

Mapping of possible educational travel operators in the region and suggestions for the future

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Abstract

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<p>The phenomenon of educational travel has grown a significant amount in Finland during recent years. The Finnish educational system has gained a distinguished reputation globally specifically due to the Pisa-results. This has sparked an interest in international visitors to come and visit the country in hopes of learning about the success of the Finnish educational system.</p> <p>This thesis was commissioned by a local destination marketing organisation interested in developing their educational travel operations further. The aim of the thesis is to map out possible educational travel operators in the region and to come up with recommendations for the future development. The research was carried out during spring 2020.</p> <p>In the study a qualitative research method, more specifically semi-structured theme interviews, is used. The subjects of the individual interviews are local educational institutions and private companies. To support the research some background information interviews are conducted with educational tourism experts on the field.</p> <p>The main results of the research are that there are interested actors and providers to collaborate and develop the educational travel in the region, but more intense development work especially with the productization of educational travel products still needs to be done. Several strengths and weaknesses with educational tourism in the region were found and the potential with combining educational travel with the archipelago was remarked.</p>	
Keywords Educational tourism, educational travel, Finnish educational system, destination marketing organisation, DMO	

Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
2	Key words and definitions	3
2.1	The Finnish educational system	3
2.2	Destination marketing	4
2.3	Destination marketing organisations.....	5
3	Destination attractions and travel motives.....	7
3.1	Why do people travel?	7
3.2	Decision-making process behind choosing a destination	8
3.3	Finland as a travel destination	9
4	Educational Travel.....	12
4.1	The definition of educational travel	12
4.2	The benefits and disadvantages of educational travel.....	12
4.3	Visit Finland's point of view.....	14
5	Mapping out background information	17
5.1	Statement of the commissioner DMO's employee.....	17
5.2	Background research with educational travel expert.....	18
5.3	Background research with an employee of the educational division	21
6	Methodology.....	23
6.1	Qualitative research	23
6.2	Conducting the interviews.....	24
7	Interview results	27
7.1	Education travel operations	27
7.2	Strengths and weaknesses.....	29
7.3	The attractive factors of Finland	32
7.4	The attractive factors of the commissioner's city	33
7.5	Validity and reliability of this study	35
8	Conclusions.....	36
9	Development suggestions for the future.....	38
10	Discussion	40

Bibliography.....	41
Appendix.....	46

1 Introduction

Educational travel is a growing phenomenon all over the world. More and more people operating or working in education related environments are interested in going out of their comfort zone to explore the way education and teaching works in places all over the world. Going abroad to learn about different international education systems can work as a practical way of learning about both the educational system and the culture overall: it can put things into perspective to both the hosts and the visitors.

Finland has become an increasingly popular educational travel destination. Especially countries on the Asian continent have expressed their interest in visiting Finland to learn about both the educational system and the culture of the country. The private and public sectors in Finland have woken up to the growing interest and demand of educational travel services. Educational travel is a rapidly growing and competitive business around the world which means that it is starting to become a considerable source of income for the tourism sector internationally.

The aim of this research is to map out the possibly suitable local actors and products for educational tourism and to give suggestions for the future of the educational travel in the city of the commissioner for the future. Developing educational travel is at an early stage in the region so this subject is very current for the commissioner at the moment.

The two research questions are as follows:

- ❖ Who/what are the possible educational travel actors (and products) in the region?
- ❖ How could educational travel be developed in the region?

The suggestion for the subject of the thesis came from the commissioner and I was interested in the idea straight away. My main criterion for the thesis subject was that it would be in fact genuinely beneficial and helpful for the commissioner. We settled on the subject quickly and I was enthusiastic to start the research process.

Educational travel in itself is international, which means that the target group is international customers. However, not all educational travel customers resemble each other. The customers can be pupils, students, teachers or administrators: practically anyone, who is working or operating in an education related environment. Because of the international aspect, I will be doing my thesis for the commissioner in English per their request. When the thesis is written in English, they will be able to get more use out of it in the future as the main portion of the

customers in educational travel do not speak Finnish and the communication language tends to be English.

There will be different versions of this thesis. The commissioner wishes that their name and city will be hidden, which means that the information that would reveal where the commissioner is located et cetera will be censored in the public version.

2 Key words and definitions

This chapter is going to focus on defining the key words, definitions and concepts relevant for the understanding of the contents of the thesis. As the thesis is about educational travel in Finland, the Finnish educational system will firstly be further explained. Background information of the city of the commissioner and the role of the commissioner will follow along with more concept theory of destination marketing.

2.1 The Finnish educational system

According to the (1999/731) Chapter 2 section 16 § in the Constitution of Finland, everyone has an equal right to free of charge comprehensive education. The liability of a person to be participating in compulsory education is also legislated. The government is responsible for guaranteeing everyone the possibility to develop oneself educationally after comprehensive education too. The possibility of further education cannot be dependent on one's financial funds. There is a guarantee on the freedom of the science, arts and higher education (11.6.1999/731).

The quality of education provided in Finland is very good. This has been proven by the PISA studies multiple times (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019). The differences between the learning results are narrow and people primarily complete grade school within the intended target time. The main objective in the Finnish education system is that all citizens have equal possibilities of receiving education and education is not dependent on the funds of the family (infoFinland, 2019).

The Finnish education system consists of many different levels. Early childhood education and care (ECEC), preschool education, comprehensive education, upper secondary schools, vocational education, universities and universities of applied sciences are all included. Preschool education, comprehensive education, general upper secondary schools and vocational institutions are all free of charge. In addition, higher education is generally cost free as well (infoFinland, 2019).

ECEC is targeted towards children under six years of age. Pre-primary education is for children aged six. Comprehensive education is where pupils go from the age of seven until they have been able to complete the whole comprehensive education syllabus or it has been 10 years since one has started compulsory education (infoFinland, 2019).

After comprehensive education, most people decide to study further and typically continue to either general upper secondary schools or vocational institutions. Before graduating from general upper secondary schools, the students complete their matriculation examinations. In vocational institutions, on the other hand, students graduate with vocational qualifications (infoFinland, 2019). Some people choose to do a so-called double degree which means that they graduate with having completed both the matriculation examinations and a vocational qualification (infoFinland, 2020). After one has completed their upper secondary studies it is possible for them to continue your studies by obtaining a degree in universities or in universities of applied sciences (infoFinland, 2019).

2.2 Destination marketing

DMAI (2008) defined destination marketing and management to be a proactive and visitor-centered approach for both the economic and cultural development of a specific destination. According to them destination marketing is able to integrate the interests of the community, the service providers and the visitors. Destination marketing and management have always been influenced by external factors and they will continue to be in the future (Wang & Pizam 2011, 3).

According to Lomanenko (2018) destination marketing can be defined as marketing that is done in order to promote a destination. The destination could be either a town or a city, or the entire region or a country. The purpose of destination marketing is to increase the numbers of visitors coming in. Lomanenko (2018) stated that destination marketing could also be said to simply be tourism advertising that is done for one specific location. Destination marketing differs from traditional marketing for products as in this case the customers visit the destinations that are being promoted rather than buying the products (Lomanenko, 2018).

Revfine (2020) gave its own definition on destination marketing. According to them destination marketing is a form of marketing where a specific destination is getting promoted to its potential visitors. The goal of these marketing procedures is to attract more visitors to the destination. The target of the marketing can be specific or broader, for example promoting a city can be more specific while if the target of the promotion is the whole region it is broader. At its very core the purpose is to make the destination outshine its competitors in attractiveness, to receive more tourists and to help the travel industry locally. It is also about improving the awareness and reputation of a destination (Revfine, 2020).

Tsvetkov (2019) on the other hand gave a similar definition but also raised the question on who destination marketing is targeted towards. Moreover, he commented on the fact that

destination marketing is not only about the tourists. This is due to the fact that destination marketing could potentially also be able to attract talented employees, students or investors to a location (Tsvetkov, 2019).

2.3 Destination marketing organisations

DMOs, which stands for destination marketing organisations, are organisations that represent different destinations and aid them in developing their tourism and travel strategy in the long run (Figueroa, 2019). Pike (2007) defines regional tourism organisations to be organisations that hold the responsibility for marketing a concentrated area of tourism to the rest of the world as a tourism destination (Pike, 2008).

