

# SHARING ECONOMY IN CULINARY TOURISM

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Tämän opinnäytetyön toimeksiantaja on Lapin yliopiston hallinnoima projekti ”Jakamistalous matkailussa”. Hankkeessa on kartoitettu jakamistalouden tilannetta erityisesti Lapissa, sekä jakamistalouden eri muotoja. Hankkeen avulla lappilaiset yritykset ovat kehittäneet omaa liiketoimintaansa.

Opinnäytetyön tavoite oli selvittää jakamistalouden elämyksellisyyttä. Vertailututkimus tapahtui Yhdysvaltojen ja Suomen jakamistalouden alustoilla tarjottuja ruokakävelyitä analysoiden. Lisäksi kartoitettiin alueiden ruokakulttuureiden erityispiirteitä ja sitä, miten nämä ruokakulttuurit näyttäytyvät jakamistalouden palveluissa. Työn tietoperustassa käsitellään jakamistalouden ominaisuuksia sekä elämyksellisen matkailutuotteen suunnittelun perusteita. Lisäksi käydään läpi ruokakulttuureita ja niiden merkitystä matkailulle.

Tutkimusmenetelmä on kvalitatiivinen eli laadullinen. Opinnäytetyön aineisto on kerätty haastattelemalla kolmea ruokakävelyopasta, sekä havainnoimalla osallistuvasti kahta Airbnb ruokakävelyä. Litteroitu aineisto analysoitiin teemoitellen yhdistäen samanlaiset aihealueet.

Työn tutkimustuloksien perusteella käy ilmi, että tutkimuksen kohteilla olleilla Suomen ja Yhdysvaltojen Airbnb- ruokakävelyillä on vain lieviä eroja. Yhtäläisyyksiä löytyy enemmän. Oppaiden käsitykset siitä, millainen ruokakävelyoppaan tulisi olla sekä paikalliset kulttuurierot osoittautuivat suurimmiksi eroavaisuuksiksi.

Avainsanat                      jakamistalous, ruokakulttuuri, Airbnb, Airbnb elämykset

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The topic of this thesis is sharing economy, and especially Airbnb Experiences. American and Finnish food cultures in Airbnb Experiences were compared in the research. The sharing economy is a trend that has become to the tourism market to stay. Customers' values of authenticity lead them to expect more local products and services than before. Food Walks are services in Airbnb Experiences website, where local expert takes a small group of people on a walking tour in a neighbourhood while customers are tasting local delicatessens. The research is done for University of Lapland project "Sharing Economy in Tourism."

The research was conducted by interviewing three Airbnb Food Walk hosts and observing two food walks, both in America and in Finland. The research methodology was qualitative, and the data collection methods were participative observation and interviews. The main concepts of the research are sharing economy, Airbnb Experiences, Experience Design and culinary tourism.

The research method used to analyse the results is benchmarking. The method is introduced in the methodology part. The benchmarking was limited to Helsinki, Finland and Santa Barbara, the U.S.A. The theoretical background was collected from e-books, journals and academic articles. The information was grouped in themes using the thematizing method.

The result of the thesis showed that there are only few differences between the American and Finnish Food Walk products. However, cultural differences and the characteristics of the American and Finnish host differ.

**Keywords** sharing economy, Airbnb, Airbnb Experiences, food culture, culinary tourism

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Sharing economy has emerged as an urban trend during the past few years. Sharing economy, also known as collaborative consumption, is about lending, borrowing and shifting. The best-known platforms of sharing economy are Uber, Couchsurfing, and Airbnb accommodation. (Shareable Tourism 2018.) This thesis discusses sharing economy, more precisely Airbnb Experiences and culinary tourism. Analysing the Airbnb Experiences as a phenomenon brings better understanding of community consumption.

The commissioner, The University of Lapland have projects called “Possibilities and Challenges in Peer-To-Peer Accommodation” and “Sharing Economy in Tourism”. The aim of the projects was to increase the traveller’s skills in the sharing areas, as well as the skills of companies related to community consumption (Sharing Economy in Tourism 2019). The Sharing Economy in Tourism project was first launched in August 2016 by The University of Lapland in collaboration with the Lapland University of Applied Sciences, and the “Possibilities and Challenges in Peer-To-Peer Accommodation” was launched 2018. This research was conducted to the project to help them broad the topic about shareable tourism in other platforms. The start-up funding, 67 928,00 euros, was provided by EAKR and Lapin Liitto.

The topic was easy to choose; the author has a personal passion toward culinary tourism and into the United States. The food walks are activities provided by Airbnb Experiences and they give new perspectives into one’s insight about sharing economy and community consumption. The thesis is based on academic sources as well as research material that writer has collected. In this thesis, the aim is to clarify the definition of culinary tourism on the sharing economy platform.

The methods used in this thesis are benchmarking and the data was analysed by thematizing. The interviews objective was to gain broad vision of Airbnb Experiences. The observation aimed for critical analyses of the experiences from a professional aspect. The results of the observation and interviews can be used in further research as well as developing the Airbnb Experience products.

## 2 SHARING ECONOMY

### 2.1 Concept of Sharing Economy

The sharing economy provides chances to respond to the tourists' needs of become familiar with the local life. Tourists are interested in local life and willing to engage to locality. They are seeking recovery through locality and active experiencing. For businesses, sharing economy provides options to become entrepreneur and gain trust and wider consumer choice. Locality, spontaneity and flexibility are fundamental values in sharing economy. (Posio, Kyyrä, Rahikainen & Rantala 2016, 11–12.) The sharing economy phenomenon is driven by traveller's willingness for sustainability, enjoyment of the activity and economic gains (Hamari 2016, as cited in Cheng 2019, 58). The development of the internet has made sharing economy possible for different platforms.

This kind of an experience additionally offers guests the opportunity to have the local experience by living like a local, interacting with the host, and staying in a 'non-touristy' area (Guttentag 2013,6) For instance, berry picking, and sauna experience are memorable activities for tourists visiting Finland.

In addition, tourists' opinion and desires have changed during the years. Independency and the freedom to decide the travel schedule has become a major selling asset in the tourism field. The young generation wants to explore unique and personalized trips, as well as concrete learning experiences. They desire to explore authentic experiences which are less standardised compared to traditional travel companies' trips. (Ferrer 2018.) To experience locality, sharing economy can respond to customers demand via Airbnb, Couchsurfing and Uber (Shareable Tourism 2018).

According to Botsman and Rogers (2010, as cited in Belk 2013, 1597), sharing economy can be viewed as traditional sharing, bartering trading, gifting and swapping. Nevertheless, the view is too broad and mixes marketplace exchange and sharing. Sharing economy makes a great business tool for those people who are flexible, innovative and forward-thinking. (Belk 2013, 1597.) According to Frenken et al., (25, 2015) the sharing economy is about granting each other

access to underused physical benefits. In fact, sharing economy can be divided in three parts. First, sharing is about consumer-to-consumer platforms and not about business-to-consumer. Second, sharing is about consumers providing each other momentary access to a service. Lastly, sharing is about efficiency of using physical assets. (Oskam & Boswik 2016, 25).

Sharing economy is also referred as collaborative consumption and the concept includes several areas: sharing space, shared departments, purchasing, services and employees. The collaborative consumption is an opposite term for hyper consumption, that has been a trend for a long time. Current trend, sharing economy, is powerful, cultural economic force. Hyper consumption is ending since lending, gifting and renting are actions that are the new trend. Sharing economy is not only a new phenomenon, but also a chance to be sustainable and utilize the world's resources. (BrandBa 2017.)

Collaborative consumption can give economic, environmental and societal benefits in tourism. It can help solve social issues such as discrimination. (Bremser & Alonso-Almeida 2017.) Other sharing economy platforms, such as Uber, Airbnb and Couchsurfing were before non-existent on the market. Uber is an affordable option for taxis where the Uber drivers can become entrepreneurial. Hence, Airbnb allows people to rent their houses, and Couchsurfing allows people to sleep on local resident's couch without a cost. (Oskam & Boswik 2016, 26).

The social networking through mobile devices expedites the appearance of new models of collaborative consumption. The sharing economy assigns to practises, platforms and models that use community to let individuals to share access to products and services. Sharing access to services and services help consumers save money and help providers earn money easily. Furthermore, travellers gain new social connections and sharing economy offers access to local knowledge. Locality and flexibility are key factors that drive travellers to choose services from local people. However, mutual trust is the key in sharing economy. Additionally, sharing economy facilitates services to be offered in destinations where ordinary businesses might not be beneficial. (Posio et al., 2016, 10–11.) According to Geron (2013, as cited in Yoonjoung 2016, 167) sharing economy has allowed

people to create markets out of assets and services that were not as monetizable objectives before. Sharing is about more dynamic use of assets; physical goods can go unused, but people cannot (Oskam & Boswijk 2016, 26).

According to Bremser and Alonso-Almeida (2017), sharing economy has grown due to the increase of urbanization and decreased importance of purchasing power. Digitalization is one of the reasons why sharing economy has become so popular. New technologies and digital platforms have made possible to extend alternative exchanges between strangers. Sharing economy allow consumer to compare prices between providers and review users' opinions. (Ferrer 2018.)

Although sharing economy has faced legislative challenges, for instance in taxation, it can be presuming as a permanent trend in tourism field. The sharing economy has remodelled tourism sector by affecting areas by peer-to-peer sharing as residents share tours and meals together with visitors. (Yoonjoung 2016, 168.)

