



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN MEETING MANAGEMENT

Case: Polaris-network meeting

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Abstract <p>The Polaris network is a co-operation channel between Nordic and Baltic education institutes and organisations, aiming to enable active co-operation between the partners. The School of Tourism and Services Management of Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences is one of the partner institutes, and was assigned to be the host for a network meeting in September 2008. The idea was to have a two-day meeting in Jyväskylä with approximately 15 to 20 participants. In this study, a project plan for organising the meeting was drawn.</p> <p>The main focus of the study was on sustainable development in meeting management, with the aim of organising the Polaris meeting in the most environmentally friendly way. To fulfil this purpose, a lot of desk research was carried out by collecting and analysing information on meeting management and sustainable development from literature, articles and the World Wide Web. Discussions with lecturers and observation through personal participation in the meeting and its planning were also a good source of information.</p> <p>The research showed that with the continuing growth of the meeting industry, developments are also being made. Meeting and event planners as well as the meeting participants are becoming more environmentally conscious. However, the industry still has a lot of problems in facing the climate change, largely due to the emissions caused by travelling. The planning of the Polaris network meeting also showed how dependant event planners can be on their suppliers and service providers when trying to design a sustainable meeting. Despite some last-minute changes in duration and expected participant numbers, the Polaris meeting was fairly successful.</p> <p>The results of this thesis give suggestions on how to make meetings more sustainable and environmentally friendly. The information can be used for the planning of future meetings or events at Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences. The topic is definitely worth more research as sustainable development issues become more important every day.</p>		
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<p>Polaris-verkosto on yhteistyökanava Baltian ja Pohjoismaisten koulutusinstituutioiden ja järjestöjen kesken, ja se pyrkii mahdollistamaan aktiivisen yhteistyön partnereiden välillä. Jyväskylän ammattikorkeakoulun matkailu-, ravitsemus- ja talousalan yksikkö on yksi verkoston partnereista ja sai tehtäväkseen toimia Polaris-verkostotapaamisen järjestäjänä syyskuussa 2008. Ajatuksena oli järjestää kaksipäiväinen tapaaminen noin 15/20:lle osanottajalle. Tämä opinnäytetyö tarjoaa projektisuunnitelman kyseiselle tapaamiselle.</p> <p>Tämä tutkimus keskittyy erityisesti kestävään kehitykseen kokousjärjestämisessä; tavoitteena oli järjestää Polaris-tapaaminen mahdollisimman ympäristöystävällisellä tavalla. Tavoitteen saavuttamiseksi tietoa kokousjärjestämisestä ja kestävästä kehityksestä kerättiin ja analysoitiin kirjallisuudesta, artikkeleista ja Internetistä. Myös keskustelut luennoitsijoiden kanssa ja omat havainnot kokouksen suunnittelu- ja toteutusvaiheessa tarjosivat hyödyllistä tietoa tulosten saamiseksi.</p> <p>Tutkimus osoitti, että kokousalan jatkuvan kasvun myötä myös kehitystä tapahtuu. Kokous- ja tapahtumajärjestäjät sekä kokousten osanottajat ovat selkeästi entistä ympäristötietoisempia. Siitä huolimatta alalla on vielä runsaasti ongelmia ilmastonmuutoksen kohtaamisessa, mikä johtuu suurelta osin matkustamisen aiheuttamista päästöistä. Polaris-tapaamisen suunnittelu osoitti myös, kuinka riippuvaisia tapahtumajärjestäjät ovat alihankkijoista ja palveluiden tuottajista yrittäessään järjestää kestävä kehityksen periaatteiden mukaista kokousta. Huolimatta joistakin viime hetken muutoksista Polaris-tapaamisen kestossa ja osanottajamäärässä kokous onnistui melko hyvin.</p> <p>Tämän opinnäytetyön tulokset tarjoavat ehdotuksia, kuinka kokouksista voitaisiin tehdä ympäristöystävällisempiä. Tietoa voidaan käyttää tulevien kokousten ja tapahtumien järjestämisessä Jyväskylän ammattikorkeakoulussa. Aihe on varmasti lisätutkimuksen arvoinen, sillä kestävä kehityksen merkitys on päivä päivältä tärkeämpi.</p>		
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1 INTRODUCTION

The meeting and congress industry has been growing in the past few years, and together with the tourism industry it is claimed to be one of the biggest trades in the world. Globalisation and the increasing growth have brought a need for development in the industry, both in Finland and globally. At the same time, the natural resources are diminishing rapidly and concerns of climate change have become an everyday focus in the media. The concept of sustainable development has been developed decades ago but only now do people begin to recognise the need for change in society and lifestyle. Different choices in business and leisure need to be made in order to leave the future generations with as much resources as are used today.

The Polaris network is a co-operation channel between Nordic and Baltic education institutes and organisations, aiming to enable active co-operation for students, lecturers, researchers and other operators in the field of business, catering, hospitality and facility management. In the previous years the network has received Nordplus funding to be used for mobility and different projects. Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences is one of the partners in the Polaris network, and more specifically the School of Tourism and Services Management. Last year the contact person of the network from Jyväskylä, Minna Junttila, attended a network seminar in Copenhagen together with one lecturer from the school. It was decided there that Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences would be the network host in 2008.

In May 2008, Minna Junttila decided together with the administrative coordinator of Polaris, the Turku University of Applied Sciences, that it is necessary to hold a meeting of the network partners in September 2008. The idea was to have a two-day meeting in Jyväskylä with approximately 15 to 20 participants, organised by the School of Tourism and Services Management.

This thesis focuses on sustainable development in meeting management by using the Polaris network meeting as a practical example. The purpose is to study the current situation of the meeting industry in relation to sustainable development. The idea is to plan and organise the Polaris meeting in a sustainable way, by minimising its environmental impact with more ecological choices. For the major part, the research

concentrates on environmental issues, with less study on other aspects of sustainable development in order to limit the topic.

The thesis consists mainly of the theory part and the practical output of the assignment, the plan for the Polaris meeting. First, the research topic is introduced in more detail and some background information on the Polaris network is given. This is followed by a definition of meeting industry, and an analysis of the industry both globally and in Finland. The benefits of meeting industry are also discussed briefly. The second part of the theory concentrates on sustainable development, how it is seen in the meeting industry, and what can be done to reduce the environmental impact of meetings.

After the theory part, the initial plan for a two-day meeting for the Polaris network is drawn. It explains everything that needs to be considered in the planning of the meeting and gives a description of what needs to be done and when. Some ideas of what can make the meeting more sustainable are also discussed. Last, there is an evaluation part assessing how the plans succeeded and how the meeting was eventually organised. Finally, the thesis is concluded by a discussion of the main results and possibilities for the future.

2 RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND AIM

Initially the idea for the topic of the Bachelor's Thesis came from discussions with a few Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences lecturers in the spring of 2008.

Personally I was interested in event management but did not have contacts to a company with a suitable topic to be researched. The School of Tourism and Services Management belongs to a network of different schools and companies from the Nordic countries and had been assigned to host a meeting for the network in the following autumn. After some more negotiations, it was decided that I would help in organising this meeting together with Minna Junttila, the international co-coordinator of the school.

The plan was to form the Bachelor's Thesis by reporting the planning and organising of the Polaris-network meeting. As the topic was not really a new issue to be researched, a fresh perspective on meeting management had to be chosen. Due to personal interest and growing public focus on environmental issues, I chose to research how sustainable development aspects can and should be considered in organising meetings. As such, no similar thesis or publications had been conducted in the School of Tourism and Services Management.