The organisations that are promoting a destination as a whole, instead of promoting their own services and products, do not have a direct interest in the financial aspect of the visitor industry. This means that they do not necessarily have their own source of income. However, requiring vast financial resources is necessary when marketing tourism destinations. The clients of the DMOs are not obliged to pay fees for the use of their services. This is due to the fact that DMOs are generally governmentally funded. DMOs are crucial for the continuous development of destinations. The organisations can give a potential visitor a general understanding of what they would be able to see, do and experience if they were to travel to that specific location. Implementing attractive campaigns to target groups and advocating for more spending to enjoy the travel experience are both examples of what DMOs focus on (Figueroa, 2019).

Since DMOs need resources in order to operate, the majority of them are dependent on governmental support regardless of what level of a DMO the organisation is (Pike, 2007). The different kinds of titles for DMOs include for example Tourism Authority or Board or Convention and Visitors Bureau (Figueroa, 2019). The other options for DMOs to gain funding include commercial activities, membership subscriptions and campaigns that are cooperative (Pike, 2007).

To this day a lot of these destination marketing organisations experience significant amounts of uncertainty, confusion and doubting from their different stakeholders, partners and the local governments. The different stakeholders are not always aware of what the role of the DMO is and what is the value of the different services they provide (Wang & Pizam 2011, 4).

Nowadays a significant number of holidays are booked through various online channels, which makes it particularly important for DMOs to put effort into their online presence. Statistics

(Jersey Island Holidays, 2020) have been able to prove that when one is booking a holiday, they tend to look at 38 different travel sites on average before booking. In 2019 the online travel market was worth approximately US\$756 billion. During 2020 the worth is expected to increase up to US\$817 billion (Jersey Island Holidays, 2020).

Conclusively the role of DMOs is to improve the wellbeing of both the locals and the tourists. When DMOs are able to increase the economic value of both domestic and international arrivals they are able to improve the wellbeing of every stakeholder (Tsvetkov, 2019).

3 Destination attractions and travel motives

This chapter will discuss theory on what makes travel destinations attractive and what are the motives that drive people to travel. The attractiveness of Finland will also be further discussed. The factors which make destinations attractive and the motives for travel can be very dependent on the individual but understanding the motivation behind the reasons why people travel is vital for destination marketing organizations. Destinations wanting to expand their educational travel operations need to consider these factors as well from the point view of the phenomenon.

3.1 Why do people travel?

People always travel for a reason and the reasons can be very complex and or multilayered. The purpose of the trip does not necessarily equal to the motive of the trip. The motives in tourism can be defined as the psychological reasons as to why we choose to travel in the first place (Travel & Climate, 2020).

The motives behind the reasons why people want to travel can be very dependent on the individual as they can be reflective of the needs of each individual person. People have different levels of experience in traveling which can make room for significant differences in the motivation for tourism. Tourists with more travel experience would rather be distancing themselves from the rest of the tourists and would like to describe themselves as explores or travelers for example (Travel & Climate, 2020).

The push and pull factor theory is often brought up when talking about the motives behind travel. According to this theory the motivation behind tourism is that people are pushed to travel by internal forces of their own and that the attributes of a specific destination pull them to travel (Khuong & Ha 2014, 490).

Push motivation stands for the factors that are motivating or creating the desire for an individual traveler to go on a holiday. There are several different socio-psychological motives that the push factor can consist of: relaxation, escapism, self-exploratory, regression, prestige, kinship enhancement and social interaction. In addition, there are also cultural motives: education and novelty. These factors are intangible (Khuong & Ha 2014, 490).

However, the pull motivation has to do with the tangible resources and the perception along with the expectations of the traveler. These expectations could be about the attractions, the general features or attributes of a specific destination. The pull factors can affect the choice of

a holiday destination a great amount after the decision on traveling somewhere has already been made. Examples of the pull factors are the historical and natural attractions of a destination, the cuisine and the people and how the destination is marketed – which are all factors from external forces (Khuong & Ha 2014, 491).

To summarise, push factors drive people away from their natural home environment and push them to make the decision to go on a trip somewhere whereas the pull factors pull the travelers to a specific destination. Considering the motivation behind traveling could prove to be very beneficial for people working with destination marketing or promoting with the tourism industry (Khuong & Ha 2014, 491).

3.2 Decision-making process behind choosing a destination

There have been several different researchers identifying the possible attributes that tourists take into account when considering how attractive a specific destination is. Venegesayi and Mavondo (2009) explored some of the attributes in their publication. Safety, overall reputation, accessibility, entertainment were the attractive destination attributes named by Kim (1998). Middleton (1989) included facilities, pricing of venues and transportation networks into their list of attributes, while Gartner (1989) mentioned for example the historic and or cultural attractions, nightlife and natural environment. Hu and Ritchie (1993) argued that the context of the holiday can affect how attractive the tourism destination is, specifically in the cases of educational or recreational tourism (Vengesayi & Mavondo 2009, 622).

TripAdvisor conducted their own research in during the years of 2017 and 2019 surrounding the travel trends globally affecting the world. There were approximately 23 000 participants. Based on the research 86% of travelers choose to read reviews before booking a destination. Consequently, 89% of travels research the possible restaurants and activities in a destination before traveling (TripAdvisor 2018, 2).

During the research TripAdvisor came to the conclusion that the younger demographic of travelers is more prone to be influenced when it comes to the target of the destination. Over middle-aged travelers are more likely to decide on their destination before doing research but younger travelers are more likely to start their research before a trip with many possibilities for destinations in mind (TripAdvisor 2018, 14). A total of 60% of the respondents said that they had decided on a destination before they started their research, while 26% of the respondents said that they were open to different destinations and 9% previously had a destination in mind but changed it and 5% had no destination in mind to begin with (TripAdvisor 2018, 32).

According to the research the dominating reasons for picking a travel destination were connected to sociocultural and emotional factors. The cost of a destination was another influential reason for choosing a specific destination, which made a difference in the purchase decision in 6 out of 10 travelers. In addition, the pricing of the accommodation was also mentioned frequently (TripAdvisor 2018, 45).

3.3 Finland as a travel destination

Visit Finland made a visitor survey of the year 2018 that was published in 2019. During 2018 there were 8.5 million trips made to Finland made by foreigners (Visit Finland 2018, 11). The trips were separated into day and overnight trips. 2.9 million of the trips were day trips and 5.6 million were overnight stays (Visit Finland 2019, 12). Based on the survey, 81% of all the respondents had Finland as their main destination. 65% of travellers only travelled to Finland while 16% of the visitors visited other countries, but Finland was still their main destination (Visit Finland 2019, 13).

According to the survey the most prominent reasons why the visitors chose Finland as their destination was the nature (59%) and culture or entertainment (38%). Other things mentioned were well-being (13%), shopping (11%) and sports or exercise (8%). There were clear differences between the nationalities taking part in the survey on this particular question. Asian travellers were very interested in the nature aspect of Finland, while the tourists coming in from Russian and Japanese were also naming shopping as one of the main attractions (Visit Finland 2019, 16).

In 2019 the overnight stays had increased up to 7.0 million (Business Finland 2020, 2). According to Business Finland those 7.0 million overnight stays were divided in the following way: Helsinki & the metropolitan area with 3.0 million; Lapland 1.8 with million, Lakeland Finland with 1.1 million and Coast & Archipelago with 1.1 million (Business Finland 2020, 5). The top five countries of foreign visitors in order were Russia, Germany, United Kingdom, Sweden and China including Hong Kong (Business Finland 2020, 3)

Finland has been a popular destination especially in the Chinese markets for years now. The Chinese visitors come to country to both do stopovers and as their main destinations. Helsinki Airport was the first airport in Europe to start accepting the Chinese mobile payment service called Alipay as a paying method in January 2017. During the same year the number of trips the Chinese tourists were taking to Finland was increased by a significant 63%. Finnair has

tens of flights each week from the capital Helsinki to the major big cities in China such as Shanghai and Beijing. The customers are able to use Alipay on all these flights (Baoyi, 2019).