## 2.2 Airbnb and Airbnb Experiences

Airbnb has rapidly gained popularity among people across the world. It was established in San Francisco in 2008, and nowadays a total number of more than 200 million guests across the world has been reached. (Airbnb 2017, as cited in Cheng 2019, 58). Airbnb is part of a larger rise in the sharing economy (Guttentag 2013, 4). Airbnb can be thought of as a 'disruptive innovation' (Christensen & Raynor 2003), because of the company's innovative internet-based business model. Airbnb defines itself as "a trusted community marketplace for people to list, discover, and book unique accommodations around the world" (Airbnb 2013 as cited in Guttentag 2013, 2).

The new business model can help to improve tourism industry' competitiveness and gives more control for the consumer. However, common opinion is that sharing economy lacks legislation, since many activities are not covered by the current legislation. (Ferrer 2018.) The Airbnb company has helped foster expansion of the informal tourism accommodation sector. The 'informal sector' refers to the production of goods that are concealed from public authorities. Since Airbnb renting occurs largely in the informal sector, guests can generally avoid



paying the taxes that are typically charged in the regular hospitality sector. (Guttentag 2013, 9–10.)

One form of sharing economy is Airbnb Experiences. According to the Airbnb webpage, the Airbnb experiences are activities hosted by locals. Activities, such as workshops, tours and experiences offer rather informal authentic local lifestyle. Anyone who has a passion, knowledge and resources to share, can be an Airbnb experience host. Hosts create not only successful events, but also lasting relationships and memories. (Airbnb 2017a.)

The Airbnb experiences offers variable activities around the world: making paella in Spain or visiting the Eiffel tower with a local in France. Hosts provide the experience by telling unique stories and reasons to visit non-touristy, or even hidden places. The Airbnb Experiences webpage sums up four qualities: access, perspective, passion and participation. (Airbnb 2017a.)

On the Airbnb Experience main page, several activity options can be decided (Figure 1). Tourist looking for an activity can decide the date, number of guests, price and time for the experience. After looking up the webpage, activities can be compared, and customer may decide where the activity will be executed. Therefore, the main page shows the activities that have got the best rates from other people. In every activity is a picture representing the experience, and the picture is part of advertising the event for the consumer. Star rating, price, theme and all basic information are provided in the front page. Themes of the Airbnb Experiences are entertainment, workshops, nightclubs, sports, history, wellness, art, music, nature, concerts and restaurants. (Airbnb 2020.)

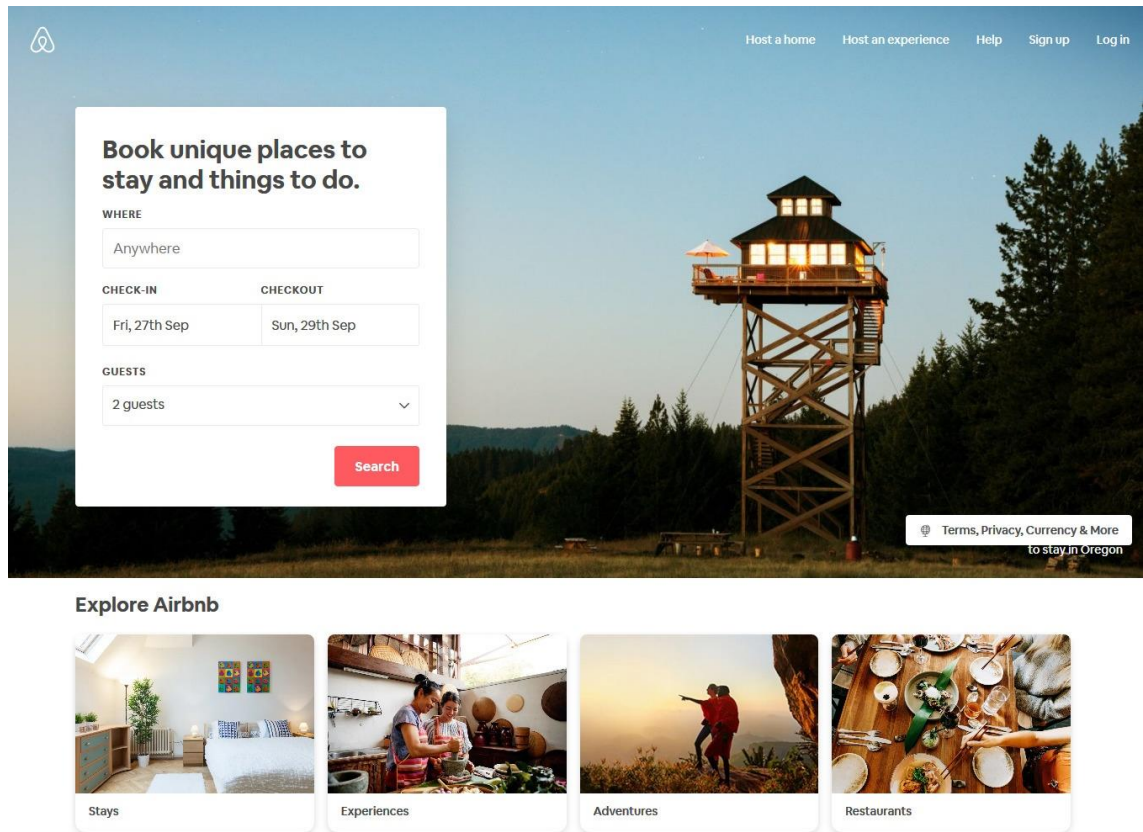


Figure 1 Airbnb Webpage (Helpie WP 2020)

By clicking a certain event more information of the experience will be seen. Hence, meeting point, host description and the activity insight are described more detailed. Additionally, it is explained what is included in the price and what to tourist should take with. Depending on the activity, it might be an umbrella or warm clothes, for instance. The webpage provides other options of other activities tourist might be interested in. The reservation schedule, availability and pictures from the host are included in the layout. (Airbnb 2020.)

The collaborative consumption requires trust between customer and provider. The new phenomena bring strangers closer to each other and to make it successful, there needs to be trust towards each other. The whole incorporation is doomed if the trust is not fulfilled. For instance, Airbnb builds trust by letting people to rate their experiences and describe them. (BrandBa 2017.) Thus, Airbnb features allow trust to be established between hosts and guests.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to predict the Airbnb's future. In fact, the future of Airbnb is threatened by general legal issues. However, it is worth researching potential threats to Airbnb's future and Airbnb's potential impacts on destinations in tourism. (Guttentag 2013, 8–13.)

### 2.3 Authenticity

One of the main reasons people choose sharing economy over traditional service providers, is the authentic experience. Authenticity is one of the main themes when thematising the pull factors considering Airbnb Experiences (Hanks 2020).

According to Pine (2011) there are 5 genres in authenticity. First, natural authenticity that includes natural responsibility. Not artificial materials are preferred. Company that is supporting natural authenticity is for example Whole Foods. The idea of natural authenticity is that it is not harming environment. Natural ingredients are focused on as well as untouched materials by human hands and products that exist in natural state for instance, hand-crafted sea salt. In Airbnb Experience, sustainability was an important or even self-evident part of the product. (Pine 2011.)

The second, original authenticity is something unseen or being the first of its kind. It is not just physical goods, but also services, for instance Airbnb Experiences, because it is something new in the tourism field. The third is exceptional authenticity. It is about fulfilling individual preferences and executing services exceptionally well. The Airbnb Experiences is all about creating memories and fulfilling the expectations customer may have. (Pine 2011.)

According to Pine (2011), in referential authenticity people tend to perceive as authentic that which refers to some other context. The last authenticity genre is influential authenticity. People think the product is authentic when it calls human beings to a higher goal. Companies want to feel influential by using three word offering, for instance, fair trade coffee or dolphin saved tuna. (Pine 2011.)

Continuing about authenticity, Pine (2009) questioned whether something is real-real or real-fake, or fake-fake. It is about the relationship between the company

and the output. For instance, if the product says what it is, and it is true to itself then it is real-real. If it does not say what it is and it is not true to itself, then is it fake-fake. But, if it says what it is but it is not true to itself, then it is called real-fake. For instance, Las Vegas that has fake Paris and New York, might be real for people who has never got to experience the actual cities. In that situation they are real for the people, although they are not real cities. Finally, it can be said that Airbnb Experiences are authentic, and they are true to itself and they are offering what they are claiming. Therefore, Airbnb Experience is real-real.

### 3 EXPERIENCES AND EXPERIENCE DESIGN

#### 3.1 Concept of Experience

According to Pulju (2019) meaningful experience can be described as multi-sensory and positive experience that might offer the recipient a personal feeling of change. When building an experience adding details that reinforce the experience is crucial.

According Pine and Gilmore (1999, 12, as cited in Ramos, Henriques, Lanquar 2016), a tourist experience can be defined as a set of activities in which individuals engage. For Oh et al. (2007, 120 as cited in Ramos et al 2016), a tourist experience is something pleasant and memorable. Experiences allows tourists to build their travel experiences so that these satisfy a wide range of personal needs (Ramos et al 2016).

The experiences must meet the customer needs and in order the experience to be successful, executing theoretical base is crucial. Hence, experiences can be divided into four categories. Pine and Gilmore (1998) have created the four realms of an experience: entertainment, educational, aesthetic and escapist (Figure 2).

