jobs are harder to find, and they are more often seasonal jobs than in restaurant business. This can also be seen when browsing the job adds in Vaasa region; there are very few if any purely tourism related jobs.

When hospitality business is compared to other entirely different fields which have a specific profession and position the employees are educated for and they have much less choices and specializations within their field. One example could be for example a kindergarten teacher. The issue is not the same in hospitality business, and it can be seen from both positive and negative perspective. In a way a restricted and not so wide profession brings security as you do not have the difficulty of choice. On the other hand it is the *freedom* of choice which better describes the field of hospitality.

## **6.5 Language**

As pointed out earlier in the hypothesis, exceptional language skills is one of the assumptions people have on the tourism business. This assumption was clearly pointed wrong when examining the respondents' opinions.

The fact that Vaasa is a bilingual city was considered to be a challenging, but still a positive thing among respondents. Most of the respondents were at the moment studying, or had already completed the 'language bath' degree, in which both Finnish and Swedish are used as a language of instruction. Even though a

bilingual study program was considered to be a good thing, and some of the respondents had chosen Vaasa specifically for this reason, some criticism rose up, too. Some of the respondents felt that the Swedish speaking courses had been spread unevenly throughout the school year. If there is for example a seven to nine month long break in between, it was questioned if the system really supports the idea of developing the students' language skills. Especially those who do not have good basic skills in Swedish from before might have difficulties to keep up. The system was also criticized for testing and evaluating the students' language skills too much, and not focusing on for example conversation skills and everyday small-talk, which would be more useful when entering working life.

The respondents that were studying in English also valued the possibility to study a bi-lingual degree, but estimated it to be too challenging for them.

The fact that mastering Swedish is naturally necessary in order to work in the Vaasa region was well acknowledged. Even though the level of Swedish skills varied among the respondents, they all pointed out that especially when working in customer service in Vaasa, language skills tend to improve quickly.

Some of the respondents had some basic skills in language such as German, Spanish and Russian, but generally everybody felt that mastering Finnish, English and Swedish is more than enough. This can also be seen browsing job advertisements in the Vaasa area; the applicants are required to speak Finnish, Swedish and English and other languages are seen as an advantage.

### **6.5.1 Internationality**

When discussing the ability to work abroad and/or with international issues, especially respondents who studied in English found it to be a great advantage that the degree is carried out in a foreign language. They also estimated that studying in English makes it easier to go abroad as an exchange student or later for work. All the respondents had already gained international experiences in the field, or were planning it. Improving language skills is not usually the main reason to go abroad, but exchange programs and doing practical training abroad are beneficial also from that point of view.



One of the respondents who was studying in Finnish said that the ability to work abroad does not necessarily come automatically with this degree. When you go abroad the first thing you run into is the different working life and culture, and it is also highly dependent on which country you choose. In Finland it is different; the employee is quite secured with all the holiday pays, trade unions and strict laws. Internationality could be emphasized more and the respondent said that it would be interesting to hear from someone who actually has worked abroad for some time.

The possibilities to go abroad during the studies were considered to be good. Most of the respondents had taken the chance to go abroad as an exchange student and especially the respondents that were studying in English said that it would be highly important for all students to use this chance while it is possible.

Almost all the respondents were interested in gaining more international experience also in the future. In most cases the idea was to work abroad for a few years. The respondents felt that international experience would be a great advantage later when applying for a job in Finland. The employers value diverse work experience, language skills and ability to understand multi-cultural work communities.

## **6.6 The future**

### **6.6.1 Continuing studies**

Most of the respondents had not thought about their continuing studies yet. All knew about the opportunity of a master level degree in hospitality management, but did not have more specific information or opinions about it.

Especially the respondents working in the restaurant business described the work to be hard and not something they are necessarily prepared to still continue for 20-30 years. Two of the respondents mentioned the possibility to educate themselves forward as teachers of restaurant business. Some of the respondents found continuing studies to be unlikely in their future plans; they felt that the bachelor's degree is enough.

Change of field was not something that the respondents were thinking at this point. They were happy with their choice. The young age distribution and the fact that the respondents had worked in the business only for a few years affect this issue. In some cases change of field might be possible in 10-20 years when their life situation and personal interests might be different. Sometimes especially in the restaurant business also health issues might force people to re-educate themselves.