According to Paavo Virkkunen (2019), the executive director of Visit Finland, one of the most significant reasons why the growth was so intense in 2017 was the fact that it was year of celebration for the Finnish independence. This was shown across the media, for example in the publications of the National Geographic and the Lonely Planet, which brought Finland more visible on the map as a travel destination (Sullström, 2019).

According to Virkkunen (2019) the main attraction of Finland is the already known clean nature and air. In addition, the Nordic lights and especially the nature of Lapland and both the arctic winter and summer are interesting to the customers. The service infrastructure that is good quality is also Finland's strength (Sullström, 2019).

An English travel journalist Michael Booth (2019) said that the attraction of Finland can be based on several different perceptions. For example, the clean air and water, and the peacefulness and calmness and the safety could be considered some of the perceptions of Finland. Booth has been observing both Finland and China as countries during his research and thinks that Nordic lifestyle seems to have turned into a model or an aim for the Chinese people who are wealthy. The social media in China gives Finland a reputation of being the happiest country in the world with the progressive educational system (Baoyi, 2019).

The Finnish way of living is also gaining more interest among the travelers. The visitors are interested in finding out where the Finns draw their well-being or welfare from. In the opinion of the director especially the demand of the younger travelers is focusing on experiencing authentic things. Visit Finland has started up a campaign called Rent a Finn to meet this demand (Sullström, 2019).

The idea of the campaign was to choose eight Finnish people to host foreign visitors for a few days during summertime. The visitors coming into Finland were social media influencers. Many video applications were received by Visit Finland from the Finnish host prospects. The influencers got to experience the way of living in Finland and then promoted it on their social media channels (Sullström, 2019). The campaign, which was launched in January 2019, was very successful and attracted interest across the world. Over 540 publications were done all across the media and they reached over 1,4 billion reads (Ylä-Anttila, 2019).

Many of the visitors want to experience the real way of living in Finland, and some companies have seen the potential in answering to this demand. Doerz is a company that has been found and established in Finland (Palokangas, 2020). The service makes it possible for the visitor to take part in the “live like a local” trend. Doerz provides for example municipalities, hotels, airlines and other regional tourism organisations a place where to offer experiences that local people take part to the international customers (Doerz, 2020).

People can register for to the service for free and then sign up as a provider of experiences. The business is based on the commissions that come from the sales of the experiences. Right now, the providers of experiences are mainly private people but there are some small businesses as well. The service has users in approximately fifty different municipalities across Finland (Palokangas, 2020).

According to the data of Doerz the most searched for Finnish experiences are local events (concerts and cultural events experienced with Finns); berries, mushrooms and moving in the nature (every man’s rights and the Finnish nature), city walks with themes, doing home visits, going second hand-shopping, going to the sauna, spotting Nordic lights, cooking courses, nature and being outside and tastings (Palokangas, 2020).

4 Educational Travel

This chapter will be focusing on explaining the concept of educational travel. Firstly, I will provide a variety of definitions on the phenomenon. Afterwards I am going to state which definition this thesis is referring to when discussing the subject. After giving a comprehensive definition to the matter, I will discuss the possible benefits and possibilities along with the disadvantages and risks of educational travel.

4.1 The definition of educational travel

Klooster (2014) defines educational travel to be a program in which the participants travel to a location that is foreign to them, either as individuals or together as a group. According to his definition, the main objective of the program is to be engaging in learning experiences related to the development of competences such as cross-cultural or management competences and or personal development (Klooster, 2014).

According to Custer (2013), the definitions of educational travel tend to differ from each other depending on the sector and the country. The journalist however stated that educational travel tends to always have elements of language and or development training (Custer, 2013).

In this thesis, the definition of educational travel will be following the definition of Klooster.

4.2 The benefits and disadvantages of educational travel

There are multiple benefits and disadvantages when it comes to educational tourism. The possible consequences and outcomes can be very subjective as everyone experiences the phenomenon in their own way. In the following subchapters, I intend on giving concrete examples while explaining the general benefits and disadvantages of educational tourism.

Firstly, one of the main benefits of educational travel is that it has an effect on the academic engagement of students. Being involved in projects where the students get to be a part of a trip, travel somewhere outside their comfort zone and experience something new has proven to often improve the level of academic engagement among students. When the students or pupils have a possibility to experience the subjects that they might have been already talking about in class pre-trip, they have something to base the new teaching on in a different way. While the traditional way of learning and teaching works often and can achieve learning results that are outstanding, educational travel can work as a way to learn about the same topics outside the classroom. When students get to experience the historic sites in person, for

example, they create connections to the subject that are deeper and more meaningful (Student Horizons, 2018).

When students get the possibility to go out of their comfort zone, they are met with people outside their own social circles inevitably. Not understanding the language that is talked around you could be a shocking experience for children that have never travelled outside of their own home country. Meeting new people internationally and learning about their culture and customs gives people a broader view of the entire world. It can work as a way to gain more perspective and make the students have more respect for other cultures (Student Horizons, 2018).

By going out of their comfort zone, the students inevitably also learn more about independence and confidence. When students are able to venture out to new experiences in a safe environment, they gain more confidence in doing new things in the future. Becoming more independent is beneficial for the future as well and it is a skill needed on class trips. For example, you could have a pair on a school trip that you need keep account for as well as yourself: making sure that the person knows where they should be at any given moment and to make sure they do not get lost from the rest of the group (Student Horizons, 2018).

Traveling is a good way to learn more about both yourself and the people around you. Meeting people from other backgrounds can give the students some new perspective in life and make them see all of the day-to-day things they are used to and might be even taking for granted. During educational travel, the students may also create lasting new relationships. Networking is a benefit between different international schools and organisations – but it can also benefit the visitors on a more personal level. Having an experience where you encounter many unfamiliar things can be encouraging for challenging the prepossessed opinions for both the visitors and the hosts (Student Horizons, 2018).

Of course, all phenomenon and events always have some risks and disadvantages to go with the benefits. The language barrier can be an obstacle for educational travel. Many of the tourists coming in from far away countries do not understand Finnish and their knowledge on English might not be on the same level as the hosts or the hosts English might not be understandable to the visitors. Cost of transportation could prohibit interested travellers from taking the trip as well (Gibson, 2017).

When designing the programs for educational travel, risk management is something that needs to be discussed a lot. There needs to be enough safety precautions in order for everything to go as smooth as possible. Accidents tend to happen, and it is more than normal for something

unexpected to happen and the hosts might have not been as prepared as they thought they were. In case these situations occur, there needs to be a plan B or safety precautions in place. Parental consent needs to be considered by both the visitors and the hosts. Supervision needs to be very highly considered and controlled. In case there are tens of small children in one group there needs to be an appropriate number of supervisors: teachers, parents et cetera, to make sure that there is enough help, guidance and supervision for each child (Gibson, 2017).

4.3 Visit Finland's point of view

Visit Finland has a brochure on educational travel in both Finnish and English. In the brochure, they list some of the possible benefits and risks of educational travel. This subchapter will give more light into those benefits and risks that they presented.

When educational travel happens, the value of the education and teaching export increases, which means that the total of the export income rises as well. In addition, all the international collaboration and awareness of the qualities of Finland and its education system will increase. Besides the increasing of the export income and awareness, educational travel is also beneficial to the whole tourism industry of Finland. This phenomenon can be described as the ripple effect (Visit Finland 2018, 54). According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2020) the ripple effect can be defined as a certain situation where an event has effects on other matters and then other effects follow (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020).

Service production will benefit from the growth of educational tourism. Simply put, there will be more people traveling to Finland, outside the main holiday seasons too, and there will be a growing demand on services. The revenue gained from the tourism industry will then also consequently increase. The nation brand of Finland is developed as well during the process, which means that the whole country can profit from the incoming educational travel tourists. Furthermore, with the growth of educational travel new occupations can be created. Some of the job titles could be for example a pedagogical travel guide, an international camp leader or a nature teacher (Visit Finland 2018, 54).