The aim was to conduct research on how meetings can be organised without having a negative impact on climate change. This study can be beneficial for the Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences in terms of giving new ideas for organising meetings and congresses in a sustainable way at their schools. The School of Tourism and Services Management also got my assistance in the practical side of arranging the Polaris-network meeting.

2.1 Research purpose and method

The purpose of the thesis is to provide a plan for organising the Polaris-network meeting successfully from the initial planning phase to the final evaluation. A specific aim was to reduce the environmental impact of the meeting and to generate ideas of

how to organise 'greener' meetings and congresses in the future at the Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences. The environmental issues are likely to be an important part of making business in the near future and thus it is necessary to analyse the topic.

The method used for this research was analysing existing information and making suggestions based on the data. Literature and other written material were collected from the school library databases and the World Wide Web. Also communication with Minna Junttila both by e-mail and in person was used to gather information on the Polaris-network. I observed the media closely to gain up-to-date knowledge on the sustainable development issues. Finally, discussions with the meeting participants provided some information for evaluating the success of the meeting.

2.2 The Polaris-network

Some background information on the Polaris-network is necessary for being able to plan a meeting that suits their needs. Today, the actual network has been formed from two separate networks a little similar to each other, namely the old Polaris-network and the Nordic Network for Catering Services and Hospitality Management (NCN). Both of them had been receiving funding from the Nordplus Framework Programme run by the Centre for International Mobility, CIMO, and the Nordic Council for Ministers. The Framework programme supports mobility, project and network activities in the eight participating countries in the Baltic and Nordic regions. (Nordplus 2008.)

The old Polaris-network began to operate approximately nine years ago from the initiative of Turku University of Applied Sciences as a student and teacher exchange channel between Finland and other Nordic countries. The NCN was launched some years later in 2006 by Laurea University of Applied Sciences, with an emphasis on having companies co-operating with schools. This year the NCN decided to join the Polaris in order to strengthen the network. The general goal of the new network is to enable active Nordic and Baltic co-operation for students, lecturers, researchers and

private or public companies and non-governmental organisations that deal with business, catering, hospitality and facility management. (Junttila 2008c.)

Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences is one of the many higher education institutes across Scandinavia and the Baltic region that are partners of the network. At the moment, there are 11 partners from six different countries, each with their own area of expertise. Turku University of Applied Sciences is the administrative coordinator of the Polaris network, and each partner institution has its own contact person. The NCN held a planning seminar for the network in Copenhagen in 2007, where it was decided that Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences would be the next coordinating institute this year. After joining the Polaris network, all partners agreed that there was a need for a meeting which should be held in Jyväskylä in the autumn 2008. The partners should meet in order to present the main results of both networks, and to discuss and plan the future activities based on those results. In April, many of the partners already expressed their interest to attend the meeting in Jyväskylä in September 2008 (Nordplus application 2008).

In the initial discussions between Minna Junttila and the contact person from Turku University of Applied Sciences, it was concluded that the Polaris network meeting would be held for two days in Jyväskylä in September 2008. The network applied funding from Nordplus for future projects and co-operation in 2008 and 2009, and part of this funding could be used for the arrangements of the meeting and possibly to cover some of the travelling costs of the partners. Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences should cover the rest of the costs of the meeting. (Junttila 2008a). With this background information, I made some research on the meeting industry and the sustainability of it, and applied this information as well as knowledge on event and meeting planning to design a concrete plan for the Polaris meeting. The following chapters present the results of the research and the final output of the meeting plan, as well as evaluation and discussion on how the plans succeeded.

3 GLOBAL MEETING INDUSTRY

3.1 Definition of meetings

Meetings can be defined as people gathering into a certain place at a certain time in order to discuss, inform, and make decisions together. They vary from simple one hour meetings to longer and more versatile congresses that can last several days and consist of different activities. The number of participants can also range from a few persons to thousands of people, depending on the purpose of the meeting. (Rautiainen & Siiskonen 2002, 24.) For instance, some objectives of meetings can be exchanging ideas between different people, negotiating on important decisions, seeing people's first reactions concerning new information, educating, solving problems, networking or advertising products. Some organisations and associations may be obliged by their rules to have meetings at certain times even if there is no real need for it. (Blinnikka & Kuha 2004, 12-13.)

The terminology in meeting and congress industry can vary a lot depending on the continent and country. Therefore it is necessary to define the basic meeting terminology used in the following chapters. The most common terms used in Finland are according to the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers (IAPCO), which are also applied in this text. There are four different types of meetings, namely conference, congress, meeting and general assembly.

As explained earlier, a meeting is a general term used to describe a gathering of several people to a certain place for a certain purpose. For example yearly committee meetings can be defined generally under this category. A *conference* is a meeting that is organised for discussing, problem solving and consultation, and has clear objectives which should be met in a defined period of time, yet has no strict time limit. Compared to a *congress*, a conference is normally smaller and more selective in nature. Hundreds or even thousands of people from common professional, cultural, or other groups are usually gathered to a congress, which is organised after regular time periods and lasts a number of days. The congress topics are generally involved around

a specific issue that come from the organising association or group, and there can be more than one lecture on at the same time. A congress is defined international if it lasts two or more days, there are at least 30 participants from four different countries, and half or more of the participants are foreign. The last meeting type, *general assembly*, is an official meeting of an association, a union, an organisation or a company, in which an earlier determined number of people must participate at minimum. In these regularly organised meetings the participants make decisions about issues such as action plans, the setting up of committees, accounts, and budget. (Blinnikka & Kuha 2004, 13-15.)

The terms conference and meeting are used throughout the thesis when discussing about the Polaris event, since their descriptions best apply to the situation. There are plenty of other definitions related to the meeting industry but only a few essential ones are explained here in order to better understand the concept. In *workshops* the participants aim to find solutions and answers to problems or open questions through discussion, exchanging of ideas and introduction of operational policies. As part of a meeting, the participants can gather into smaller groups to have a *break-out session*, where specific topics can be discussed. *Plenary session* is a session where all participants of the meeting have the right, or sometimes obligation, to take part in. There are no other sessions organised at the same time. (Rautiainen & Siiskonen 2002, 26-27.)

3.2 Global industry statistics

The origins of the meeting and conference industry lie in Europe and North America but it has grown to be a young and dynamic industry across all continents. Although meetings and gatherings have been taking place since the early days of civilisation, it was not until the late 19th century that meetings became more common with the increase of political and religious congresses. Since the early days, meeting industry has seen huge developments with major investments being made all over the globe, especially in the past couple of decades. (Rogers 2003, 1-5.)

The main reasons affecting the development of the meeting and congress industry are globalisation, the mobility of people and the recognition of the potential this industry has to offer. The globalisation has had an impact on the fusion of economics, infrastructure and the communication culture. Travel and tourism have changed from mass production towards individuality due to the ever-growing mobility of people. Towns and cities have started recognising the potential and advantages offered by the meeting industry and thus more effort has been put into managing of facilities and the overall development of the industry. (Go, Govers & Vliegthart 2002, 37.) All the developments and changes taking place in everyday life clearly have a major impact on the way of making business, therefore meeting industry professionals must be up-to-date with the development constantly.

The globalisation of the conference and meeting industry has made it a very important sector of the tourism industry, which according to Rogers (2003, 7) is claimed to be the world's largest trade. The International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) ranking for 2007 shows the top 20 countries and cities for meetings organised by international associations. In their research, over 6500 events that take place on a regular basis were identified, as listed in Table 1. (ICCA 2008.)

TABLE 1: ICCA country ranking measured by number of meetings organised in 2007 (ICCA 2008).