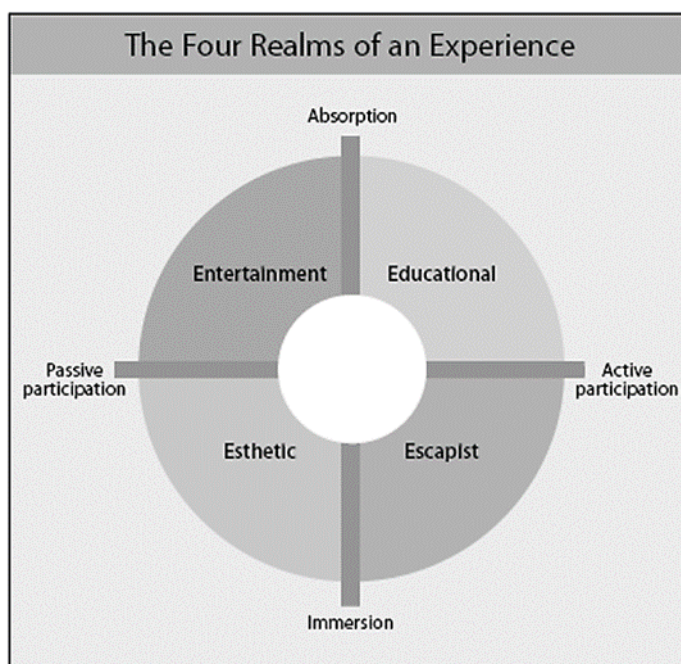


Figure 2 2020. (Pine & Gilmore 1998)

Entertainment provides joy for example via watching tv. Often people are observing the event, leading to the passive participation. Another passive participation includes aesthetic experience. Customers have no effect on the activity. Experience should be educational and provide new knowledge. Escapist experiences involve great tourist immersion. It offers an escape from one's daily routines. In the middle of the spectra, there is a sweet spot, which is an ideal point of the experience. In general, the richest experiences achieve the sweet spot, such as Disneyland.

### 3.2 Experience Triangle

The meaningful experience triangle offers five elements that helps to analyse and understand meaningful experience aspects. Functional experience product includes all five elements included on each level of the experience. (Pulju 2019.) In Airbnb Experiences, all factors should be included in the experience.

An experience is affected by customer's own background; therefore, the individuality must be considered in the triangle (Figure 3). For instance, it includes client orientation. Authenticity is the credibility of the product and it reflects the existing lifestyle of the region. The food walks should see every customer as individual while providing authentic service. All products that want to achieve to be memorable must have a good story behind. The story is a base for the unique food walk experience. It is important to bind the various elements to make the experience compressed. Additionally, the story holds factual and fictional elements which spices up the tale.

Multi-functionality perception should provide visual influence, odours and aroma, as well as provide ability to taste, feel and hear. Stimulus must be balanced, since imbalance might lead to customers suffer at the event. During the food walks, it is easy to make sure all the senses are concluded. Smell and taste of the food are in central focus, but also the hearing, such as distracting noises might affect to the experience. The overall feeling of the food walk is crucial because that creates the positive experience.

Event should be out of ordinary and provide contrast to customer's perspective. The food walks differ from people's daily life therefore creating a contrast. In order to succeed with being memorable, fluent interaction is the key. Interaction should awake the feeling of community, experiencing the event together as family or community. (Pulju 2019.) Interaction between the customer depends on the customers personality but should be smooth and the discussion should feel natural for the customer.

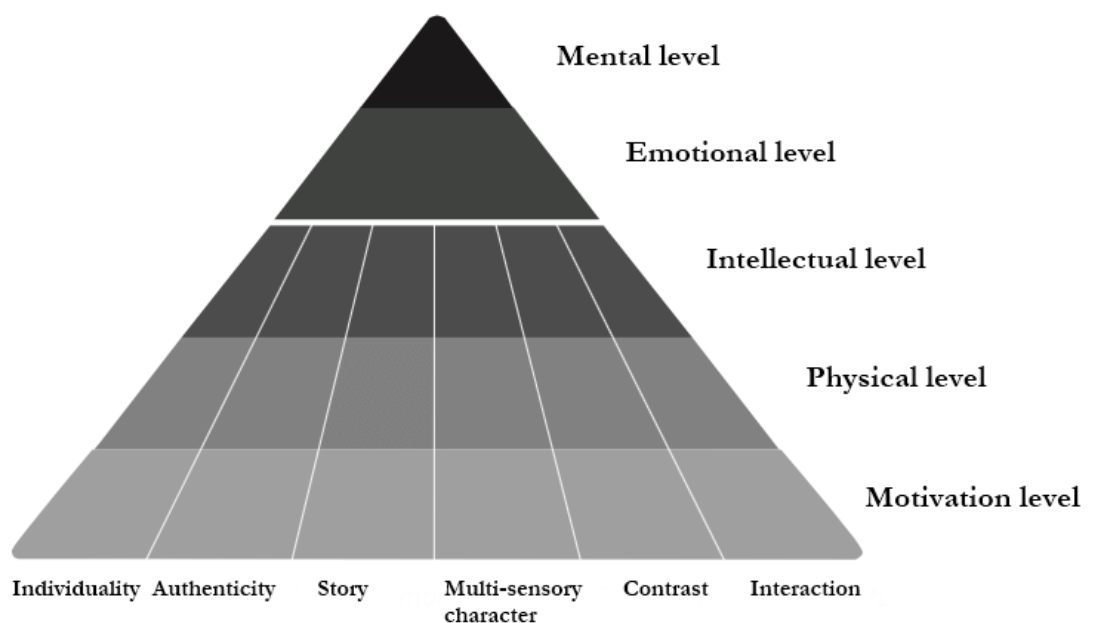


Figure 3 2020 Model of the experience pyramid (Tarssanen & Kylänen 2005, 135-136)

The lowest, motivational level includes interest. The event must awake the interest of the recipient. Above it, there is a sense perception, which is part of the physical level. In the middle, there is rational level which includes the learning part. Thus, the recipient learns new skills or adapts new information at the event. In order to event to be meaningful, achieving the emotional level and involvement in experience is valuable. The highest level of the triangle is change on a mental level. The ideal event affects to recipient's soul and persona so much that it creates a change in their mindset. (Tarssanen & Kylänen 2005, 135-136.)

### 3.3 Concept of Experience Design

The reason to take an insight to the experience design is because the thesis is based on creating and developing, thus executing experiences. Therefore, designing an experience is part of the service process. For Airbnb Experience hosts it is crucial to understand how and why to engage the customer. Furthermore, creating their business vision, mission and values are an essential part when it comes to Airbnb Experiences.

According to Newbery and Farnham (2013, 8) experience design as systematic approach of how design is evaluating solutions and how it deals with opportunities. The objective of the approach is to make sure that customers will stay engaged with the services and products but also receive recognise value. Basically, experience design delivers quality and value in customer service. Experience design can help businesses to build a vision how to look at strategies, problems and tactics. In experience design, it is important to understand what points are for any given stage of the customer experience. (Newbery & Farnham 2013, 8-9)

Managing a business where design plays a crucial role, is becoming more complex creating disjointed customer experiences. The strategic framework of experience design contributes the trade to co-operate more adroitly when a business is aiming at creating value and engaging customers. The structure of experience design allows companies to convert competitors. The experience design concludes all the activities that bring brand to live through value to customer. It takes into account all the touch points along the customer journey to maximise the value delivers. It is important to keep the value engaged around the customer for as long as it is possible. (Newbery & Farnham 2013, 18.)

Newbery and Farmham (2013, 18) states that the main principles of the experience design are time, brand intent, engagement experience as well as products and services. The objective of the experience design is to create competitive advantage with lasting customer relationships. It is crucial to manage the brand to make sure that there is equity through loyalty.



Therefore, the experience design helps business to differentiate their products and deliver value more effectively. It can help start-up businesses to dispose efforts with time and money. Experience design helps businesses to improve their performances and deliver innovations to customers. (Newbery & Farnham 2013, 170.)

### 3.4 Brand Storytelling

Storytelling is an essential tool when creating Airbnb Experiences. Without stories, the Airbnb Experience hosts are only delivering services, not experiences. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the structure of storytelling and its importance in experiences. The stories that were told in the food tours were about the local history or heritage. For instance, food tour in Lapland uses stories about reindeers, while providing reindeer meat for the customers. In Santa Barbara, the stories concluded background about the area called Funk Zone.

According to Mossberg (2008, as cited in Ryu, Lehto, Gordon, Fu, 2018) brands have used stories to create a brand culture internally and externally. People tend to believe in fantasies (Jensen 1999, as cited in Ryu et al., 2018), therefore many businesses tell their brands with their own stories (Holt 2003; Holt and Thompson 2004 as cited in Ryu et al., 2018). Company can develop its story to convey what its brand stands for (Fog et al., 2010 as cited in Ryu et al., 2018).

Ritz-Carlton (2019 as cited in Luxury Hotel Association 2019) states that storytelling uses “Wow” stories. A “Wow” story is a written note where an employee describes a unique moment with client or co-worker. These stories are used to engage and encourage workers and the brand can use them in customer-facing campaigns. Via those campaigns’ customers sense a deeper purpose that increases customer loyalty and advocacy. (Luxury Hotel Association 2019.)