Well-prosecuted and created educational travel trips will lead to the guests gaining more knowledge and a positive picture of Finland in both the educational and touristic senses. If the visitors get a good experience, they will also receive some valuable learnings and memories. If this is promised and delivered, they are also prepared to pay for the educational travel packages. The visitors, often students and teachers, and the parents of the students can think that investing on a trip can be a good idea. When the children get more experiences that are

international, their view of the world can broaden and it might even drive them to consider an international career (Visit Finland 2018, 57).

Friendship school programs can create different types of action and reciprocal connections and projects with international schools. This makes it easier for the students to create new relationships with people coming in from an unfamiliar culture. Networking like this can prove to be very beneficial for them in the future. Having conversations and learning about the different cultures and customs from each other can be the most valuable experience of the entire educational travel trip. The conversations can work as a way for the Finnish students and teachers to start questioning the different habits that we have been accustomed to and then based on the received criticism come up with new ideas that could prove to be more functional and efficient (Visit Finland 2018, 61-62).

Educational travel trips tend to be longer than trips done in one's free time. This means that the travellers of educational travel stay in one destination for a longer period: sometimes for even two weeks. Because there is more time this also means that they will be able to create a deeper emotional connection to the culture of the country. Due to the growing demand on educational travel the holiday periods of the Chinese have been slightly shifted when it comes to the point of time. They are not only coming in during their highest season of travel, for example during their own summer holidays, but they also come and visit Finland during the other seasons as well (Visit Finland 2018, 57).

Educational travel is also a way to attract the international guests to destinations that are not that well known among the bigger cities of Finland such as Helsinki or Tampere. Even though all of the cities and municipalities of Finland are not popular in terms of tourism, there are still educational institutes in most of them. These schools are able to start collaborative work with the international schools, which then again can drive more traffic to their location and its surrounding areas. Educational travel visits can be a catalyst for creating extensive collaboration patterns, which can be developed further and continued on years later as well (Visit Finland 2018, 61).

The risk management process involves a lot of planning at the very beginning. The planning can take more time than expected, but when the risk evaluation and risk management plans are figured out it makes acting in a real situation easier. It is not possible to put too much effort into the safety precautions and measures at educational travel programs and trips. It is crucial for everyone to be able to understand the guidelines and directions for different activities. This means that both the hosts and the visitors possibly need to have some translators and guides

of their own so the language barrier can be overcome. The appropriate insurances need to be taken care of by both the hosts and the visitors (Visit Finland 2018, 62).

During the planning process, the different qualities and characteristics of the visitors need to be considered. It is important for program creators to realize that even though the children from different countries might be in the same age group, they still might not have the same skill set as each other. In addition, the visitors could have very specific diets, which the organisers need to take into account. If the food provided does not suit all the visitors, it will create more issues to be solved. The safety and well-being of the visitors always affects the overall acquired experience from visiting the country and meeting the people from another cultural background. Respecting the values and the culture of each other is necessary for success (Visit Finland 2018, 64-67).

5 Mapping out background information

This chapter will provide some background information on the phenomenon of educational tourism from experts in the field. The first subchapter will focus on the point view of the commissioner while the second will discuss the results of an interview with an educational travel expert and the last one will present the findings of an interview with an employee of the educational division of the commissioner's city.

5.1 Statement of the commissioner DMO's employee

In order to gain a better understanding, I asked a representative of the commissioner to give their statement on the educational tourism phenomenon in the region. There is no existing statistics about the current state of educational travel in the region of the commissioner. The representative of the commissioner has so far been in charge of most of the educational travel efforts. This subchapter will present the highlights of the received statement.

The representative stated that educational travel is interesting to the all-year-round nature of the phenomenon. They also said that it is very fitting for the city of the commissioner due to the target group which is why more time and effort is being invested into it. The commissioner organization has been doing educational travel development since September 2018. As the starting point they organized an event for local actors and many of them joined their efforts. The first educational familiarization trip was in late 2018 when tour operators from South China and Hong Kong came to visit the city and some of the destinations in the region.

According to the representative, educational travel is a part of all the sales materials from the commissioner to the Asian market with example products presented. Currently the biggest demand for educational tourism are coming in from China, South Korea, Japan, India and the Persian Gulf area. The representative also mentioned that there are reoccurring themes on what the visitors want to experience and see.

The biggest demand for educational travel is currently coming in from China, South Korea, Japan, India and the Persian Gulf area. The groups want to learn for example about the Finnish educational system, using nature to one's advantage as a learning environment, the Finnish way of living and the Finnish culture, recycling, water supply, environmental actions, health care and the logistical solutions. The common thread of the productization is in presenting phenomenon-based learning in practice and different hands-on experiences accompanied with traditional lectures. The Local Home –visits, meaning visiting a local home, are especially popular. During the visits, one familiarizes with the Finnish way of living by for example, taking part in the

cooking and or eating, warming up the sauna or going to the sauna, fishing, nature activities et cetera.

The organisation has also been collaboration with the local educational division in order to organize the school and day care visitations. The goal has been to collect all the most interesting learning contents as vendible products and to find more inspiring experts to our lecturer ring of people, which is an essential part of the productization of educational travel.

5.2 Background research with educational travel expert

This subchapter will focus on discussing the results of the educational travel expert interview. I wanted to get a general understanding of how the educational travel phenomenon has affected the tourism industry in Finland and interviewed an expert on educational travel for this purpose. The interviewee represented a big international DMO organisation.

The expert was asked several different questions within the phenomenon of educational travel. The questions were focusing on the development process of educational travel in the country, the current state of educational travel and the future plans of developing the educational travel in the country further. The interview gave some good insight to the current state of educational tourism in the country and gave some valuable viewpoints to the thesis.

Previously the organisation represented by the interviewee has received extra funding for the development of educational travel. Even though they do not receive extra funding anymore, educational travel still remains to be one of their main focus themes. Originally the development partially started off as the market representatives informed the organisation that educational travel was a growing trend globally and especially in the East Asian markets.

A lot of different delegations have come to Finland inspired by the results of the Pisa-survey, especially groups of professionals. The organization has considered that there should be more productization of the educational travel visits. This is because they do not have clear set to stone practices, and the visits take up a lot of resources. There should be clear participations fees and it should be made more systematic overall.

According to the expert the educational travel in the city of the commissioner still needs more development. Bringing out clear product packages and incoming-actors, who could be able to organize the practicalities would help improve the current situation. The interviewee thought that the educational institutions in the city probably have their own programs to offer but it

would be helpful to have a few active incoming groups that would bring them to the locations and package the existing supply of products.

According to the interviewee different regions and cities in Finland have noticed the potential of educational tourism and some of them have even chosen it to be their main focus. What comes to the educational travel collaborations and contact queries, according to the expert most of the contact queries reach the DMOs or local private companies directly. Some of the queries come through the organisation that the interviewee represented first, but they are then able to direct them towards the right actors and providers.

As it is hard to estimate the number of jobs created as a result of educational tourism growing in Finland, the interviewee did not have exact numbers or statistics on this. The expert still stated that they have noticed a clear increase in the number of incoming actors who bring groups of educational tourists to the county.

When asked about which city of Finland is the most developed as of now in educational tourism the choice of the educational expert was the city of Oulu. According to them Oulu is one of the most popular destinations for educational travel in Finland specifically for the Asian market – they have been doing educational travel operations the longest of all the cities in Finland and have been able to take processes quite far already.

The interviewee also mentioned some other destinations that have been expressed clear interest towards. Specifically, Rovaniemi in Lapland is also attractive to the visitors along with Joensuu and the rest of the Lakeland region and the city of Tampere. The metropolitan area is also interesting to the visitors, but the challenge with Helsinki is that the city does not accept guests to the schools as a principle.

Well, Oulu is probably one. They have had quite a lot of especially Japanese and maybe even more of these professional groups. Well then of course Lapland specifically Rovaniemi is interesting. Then also in the Lakeland area to some extent, there in Joensuu there is quite a lot of actors and elsewhere as well. Then well, Tampere is probably one of them as well. The metropolitan area is also interesting, but we have maybe then again some challenges in relation the school visits, as in principle the schools in Helsinki do not accept visitors there, but there is some of them, who do programs in Helsinki or then there are these combinations, where a few days are in Helsinki and then the rest is somewhere else.