Rank	Country	# Meetings
1	U.S.A.	467
2	Germany	429
3	Spain	303
4	United Kingdom	281
5	France	255
6	Italy	250
7	Japan	215
8	Brazil	209
9	Austria	204

10	Canada	197
11	Netherlands	195
	China-P.R.	195
13	Australia	194
14	Switzerland	175
15	Portugal	153
16	Sweden	137
17	Belgium	124
18	Finland	122
19	Singapore	120
	Republic of Korea	120

As the table shows, the popular tourism destinations are keeping lead also in the meeting industry. According to ICCA's report (ICCA 2008), U.S.A. and Germany have been at the top for the past few years, and while The United Kingdom and France have dropped their positions, Spain has climbed to the third place. The first Latin American country ever to make it to the top ten for the first time in 2006, Brazil, has strengthened its position by being eight. There are also two newcomers in ICCA ranking for the top 20, respectively Finland and Belgium. It is interesting to note that the top city in the ranking since 2005 has been Vienna, followed by Berlin and Singapore. There are no US cities in the top 20, although it has the leading position in the country ranking. (ICCA 2008.) These statistics demonstrate how the industry has spread all over the world, not only Europe and North America, and the only continent missing from the top 20 rankings at the moment is Africa.

3.3 The meeting industry in Finland

Finland has secured its position as a popular meeting and congress destination in the past twenty years, as proven by the ICCA statistics. The development needs of the industry have also been recognised with the establishing of the Finland Convention Bureau (FCB) in 1974, being one of the first of its kind in Europe. The FCB is a national marketing organisation of the meeting and congress industry, with the aim of

increasing the number of international meetings, conventions, congresses and incentive trips organised in Finland. It has 14 cities and approximately 80 meeting and tourism industry businesses as its members, which are funding the FCB's operations together with the Ministry of Employment and the Economy. The Bureau is also actively co-operating with other international organisations in the field, such as the ICCA, Meeting Professional International (MPI), Society of Incentive & Travel Executives (SITE) and the Union of International Associations (UIA). (Finland Convention Bureau 2008.)

According to the FCB, there were 438 international meetings organised in Finland in 2007, which had altogether 60 790 participants. Out of this amount, Helsinki received the most guests, followed by Turku, Tampere, Espoo, Jyväskylä, Vaasa and Oulu. The peak season for organising meetings and congresses was between May and September, June being the most popular month. The average size of the congresses was 139 participants and the average duration was 3,3 days. Seven of the congresses had more than 1000 participants, the biggest one receiving 2500 guests, although most often there were 100 to 250 participants. The majority of congresses and meetings were organised in the fields of science and mathematics, technology and information technology, and history and sociology. Approximately half of the congresses also organised an exhibition as a part of their event. (Finland Convention Bureau 2008.)

Finland's nature with all its lakes, forests, four seasons and the sense of space is probably one of the greatest attractions for foreign people visiting the country. During the past years, more commercial aspects such as Santa Claus, or Finnish sports and music stars have also become important for many visitors, together with modern technology and architecture. The architecture can also be seen in various modern and high quality meeting and congress facilities. There is plenty of choice from different small scale meeting spaces to congress and exhibition facilities for over 1000 people, of which over 30 congress centres can host an event for more than 500 participants (Finland Convention Bureau 2008). All these qualities that Finland possesses can be seen as great advantages in attracting meeting and congress guests to the country. These attributes can also be considered when planning the program of the Polaris-meeting

The greatest disadvantage for Finland as an international congress and meeting destination is probably the isolated location in the far north, making it more difficult and expensive to travel to. Overall, the high price level of Finland can turn some visitors away. However, the growth seems to be positive compared to earlier years and in 2006 Finland had its record of international meetings and congresses, due to the country having the EU chairmanship (Finland Convention Bureau 2008). Despite the long distance and high costs, with good marketing and attractive meeting program, event planners can ensure that the participant numbers stay high.

3.4 The benefits of meetings and congresses for the destination

The significance of meeting and congress activities for the organising countries can be quite large, especially for a small nation like Finland. Like any form of tourism, it affects the country's economy positively and also makes their society better known in the world. Compared to leisure tourism, business tourism (i.e. meeting and congress travel) caters for the high-quality and high-cost end of the market, meaning that business tourists have more spending power and thus bring more economic benefits for the host destination (Rogers 2003, 23). According to FCB's statistics on international meetings and congresses for example, one congress participant spent 246 Euros per day in average and overall brought an income of 1640 Euros to the Finnish economy. The total economic benefit was 99,5 million Euros. (Finland Convention Bureau 2008.)

The benefits of meeting and congress industry are not explicitly financial but it also affects the economy indirectly. It is especially important to organise congresses in those fields of science that the host destination's most important economic life is based on. For instance in Finland, commercial meetings provide a good opportunity to prove the Finnish industry expertise, efficiency and reliability. Therefore business travel can also give a great image boost to the country. (Blinnikka & Kuha 2004, 20.) Another positive aspect of business travel in comparison to leisure travel is that it usually takes place throughout the whole year and rarely clashes with the peak tourist seasons. For example in the northern hemisphere, there are least meetings and

congresses during January, July and August, which are often the peak holiday times for leisure tourists. (Rogers 2003, 23.)

Overall the meeting and congress industry is an important part of the tourism industry, giving long-term benefits to the destination. A well-organised congress can leave the participants with such a positive image of the destination that they will later return as leisure tourists with friends and family. The fact that most congresses and meetings are not organised during the most popular holiday months means that some resorts can offer year-round employment, not only during the peak leisure tourism season.

Recognising the benefits of business tourism and putting an emphasis on improving the services and facilities for these purposes can therefore be fundamental to some destinations in order to keep their business successful.

4 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

4.1 What is sustainable development?

'Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.' (United Nations 1987.)

This definition by the United Nations' World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 is still today one of the most widely used when describing the meaning of sustainable development. In other words, development can be defined sustainable if it leaves as much different resources to the next generation as the previous one has been able to use in the past (Heiskanen 2004, 18). Basically nature should be able to produce the amount of resources at the same pace as they are needed and even over that so that in the future people can satisfy their basic needs.

Sustainable development is often divided into ecological, social and economical sustainability. Ecological sustainability means development that is in harmony with ecology, biodiversity and the preservation and maintenance of natural resources. Social sustainability demands that the development strengthens people's own life management and improves communal operations. In economical sustainability the development is economically efficient and the results of it are divided equally between generations. Cultural sustainability is also sometimes discussed in terms of development being in harmony with people's culture conceptions. The different aspects are all tied together and the core of the whole concept is the ecological sustainability of the society. The society is the more sustainable, the less non-renewable energy and resources are used when building it and living in it, the less emissions and waste harmful for the environment or humans are produced, and the less harm is made for the biodiversity. (Ojala 2000, 10-11.)

Adequate food and water, healthcare, education, and employment are requirements for wellbeing, but at large parts of the world countries cannot provide even the most basic

necessities to people. In the global scale, the development in these days is not sustainable. The consumption lifestyle, constant increase in the use of resources and energy, the uneven division of wealth between the developed and developing countries, the strengthening of the greenhouse effect, and the ominous climate change or extinction of threatened flora and fauna species are only examples of non-sustainable development. (Ojala 2000, 11.) The reasons behind the world's problems are too extensive to be discussed here but it is clear that society cannot continue to live the way it does if people still want their children and grandchildren to have what we have now. A complete change in people's lifestyle and in the way of making business needs to be done in order to turn the current direction of the development into being more sustainable.