As shown in Figure 4, there are three steps which lead to strong brand values and eventually successful business brand. Consumers can experience the brand story and employees get motivation to achieve the brand goal. According to

Mckee and Fryer (2003, as cited in Ryu et al., 2018) brands need to take the structure of the story into account if compelling brand story is wanted. The brand storytelling process can offer special opportunities for creating a brand identity and building a brand meaning.

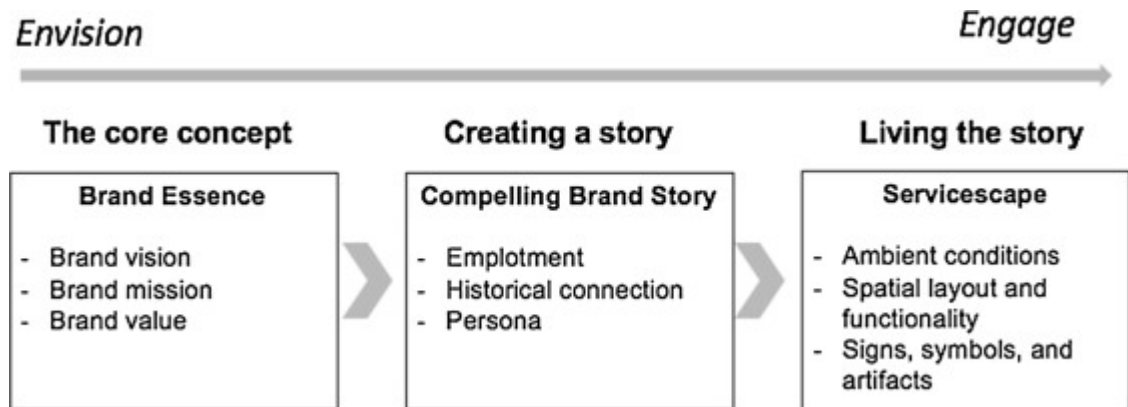


Figure 4. A process and component model of compelling brand storytelling (Ryu et al., 2018)

Urde (2003, as cited in Ryu et al., 2018) states that brand essence is an important first stage when answering to people why people should care about the business or its service. Brand essence embodies what brand owners think the brand is. (Drucker, 1974; Kelly, 1998 as cited in Ryu et al., 2018) The credibility and brand strengths will suffer if the essence is not kept connected in the story. The next step, building a story shapes the efforts of partners as they strive to realise its vision (Baker & Boyle, 2009, as cited in Ryu et al., 2018). The last step of the process is servicescape. It is a physical factor of service surroundings that might have influence on customer behaviour. These factors are ambient conditions, spatial layout and sign, symbols and artifacts (Bitner 1992, as cited in Ryu et al., 2018).

There are several benefits in using storytelling and storification in service design. It increases the value of the service because services without stories are not enough anymore. Storytelling creates a bridge between digital and physical service environments. In fact, stories increase the competitive advantage and provides better result while enhancing profitability. Businesses must constantly produce comprehensive experiences that are unique and memorable. Story-

based service design is a useful tool in order the company to achieve meaningful customer experiences. Additionally, storification provides a common thread. (Kalliomäki, 2014.)

Story-based service design makes it easier to commercialise services and create more lasting impression for the consumers. Storification underlines company's strengths, authenticity and values. It also helps business to market their company. Finally, storification helps to customise the service for the needs of different customers. (Kalliomäki 2014.) For instance, during the food walks, the guides told stories about Finnish forest, and its animals, such as moose, reindeers and fish. Additionally, it was mentioned how Finnish people are passionate about their salty liquorice (salmiakki), and how foreigners usually have a suspicious attitude towards salty liquorice.

## 4 CULINARY TOURISM

### 4.1 Overview of Culinary Tourism

It is essential to understand the culinary tourism scene in order to understand the food walk products. Thus, the role of food has dramatically gained importance among tourism researchers. According to Stone et al. (2018, 1121) Everett (2016) hypothesis that culinary tourism has become distinct sector in tourism field. Food experiences are valuable to destinations and the memorable experiences have been linked to an increase in travel satisfaction. Food may be memorable for many different reasons. Food and drink experiences, as part of the local culture should be a main component of a destination management strategy. (Stone et al. 2018, 1121.) In the beginning of 2000's the first definitions of food tourism were created, but in 2012 food tourism term was starting to catch on with tourists from social media. After 2018 food tourism has been known in all over the world and there has been a global increase in the food tours and other experiences, such as food events. (World Tourism Food Association 2019.)

Culinary tourism is based on the concept of learning about food cultures by tasting and enjoying food. For example, Airbnb Experience hosts generate unique experiences with the new expectations of tourism demand which seeks experiences and memorable activities. (UNTWO 2012.)

According to WFTA (2019) even 96% of travellers can be considered as food travellers. "Foodie" means a food traveller who had participated in a food experience during the past year. Food travellers attend to cooking classes, food tours or go shopping in a local grocery store. Foodies visit alcohol tasting such as beer and wine tastings, as well as other culinary experiences. The main key words in food tourism are education, curiosity and adventure. Those words can describe why people want to be foodies and what attracts people in culinary tourism. Food tourism teaches people new facts about the local area, food and surrounding culture, even about the local people. In food tourism it is important to be open-minded and discover new textures and flavours, which is part of curiosity. Furthermore, foodies are adventurers, who foodies are adventurers,

who eager to travel to find authentic food and beverage experiences. (World Tourism Food Association 2019).

Culinary tourism has a lot of affirmative benefits. According to WTFA (2019) food travellers are sustainable, respectful and educated, which can be considered as “quality” travellers features. Additionally, culinary tourism increases the economic benefit, competitive advantages, and media coverage. Community awareness and tax revenue allocated to government authorities are increased as a benefit of food tourism. Food experiences can strongly impact the development of destination image (Harrington & Ottenbacher 2013, as cited in Stone et al 2018, 1121). According to Stone et al. (2018, 1121) Sutton (2001) analyses food and drink important to memory since they often involve all five senses.

Culinary tourism plays substantial role for tourists who consider gastronomy even a secondary reason when choosing a travel destination. The gastronomic travels apply to travellers who plan their trip to achieve gastronomic experiences, such as food markets or events. The motivations constitute a key concept for designing tourism products and strategies. The motivation to food tourism might vary and be influenced by social or cultural needs. However, culinary tourism has a positive impact on economics, employment and local heritage. Food tourism is becoming a model for socio-economic development. Utilizing services produced locally enriches the tourism experience and minimizes the dependence on imports. Additionally, it reduces outsourcing employment. (UNTWO 2012.)

Via culinary tourism, tourist may gain new experiences and explore local identity and culture. The traditional values of culinary tourism are respecting the local culture and traditions, sustainability, authenticity and healthy lifestyle. Food tourism idea is not only to attract tourist but attract them to participate them in the cultural reality through cuisine and local services related to gastronomy. (UNTWO 2012.)

Although Airbnb Experience has started to spread around the world and the Food Walks has become more known, the food tourism is still a regional phenomenon. Luckily, the demand for culinary tourism and its competitive marketplace is on the rise. (UNTWO 2012.)

## 4.2 Food Culture in Helsinki, Finland

Finland is not famous for food, but it does have its own food culture. The food scene in Finland has changed a lot as a wave of gourmet restaurants in the big cities has added innovation to fresh local produce. Finnish food culture has got influences from both Russia and Sweden since Finland has been under Russia's and Sweden's domination in the past. In Finnish food culture Western Finland's and Eastern Finland's food cultures intertwine. Culture has a great possibility to productise the Finnish food products. (Food & Tourism Strategy 2015, 13).

Helsinki is the capital of Finland. It has over 1,5 million inhabitants, therefore it has the most variety of restaurant, cafes, bars and food selection. Indoor markets sell local produce, and outdoor food markets are popular during the summer. Helsinki is also known for organizing food events to admire the booming food scene and active culinary culture from long distances. (My Helsinki 2018a.)

Helsinki has a diverse culinary scene. Helsinki has multiple markets, local top chefs and eventful events. The main stops for foodies are Hakaniemi Market, Töölöntori, Hietalahti Market Hall, where people can enjoy foods from all over the world. (My Helsinki 2018b.)

Food tourism is developing globally. However, there are only few food tourism products in Finland. Development of the services would be beneficial, because eating is part of every tourists' trip, therefore everyone is part of the target market. The quality of the service should be enhanced in places where tourists visit. Understanding the needs and values of the customers is crucial. Finland has already received positive feedback from the international media through food, therefore it has a good reputation. (Business Finland 2020.)

Food tourism can be represented by a continuum (Figure 5) To create memorable culinary experiences, all levels of the continuum are necessary. Agriculture is the base for the food products, and the services help the food products to be sold. Food tourism consists of experiences and without the other steps, food tourist would not exist. (World Food Travel Association 2019.)