### **6.6.2 Personal future plans**

Taking into account the young age of all the respondents, it is natural that they do not have a specific career plan at this stage of their life. Two of the respondents had a clear plan of aiming to be a hotel receptionist, but were also interested in other duties. Generally the dispersed field of business was seen as a positive thing; there are so many possible jobs you can apply for. This also brings some kind of security. If you are prepared to do diverse work tasks, there should not be a problem finding a job.

At this point of their life, none of the respondents could say for sure that they will stay in Vaasa. Especially the respondents that are not originally from the Vaasa and Ostrobothnia area said they most likely will move elsewhere at some point. The issue is yet dependent on their work situation.

### **6.6.3 Future of tourism and hospitality business**

Also in this section the division between tourism and restaurant business was made very clear by the respondents, most of them only estimated the future from the point of view of their specialization.

This topic was considered to be the most challenging one, and some of the respondents found it difficult to find answers. This might have to do with the nature of the business; it is changing fast, affected by trends and 'seizing the day'. Therefore it is not easy to estimate what the future will look like.

When discussing the future of tourism business everybody mentioned traditional travel agencies that will most likely vanish from the street sight in the near future.

They are considered to be old fashioned and only something elderly people want to use. Yet the tourism business is constantly growing, but changing, too. The respondents had a positive picture of the future even though they found it hard to describe their expectations more deeply.

The future of restaurant business was estimated to be growing too, as also in Finland eating out is becoming more common. One of the respondents hoped that the business would follow the trends and new ideas more, as us Finns tend to be a little behind when it comes to food trends. The business would be more alive if it would not stick too much to old ways and traditions.

### **6.7 Comparison to other researches**

When the results of this research are compared with the MATKA 2020 research completed by Havas et al. (2006 : 50) it is interesting to see how the opinions of the employers in the industry were mostly in balance with this research. They were asked about how they feel about the graduates' professional skills and readiness to working life. The results are similar especially when discussing placement in working life; only based on the degree is difficult to say where and how a graduate will be employed. Work experience and personal issues have a great importance on this. In MATKA 2020 research (2006 : 50) it was also estimated that in the future having a degree will be even more important, and there will not be as many employees with no education at all.

Some of the respondents in the MATKA 2020 research suggested that all the hospitality management students should have work experience in the field even before they apply to the school. This would increase the understanding of the field. Based on the results from my own research, I do not consider the suggestion to be realistic. As studies in a university of applied sciences are most commonly started in late teens or early 20's, it is rare that the applicant would have had the time to gain work experience in the field they want to study. Also at that age many are still uncertain what their future career might be.

There were still some dispersion with the answers when discussing the graduates' professional skills and readiness to working life; half of them thought that the

education provides the business with competent and actually beneficial people to the business and the others said that there are remarkable shortages in the graduates know-how and the employers suffer from it as they have to fill in the gaps by training the new employees. As a defense to the last mentioned claim it can be said that even though you are a hospitality management graduate, it is simply impossible to know ‘everything’. Is it not a common custom that a new employee has to be trained in and taught the ways and manners in the company? Policies and operation modes might differ remarkably in different companies. Here the diversity and broadness of this business rise up again.

### **6.7.1 The view of students and graduates**

In the MATKA 2020 research also the placement of graduates was studied with a quantitative research method. The results showed for example that more than 90 per cent of people with a bachelor’s degree were employed, but only one in three felt that their job corresponded to their education. The number is worryingly low. In MATKA 2020 research (2006 : 55) it was questioned if the study places in universities of applied sciences should maybe be decreased. It is not beneficial to have too over-educated work force; in most cases the vocational school hospitality management degree would be enough.

95 per cent of the respondents were planning on working in tourism business also in the future. Other possibilities were sales and marketing, international businesses, teaching and other service businesses. According to my research these are the most probable options a hospitality degree graduate might end up with. Internationality was brought up also in the MATKA 2020 research and 40 per cent of the respondents estimated that they will work abroad in the future. The most beneficial issues in the degree were considered to be internationality and cultures, languages, interaction and quality. In my own research languages were not one of the most beneficial issues, probably because especially in the Vaasa area mastering three languages is considered to be self-evident.

## 6.8 Conclusions

In this research the parallel of the hospitality management degree and working life was studied. The aim was to find out if the students and graduates are happy with their education and feel that the degree gives the proper readiness and professional skills for working life.