As individuals cannot save the world by themselves, it is the big businesses and the way of industrial production that should be changed. However, small changes in people's lifestyles and attitudes for instance towards energy and material consumption can help put more pressure on businesses to go greener and more ethical. The more customers demand sustainable and green production, the more companies must start changing their operations. Individuals can affect the development with their own choices up to a certain limit by taking responsibility and not enhancing the global threats. Small acts such as using renewable energy sources and minimising energy use, using fair-trade, organic and locally made products, reducing waste and emissions, and recycling can have a major impact on reducing the environmental effects of one's actions. Sustainable practice should be made part of everyday life for the change to be permanent and to have ecologically efficient long-term impacts.

4.2 Sustainable development practice in the meeting industry

In the past few years, people have started taking threats of global warming more seriously and the effect has begun to show in individuals, businesses, cities and countries over the world. Green issues are no longer something that only experts talk about but they are more and more visible in everyday life. The meeting industry has also started recognising the need to 'go green' by applying environmental strategies to the businesses. In this chapter, the reasons why global concerns have become

important for businesses are discussed shortly, followed by some ways on how to change the meeting industry operations into being more ecologically efficient.

As was mentioned earlier, the pressure from individuals affects companies to change their practices. This also applies to meeting and congress organisers who can no longer ignore the continuing media coverage and customers' questions on their ethics and green policies. According to ICCA Intelligence's article, meetings and incentive travel decision-makers and participants strongly recognise the environmental issues due to the media focus, better education that has led to a new generation of well-informed young people, and further damage and destruction that is arising from issues such as industrial pollution, strip mining, mass land clearance, and deforestation. Therefore approximately 58 percent of meeting and congress organisers report that participants will show their concern unless environmental issues are not taken into account in the planning of the events. (ICCA Intelligence 2005.) These statements clearly indicate why the industry professionals must change their practices in order to keep the customers satisfied.

The pressure caused by the overall public opinion on environmental issues in society can make many companies and especially their shareholders concerned about the company image, which is another reason to develop environmental policies. Nowadays these issues can be a major competitive factor in the business. One report shows that approximately 75 percent of meeting organisers in 12 different countries across Europe have taken action towards environmental considerations in their planning. (IMEX 2007.) Also a survey by the Finland Convention Bureau states that 65 percent of the respondents have clearly noted issues related to social responsibility in their corporate strategy (Finland Convention Bureau 2008).

4.3 How to reduce the environmental impact of meetings

As meeting organisers get more environmentally conscious, there are several actions they can take to make their operations more ecologically efficient. The way companies in the meeting industry relate to purchasing materials, energy consumption, and the waste and emissions produced by their partner companies demonstrates their

commitment towards more sustainable development. Companies can also try to direct the business travellers' choices regarding transportation and accommodation into choosing options that are better for the environment. The implementation of an ecological strategy can also depend a lot on the meeting type and purpose. (ICCA Intelligence 2005.)

When planning a meeting or a congress, the choice of location is the first important issue that can affect on how sustainable the event is. The rapid growth of development has brought up a question on whether face-to-face meetings are really necessary any longer. With the help of new technological inventions negotiations could be organised without actually meeting one another, which would not only save time and money, but there would also be less harmful emissions and energy consumption from travelling to places. However, virtual meetings and video conferences are not likely to replace face-to-face meetings since there will always be a need to exchange ideas personally and silent information can be passed on better when meeting in person. Especially important meetings with new partners or co-workers should be held in the traditional way, whereas for people already familiar with each other it may be more convenient to communicate virtually. (Blinnikka & Kuha 2004, 23-24.)

As the need for having face-to-face meetings is still quite obvious, the location should be chosen as close to the majority of the participants as possible. Participants should also be encouraged to use transportation that causes the least damage on the environment. The national rail service in Finland, the VR Passenger Services, is doing its part in controlling the climate change with their own environmental campaign trying to persuade people to use the train. They state that traffic and transportation cause 20 percent of the greenhouse emissions, of which one percent is generated by railway traffic. A comparison on VR's website shows that for example when travelling by train between Helsinki and Jyväskylä, one uses approximately 150 MJ of energy and no carbon dioxide (CO₂). The same trip on different modes of transportation would cause the following consumption of energy and CO₂; a bus 184 MJ and 14 kilograms, a petrol car with one passenger 540 MJ and 40 kilograms, and a plane 517 MJ and 38 kilograms. (VR Ympäristö 2008.) These numbers clearly indicate the difference that small choices in business travel can make in the

contribution to controlling climate change and working towards more sustainable future.

Since the airplane is often the only option for travelling to international meetings, business travellers have lately had the opportunity to compensate the environmental impact caused by flying. For example, a Finnish travel agency Kaleva Travel, has brought to the market a combined carbon dioxide calculator and compensation service, which is suitable for both business and leisure travellers. With this service, passengers can calculate the amount of CO₂ of their flight and see what they can do to compensate it and to keep their emissions in balance. There are two different climate programs the customers can choose from, which support the use of solar energy in India and waste heat recovery in China. By donating a certain amount of money to one of these causes, the customers can do their part in fighting the climate change. (Ratia 2008.) Meeting planners can also contribute to the good of the environment and organise a carbon neutral event by investing in an environmental project.

Meeting and congress organisers should also consider the amount of transportation needed for the products used in their events. FCB's research shows that over 60 percent of companies concentrate their purchases on local sources and that they favour local food and products made in Finland (Finland Convention Bureau 2008). The closer the products come from, the less emission are caused by their transportation. Also concentrating purchases to a few suppliers can help bring the costs down and all products can be delivered at once. Other co-operation partners like event hotels should be enforced to use green policies during the meeting, such as bed sheet and towel change programmes and providing recycling facilities for delegates (ICCA Intelligence 2007). Producing as little meeting and congress material as possible, printing on recycled paper, committing to electronic communication, monitoring energy consumption, avoiding excess packaging materials on products, and recycling all waste are also ways to make meetings more environmentally friendly (IMEX 2007).

5 PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT OF THE POLARIS-MEETING

5.1 The Initial Planning Phase

This chapter explains the first steps to be taken in the planning of the Polaris meeting. First of all, it is necessary to define the objects and purpose of the meeting so that the planning supports them and the meeting will be successful. If the purpose is unclear to the participants, both organisers and the invited guests, it can affect all aspects of the meeting. The next questions to be asked are who, when, where and how. Identifying the people and their responsibilities is important so that everyone knows their role in the meeting. There are different aspects to be considered when choosing the timing of the meeting and the people involved can also influence this. Last, the location of the meeting and some ways of how to deliver the meeting in a sustainable way should be analysed.

5.1.1 Objectives and Purpose

The main objective of the meeting is to gather teachers or students from the partner institutions of the network to discuss what has been achieved in the old networks so far and plan the future activities of the new extended Polaris network. There is no clear benefit that the network wants to achieve with the meeting, but mainly it is for exchanging ideas, sharing knowledge and discussing issues that affect the network in the future. The goals of the network are benchmarking, and learning and co-operation between the partners (Junttila, Mertanen, Mikkonen, Sachse 2008). Best practices and a common understanding of concepts among the network should be discussed at the meeting. Also the possible funding from Nordplus or other sources should be studied in order to be able to better plan the future activities of the network. The meeting is also a good opportunity for the organising university to market their expertise and facilities.

5.1.2 The Participants of the Meeting

As explained earlier, Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences (JUA), the School of Tourism and Services Management, was appointed in the previous network meeting to be the administrator in 2008, also meaning it has the responsibility of organising the Polaris meeting that year. The International Coordinator Minna Junttila and Enni Mertanen, the Principal Lecturer in Hospitality and Catering Management participated in the past cooperation of the network and are the project leaders in organising the meeting this year.