According to the expert the educational travel in the city of the commissioner of this thesis still needs more development. Bringing out clear product packages and incoming-actors, who

would be able to organize the practicalities would help improve the current situation. The interviewee thought that the educational institutions in the city probably have their own programs to offer but it would be helpful to have a few active incoming groups that would bring them to the locations and package the existing supply of products.

According to the expert, there are many things that drive people to come to Finland, firstly getting to know the Finnish pedagogy and familiarizing oneself with the educational system of the country. Finland has a good reputation globally due to the results of different studies for example - and the learning and teaching methods can differ quite a big deal from what other countries are used to. The school days in Finland are rather short and the individuality of each student is highlighted. According to the expert the lifestyle of the Finnish culture could be also more focused besides the academic results. The natural elements are also interesting to the visitor as there is a certain element of exoticism. The Finnish nature and doing things in the nature can prove to be more exotic than Finnish people can understand.

Educational travel is often about the professionals and their visitations. They want to learn about how the educational system works in practice and to understand the thinking behind it. Phenomenon-based learning is quite standard in Finland but can be very interesting to learn about to the visitors along with the science education, for example. The more complicated thing to teach or present is the whole philosophy behind the Finnish education system.

When talking about the camp schools often the reason why the children come to specifically to Finland is the parents. The parents might have heard about the success of the Finnish students and would like their own children to experience it as well. Typically, they want to have the students go to the Finnish schools to be taught by a Finnish teacher in English.

Educational travel remains to be one of the themes that the organisation develops, and they do see the potential in it, especially in the Chinese markets. They are also maybe diving into the review the European markets in terms of educational tourism. The organisation is going to continue on trying to make the operations more systematic especially in terms of the school visits. The practices should be developed further in order to work with even bigger groups and to make those visitations happen. There is a need for clear shared processes and common goals.

The expert thinks that the growth of educational tourism will continue. They also pointed out that making sure that the visitations keep on happening as well for it to be possible.

Alternatively, other packages surrounding the Finnish educational system could be created to be done outside the classrooms.

The future of educational travel in Finland does look bright to the expert. In the opinion of the interview it is hard to try and estimate what the situation will look like in five to ten years. During the recent years there have been several new incoming actors coming up who have seen the potential in the supply and demand chain of educational tourism. It is likely that at some point the bigger actors will take over and the smaller incoming actors will disappear.

5.3 Background research with an employee of the educational division

As a part of the research, I wanted to gain insight on what the municipal organisations do involving the educational travel aspect. The commissioner suggested the representative from the educational division of the city and the background information interview was conducted with them. This background information interview was done to understand the role of the educational division better which meant that the interview focused on the responsibilities of the organisation within educational travel. Questions on the development and the future plans were also asked.

According to the representative, the role of the educational division in educational travel is to be the so-called middleman who chooses the fitting schools according to the needs of the customer and tries to make the visits benefit both parties. Essentially, they connect the educational travel visitor groups, often professionals, with the local schools in order to make the visitations happen.

Depending on the interests of the visitors the visits focus on different destinations in the region. The school visits are always dependent on the principal's approval, as they cannot organize the visitations otherwise. According to the interviewee the visits to the primary school grades 1 - 6 are the easiest of all to organize. There are some challenges with organizing visits to the school grades 7 - 9 but the upper secondary schools and vocational schools are the hardest to organize visits to. This is due to the fact that these higher levels of schools have stricter annual academic calendars and the operations are more highly organized and tied to the schedules.

Teachers coming into the city from abroad to do complementary studies after they have already completed their main studies is one example of the educational travel happening in the city already. Among other things they go and visit the training school for teachers. However,

not all of the visits are necessarily very long. The visits can be much shorter as well, some visits can be a minimum of a two-hour presentation on the Finnish educational system.

There have not been any set goals for educational travel in the city for the future. The operations are done as a municipality, which means that the marketing is restricted by laws. Marketing can be done to some extent, but it is not allowed in the means of making profit since there are limits on commercial marketing for municipalities. The interviewee still considers that the city has been able to fulfill the demands of the customers so far.

According to the representative the strength of the city is that it has all of the possible levels of education, which provides a chance to get a wholesome picture of the educational system of Finland. In their opinion people are interested in coming to visit Finland because of the good reputation the education provided in the country has.

Well, they come to us in Finland precisely because of the good reputation that the Finnish education has and because we have had good results in the Pisa-surveys. They still are good, the Asian countries have passed us slightly because they basically have a different type of concept of education to us. They believe in the 12-hour work day whereas in Finland the pupils in comprehensive schools do a maximum of a 30 hours of work per week, so these teaching methods are what they come to look at and how it is possible to reach almost as good results with half the work load like in Shanghai.

6 Methodology

As I am doing research on a relatively new phenomenon, I chose to do qualitative research. This chapter will focus on providing some theory on this type of research and the relevant methods. Furthermore, I will explain my own approach and describe the implementation plan for my thesis.

6.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research is a fitting method for researching a subject where you need to gain an understanding of a new phenomenon. The process behind doing qualitative research begins in a similar way to quantitative research: having a research problem, defining it and forming the research questions. The main difference between qualitative and quantitative research is in the data collection methods. In quantitative research, the analysis focuses on the numbers and the correlation between them, meanwhile in qualitative research the research focuses on everything else besides numbers. The amount of people involved is also different: in qualitative research, there are generally only a few participants, but quantitative research often requires tens or hundreds of respondents in one research (Kananen 2010, 36-38).

The data in quantitative research is based on different meanings that have been derived from numbers whereas qualitative data is based on the meanings that have been expressed through either spoken or textual words instead. In quantitative research the results are displayed in both numerical and standardised data. Qualitative research results are non-standardised, and the results need to be classified into different categories (Saunders, 2015).

Qualitative research is a suitable research method if there is no previous knowledge, theory or research done on the phenomenon or a deeper knowledge of the phenomenon is wanted. If there are new theories or hypotheses being developed in the research, triangulation is used or a good description of the phenomenon is wanted, qualitative research is also the correct way of doing research (Kananen 2010, 41).

Typically, the data collection methods in qualitative research are mainly observation and different types of interviews, for example theme interviews (Kananen 2010, 48). There are several different types of interviews. Personally, I chose to do semi-structured theme interviews as a part of my research process.

Semi-structured interviews are different to interviews that have a clear structure or no structure at all. In semi-structured interviews it is possible for the researcher to have list of

themes and a set of key questions to be asked, but the questions might differ depending on the interview as the same questions might not be relevant for all the participants in the research process. The order of the questions asked might also change from time to time depending on the conversation. In semi-structured interviews there is space for some additional questions (Saunders, 2015).

Theme interviews are interviews where a discussion between two people takes place focusing on one subject at a time. The researcher has chosen the themes that are talked about with the interviewee ahead of time. The theme can be very general and primarily the whole subject of the conversation (Kananen 2014, 70).

6.2 Conducting the interviews

As a part of my research, I conducted interviews to collect data. For my research I completed 10 interviews in total. All of the interviews were individual. A large portion of the interviews were done personally face to face but some of them were done via phone calls and online video call applications due to the distance and the current state of the world with COVID-19. The interviews were all recorded with audio recording programs of a phone or a laptop. Afterwards the collected data was transcribed into text form and then analysed with the content analysis method.

Two of the interviews were done with a representative of an educational institution and the rest of the interviews were done with different companies and organisations who have agreed to be collaborative partners of the commissioner before. The subjects of the interviews were the collaboration companies and organisations of the commissioner that were named to be possible good targets of the interviews by my internship advisor. Because they all were linked with the organisation already, I was able to get hold of the contact information of the interviewees through the organisation.

I made my own list of questions relevant for the research topic and used that as my base for all of the interviews. I modified some questions and the order of them depending on the interview as every question was not relevant for each interviewee. The general frame of the questions stayed the same in every interview and additional questions were also asked. The framework for the interview questions can be found in the Appendix chapter in Attachment 1.