The degree is considered to correspond well to working life, but the extent of the field makes it difficult for students to understand what the tasks the degree qualifies for actually are. The overall attitudes and expectations of the respondents are after all positive and people trust the business to be active and growing also in the future. Economic situations such as recession affect the growth in a negative way, but these issues are considered to be quite short-term and not something that threaten the whole business as such.

Even though students studying this business are all graduated as bachelors of hospitality management, the division between restaurant and tourism business is clear. It might be questioned if it is beneficial that the business is so divided and the different segments are not connected enough. These are issues that could be emphasized more by the school. Specialization studies could also be extended so that the student would have more to choose from according to their own interests and future plans. For example the MICE industry (meetings, incentives, congresses and exhibitions) is something that is highly connected to the field and something many, especially tourism students, would be interested in, but the school only provides one virtual free-choice course concerning this topic.

The division to tourism and restaurant specialization also affects this research. As I personally am specialized in tourism business, also this research is made from that point of view. Even though the purpose is to study the hospitality business as a consistent whole, I still cannot understand restaurant business like the trained professionals do.

In this research the teaching methods and contents of the courses were not examined in detail, but based on the results it can be said also some adjustments to

the content of the degree should be made. For example the fact that some of the teachers do not have work experience in the field affects the amount of unnecessary and too broad information. In these cases for example guest lecturers could be used more.

When discussing what I would do differently if this research were done again the first thing that comes to mind is to plan the division of the respondents better. Also considering my own starting point it would have been interesting to interview someone who has already graduated and had tourism as a specialization. However, getting to know restaurant business a bit better also gave me some new perspective. It could be questioned if the sample group should have been bigger, but in this case I think the amount of diverse information would not have increased in the same relation.

When career development was examined one topic that missing in this research was if the respondents are satisfied with the wage level. Generalized in can be said that hospitality business (as other service businesses) is not usually the most well-paid business, but it depends a bit on what your status is.

This research could be continued by for example doing a quantitative research in order to get a larger view, and also include those who have worked in the business for several years. Also a deeper view could be added to examine reasons why people chose exactly hospitality management. Vaasa University of Applied Sciences could profit from a continuing research where the study module feedback would be compared to qualitative research methods in order to get a deeper knowledge of the students' opinions of course contents.

As a conclusion it can be said that this research achieved the aims set for it quite well, but the results show that the hospitality management degree in Vaasa University of Applied Sciences does not correspond perfectly to working life due to the extent and diversity of the field. Making the most out of the education is up to the student and the school should provide more opportunities for that.

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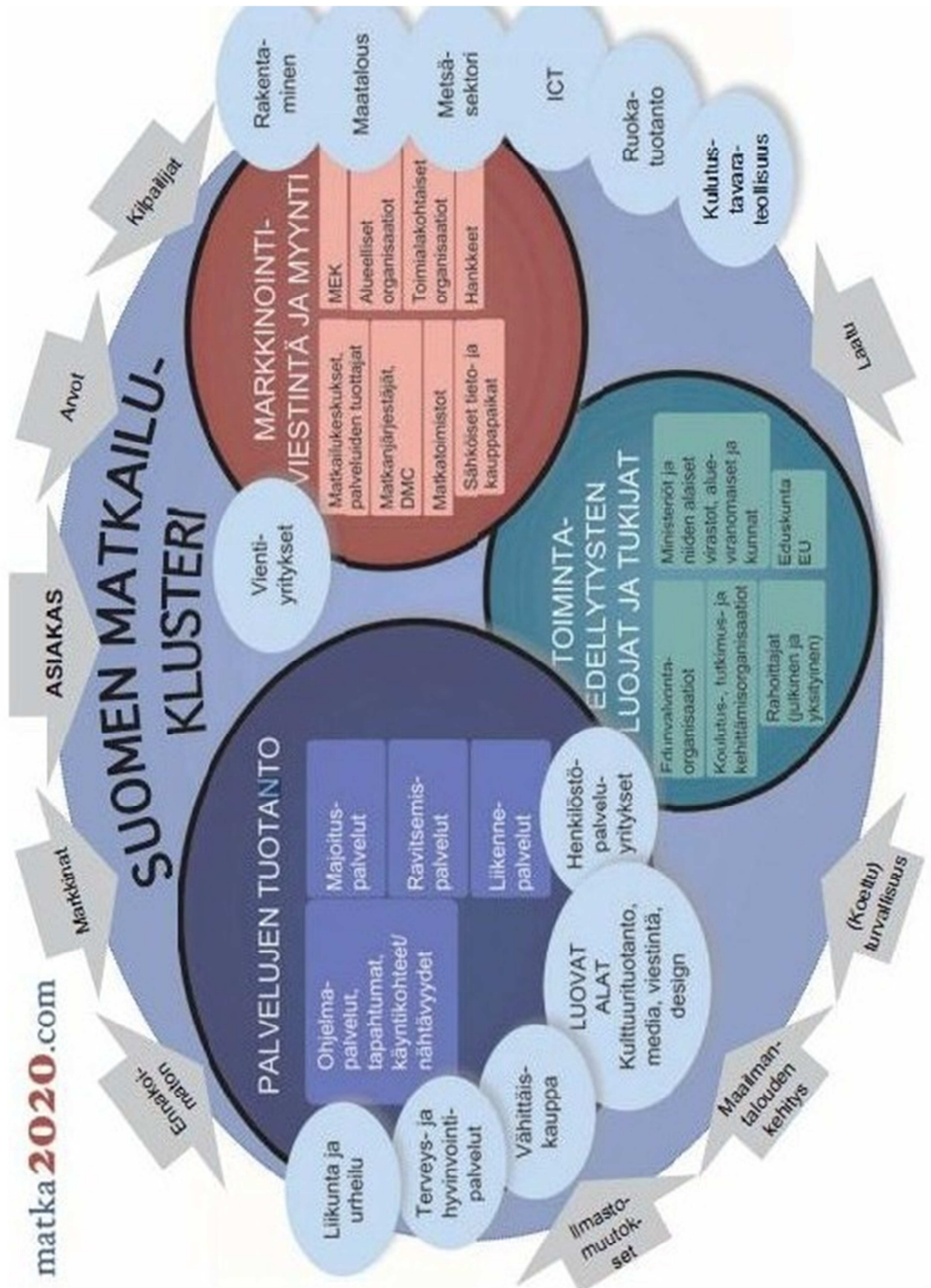
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FIGURE 2