Also considered at this point must be the people who should be invited to the Polaris meeting. The aim is to attract one or two persons from each participating organisation so that the total number of participants would be between 15 and 20 people. The contacts are obtained from Turku University of Applied Sciences. (Junttila 2008a.) It is important to get as many participants as possible to be able to arouse conversation and to keep everyone properly up to date. Since there will be participants from outside Finland, this also affects the language of the meeting, meaning it will be held in English. The possible participants also impact on the other planning of the meeting as different arrangements might have to be made than what would be necessary if the meeting was only for Finnish participants.

5.1.3 The Timing of the Meeting

The planning started in late May, when it had been decided by JUA that the meeting should take place in September or October. Minna Junttila had a contact with Turku and Laurea Universities of Applied Sciences and together it was finally decided the final dates for the meeting. The plan was to have a two-day meeting on Monday 22nd and Tuesday 23rd of September 2008. This timing should give adequate time for planning the meeting. These dates were chosen since they seemed to suit all of the three universities best. (Junttila 2008a.) Additionally, this timing should not be the busiest time at most universities as the autumn semester has started weeks before yet the exam period is only on its way some time after the meeting dates. Some thought was also given to the weather issues, since in September it can still be nice and sunny

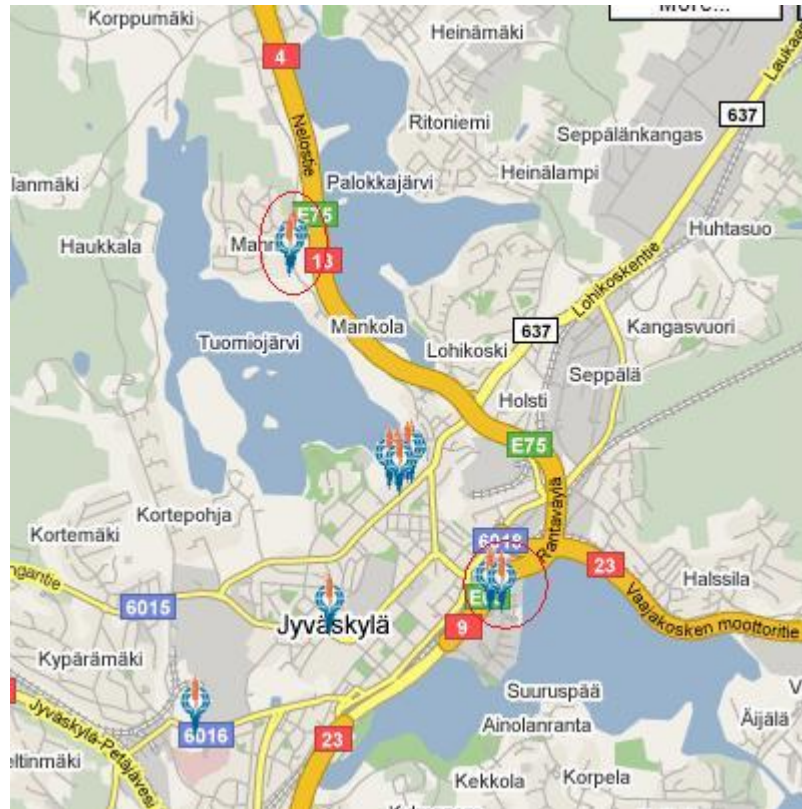
in Finland whereas October could be too rainy and leave the participants with a less positive image of the country.

When thinking about the timing of any event, the organisers must leave enough time for the planning phase. The timing affects the availability of meeting facilities and the price level of services, although the price is not normally the main competitive factor in marketing the event to the participants. (Blinnikka & Kuha 2004, 90.) For a fairly small meeting like the Polaris, a few months for planning should be enough. Also the participants should have enough time to make their travel arrangements, if the message about the meeting is delivered early enough to them.

5.1.4 The Meeting Location

The location for the meeting is naturally going to be Jyväskylä since the JUA is organising it. It is quite easy for all the participants to reach with train, bus and plane from Helsinki several times a day. Since one of the purposes is to show the University of Applied Sciences to the participants, the meeting should be held at the school premises. The initial plan is to have the first day of the meeting at the School of Tourism and Services Management in Mankola, approximately four kilometres from the city centre. The second day could be organised at the School of Information Technology, IT-Dynamo, located in Lutakko in a walking distance from the city centre (see Picture 1).

Another option could have been organising both days at Mankola but the fact that most participants might be leaving back home right after the meeting on the second day affected the choice. It would be more convenient to organise the second day in Lutakko so that the guests would be near the city and the railway station. This way the guests would also be able to see more than one of the units of JUA. Both of these units also provide catering and suitable facilities for organising the meeting and are therefore a good choice.



PICTURE 1. Jyväskylä city map with the locations of Mankola and IT-Dynamo (JAMK 2008).

5.1.5 How to deliver the meeting

A general idea of what the meeting includes and how it should be delivered was generated at the initial planning phase. After deciding on the timing and location, an overall project plan could be drawn showing the time needed for each planning phase. Also the services were considered at this point and a general plan was made on what services are needed, e.g. catering, accommodation, transportation, and leisure activities. It was decided that the meeting would include some workshops or break-out sessions in addition to general discussion, but no special arrangements concerning the facilities or services were needed. There should be two coffee breaks and a lunch break during the day, which could be organised quite easily. Transportation would be needed on the first day to Mankola and back to the city. For the first night, a social program including a dinner and possibly a visit somewhere was also considered. The accommodation supply of Jyväskylä would need to be surveyed so that some hotels could be recommended to the possible participants.

The main idea throughout the whole planning phase was to make the meeting as environmentally friendly and ecologically efficient as possible. At the beginning, some ideas were exchanged on how the idea should be implemented throughout the program, communication, and services. The first issues that came up were, for instance, using the minimum amount of printed material, organic and locally produced food, electronic communication, and minimising the need for transportation.

5.1.6 The Project Plan

The following timetable was drawn in June 2008 to be used as a guideline for organising the Polaris meeting. It lists shortly what needs to be done and when, but no strict deadlines are set so that there is some flexibility.

By the 20th of June:

- decide the place and timing for the meeting
- define the form and goals of the meeting (informative/action?)
- make a preliminary plan for the program and topics (workshops, presentations?)
- contact a few hotels for the prices
- get an address list of participants and email the first notice with a hotel list and preliminary timetable
- make preliminary plans for catering
- discuss the budget (and need for funding?)

July:

- planning a few suggestions for the social program
- making hotel reservations for participants if necessary
- continue planning the program
- making a written plan & report, planning 'green issues'

Early August: *meeting of the project team*

- decide on the final program & timetable of the meeting, social program, transportation
- discuss the need for printed material
- updates on the participant list
- planning the menus

2nd/3rd wk of August:

- send info to the participants (reminder to enrol, final program)
- prepare material for the meeting
- make reservations for catering, social program, transportation
- check the budget

End of August:

- the final enrolment date 1st September
- check travel arrangements, hotel reservations & special needs of participants
- finalise the program plans & timetable
- reserve the meeting rooms

Weeks 37/38:

- print/produce electronically the necessary material
- confirm the number of participants
- confirm catering, transportation, social program

Week 39:

- organise the meeting room (1 day prior to the meeting)
- welcome the participants
- help with any arrangements
- check the services (meals, hotels, social program)

Post-meeting time: evaluation, reporting, final meetings, checking the budget

The whole practical planning of the project will basically be my responsibility, under the supervision and guidance of Minna Junttila and Enni Mertanen (catering). The goals, theme, topics and budget of the meeting will be discussed more in detail together. I will also be taking care of communication with the participants. During June and July the options for the social program will be planned and together the best option can be decided. The whole project team should meet in the beginning of August to make final decisions on the program and services, and to keep up to date with the project.