Due to the fact that the organisations will remain anonymous in the public version of the thesis, I am not able to give specifically detailed information on the interviewees or the organisations.

To gain a general understanding of the backgrounds of the interviewees the researcher created a table that consists of the coded identity names of the interviewees, their positions at the organisations and some general details of the organisation (see Table 1.

The table will have the code name of the interviewee with the date and the duration of the interview. The interviewees will be presented in code form in order for the results to be clear as well as anonymous. The interviewees that were representatives from educational institutions will be coded with the letter A and a number. The interviewees that were from private companies and organisations will be coded with the letter B and a number.

Table 1. Interviewee and organisation details

Interviewee A1. 9.3.2020 07:17 very big organisation over 3000 employees	The interviewee has been a researcher for a long time and has been doing public presentation work for the educational institution located in the city of the commissioner the past two years.
Interviewee A2. 10.3 20:27 big organisation over 700 employees	The interviewee is a lecturer in an educational institution in the city of the commissioner.
Interviewee B1. 4.3. 06:40 very small organisation under 20 employees	The interviewee is the CEO of the company. The organization is a meeting and events location.
Interviewee B2. 11.3. 14:27 small organisation under 50 employees	The interviewee is the sales director of the organization. The organization has three main segments for products which are accommodation, restaurant services and golf.
Interviewee B3. 12.3. 10:28 big international organisation over 14 000 in total	The interviewee is a hotel manager. The organization is a luxury hotel.
Interviewee B4. 13.3. 07:27 very small organisation under 20 employees	The interviewee is a museum director. The organization works under one of the educational institutions of the city.
Interviewee B5. 19.3. 05:33 very small organisation under 20 employees	The interviewee works in the sales department of the organization. The organization sells the spaces that are left over from the use of the institution that it is connected to for meetings and other events.

<p>Interviewee B6. 20.3. 10:17 middle-sized organisation very small organisation under 20 employees</p>	<p>The interviewee is the CEO of the organization. The main product segment of the organization is the restaurant, the lunches etc. There is also accommodation and a small boutique. They organize meetings and different kinds of events. If the customer wants, they can also provide some activities along with the meetings.</p>
<p>Interviewee B7. 31.3. 15:56 middle-sized organisation under 50 employees</p>	<p>The interviewee is the owner of the company. The main customer target group is business customers, more specifically the meetings clients. The company also has accommodation services that are also used by other types of clients.</p>
<p>Interviewee B8. 15.4. 13:54 big international organisation over 1500 employees in total</p>	<p>The interviewee is a key customer manager in the organization and is in charge of getting new customers and maintaining the relationships with the old customers.</p>

7 Interview results

This chapter will present the results of the semi-structured theme interviews. A total of ten interviews were conducted, two of which were with representatives of educational institutions and eight were from private companies. The results will be discussed one theme at a time. The discussed themes are going to be previous educational travel operations, strengths and weaknesses and the attractive attributes of Finland and the city of the commissioner.

7.1 Education travel operations

During the interviews the interviewees were asked whether they had previously had educational travel operations. This subchapter will focus on the answers to this question, separating the results between the private companies and the educational institutions.

The minority of the private companies had only had educational tourism in terms of business clients who came in to have trainings, seminars or meetings at their locations. However, the majority of the respondents had had customers from not only the business customers segment but additionally customers who were coming to Finland to learn about the educational system itself. Based on the interviews, the main target group of the private companies is mostly the business clientele. Many of the companies or organisations that focus on the business clientele do have many MICE clients, but they do not necessarily come from the educational travel segment even if they come from abroad.

Interviewee **B1**. stated that even if 30% of their customers are foreign, they typically come in with hosts that are from Finland:

- - 30% of all our clients are foreigners, but they do not come as their own companies or own groups on the educational travel side, but instead they are usually coming in with Finnish export companies so in connection with multinational companies, they come to us to attend a meeting or a training. Then they usually always have a Finnish host, even being foreigners. Which makes that approximately a third of the customers are foreigners.

Interviewee **B8**. pointed out that even when they know that educational travel has brought them some customers, they do not necessarily know the whole process:

It is hard to measure whether we have had those customers because we do not necessarily see the whole chain behind it. - - But clearly, we have had customers who I know operate in educational tourism circles and then buy the accommodation and restaurant services from us in

a way maybe. They do not tell us directly, but we know ourselves that what segment the client is operating in then we know that the programs gotten from DMO (commissioner) can be combined with our accommodation services.

The private companies that said that they have had educational travel operations before were also asked whether they have done collaborative work with educational institutions during their educational travel operations. The result was exactly divided as half of the respondents said that they had collaborated with educational institutions and the other half stated that they had not worked directly in collaboration with educational institutions.

The interviewed educational institutions in the city of the commissioner have both started their own educational travel operations but their operations have been quite small so far. The educational institutions have worked on their own products in educational travel and have products available online on their websites. Both of the educational institutions have had visitors coming in to learn about the educational system of Finland and also more specifically about what the educational institutions have to offer themselves.

Interviewee **A1**. has been a part of the public operations where international visitors come to visit them in one of their locations, the institution itself or one of its other locations. These visits have mainly focused on groups of children and the general younger target group. Oftentimes this means that the parent is in charge of choosing where the child goes, which makes the safety issues very important.

Interviewee **A2**. has done collaboration with their colleague to create export products of the degree programs that she lectures for at the educational institution. So far, the product has not been bought but it is visible on the website of the educational institution. Different delegations interested in selling or buying products have still visited them.

Conclusively, most of the interviewees from private companies have had some type of educational travel operations before. However, not all of their customers are from the type of customer target group that this research focused on. If there has been some educational tourism in the past it has been done typically in collaboration with the educational institutions. On the other hand, both of the educational institutions interviewed have had some educational travel operations already but are continuously developing them.

Table 2. summarises the discussed educational travel operations history of the interviewees.

Table 2. Educational travel history of interviewees

Previous educational travel operations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Majority of interviewees have had educational travel operations previously▪ Not all operations have been focused on the researched educational travel (also trainings, seminars, meetings hosted by the visiting private companies)▪ Educational travel focusing on the Finnish education has mainly been done in collaboration with local educational institutions

7.2 Strengths and weaknesses

The interviewees were asked to describe the strengths and weaknesses of the organisations during the interviews. Reoccurring themes in the interviews were the geographical location, environment and spaces at their locations. When asked this question, many of the private companies stated that the location could be considered both their weakness and their strength.

Several of the interviewees said that they benefit from their location. Many of the collaboration organisations are able to use their location as their selling point or marketing tool, since their location is just outside the city in a more natural environment or in the archipelago area. This can work as a marketing tool, but it can also create some challenges with the distances and public transport.

The interviewees **B1.** and **B6.** talked about their strengths in the following way:

B1: Well, we have one strength which is everything and that is nature. The different forms of nature, which effect the environment and then we're talking about the big major things in the tourism of Finland right now: cleanliness and beauty and calmness and everything that has to do with it, nature is then our best partner.

B6: - - they found that the area was very inspiring when they were trying to develop new procedures and forms of cooperation, then this peace of nature and that kind of thing appealed to these foreigners. They found that they were so inspired by even the fact that the destination they arrived to was not a complete city destination.

Common challenges for the private companies were distances, public transport and other issues that had something to do with their location. Many of the companies seemed to suffer from similar inconveniences caused by their physical location. Productization of the educational travel products was also mentioned to be one of the challenges the interviewees were facing.

The fact that the biggest airport in Finland is located within the metropolitan area was mentioned multiple times during the interviews. This is important because many of the international visitors first arrive to the country by flying to the Helsinki-Vantaa airport. However, after landing the visitors still need to take another transport vehicle outside of the capital region if they intend on staying somewhere else.

Interviewee **B2**. spoke about the challenge of having the location be both the strength and the weakness:

- - in Finland primarily the visitors fly to Helsinki and then afterwards they would have to travel to our place with some kind of transport for a couple of hours, which can make it challenging for us, so if I say that our strength is that we are next to nature in the archipelago, then again the overall location for these kind of international training groups can prove to be a challenge after all when first you fly... Which has in fact in some cases has unfortunately concretely come out, when we have been in an offer competition and they have felt that our location would be the most suitable but the customer does not want to fly out their people to the Helsinki-Vantaa airport first and then take a bus for a couple of hours to get to the destination so the concrete location is easily the thing that proves to be the challenge.