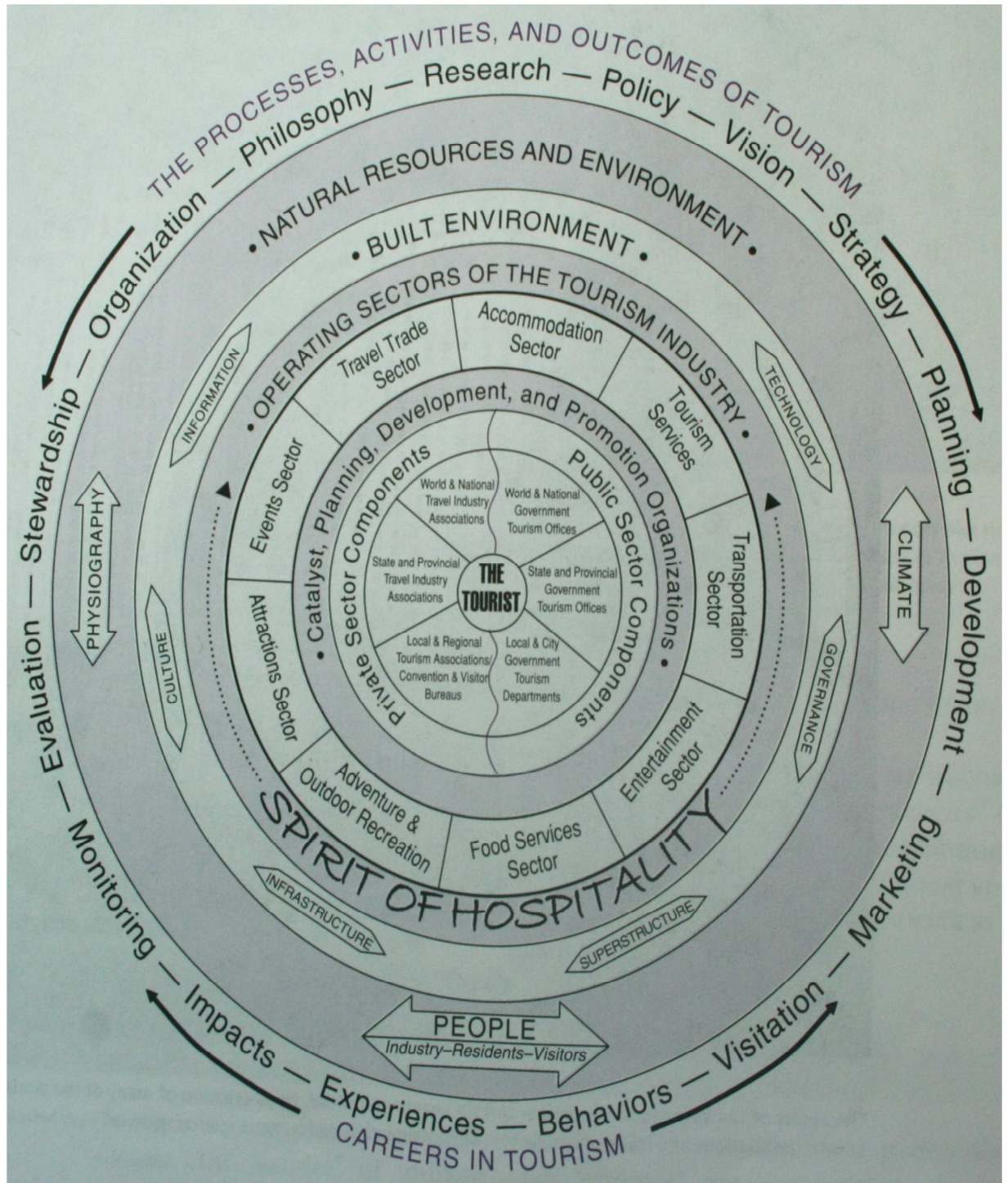
The Finnish tourism cluster. Havas et. al MATKA 2020 (2006 : 20)