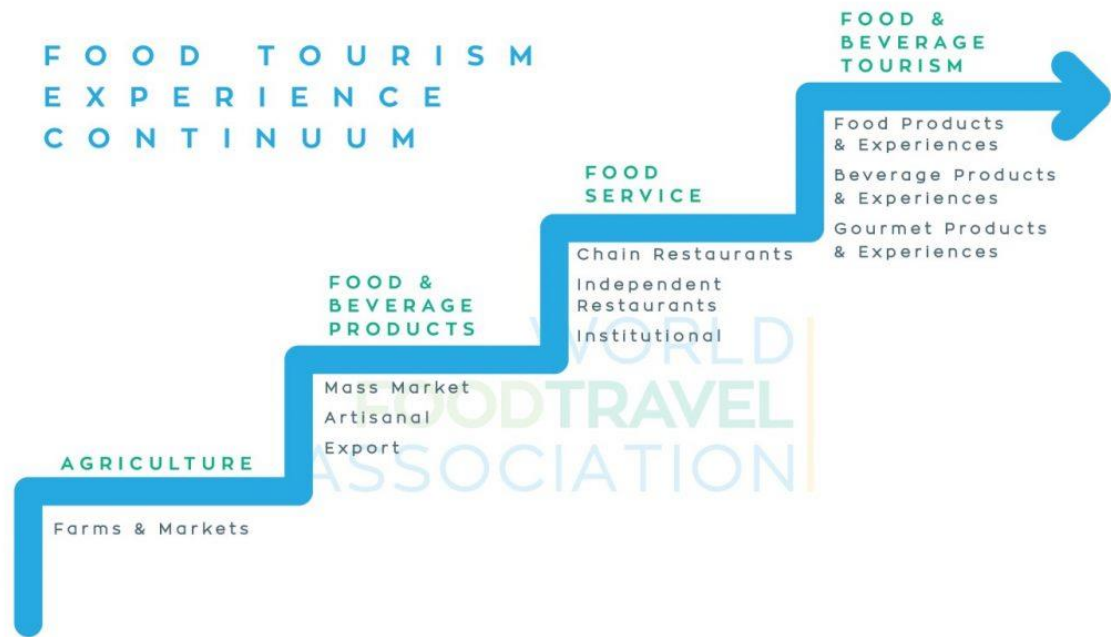


Figure 5 2019. Word Food Travel Association.

Finnish cuisine's basic ingredients are meat, fish, milk and potatoes. The main spices are salt and pepper. The Finnish food culture is mainly based on the nature's seasons. Additionally, it is important to understand the importance of agriculture to Finnish food culture. During the winter there is canned food from the nature, and during the summer more local fresh fruits and foods are on the market. The pure nature provides the best ground for the high-quality food industry (Food & Tourism Strategy 2015, 13).

#### 4.3 Food Culture in Santa Barbara, California

The United States of America is a mixture of nationalities and has variety of cultures. Therefore, American food culture is diverse and comprehensive. The United States is known for its unhealthy fast-food culture. California is one of the largest states in the United States, in fact, also the most populous. The state is ingredient rich and therefore variety of foods is enormous. California's staple ingredients are local and fresh avocados, artichokes, figs and dates. (Essman, 2014.)

Despite the fast-food reputation, the healthy phenomena have been growing in California. Californian restaurants are trying to make food lighter and healthier. Along with Asian and European effects, Latin America has probably the biggest

influence that can be seen in California. California has deep impact of Honduras, Mexico and El Salvador. Varieties of Mexican food is available everywhere in California, even the less known ingredients. The phenomena of healthier living have affected not only to American food, but also healthier versions of Mexican food are available. That is called “Baja-style”, which stresses fresh and light ingredients. (Essman, 2014.)

Santa Barbara “American Riviera” is located about 100 miles to north from Los Angeles. According to Finn Davenport (2017) Santa Barbara has turned living into a fine art. There are over 100 wineries in the region, and the best area to explore both drinks and food is Funk Zone. Funk Zone is also called city’s indie heartland, which is the area the research was partly operated on. (Davenport 2017.) Funk Zone is the area of Santa Barbara where the American Food Walk was conducted in August 2019.

As Figure 6 shows, National Restaurant Association (2016) identifies the growth of restaurant industry in the United States. Restaurant industry capita has grown 26% from 2000 to 2016. The reason for the growth is the trend of experiencing restaurant culture. Due to the rising income levels and lack of time created a starting base for the global restaurant trend.



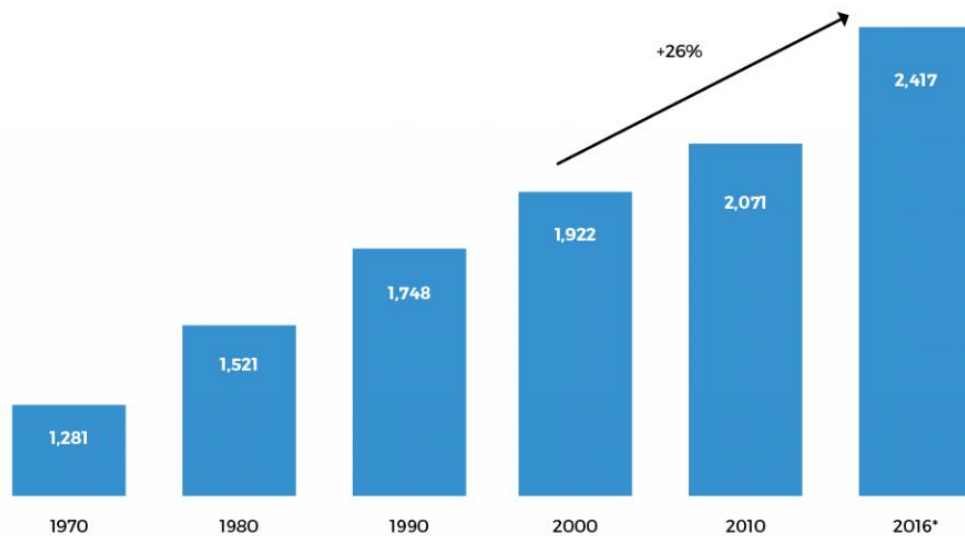


Figure 6. 2020 U.S Annual Restaurant Spend Per Capita (Bujarski 2016)

The growing demand for authentic, individual, and unique culinary events are forcing the restaurants to level-up their performance. In the United States the food trucks, beer trails, farmer's markets, food festivals and wine classes are getting more popular rapidly, and due to that providers must offer the products the customers expect and seek during their travels.(Bujarski 2016.)

According to Bujarski (2016) tourists are compelled to explore deeper into local neighbourhoods instead of the typical tourist environment. American tourists are ready to travel away from the accommodation for a unique culinary experience. Additionally, tourists are willing to ask questions about the process behind the meal's production and they are genuinely interested about the topic. Therefore, the culinary experience shapes the entire experience of the travel and the destination. (Bujarski 2016.)

## 5 RESEARCH METHOD

### 5.1 Qualitative Research

The objective of the thesis project was to clarify the definition of culinary tourism on the sharing economy platform and discuss how food walks are conducted. The goal was to make benchmarking research based on the experience of food walks in different cultures, American culture and Finnish culture.

Moreover, it was significant to allocate how the new tourism trend, sharing economy, affects the whole tourism industry. The research was limited to the Airbnb platform only, and especially into experiences, not into accommodation or car sharing. Research was necessary since sharing economy is a new concept in the tourism field, and there have been only a few researches done regarding culinary tourism in the sharing economy.

The research method chosen for this thesis is the qualitative research methodology. The qualitative research focuses on acquiring data through open-ended communication. This research method allows deeper analyses based on respondents' answers in the interviews that were used as a data collection method. (Bhat, 2020.) These interviews provide a closer look to the sharing economy in culinary tourism. The interviews also provide characteristic of the food walk hosts and their feelings and development suggestions for Airbnb.

The non-existent expectations towards the topic were the main reasons why the qualitative research method was chosen. The aim was to keep the approach professional, yet personal and respectful for the food walk hosts. Having the interviews with the hosts and observing the food walks gives the research an in-depth perspective, making it reliable and authentic.

### 5.2 Data Collection

Material was gathered from Santa Barbara Food walk and Finnish Food walk in Helsinki. The walks were booked from the on Airbnb Experiences platform. A structured observation chart (Appendix 1) was created by author which was taken along the food tours. The observation data were collected 5th of August 2019 in

Santa Barbara, California. In January 2020 data was collected in from Helsinki, Finland. The author participated in the food walks as a customer. The host was informed beforehand that the food walk was for the thesis and the permission to ask any questions considering the food walk was dealt with beforehand. As the activity was experienced, notes were marked in the chart during and after the activity. It was also discussed that any further questions could be sent for the host to help to proceed with the research.

After observing both Finnish and American food walks, research results were analysed by benchmarking. Benchmarking was the best option for analysing the thesis since there are two different countries with the same product and it was the most efficient way to find the results. Comparing the results offered the possibility to see the differences and similarities in between the cultures.

The data was also planned to be collected by using various sources about sharing economy and food tourism. These included project's websites, sharing economy publications, culinary books, journals, eBooks, and articles. The search words were sharing economy, collaborative consumption, food tourism, culinary tourism and Airbnb experiences. It was relatively easy to find up-to-date data about Airbnb and sharing economy-related publications, but culinary tourism seemed to be challenging. The few articles were found about Finnish food culture, but American food culture seemed to be difficult to find data. All the internet articles were mostly about sharing economy, but the library books considered more food cultures and culinary tourism.

In the beginning, only observation was preferred as a research method, but soon it was figured that more data is needed to make the research more valid and reliable. An interview was chosen as a second methodology since interviews are effective for qualitative researches and offer a wide understanding of experiences and phenomenon. In the thesis project, three food tour hosts were interviewed; two of them were the hosts that the author took the food tour with, and the third person is a local food tour host from Rovaniemi, Finland.