According to the interviewees, public transportation can prove to be an issue if the location is just outside the city. The customers accessing the location of the provider of services or products is vital to the success of a business. In case the customers are international they do not necessarily have their own vehicle at their use, which in other words means that they might have to rely on public transport.

Interviewees **B4**. and **B6**. pointed out their challenge has to do with the public transportation:

B4: People seem to consider that we are far away, even when we are right on the border of the city but somehow people think we are far away at the back end of the neighboring municipality. The fact that the public transportation does not come right to the front the door, that there is a short walking distance, then at least somehow to foreigners it seems to be challenging to use the public transport.

B6: Well, the weak spot could be that if public transport is being used for transportation the connections are not very good. But now there has been a little improvement since now there's an express bus line connection stopping at us, but sometimes things have almost fallen apart when we have had to consider how to transportation is organized, even when we are only 13

kilometers away from the city center, but these public transport connections go so rarely during the weekends.

The companies that are located in the archipelago or otherwise close to nature or have natural elements combined with their business have a significant advantage in the MICE industry segment. The companies coming in to have meetings are going somewhere else to have their meetings to get something new out of it. Typically, the meetings are combined with some kind of activities in the destination, which makes the natural environment an asset to these companies.

Another thing that was mentioned by the interviewees mentioned as one of their challenges at the moment was the productization of the services and products specifically for the use of educational tourism. The general wish of several interviewees seemed to be that there should be an actor that would be there to create this package deals of the different products and services that would be attractive to the potential customer.

Interviewee **B8**. expressed their opinion:

But in our area there are loads of different products available, which can like be combined together and then we just have to stand out among other educational travel destinations and sort of do these different kinds of options in our area too, four to five different products aimed at different target groups.

Both of the interviewed educational institutions discussed similar strengths and weaknesses of theirs. The strengths mentioned for both organisations were the versatile and modern locations along with the learning environments. In addition, the professional and skillful personnel was mentioned as well to be both of their strength. Based on their answers on the weaknesses of the organizations many of the challenges have to do with practical issues. The productization of the educational travel products was still in development.

The educational institutions spoke about their challenges accordingly:

A1: Well, for now our operations have been quite small-scale, so we can say that every group has then been customized separately. So, what is now visible on the website of the local DMO (commissioner) are models so, they are the kind of things from where the entirety of the product can be built on.

A2: Yes, so we have not actually, we have not had anything completely materialized just yet because our (educational export) products have not been bought once yet, but I and my colleague have worked on the products from one of the degree program’s perspective, on that educational program’s perspective we have been the ones who have made the offering that now exists. And that has to do with this degree program exactly.

The discussed strengths and weaknesses can be found summarized in Table 2. below.

Table 2. Strengths and weaknesses of the interviewees

Strengths of the interviewees	Weaknesses of the interviewees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ location ▪ environment ▪ spaces at location (inside and outside) ▪ nature ▪ versatile products and services ▪ professional and talented personnel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ location ▪ public transportation ▪ distance from Helsinki-Vantaa airport ▪ productization

7.3 The attractive factors of Finland

The interviewees were asked what they considered to be some of the factors that attract international visitors to Finland. When asked this question, the interviewees seemed to generally have the same opinion as many of the answers followed through with similar touch points or even completely same factors that are contributing to the attractiveness of Finland as an educational travel destination.

There were several different factors that were repeated in multiple interviews. The reputation of Finland’s education was mentioned by half of the interviewees. Five of the interviewees mentioned that the good reputation of the education works as one of the attractions of Finland as a destination for educational travel.

For example, Interviewees **A2.** and **B6.** talked about the reputation of the education in Finland:

A2: Well they are probably coming to find some type of a “Philosopher’s Stone” on how we have succeeded so well in things, that I think what we really should tell is that how in reality is that our teachers all the way from the kindergarten we have a different kind of starting point like an approach to it, to what learning is that we would probably have to train them on that kind of a hard thing maybe. Our society appreciates teachers, which is a starting point that makes the education in Finland so good. Here a person who wants to teach, has to have finished master’s

degree and their know-how is appreciated. - - So in a way they come to wonder about it, the message is so that it should go to the society and on the other hand it should go to the political decision making and that kind of a thing that the freedom in teaching is different and that is probably one of the key things in Finland.

B6: Well I think that Finland is considered to be developed or a specialist in many ways, that the level of education is top notch and all these social benefits, which make education possible, then probably things connected to that kind of a thing are interesting. Also, overall this social security and the different structure of the society than what they have elsewhere.

In addition, the nature of Finland was mentioned by multiple interviewees. The interviewees agreed on the fact that the beautiful nature of Finland is one of the key selling points of Finland. The general peacefulness and cleanliness of the country along with learning something new were all factors named by several interviewees as well. Other things that were mentioned were the exoticism, safety, beauty, Lapland and student exchanges and internships. All of the attributes adding to the attractiveness of Finland can be seen summarised in Table 5. below.

Table 5. Finland’s attractive attributes

Attractive attributes of Finland
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reputation of Finland’s education ▪ Nature ▪ Peacefulness ▪ Cleanliness ▪ Learning something new ▪ Exoticism ▪ Safety ▪ Beauty ▪ Lapland ▪ Student exchanges and internships

7.4 The attractive factors of the commissioner’s city

The interviewees were asked what they thought to be the selling points in the city of the commissioner or what they thought could be used more to the city’s advantage. This was asked to see if there was something that the city could use when creating educational travel products, as educational travel product packages tend to have both elements of learning and different activities such as cultural activities.

By a clear majority the archipelago was mentioned the most by the respondents, as over a third of the interviewees mentioned it to be a region in the city’s close proximity that could be

further developed and used to the benefit of the tourism sector. The interviewees seemed to think that this area in the near hood of the city was not being used to its full potential and that there would be something that could be used more to the city's advantage.

Interviewee **B8**. talked about the potential of the area:

Well I would say, that it would be our archipelago so in a way we have not productized we have not succeeded as well in that sense. That overall in the archipelago and the products there, they should be formed into some kind of a compact form so that it would not be so difficult for the customers and the international customers to go there and gather that information, that we would have simple and easily accessible archipelago products. So, I would see a lot more potential in that. Of course, we of course can't necessarily do it alone as a region that we would need bigger forces and "marketing machinery" behind it, but there is a lot of potential in it.

Other factors that were mentioned multiple times were the history of the city, education, nature and the culture in the city. The transportation and activities in the city were both mentioned once. Some interviewees pointed out that the city played a significant role in the development of the education in Finland which makes the history even more interesting from the educational travel perspective.

The attractive attributes of the history, culture and education were named for example by the interviewee **B3**:

I'm not originally from the city but I always say that the city is like the Paris of Finland. There are so many things here but yet it is compact. It is easy for you to move around here, you don't necessarily need any big transportation things and you can get around by walking, the history of the city is incredible, and there is the wine and dine-culture and the level of education, the universities and everything and there are so many things here that I see this as the first city of Finland.

Similar attributes were discussed in multiple interviews. All of the mentioned attractions of the commissioners' city can be found summarized in Table 6. below.

Table 6. The commissioners' city's attractions

Attractive attributes in the city of the commissioner
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Archipelago▪ History▪ Education▪ Nature▪ Culture▪ Transportation▪ Activities

7.5 Validity and reliability of this study

The credibility questions of qualitative research differ from how they are evaluated in quantitative research. The concepts of reliability and validity from quantitative research cannot be directly used in qualitative research as the basis of the research is different. Some factors used to evaluate qualitative research are confirmability, dependability, transferability and credibility. Triangulation is a way of adding credibility in qualitative research. This can work as a way to view a phenomenon from as many angles as possible. Saturation is what happens when enough research has been done and the answers start repeating themselves (Kananen, 2010).