Communication with the participants will be done by email contacts in order to save on printing and mailing costs. Printing of any material should be limited and environmental friendly practices used in all of the operations. A risk assessment should also be made.

5.2 Program and Services

According to Blinnikka and Kuha, the most important activity in the production process of a meeting is planning the program as a whole, including both the official and social program as well as the services related to them (Blinnikka & Kuha 2004, 96). As the more specific content of the Polaris meeting was still unclear when writing this, a rough program draft is drawn here so that the necessary services can be designed around it. Also the evening program for the first day is included. The program is accompanied with an explanation of what needs to be considered at different parts of the meeting, as well as briefly discussing the services needed.

On the first day, the participants are picked up from their hotels with the small bus owned by the School of Tourism and Services Management. For this, whoever drives the bus will need the list of participants and the hotels they are staying at, provided by me. The bus should arrive to Mankola before 9am so that everyone is ready to begin according to the schedule. Depending on the number of the participants, the bus might need to leave earlier. The most environmentally friendly option would clearly be walking or cycling and one possibility could be renting bikes

for the participants. However, the weather can be quite cold or rainy in September and therefore most participants would probably not appreciate having to cycle to Mankola and back to the city.

Day 1- Monday 22 nd September 2008

<p>8.30 Transportation of the participants from their hotels to Mankola</p> <p>9.00 Beginning the meeting at Mankola, welcome words from the Head of School Annikki Mikkonen, brief introduction of the school premises</p> <p>10.30 Coffee Break</p> <p>11.00 Meeting continues; introducing the current situation of the Polaris network</p> <p>12.30 Buffet Lunch at Restaurant Rosmariini</p> <p>13.30 Meeting continues; presentation by one of the JUA lecturers</p> <p>15.00 Coffee Break</p> <p>15.30 Meeting continues; dividing participants into workshop groups with different themes to work on</p> <p>17.00 Meeting ends, transportation back to the hotels</p> <p>19.00- Dinner at Restaurant Idea, Lutakko</p> <p>22-30</p>

Day 2- Tuesday 23 rd September 2008
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<p>9.00 Meeting begins at IT-Dynamo, Lutakko; continuing the workshops</p> <p>10.30 Coffee Break</p> <p>11.00 Meeting continues; presentation of the results of the workshops</p> <p>12.30 Lunch at Restaurant Idea</p> <p>13.30 Meeting continues; discussing the future</p> <p>15.00 Coffee Break</p> <p>15.30 Meeting continues; more discussion, thanking participants and closure by Minna Juntila</p> <p>17.00 End of the meeting</p>

There are a few things that should be correct in the meeting room in order to maximise productivity and learning, namely shape and size, acoustics, lighting, temperature and

air-conditioning, material and colours, and technology (Blinnikka & Kuha 2004, 111-114). The meeting room should be set up in the morning of the meeting or after the last time it has been used. The seats in the room would best be set up in a U-shape (see Picture 2), so that the participants can see each other and also the screen in case there are presentations that need to be shown on a projector. If the space in the room is limited, a boardroom style set up can also be used (See Picture 3).



PICTURE 2. U-shaped set up for a meeting room (MWB Business Exchange Plc 2008)



PICTURE 3. Boardroom style set up for a meeting room (MWB Business Exchange Plc 2008)

The meeting will be opened by the Head of the School of Tourism and Services Management, Annikki Mikkonen. A short introduction of the operations of JUA and of the school premises could be made in the beginning of the meeting. At 10.30, the first coffee break will be held, either served in the meeting room, the school cafeteria or in the school lobby. The catering services of Mankola will be used for both coffee breaks of the day, and they will be asked to serve coffee, tea and a small snack. Half an hour should be enough for the participants to refresh and have their coffee before the meeting continues. Lunch will be served in a buffet in the Restaurant Rosmariini where the tables need to be reserved at 12.30.

As mentioned earlier, the more specific contents of the meeting will be the responsibility of Minna Junttila and Enni Mertanen. This program is only a suggestion of what topics could be discussed during the meeting and how it could be carried out with different working methods, such as workshops. After the lunch there could be a presentation by a JUA lecturer on a current issue that involves all participants. The second coffee break could be followed by the division of participants into workshop groups, in which they can work on different themes concerning the Polaris network and its future operations. After they are finished with the themes for the day, the participants will be transferred back to their hotels at approximately 17.00. On Monday evening, a dinner at Restaurant Idea in Lutakko will be organised for all the participants. The theme of the dinner could be similar to the overall idea of the meeting, for example organic and locally produced food with the season's best ingredients.

The second day will be held at the modern facilities of IT-Dynamo in Lutakko. Again, a meeting room will be needed with a similar set up as on the previous day. In the morning session, the participants will have time until the first coffee break to finish with the first day's workshops. Catering will be organised by the restaurant services of IT-Dynamo. After the first coffee break, the workshop groups can present their results to the rest of the participants and everyone can discuss and share their ideas on the topics. The lunch break will be held at Restaurant Idea, with the main courses table served and the rest of the lunch from a buffet.

The meeting will continue until 17.00 like on the first day, but by the time of the last session the most important topics should have been discussed since some participants may have to leave earlier for their train or flight. Despite this, the last session needs to be interesting enough for those participants not having a plane or a train to catch to be keen to stay until the end of the meeting.

All guests will receive a small gift in acknowledgement for their participation in the Polaris meeting. A good idea for a gift would be a USB drive made of recycled plastic or other material such as bamboo, with a small JUA logo on it. The prices vary a lot but one can be purchased at approximately 12 Euros. (Far from boring! 2008.) All of

the meeting material could be saved on the USB drives so that none of it would have to be printed and thus paper would be saved. If printing needs to be done, recycled paper should be used for it. There are also a lot of other eco-friendly promotional products in the markets, such as bags, umbrellas, office supplies, kitchenware and clothing.

5.2.1 Ecologically efficient catering services

All the catering services of the meeting should be made as ecologically efficient as possible. Some ways to reduce the ecological impact of the catering services could be using nature's own ingredients such as berries and mushrooms, using Fair Trade products, making the food preparation processes more efficient by saving water and energy, and recycling or re-using products (Heikkilä 2002, 10-11). Locally produced food reduces the transportation costs of the products and also the emissions that would be released into the environment from the transportation. Sustainable development issues can also be considered ethically in the catering services, for example by favouring vegetarian and organically produced food. Special diets should also be taken into consideration when planning the catering.

In Finland, there are two different official environmental certificates that can be given to products if they have a smaller impact on nature than other similar products, namely the EU-flower and the Swan eco-label. The environmental impacts of the product's whole lifecycle are estimated, including emissions, energy use and chemicals. (Heikkilä 2002, 13.) Products with these labels are the most environmentally friendly and choosing them for the catering services of the Polaris meeting would definitely be a step towards more sustainable development.

5.2.2 Accommodation

The participants can either book their accommodation for themselves or it can be booked through the organising team. Some hotels in Jyväskylä were asked for an accommodation offer in June and out of those offers three hotels were selected to be

recommended to the participants. The selection was based on the prices they offered and on the quality of the hotel so that there would be some versatility on offer. All of the hotels are located in the centre of Jyväskylä for ease of accessibility to the meeting location, the travel centre and the town services. The selected hotels and their prices are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2. The selected Jyväskylä hotels with the most suitable offers (Fisk 2008; Ketosalo 2008; Ruuth 2008).

	single	double
Hotel Milton	70 €/night	90 €/night
Hotel Yöpuu	85 €/night	132 €/night
Hotel Cumulus	91 €/night	116 €/night

Out of these three hotels, Hotel Cumulus seems to be the most environmentally friendly since they have a clearly identified environmental program which is reviewed and updated yearly (Restel 2008). However, their single rooms are also the most expensive which may affect the choice of the guests. Hotel Milton and Hotel Yöpuu seem to be lacking an environmental program but are probably more unique by character since they are both privately owned (Hotel Milton 2008; Hotel Yöpuu 2008).