Interviews are broadly used methodology in qualitative researches. Interviews can be traditional face-to-face interviews, or via telephone. Additionally, internet interviews such as Skype or social media surveys are common interview techniques. According to Young et al (2020), the key stages are question formulation, ethical review, and techniques to perform the results. Everything starts by identifying research questions and choosing the interview type. Designing and thematizing the questions is helpful in order to create the research questions (Figure 7). Interviews as a research methodology help to gain ecological and socio-economic information. In addition, interviews strengthen research output and design (Young et al 2018).

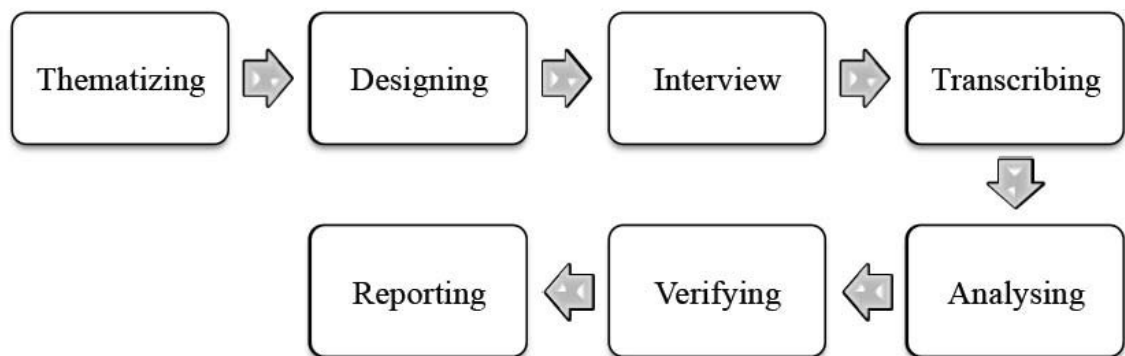


Figure 7.2012 Seven stages of interview (Ali, Mohd, & Isa 2012)

Interviews were executed during the spring of 2020. The research questions were identified with teachers in order to make them as professional as possible. Interview type was decided to be an open-ended question rather than structured. Descriptive interview answers are part of qualitative methodology. There are thirty questions, and it takes approximately 30 minutes to complete the survey. After the analysis has been done, findings are written down. Young et al., (2018) point out that critical evaluation of the benefits and disadvantages of using interviews must be included in the last part of the key stages. One of the interviews was sent as an email since phone call was not possible at the moment. However, it was clear that email interview did not give that much of information compared to the interview that were conducted via phone. Nevertheless, it gave the simple structure view and perspective from the Californian food tour. Two of the interviews were transcribed into text on 27th of March by using an app called Otter. All the interviews were conducted by 1st of April 2020.

The interview as a research method was chosen because it seemed to captivate more material and data rather than only observing the food tours. The research question was to analyse the food cultures and Airbnb experiences since there has not been many previous researches about Airbnb experiences. Professional interviews gave a chance to have personal connection to the interviewees and as relaxed situation possible in order to receive as much data as possible. Additionally, interviews were chosen to be part of the methods because the interviewees personal aspects wanted to take into account, opinions and remarks into account. The interview seemed to be a good method since it gave a possibility for the author to make additional questions. In fact, it was effortless to stay connected with the interviewees in case some information was lacking.

To analyse the data, thematising is used in order to collect the necessary data from the interviews. Key themes and possible new aspects are convenient to find when using thematising. Similar themes were collected in the same group. In this way, thematising is be easier to do. After organising the themes, it is convenient to find answers to the research questions. Additionally, the used charts to visualise the differences in food tours and to thematise the areas from the interviews. It was convenient to copy and paste relevant themes from the materials to the charts in order to thematise.

Benchmarking is a way of discovering what is the best performance being achieved. Moreover, it focuses on striving for improvement and partnering to share information. (Stroud 2020.) In terms of benchmarking categories, benchmarking has two categories in terms of its micro- and macro applications: destination benchmarking and organization benchmarking. Destination benchmarking is about seeing the bigger picture including all elements of one destination, such as transportation and accommodation. The objectives of destination benchmarking include assisting the manager and to establish its own standard values. The measurement of each performance indicates its own weaknesses and strengths. Additionally, potential threats and opportunities will be indicated for the future. Organization benchmarking focuses on performance evaluation of only an organization and its departments. (Kozak 2003, 41.) According to the categories, this research is considered as destination benchmarking. Nevertheless, benchmarking can be divided into internal and

external categories. External benchmarking objective is to seek answers to questions such “what we are doing, and why?” Internal benchmarking consists of organizations comparison of their own processes with each other. (Kozak 2003, 96.)

The process of external benchmarking can be explained in different steps (Figure 8). The proposed model of external destination benchmarking aims to deliver a focused structure of the model by showcasing information about models in upstroke in its operation.

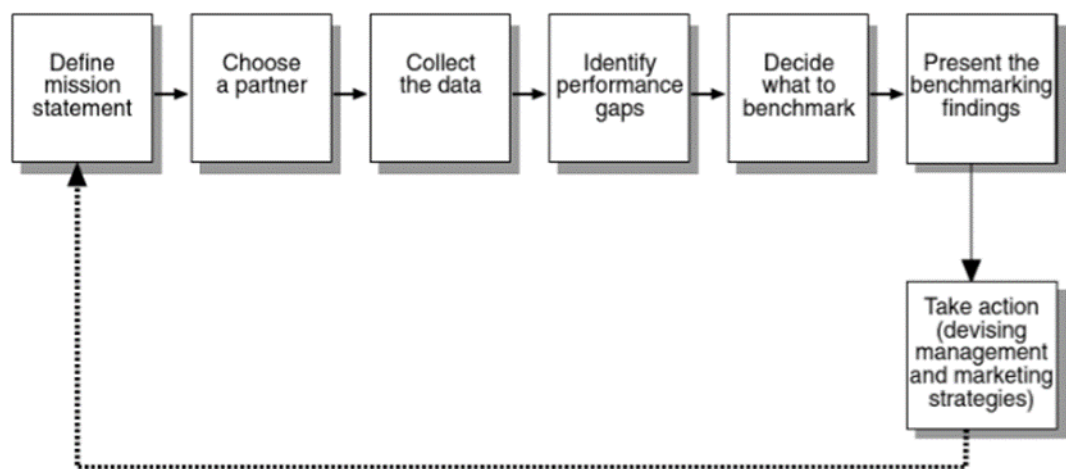


Figure 8. 2004. The proposed model of external destination benchmarking (Kozak, 2004, 97)

In this research, the commissioner and the mission are explained, as well as the main objective of the research. The first two steps of the process can be described as planning part of the research. The data collection is discussed and analysed in the text, which will be followed by the findings that will be presented.

## 6 RESULTS

### 6.1 Food Walk Host's Expertise

In this chapter each interview question is analysed through sharing economy and culinary tourism aspect. In the analysis the differences between answers will be analysed. The interview questions in themes were divided in themes, which include the sub-questions. The main themes of the interview were food tour guide, food tour itself and Airbnb. Subthemes were customer path, characteristics of the food host and improving the food tours.

This thesis is commissioned by the University of Lapland and Lapland University in Applied Sciences. The project aims to investigate collaborative consumption in the Lapland Region, but it also considers the challenges the sharing economy causes for the region and the ways to overcome them. (University of Lapland Current Research System 2017.) As the project clarified the possible challenges, also the thesis found challenges in sharing economy platform. The possible development ideas were presented.

Three food tour hosts were interviewed, and the author participated in two of their food tours. The author did not know them personally before attending to the tours. All interviewees had different background: one is entrepreneur in crafting, other is freelancer and third is a photographer. All the hosts had been executing food tours 2 years or less, which tells how new trend Airbnb Experience is.

Additionally, observation results are considered. Observation was executed in August 2019 in Santa Barbara, and in January 2020 in Helsinki. Observation has been analysed together with the interviews and combined them with discussed theme. The author joined the food tour as active member but did not make any pre-assumptions of the tour nor made suggestions in changing the route of the tour in any way.

The main reasons doing Airbnb Food Tours are clearly on businesses purposes, but also because the hosts like to be around people. Furthermore, the hosts are aware of the current sharing economy trend and are willing to be part of it. They find it as a good experience and personal development for themselves too, thus

the hosts have a personal interest in restaurant scene. It can be said that the food hosts receive personal benefits, so that makes it valuable to execute for them.

The main benefit is that I enjoy doing it. It's always been my favourite thing to do and an enjoyable part of my job for me...I can eat tasty food as well. (R2)

Airbnb experience is a good sales channel for my services... it's also kind of starting to be trendy...my expertise on the tourism...I am really into dining...I kind of know what to show for the customers from a different perspective. (R3)

Based on the interviews, being a food tour host requires a lot of professionalism and knowledge. The tour guides must know their field thoroughly and they must have done a lot of research before executing the product. Knowledge not only about food, but also about local heritage and history is needed. At the same time, food host is an entertainer, problem-solver with planning skills.

I think you have to be knowledgeable; I think has to be able to adapt to the situation easily...you have to be flexible, too. (R2)

Additionally, authenticity was mentioned to be main theme and even a requirement as a food walk host. All the interviewees think that understanding and being flexible with clients was important when executing food walks. Therefore, it can be said that in order to make it successful experience, it must create value for the customers and the tour should be like a “carnival show”, that is memorable and entertaining.