APPENDIX 2

FIGURE 3

The tourism phenomenon figure: Components of tourism and tourism management (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006 : 14)



## APPENDIX 3

### SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE IN FINNISH

Olen Petra Päivärinta, neljännen vuoden matkailualan opiskelija Vaasan ammattikorkeakoulussa. Opinnäytetyönäni teen tutkimusta siitä kuinka restonomikoulutus koulussani vastaa työelämää opiskelijoiden ja jo valmistuneiden näkökulmasta. Tulokset tullaan käsittelemään luottamuksellisesti yhteenvedoina useiden henkilöiden mielipiteistä, eikä haastateltavien nimiä mainita.

### HAASTATTELU

#### 1. Elämäntilanne

Valmistunut ( )

Opiskeleva ( )

Ikä

#### 2. Työ ja koulutus

Koulutustausta

Matkailualan työkokemus

Muu työkokemus

Nykyinen työ / asema

Kuinka pitkään samassa työpaikassa / missä vaiheessa opinnot

#### 3. Opinnot

Suuntautuminen

Työharjoittelu

Työskentely opintojen ohella

Tutkinnon sisältö

## APPENDIX 3

### SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE IN FINNISH

Valmius työelämään opintojen jälkeen (taidot)

#### **4. Motivaatio**

Miten tutkinto tukee urakehitystä

Näkemykset alasta, arvostus

#### **5. Kieli**

Kielitaito

Valmius työskennellä ulkomailla

#### **6. Tulevaisuus**

Jatko-opinnot

Omat tulevaisuuden suunnitelmat

Matkailualan tulevaisuus



## APPENDIX 4

### SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE IN ENGLISH

I'm Petra Päivärinta, a fourth year student at Vaasa University of Applied Sciences. I am conducting a research aiming to examine how well the hospitality management degree program at Vaasa AMK corresponds to working life. The gained information will be processed confidentially and the names of the interviewees will not appear in my thesis. The results will be processed as summary of several interviewees' opinions.

### INTERVIEW

#### **1. Life situation**

Graduated ( )

Currently studying ( )

Age

#### **2. Work and education**

Educational background (other than studies at VAMK)

Work experience in tourism business

Other work experience

Current work situation/position

How long have you been at the same workplace / on what stage are you with your studies

#### **3. Studies**

Specialization

Practical training (What? Where? Usefulness?)

Possible working beside studies, positive/negative impact

## APPENDIX 4

### SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE IN ENGLISH

Content of bachelor degree (basic studies, specialization, thesis)

Readiness for working life after studies

#### **4. Motivation**

How does education support your career

Outlook and respect of tourism business, possible disrespect or underrating

#### **5. Language**

Language skills

Readiness to work abroad and/or with international issues

#### **6. Future**

Continuing studies

Future plans

Future of tourism business and what it requires from employees