5.3 Communication

The communication needs for the Polaris network meeting are mainly the negotiations with the meeting venues, catering services, and hotels, and sending invitations and information of the meeting to the possible participants. It is important to define who is responsible for the communication processes before, during and after the meeting. The communication must be designed by keeping in mind the sustainability aspect, for example by making the most out of technology. All communication should be electronic in order to save on the use of paper.

The first invitations were sent to participants by e-mail at the end of June. Minna Junttila obtained the list of e-mail addresses from the administrator of the network from Turku University of Applied Sciences. I was responsible for formulating the invitation e-mail (See Appendix 1) which Junttila inspected and then forwarded on to everyone on the mailing list. According to the project plan, more detailed information should be sent in August. The invited persons should register their participation and possible hotel reservations to me by September 1, 2008. If necessary, additional information could be sent a few days before the meeting the latest either by me or Junttila. After the meeting, a memo of the meeting will be sent to all the partners in the network by e-mail by Minna Junttila.

I also have the communication responsibility with the hotels, meeting venues and catering services. The negotiations with them will be made mostly by e-mail or phone contacts. The booking confirmations of the hotels will be sent through me to the participants. Since Minna Junttila is supervising the work, I will confirm the catering and facility services with her first before confirming them with the meeting venues.

5.4 Budgeting

Budgeting is a necessary part of any event, whether it aims for a profit or not. The budget includes all the costs involved in the organising of the meeting and discussion on how the costs will be covered. (Parry, Shone 2004.) Due to lack of information the Polaris meeting's budget is not very detailed in this thesis. However, the main expenditures and incomes are listed. In addition to that, the participants will have personal costs of transportation and accommodation.

The greatest expenditure of the meeting comes from the venue hire and catering costs. Although the meeting facilities will be from the JUA, the School of Tourism and Services Management needs to pay rent for using them. This will be a fixed cost, meaning it is not dependent on the number of participants. There will be no salary costs since no extra personnel need to be hired and I have been assigned to take care of the practical issues as part of the thesis. Also no costs on printed material or postage of the invitations will be generated since they are sent electronically.

Variable costs, dependent on the number of participants, are mainly from the catering services but some expenses can also come from the transportation of guests and the gifts given to participants. The meals are charged according to the number of people participating in the meeting. An estimated budget for catering per participant can be drawn based on the current prices of Restaurant Rosmariini and Restaurant Idea. The lunch at Restaurant Rosmariini costs 6 € per person and at Restaurant Idea 6.50 € or 8 € depending on the main course. At Restaurant Idea, a meeting package including a morning and an afternoon coffee, lunch and the rent of the meeting room is 28 € per person. (JAMK 2008.) Restaurant Idea also gave two menu suggestions for the first night's dinner, which would cost either 29 € or 36 €, including water, bread, 3-course dinner, waiting staff and the use of the facilities (Rajala 2008). The USB-drives made of recycled material can be estimated to cost 12 € each, thus totalling 240 €

If these numbers are used to estimate the total expenditure for one day, the costs of a two-day meeting with 20 participants would be 1120 € plus the dinner for 20 persons costing 580 € or 720 € depending on the menu choice. In total this makes 1940 € or 2080 €. Any additional or unexpected costs should be kept in mind and thus the total budget can be rounded up to 2200 €. It might be a good idea to calculate the budget according to the more expensive dinner option even if it was not chosen, since this leaves room for contingencies in the budget. If the cheaper menu option is chosen, the extra money could be used for offering wine at dinner, especially if the school wishes to make a better impression on the guests. If money is restricted, one option is to not give any gifts to the participants or to replace them with something less expensive.

To cover some of the meeting costs and travel expenses of the participants, the network should get some funding from Nordplus. However, no exact amount can be specified since the funding is not completely certain. Being the host of the meeting, the School of Tourism and Services Management will pay the rest of the expenses. There is no other income that could be used for covering the costs and therefore the meeting plans are quite dependant on the Nordplus funding, since the school cannot use excessive amounts of money on the arrangements.

5.5 Risk Analysis

Safety operations and risk factors should usually be identified before a meeting or a congress, especially if the event in question is very large or international (Blinnikka & Kuha 2004, 124). The Polaris meeting is in quite a small scale and therefore there are no major safety risks involved. Clearly when making the selection for the meeting venues it is important to check their emergency systems for example in case of a fire. The overall security of the participants must be ensured beforehand.

Other risks than safety and security issues can also cause failures in the running of the meeting. The most critical risks for not making the Polaris meeting successful would probably be related to the services and facilities. With good planning these possible risks can be prevented or reduced. There could be some delays in the timetable and this can lead to the preferred services and facilities being unavailable. Therefore it is vital not to leave the booking of the meeting rooms and catering services to the last minute. Other important issues to be considered are good communication with the invited persons and making the meeting proposal sound interesting enough for them to participate. If people are not enthusiastic to travel to Jyväskylä for the meeting, there will be no participants and it is useless to have a meeting with only a few people.

Financial risks can also cause problems in organising the meeting. If the funding from Nordplus is not received, the School of Tourism and Services Management may not have the budget to cover all the costs. This can lead for example to changes in the duration of the meeting or to reduction of the activities that have been planned. Unfortunately there is no back-up funding in case the Nordplus application is rejected, thus some of the plans will have to be changed in case of a financial failure. Overall there must be some flexibility in the whole project, since it is normal that plans can change unexpectedly.

6 IMPLEMENTING THE PLANS AND POST-MEETING EVALUATION

After the meeting will be officially over, it is time to evaluate how all the plans were realised in practise and also elaborate on any changes that took place during the project. In a greater event, it might be useful to ask the participants to fill in an assessment form in order to receive feedback on the event and possible improvement ideas for the future. Since the Polaris meeting was fairly small and time was restricted, no evaluation forms were given to the participants to be answered. However, some face-to-face feedback was received during the meeting and overall it succeeded even though there were some major changes in the plans.

Even if it seemed at the beginning of the summer that there would be plenty of time for the planning phase, the summer holidays cut the project a little. According to the project plan, July should have been used for making preparations so that in August a program sketch of the meeting would have been at hand. However, due to other commitments there was not much time to write any plans during the summer. Despite this the arrangements were made quite quickly as soon as the autumn semester began. I had booked the meeting rooms from Mankola and IT-Dynamo and also negotiated about the catering services. Some registrations from the participants had also been received, although not as many as wished.

As written in the risk analysis, one threat for the meeting could be a financial risk. Two weeks before the meeting was meant to take place, Anu Härkönen informed Minna Junttila that the Nordplus application had been rejected and no funding would be received from them (Junttila 2008b). This meant that the meeting had to be cut from two days to a one-day meeting and there would be less participants since it would not necessarily be sensible to travel from other countries only for one day. Quickly it was decided that the meeting would be held on the Monday, September 22, at Lutakko. The location would be easier to access than Mankola, especially for participants arriving by train. Therefore I had to cancel all the reservations and try to make new ones from IT-Dynamo and Restaurant Idea. This turned out a little problematic because there were no more free meeting rooms at IT-Dynamo.