I think to be authentic and that's what we would do... requires to be authentic and to be real, and to be something that what you are who you really are. (R3)

In the observation it was crucial for the observer that the customer is recognised, and that the customer feels safe and comfortable around the host. The quality of the tour depends on the customer service a lot. The customer must always feel



entertained during the food tour. Food hosts' hard skills are knowledge of the field and storytelling skills, but soft skills were required more. In fact, it was remarkable how much of social skills guide has. All hosts agreed about the importance of sociable knowledge and know-how.

Storytelling and uniqueness were also mentioned as crucial characteristic. In order to make the tour memorable, the host must bring new insights to one's mind. Therefore, storytelling is a great tool to captivate customers and according to the interview answers service providers use storytelling to create bond with the customers and bring new insights to ones' thinking. Storytelling was used in the service both in the U.S.A and in Finland, and all interviewees pointed out the importance of using the storytelling during tours. As Mckee and Fryer (2003, as cited in Ryu et al., 2018) states, brands need to take notice of the story structure if convincing brand story is aimed. This structure also applies to the Airbnb Experiences and food walks.

Storytelling about the area as well as the restaurants is what makes the tour great. Otherwise, you're just leading people from place to place to eat....and quite frankly guests don't need us to do that for them. (R1)

The answer that was aimed to find the most, was food hosts own opinion why Airbnb Experiences are gaining more popularity. Furthermore, the research aimed to know why tourist would take Airbnb Experience and not the traditional tourism agency tour.

I think guests know that with Airbnb they are guaranteed a local connection and a special experience. (R1)

When constructing the tours, there are several issues to consider. First, planning and knowing the customer group is crucial. For instance, allergies and food restrictions, as well as the group size are important to know in advance.

First you need to set up a plan...you need to test out the plan. After that, you need to execute the plan... within three hours. That means that you have three hours you need to be really good performer or artist. (R3)

The difference that occurred, is that some of the tours operates the same way each time whereas some of the tours prefer to make each food walk customized. However, contacting the customer and getting to know their preferences in advance seemed to be important. The hosts customised the food walk products if there were allergies or food restrictions. For instance, the author needed to have non-dairy portions when participating for the food walks. The needs of the author were considered extremely well. The guide knew how to replace dairy products with other options.

I like to make it customized... especially when you're charging that much money ... the customization is very important in my service. (R3)

We try not to switch things up too much so that we don't run into problems. (R1)

Although sharing economy is a new trend, it will be here to stay. In the food tours, tourists want to experience something different and new, and they want it to be special and memorable event. Connecting with the host well and learning something from the tour might lead to personal growth or even change the tourist's values, and then it can be called as transformational experience. In addition, people want the experience to have a nice atmosphere as well as a private, out-from the ordinary experience.

## 6.2 Customer Path Findings

Customer path includes a pre-experience, on-site experience, and a post-experience. All food tour hosts had different kind of way to describe the tour when the question is "What happened before the tour, during the tour and after the tour?". The pre-experience includes the overlook of the Airbnb Webpage. Interviewees had described their products there in detail. Planning and preparing the experience is crucial in order the experience to be successful. In fact, contacting the restaurant that guide take customers into, seemed important to make sure that everything is organised.

I kind of see how many people have signed up, depending on how big the tour is, I will pre-order things to eat, to make sure that everything is still available by the time I arrive with the group.(R1)

The on-site experience includes the peak experience, walking around the specific city and experiencing local goods. This part of the tour different the most amongst interviewees. All interviewees had similar yet completely different experience, in different environments.

In Santa Barbara food tour, there are nine food walk stops. First is Enterprise Fish where customer tastes delicious lobster, then in Figueroa Mountain Brewing small amount of beer is served on terrace. Tony's Mexican Food offers authentic Mexican tacos. In Shalhoob Meat, huge portion of fries and burger are experienced. Lucky Penny provides delicious pizza. Here customer can also get a whole pizza and take the rest home after the tour. In Santa Barbara Wine Collective tasty wine, piece of bread with delicious butter is served. Additionally, Helena Avenue Bakery and Cutlers Artisan Spirits are visited. The last stop for the fulfilling tour is McConnell's Ice Cream. This ice cream place provides non-dairy ice creams also in addition to the regular ice creams. During the tour, also photo tips to take pictures of the food portion is provided. For instance, there customers will practise how to use front light while taking pictures of the food and how to use sunshine icon to adjust exposure.

In Helsinki, the first stop of the food tour is the Fazer shop, where the hosts provide few delicacies from the shop. Next, the customers visit the marketplace in local harbour, Kalasatama. Stories about Finnish cloudberry are being shared to the customers. In Roobertin Herkku, which is a local candy store, the customer is introduced to Finnish salty liquorice (salmiakki). In Hakaniemi Food Market the food walk host provides a reindeer slice, Karelian pie, cold smoked salmon with Tsaar seasoning, cheese with cloudberry and Runeberg's tart (Runebergin torttu). Reindeer meat is popular meat in northern Finland, whereas Karelian pie is originally from the Eastern Finland, Karelia. Karelian pie is a salty dough with rice or potato filling inside. Customers also taste Finnish cinnamon bun and depending on the availability customers receive Finnish Shrove bun,

(laskiaispulla). The tour ends with a visit to a local grocery store, S-market. Finnish drinks, such as gin-based alcohol drink (lonkero) is introduced. Additionally, the host gives recommendations for the customers and uses storytelling to describe the products, food trends and the vegetarian options.

The post-experience satisfaction is a critical indicator for measuring the effectiveness of the products and services. The customer satisfaction with the experience depends on the product's performance in relation to the tourist's expectations. (UNTWO 2020). Nevertheless, it is crucial to keep in mind that different nationalities and cultures have different expectations and values of perceived services. The post-experience differed a little bit between interviewees. Two of the respondents found receiving feedback extremely crucial whereas one of the interviewees did not find it that relevant. Additionally, the importance of staying in touch with the customer seemed to share opinions amongst the interviewees.

And after the tour I'm usually not so much in touch with the people afterwards. It depends if they leave a review. (R2)

The main finding was fulfilling the experience by providing the professional customer-service by excellent service. However, the food tours were surprisingly similar despite the difference cultures and location (Table 1). The only remarkable difference was the food culture, so in this case the difference was recognised easily by experiencing the food and drink portions.

Table 1. Customer Path Comparison in Food Walks (Paavilainen 2020)

<b>Food comparison</b>	<b>Helsinki</b>	<b>SB, California</b>
Meat	Yes	Yes
Vegetables/Greens	Yes	No
Sweet	Yes	No
Savoury	Yes	No
Alcohol	No	Yes

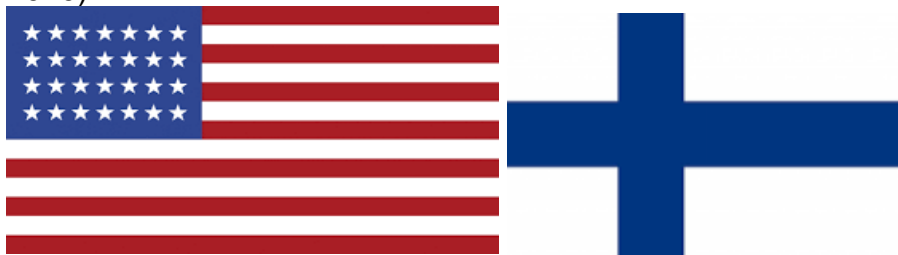
Local speciality	Yes	Yes
Bread	No	Yes
Warm dish	No	Yes
Local dessert	Yes	Yes

In California, Mexican food is extremely common, for instance tacos. However, vegetables and sweets are not offered during the food tour. In Finland, Food Tour offers seafood and agricultural ingredients, such as bread made of rye.

### 6.3 Differences in Conclusion

Table 2 shows the main differences in food tours between Finland and the United States. In result, all the responses were had similarities. Authenticity and experiencing local products have become a value and it is not possible to achieve in hotel resorts. People want to explore authentic and local experiences in order to be satisfied.

Table 2. Differences and Similarities Between the U.S.A and Finland (Paavilainen 2020)



Interview themes/Category	Interviews 1, 2 and 3
Airbnb host	<b>DIFFERENCE</b>
Tour itself	<b>SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES</b>
Pricing	<b>DIFFERENCE</b>
Sustainability	<b>SIMILARITY</b>

Airbnb Improvements	SIMILARITY
------------------------	------------

The cultural differences between the three interviews and two observations can be summarized in following ways:

Both countries, have got impact on their culinary tourism from other cultures. Finland from Russia and California from Mexico. Due to these impacts, the food provided is obviously different and only few similarities were found.

Due to the strict alcohol restrictions in Finland, Airbnb Experiences are not allowed to provide alcohol for their customers. Therefore, California included several alcohol beverages in the food tour: wine, beer and spirits. Additionally, California's food tour was much fulfilling compared to Finnish food tour. However, it can be said that Finnish food tour had healthier options compared to the American tour.

The Experiences differ also from the customer path and touchpoints. Helsinki Food tour did not provide any dishes in restaurant, and therefore there was no warm dish provided. However, Santa Barbara tour offered many heavy portions in several restaurants. Luckily, observer was able to take rest of the food home after the tour.

Pricing was set in certain level in different reasons. Differences occurred in each of the Food tours, and the price level was depending on the experience that hosts have, if they have another job and how many hours the tours take.

We base pricing off our cost of operations... food, costs, employee wages  
(R1)

Sustainability was one of the main values in all food tours. The American hosts are proud about the sustainability that had developed in the United States during the past years whereas Finnish Food Tour host considered sustainability as self-evident factor. However, both cultures find ecological lifestyle and sustainability important.