The intention of this research was to gather a deeper understanding of the educational travel in the region. The results of the research are more credible as the research was done with several different actors in the field to gain a broader understanding of educational travel as a phenomenon. The quality of the study was improved by doing background research and interviews with the experts on educational travel. This research was able to reach triangulation as the data was collected through both semi-structured interviews and background research on theory and interviews with educational travel experts. The saturation where the results start to repeat themselves was reached within this research. Similar themes and topics were discussed repeatedly with the interviewees, which gave me a good understanding of the common strengths and challenges the interviewees were facing with educational travel.

This study focused on a portion of the local companies and educational institutions. The matters discussed in this research are very focused on the local issues. The results of the study of the educational travel are not representative of educational travel in Finland as a whole since they focused on this specific region. The current situation with educational travel in another city in Finland could be very different if it was researched somewhere else.

8 Conclusions

This chapter will present the conclusions derived from the results gained that were found using the qualitative data collection method. The interview results will be discussed as a whole while presenting some of the recurring themes that came up.

Finland has become an increasingly popular destination of all tourism. The number of overnight stays in the country has increased every year according to the research of Business Finland discussed in the Chapter 3. There are multiple different reasons as to why the tourists decide to come to Finland, one of the main ones being the nature and the culture and entertainment. Along with the more traditional attributes of Finland, educational travel has now become one of the newer areas of tourism that attracts more and more international visitors to the country.

Currently, the problem with the commissioner's city is that despite the abundance of providers and educational institutions interested in working more with educational travel, the development process is not very far just yet. Some productization of educational travel products has been done but there is still considerable development work to be done. The challenge at hand right now is creating functional and successful enterprises and packages with attractive products and services, that would be available all-year-round and would target several different segments.

The Finnish educational system has gained a distinguished reputation all over the world which drives more people to come visit the country. The city of the commissioner could benefit from putting more resources to the educational travel phenomenon as it has been remarked to be a growing phenomenon globally. Educational travel can benefit the city on multiple levels as tourism always has an effect on several different stakeholders.

A large majority of the interviewees mentioned the archipelago as a destination that could be further productized and developed. The common thought behind it was that there is some untapped potential in the region that could be used to the city's advantage more in the international markets as well. This speaks volumes about the local providers being dissatisfied with the use of the archipelago in regional marketing.

The archipelago is a destination close in close proximity to the city. There are available products and providers in the archipelago that could be put into a more compact form, which would make it easier for international customers to travel there and gain more information

about the area. Simple and easily accessible archipelago products are what the region is currently lacking. The general information on the archipelago and information on how to access the area are not necessarily as accessible as they could be right now. There is a need for more focused intensive marketing and development.

When international visitors come to a destination abroad, they are often dependant on public transportation. The easy accessibility to the city of the commissioner was mentioned by several interviewees as one of the selling points of the city. According to the interviewees, functioning public transport to and from the city makes a significant difference. However, other interviewees mentioned that there are challenges within the city's internal public transport.

Despite the functionality of the public transport that comes into the city from further away, the public transport within the borders of the city is insufficient (in terms of frequency and range of areas covered by it). All of the interviewees are located within a relatively close proximity to the city centre of the city but the public transport connections in many of the cases are not ideal.

The city can also be attractive because it has had a significant role in the history of Finland. Finnish education is deeply rooted in the city. This makes the city more valuable in the educational tourism perspective. In addition, the nature and the quality of education were also mentioned several times by the interviewees. All of these factors can work as the push factors, discussed in Chapter 3, of the city and could be further utilized in the marketing of educational travel products.

The interviewed educational institutions of the city have both expressed interest in deeper collaborative work in the future. Both of them wished that in the future the collaboration would be more long-term. Long-term collaboration would benefit all of the stakeholders would guarantee the future development and success of educational travel in the region. It would not only benefit the commissioner and the educational institutions but also the private companies.

9 Development suggestions for the future

This study was done to research the existing educational travel providers and possible products that could be further utilized. What has proven to be difficult in the educational travel operations so far has been the productization.

There is great potential in the city of the commissioner for the growth of educational tourism. However, the development process involves many different stakeholders. The full development of educational travel in the commissioner's region is in its very beginning at the moment. The question to be solved is: how can the city unite all these forces together to deepen the collaborative work between the different actors in order to create educational travel services, products and packages?

The operations and actions need to be planned and considered while thinking about long-term solutions. A successful and lasting collaboration partnership is beneficial for everyone involved, but there needs to be an initial willingness in all the participants to work on a deeper development process with joined forces. If a collaboration is functional between all stakeholders, they will be able to successfully create interesting products for the international educational travel tourism segment.

Currently what the city of the commissioner's city is missing is a clear incoming actor for educational travel that solely focused on the field. The DMO that commissioned this thesis is the sales and marketing operator of the whole city. This means that the organization already has a lot of responsibilities as is, which has meant that the educational travel phenomenon has not yet been explored in depth. The scope of the activities organized right now by the commissioner is so vast that there may not be enough resources to work on the development of educational travel. If the organization wishes to adopt educational travel as one of their main focuses as a DMO and the city's main promoter, more prominent results can be obtained.

There is a limited selection of possible educational tourism products available on the website of the commissioner. For the international customers to find this information the educational tourism possibilities should be promoted more heavily on the commissioner's online presence, both on their social media and the main website. Deeper collaboration with the educational institutions and private companies in the region could help with creating some more attractive products in the educational travel segment.

My proposal is to create systematic and far-organized entireties of products to help with the productionalization of the educational tourism products. If there was a local actor putting together the existing services and products the educational institutions, the accommodation providers and other actors in the tourism field it would make process swifter and more efficient. At the moment the commissioner already has a lot of responsibilities as is, so the educational travel phenomenon has not necessarily had that many resources behind it.

It was interesting to see how many times the archipelago was mentioned during the interviews when discussing the region's key selling points. The archipelago region is something that could be used to a greater extent to the city's benefit. The archipelago area near the region has considerable potential that could be further utilized. My recommendation for the organisation is to research all the possibilities of the actors working in the archipelago and to consider what products and services could be used along with an educational travel package.

10 Discussion

This chapter will conclude the thesis. It will contain my own reflection on the thesis process and the results as well as general thoughts of the end result.

During the thesis process I have familiarized myself with the educational travel phenomenon. Working on the thesis has been rewarding to me for multiple reasons. I enjoyed working closely with the commissioner and they were a significant help to me throughout the process. Because my own internship advisor from the commissioner had a vast knowledge on the educational travel phenomenon, I received valuable advice and comments while working on the thesis.

I saved a lot of time by getting the interviewee contact information from the commissioner and there was good collaboration also from the local collaboration partners of the commissioner. This was immensely helpful for my research process and I am very thankful to all the interviewees that helped me complete my research. Working closely with the local collaboration companies gave me a broader understanding of different local companies that could in the future be more linked with educational travel among all that they are already doing.

The multifacetedness of the research surprised me along the way. There were several different angles the research could have focused on more in depth. The original plan for the research was originally to include broader benchmarking and a comprehensive development plan for the future but as that would have expanded the thesis report itself too long. It would have been interesting to focus more on the combining of the archipelago with educational travel as it came up in the interviews and it was an interesting factor to me. Unfortunately, the research process was too far along to focus on the archipelago when I realized that it could have been a bigger focus on point during the process.

In the future it could be beneficial for the DMO to do more research into combining the elements and activities of the archipelago with the educational travel phenomenon. This could be something to be explored in the future, if the commissioner wishes to conduct more research to the potential of the archipelago with educational travel.

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Appendix

Attachment 1. Interview question frame for the collaboration organisations

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The collaboration organisations:

- What is your position in the company and what kind of responsibilities do you have?
- What does the company do, provide, offer...?
- Have you already had educational travel operations?
- Were the operations done in collaboration with local educational institutions?
- What strengths do you have in relation to educational travel? What are your selling arguments?
- What about weaknesses?
- What are the selling points for educational tourism in Turku & what could prove to be an issue?
- How could the educational tourism in the area be developed?
- Is there a product, destination or an area that could be further developed?
- What do you think the typical educational tourism tourist comes to find in Finland?