In the end, a meeting room at Restaurant Idea was free and it was booked from 11 to 17, with catering services from the same place. The rent of the meeting room included two coffee breaks, a lunch and use of the meeting equipment, costing 23.50 € per person (Rajala 2008). This would have to be paid by the School of Tourism and Services Management. The invited guests were informed as soon as possible about the changes and I made adjustments to hotel reservations for those who had booked them in advance. Minna Junttila also prepared a short agenda for the meeting that was sent to participants together with the other information. As had been planned, all communication was made either by phone or e-mail.

In the end, we received registrations from seven persons. Reservations to Hotel Yöpuu were made for four persons, who seemed satisfied with their accommodation. A more environmentally friendly choice could have been made by staying at Hotel Cumulus. One of the participants was picked up from the Jyväskylä airport by the school car so that she could make it to the meeting on time. Public transportation would have caused less emission but that would have delayed the participant even more. Here is the day's program shortly:

11 -	Refreshments Words of welcome - Annikki Mikkonen, Director (School of Tourism and Services Management, Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences) POLARIS / NordPlus application round 2008 - Anu Härkönen and Annika Karpelin, Turku University of Applied Sciences Short introduction to both networks: POLARIS/Anu Härkönen and Annika Karpelin NCN/Sirkka Antinluoma (Laurea University of Applied Sciences)
13 - 14	Lunch
14 -	Planning the future cooperation of POLARIS network, deciding on the next actions
16.00	Coffee/tea

Despite the late changes in the plans and a decrease in the expected number of participants, the meeting was quite successful. The original purpose of discussing the past and the future of the Polaris network was achieved and everyone seemed quite satisfied with the results of the meeting. The services of Restaurant Idea were also very efficient and well organised. At the end we could not affect on the menu that was offered and thus it is hard to evaluate the environmental impacts of the catering services.

The set-up of the meeting spaces was as planned. There were two separate tables in the meeting room, one for having lunch and the other to be used during the meeting, and also a small coffee table. Both of the bigger tables were set up in a boardroom style. The meeting room was functional in terms of lighting, acoustics, technology and materials. Air-conditioning could have been better since the room was quite small and at the end of the day it got quite hot and the air became stale, causing the participants to become tired and less productive.

If looking at the meeting budget, one can notice that major savings were made due to the change of plans. The overall costs of the meeting ended up being 282 € for the 12 participants that were present. Compared to the original budget of over 2000 € it is clearly less than planned. In the original plan, the first night's dinner formed a big part of the budget. Also the smaller number of the participants and the meeting being cut into one day brought down the costs. At the end, no gifts were purchased for the participants. Restaurant Idea charged the School of Tourism and Services Management directly according to the number of people in the meeting.

On the whole, the arrangements of the Polaris network meeting were functional. The diminishing of the meeting, both by duration and number of people, signified that there were less aspects where ecological thinking could have been brought into practice. The participants' choices regarding transportation and accommodation most likely formed the biggest strain on the environment, whereas the meeting itself did not have a huge environmental impact.

7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As the theoretical part of this study suggested, the meeting industry has grown to be one of the biggest trades in the world. At the same time, the public focus on environmental issues and sustainable development is very strong as people want to leave something for the future generations. These two observations made during this thesis are somewhat in contradiction with each other since not all of the increasing needs of the meeting industry are likely to be the most sustainable for the environment, society or economy. The Polaris case showed that meeting organisers are quite dependant on suppliers and service providers, time limitations and the overall attitudes of the participants when trying to plan a sustainable meeting. Although it seems that there is a positive change in the industry towards more sustainable development, a number of changes still need to be made in order to compensate the used resources.

The research also pointed out the growth of the meeting and congress industry in Finland. A considerable number of developments have been made to improve the image of Finland as a meeting and congress destination. The question is how sustainable all this development is and whether meeting and congress facilities, accommodation and catering companies, or other service providers really care enough to make investments that would be beneficial for the environment and society. Yet, compared to many other countries, sustainable development issues are probably quite well recognised and considered in Finland. In a way, Finland could be an innovator or a pioneer in leading the way in sustainable meeting management. Nature is still one of Finland's greatest assets in attracting foreigners and by preserving it and making environmentally friendly choices, meeting organisers could create a positive image of Finland being an environmentally conscious meeting and congress destination.

I came to the conclusion that in the end it is people's attitudes that matter the most. There needs to be demand before there is supply. As one cannot force anyone to make choices that are better for the future of the society or environment, the initiative must come from everyone's own actions. Meeting participants need to realise themselves, that it is better to use trains and other public transport instead of flying if there is a

possibility to do so. Unfortunately, it might often be cheaper and more convenient to travel by plane and many settle upon doing so. More pressure should be put on public transport operators to bring the costs of travelling down a little so that train and bus travel would become more attractive. Meeting participants also need to put pressure on the meeting organisers to make greener choices. If there is pressure on the organisers, they will put pressure on their suppliers and other partners. The more demand there is for ecologically efficient products and services, the more suppliers and service providers will start responding to it. In the end, the change will become permanent and all the resources that are used can be replaced for the future generations. Clearly the problems cannot be solved overnight and it takes a lot of work and co-operation to make the changes.

For both new and existing meeting and congress industry professionals, I would suggest to really pay attention to the way they operate and the choices they make. At the moment, sustainability and environmental issues receive a lot of attention in the media and among consumers and therefore cannot be neglected by any business. It is also wise to question the need for face-to-face meetings at all and have virtual meetings instead if possible. As much as a cliché it may sound, small changes can make a big difference.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Polaris network meeting invitation



JYVÄSKYLÄN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU
JYVÄSKYLÄ UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Invitation to the meeting of POLARIS network in Jyväskylä, Finland
22 – 23 September 2008

Dear POLARIS network members,

It is our pleasure to invite you to the 1st meeting of the extended POLARIS network ('old' POLARIS network plus 'old' NCN network), held at Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences on 22 – 23 September 2008. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss what has been achieved in the old networks so far and plan the future activities of the new extended POLARIS network.

A fourth-year student of Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences, Laura Räisänen, will be assisting with the organising of the meeting as part of her Bachelor's Thesis. The focus of her thesis is sustainable development in event management and her idea is to organise the POLARIS meeting in the most ecologically efficient way possible. We hope that you consider this aspect as much as possible in your travel arrangements and when participating the meeting.

With this letter we just wish to give you a preliminary notice of the POLARIS meeting. More information will be sent to you after the summer holidays in early August, also with more detailed programme. The programme will start at 9am and finish around 4pm on both days. The final date for registration is the 22 August but if you can already confirm your attendance sooner, you can do so by emailing Laura Räisänen at laura.raisanen.mfa@jamk.fi. Please inform her also if you have a special diet or any other special needs. Do not hesitate to contact her if you need assistance with travel arrangements or have any other enquiries.

We are looking forward to hearing from you and wish you all a sunny summer holiday.

Kind regards,

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International Coordinator

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For further information on Jyväskylä, go to <http://www.jyvaskyla.fi/international/>

Here are a few centrally located hotels we can recommend for you to stay at. The prices have been negotiated especially for the participants of the POLARIS meeting, so if you wish to book at any of these hotels, please contact Laura. If you choose any other hotel in Jyväskylä, you should make the reservation yourself.

	single	double	for more information
Hotel Milton	70 €/night	90 €/night	http://www.hotellimilton.com/
Hotel Yöpuu	85 €/night	132 €/night	http://www.hotelliyopuu.fi/yopuueng/
Hotel Cumulus	91 €/night	116 €/night	http://www.cumulus.fi/view.cfm?page=hotel.7

Finncomm and Finnair operate several flights per day between Helsinki and Jyväskylä. For more information, go to <http://www.fc.fi/> or <http://www.finnair.fi> .

Trains run daily between Helsinki Central Railway Station and Jyväskylä, more information on <http://www.vr.fi>.