I feel like it is sustainable product to begin with... all the walking and then for the public transport, its local products from local farmers... I always bring in kind of reusable plastic plates... put them in the dishwasher afterwards and we use compostable cutlery. (R2)

The atmosphere of the food tours was extremely laid back and relaxed. The hosts made sure that the customer is the most important and delivering the best value is the main point. The host took care of all the orders and made sure that the customer is feeling well during the walk.

#### 6.4 Future Development Suggestions

Minor improvements are needed in all areas: food tour, tour leaders' skills and Airbnb. It is crucial to develop food host skills and know the current information. All the food hosts find self-development and constant learning a main task, when it comes to improving their skills or improving food hosts own tours.

And there's many stuffs that I still feel like I'm very rusty. And then with the with the local people are still just started all the cooperation. So, there was a lot of better choices that I could bring out from my services.  
(R3)

According to the interviews, there are difficulties with earning money via Airbnb Experiences, because of the high taxes. In the result, it can be confirmed that executing food walks is not so called "easy money". In fact, interviewees pointed out that pricing is one of the challenges and they hoped it to be improved. There are various factors that must be considered when pricing the food tour. It was mentioned that people have a thought that the food walks should be cheap since it is not provided by tourism company (Deter 2020). Airbnb takes a big part of the hosts incomes for itself. The food walk prices in Airbnb experience pages are usually from 90 euros to 200 euros, which is based on the fact how little profit the host makes out from it after paying taxes and other costs.

Their commission rate is also higher than most other third-party sites by 5% or more, which sometimes doesn't make it worth it to run tours when there are small groups attending. Otherwise, I think it's a good set up. (R1)

In the observation, minor improvements could be done in order to develop the experiences even further. About the pre-experience, the description of the food tour must be clear for the customer and not misleading. Unpleasant events might occur in case the customer expects something else what the hosts is able to provide. Customer needs to be faced with kindness and the service must be high-quality. The customer journey must be planned, and it has to be in logical order. Additionally, the changes must be able to take into consideration. For instance, if the tour changes radically for any reason from the promised that has said in the web page, host must take it into consideration when pricing the product.

## 6.5 Dependability and Credibility

According to Trochim (2020, as cited as Conjointly 2020) dependability highlights the need for the researcher to account for the changing context within which research occurs. The author has a responsibility for describing the changes that may occur and how these changes affected the way the author approached the research. (Conjointly 2020.)

The research was not easy to conduct. First, the American Food Walk observation had to be conducted already in August 2019, because the author was in Santa Barbara that time, and the observation was not possible later. Therefore, the observation chart was not precisely planned, and changes had to be made to it later. Another relevant limitation was that there are only few Food Tours in Finland. In the end of 2019, there was only one Food Walk available in Finland and it was in Helsinki. Since the author lives in Rovaniemi, it took a long time to match timetables together with the Food Walk host in Helsinki. Additionally, one of the food tours companies did not answer to the e-mail when they were tried to reach for the interview.



Furthermore, when the observation was executed, the hosts were informed in advance about the research. It might be possible that informing the hosts about the research might have affected in the results. However, the author does not personally believe into it, because it would have been similar experience, no matter if there is research conducted or not.

During the research process while implementing qualitative interviews, minor ethical problems were faced. Due to the fact, that the author gives an opinion considering hosts business, it was important to analyse the findings in professional and neutral way. Additionally, the respondents gave their permission to keep their names in the research, however, the research was found to be more professional when keeping the interviewees names hidden and using coding instead. The first idea was to focus on the food cultures, not the service products. Even though there were only three interviewees, there were so much data that some parts of the data were left out eventually. Additionally, observation chart had irrelevant questions at first, that were deleted after executing the participative observation.

A problem that appeared during the process was that there were first only two hosts that could be interviewed. When looking for food tour operators, it was found difficult to contact them since the local company did not reply. Finally, one more local interviewee was found from the Airbnb Experiences and broader data analysis was possible to execute. Furthermore, there was an idea at first to make the thesis only based on the two observations that were executed in Santa Barbara and Helsinki. However, there was not enough data coming out of that method, so interviews were extremely crucial in order to make the research reliable. Finally, the observations and interviews were combined in the analysing part.

Credibility is seen as the most crucial aspect to measure trustworthiness in qualitative researches. Research study findings are linked with reality in order to prove the truth of the research results. (Statistic Solutions 2020.) The data basis was collected only from sources that were considered reliable. Information was collected from e-books, online articles and journals as well as books by industry

professionals. The research results of the thesis can be considered valid, because they provide research about the current situation of Airbnb Experiences. However, the research result part is too narrow due to the fact, that more interviews would have been needed in order to enhance the credibility. Therefore, more than only two Airbnb Experience food walks could have been observed to increase the credibility.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The key contents of the thesis are sharing economy, Airbnb Experiences and culinary tourism. The author's personal passion into other cultures, especially to the United States of America created the research idea about benchmarking research between the U.S.A and Finland. Since the sharing economy, especially Airbnb Experiences is a new platform, the author found it important to research the topic more. However, research concerning Airbnb Experiences is not prominent in the tourism researches. Airbnb Experiences is a new concept and thus it needs more precise research. This thesis discussed about sharing economy, more precisely Airbnb Experiences and culinary tourism.

The aim of the thesis project was to clarify the definition of culinary tourism on the sharing economy platform and discuss how food walks are conducted. For this research, three interviews and two participative observations were conducted. From these interviews and observations solutions to the research question were given. The intention was to create an observation chart and interview the Airbnb Experience food walk hosts to get an image of culinary tourism and Airbnb Experiences through hosts perspective.

The results of the research, it can be concluded that despite the minor differences in American and Finnish food cultures, the food tours researched have many similarities according to this thesis. Few notable differences can be pointed out according to the interviews and observation, however, the U.S.A and Finland's food walks are similar in certain areas of the services.

The differences were mostly in the area of food portions, improvement skills, characteristics of the host and customer path. For instance, as shown in Table 2, alcohol is not served in Finnish Food walks due to the strict alcohol legislation in Finland. American Food host found the changes in Airbnb Webpage crucial, as well as Finnish Food Walk hosts. Taxation and high commission rate were pointed out as problematic when working with Airbnb. One of the main solutions was that food walks must deliver value and provide unique experiences for the customers.

Storytelling and authenticity came up as important themes when creating memorable service experiences. Stories increase the competitive advantage and provides better result while increasing profitability. According to Hanks (2020) the authenticity is a main object when thematising the pull factors considering Airbnb Experiences.

In fact, it is relevant to find the development possibilities and further explore the concept of sharing economy. This could, however, be something to further research in the future by making surveys or interview a wider audience of food walk hosts. In conclusion, the thesis has proven the importance of Airbnb Experience to tourism field especially in the context of memorable tourism products.

This research was conducted for the benefit of “Possibilities and Challenges in Peer-To-Peer Accommodation” and “Sharing Economy in Tourism” projects. The projects provide information on the current state of the sharing economy in Finnish Lapland by analysing the travellers’ experiences. The author sincerely hopes that this research is found helpful by the commissioner, as the thesis will help the commissioner broad the sharing economy topic about shareable tourism in other platforms.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Food Walk Analysis

Appendix 2. Interview Questions

## Appendix 1.

<b>Food walk Santa Barbara, California, USA/ Helsinki Finland</b>
My own expectations before food walk according to the webpage
Name of the host and product
Who attended?
Was it worth the money? If not, why?
What kind of places were visited? Location and provided food
Professionalism of the food guide/host
Origin, material of the food
What customer can learn and how customer is taken inclusion?
What special that could be used in Helsinki/Santa Barbara?
What would I do differently?
Other notes:
What kind of food/drink waitress recommended and why?
My own experience of the quality and the price of the food? Justification

## Appendix 2.

1. Please introduce yourself; Who are you and what do you do?
2. When did you start as an Airbnb experience host? Why?
3. Can you please tell me something about your background?
4. What tasks are included in your job as an Airbnb host?
5. What kind of skills should the host have? (soft/hard skills)
6. Mention 5 characteristics of a great food tour host?
7. How can you improve food host skills?
8. Do you use storytelling to captivate your audience?
9. How did you end up executing food tours? What are the benefits to you in your opinion?
10. What does it require to be a host?
11. Have there occurred any challenges with tourists?
12. Can you tell about the food tour process, what happens before the tour, during the tour and after the tour?
13. How precisely have you planned the food tour?
14. Are you willing to modify the tour depending on different customers, or would you rather keep the basic structure according to the plan?
15. What makes your product memorable for the customers?
16. How do you choose a certain price for your product?
17. How do you choose the restaurants you take tourists to? What are the criteria?
18. Do you cooperate with the restaurant you are taking customers to? How?
19. Do you find the visual display of the food important?
20. What are the benefits of purchasing an Airbnb experience/food tour in your opinion?
21. Why should people buy your product?
22. How has sustainability been taken into account on your tours?
23. What makes your product better than one of your competitors?
24. How could your food tour be improved?
25. What kind of feedback have you received from the customers? Please mention examples.
26. What is the approach the host should use to make an Airbnb experience conspicuous?
27. What is the future of Airbnb in your opinion?
28. Have you had challenges with Airbnb?
29. How could Airbnb experiences be improved?
30. What are the main reasons people prefer Airbnb experiences over tours of travel organizers?
31. Please describe your best and worst customer experience while executing food walks.