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# **Exploring agritourism products**

Case: Saaren Luomuosuuskunta

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<p>The objective was to discover the elements and customer experience levels that are most meaningful in popular agritourism experiences in Germany and find out which ones of the activities are the most suitable for the commissioner Saaren Luomuosuuskunta based on their strengths and weaknesses.</p> <p>The theoretical framework focused on the current position of agritourism in Finland and in Germany, organic agritourism, contemporary trends, and identifying farm experiences based on the benchmarked farms. Furthermore, it studied the experience economy, experience design and customer experience mainly from the Experience Pyramid's point of view.</p> <p>The study was done with qualitative research method, and more specifically theme interviews, benchmarking, and SWOT analysis. Data was gathered from observations from benchmarked farms social media channels and websites, as well as from theme interviews with the farm representatives. SWOT analysis was done by assessing Saaren Luomuosuuskunta as a visitor attraction and also to support the development suggestions for the commissioner. The data from the interviews was analyzed using thematic analysis method where the themes arise from the interview content.</p> <p>The results revealed that the vital elements in farm experiences were authenticity, story, multisensory, interaction and contrast, whereas the most prevalent levels of customer experience were physical, intellectual, and emotional. The most popular experiences were the farm tours, various workshops, outdoor activities, and events that contained culture and food. Recommendations of certain farm experiences were suggested to the commissioner based on the research results.</p> <p>It was concluded that agritourism product's attraction lie on theming, learning new things in authentic environment in a small group, conversing with other participants and to be able to actively participate in activities that involve physical doing. There are also suggestions for future research regarding the topic of agritourism products and organic agritourism.</p>		
<u>Key words</u> Agritourism, organic agritourism, farm experiences, Experience Pyramid model		

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Over the last decades the supply and demand of recreational activities on farms have increased and due to that the future looks promising for agritourism as it brings benefits to farmers and the people who visit the farms. (Barbieri, Shuangyu, Gil-Arroyo & Rozier Rich 2016.) Farmers and other members of farm communities have been exploring other ways to generate income since the earnings from agriculture have been decreasing in the framework of continuous reform of agricultural policy in the European Union. European Union has highlighted this in the shape of diversification of farm family earnings generated by activities that are carried out either off or on the farm. There is proof of new farming and non-farming activities that might end up pushing farmers away from their traditional culture and lifestyle. It is demonstrated that agritourism has the potential for development for rural areas, farms, and ranches, as well as generating additional earnings, promoting sustainability and employment, and also advance cultural landscape. (Potočnik-Slavič & Schmitz 2013.)

This thesis's literature focuses on agritourism in Finland and in Germany, and agritourism trends, farm experiences, experience design and customer experience mainly from Experience Pyramid's point of view. The aim is to find successful farm experiences in Germany and current trends based on theme interviews and benchmarking method, and then to recognize the development opportunities for Saaren Luomuosuuskunta with the help of SWOT analysis. The purpose of benchmarking method is to support the interviews by assessing the offerings of each farm and to find out how Saaren Luomuosuuskunta is doing compared to its international competitors. Additionally, benchmarking gives an insight to farm experiences since the literature does not categorize farm experiences separately. Experience Pyramid works as a guide and a tool for the interviews to gain understanding which elements are vital and most popular in agritourism products and in which levels the customers experience them. The findings from these methods will provide suggestions on how Saaren

Luomuosuuskunta and other small farms in Finland can evolve their farm as a visitor attraction by creating memorable farm experiences.

According to Shen, Chang & Liu (2020) by arranging innovative activities or events based on organic agritourism offers the visitors experiences based on organic agriculture and leisure activities moulded by natural farms and relaxing surroundings. The outcome would raise the interest of public related to the topics and matters of these activities, as well as attract media and evoke dialogue and engagement amidst the visitors. It can be suggested that small farms in Finland would benefit from diversification of services as well, assuming that many of them do not have the option to increase their volume of agricultural products to match with the prices of mass production. In addition, agritourism relies on farm experiences and nature-based activities which gives small farms a great opportunity to develop themselves as tourist attraction (Petroman & Petroman 2010).

Saaren Luomuosuuskunta is a small organic berry farm with five hectares of land located in the city of Ulvila in Finland. The farm was chosen for this thesis because the author did an internship for them and saw a great potential in developing the farm as a visitor attraction due to the small-scale agritourism in the region and the lack of expanding opportunities area-wise. The internship consisted of creating two new products for them, an organic farm tour and a seedling workshop for the summer season 2021, as well as a three-fold brochure of the farm. The co-operatives of the farm got interested expanding their offerings in form of activities and through that becoming economically more stable for the future. The benchmarked farms were chosen from Germany as they have similar agricultural and tourist season than Finland and due to their organic and sustainability approaches. Furthermore, the co-operative Mrs. Mäkinen had a farm field trip in 2017 to Germany to visit nearly twenty different farms and she contributed towards the author's selection. Germany also has the largest organic food market in Europe with annual sales revenue nearly 12 billion euros, as well as 34,110 organic-production holdings were listed in 2019 (Official statistics of Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture 2021).

## 1.1 Purpose and objective

The purpose of this thesis is to comprehend the topic of agritourism, organic agritourism and contemporary trends, as well as to identify the most dominant factors in agritourism products. Furthermore, which elements make certain farm experiences successful in Germany based on Experience Pyramid and in-depth interviews, that Saaren Luomuosuuskunta and other small farms in Finland could replicate when developing their farm as a visitor attraction.

Research problem emphasises on discovering suitable farm experiences for the commissioner that are proven to be successful in other small and medium sized farms. Research questions are as follows:

- Which farm experiences are successful in the chosen German farms?
- Which elements and levels do those experiences touch from the Experience Pyramid's point of view?
- Which are the current trends in agritourism products?

Topic was narrowed down to agritourism, organic agritourism, experience design and agritourism trends as well as customer experience through Experience Pyramid, where it could have also dealt with visitor attraction or destination management from different point of views, for example stakeholders or effects on surrounding environment. Reasoning behind is that the successful experiences found were more focused on customer centricity and participation, as well as multisensory activities rather than visitor attraction or destination management. Additionally, the objective was to name the best and most suitable experiences for the commissioner instead of focusing on the process of developing a certain experience. One other delimitation is that the study focuses on German farms, instead of other countries in Europe. Due to the fact that Germany has almost half of the land in agricultural use, and it has Europe's largest economy and population (Website of Index Mundi 2021).

The topic of agritourism has been gathering more attention lately due to its diversity of activities in various settings such as culinary experiences, ecotourism, country

recreation and rural and ethnic tourism (Website of Tourism Review 2021). Large amount of people have very little contact with agriculture, that is why farm tourism plays a crucial role raising awareness of the general population of the crop cultivation and agricultural methods. It also gives the non-farmers a possibility to learn about farming and support the farm by purchasing their products. Study made by Future Market insights forecasts that agritourism market will rise around 11 percentages between the years 2019 to 2029. (Website of Daily News 2021.) The results of this study will be usable for other small farms in Europe as well, especially those struggling with expanding their business land-wise.

## 1.2 Saaren Luomuosuuskunta

Saaren Luomuosuuskunta is a small co-operative business that is focused on organic farming in Vanha-Ulvila, Finland. Its active co-operative members are Ulla Mäkinen, Susanna Harjunpää and Mikko Lahtinen, which are displayed in Picture 1. The farm has a long history starting from 1940s when family Nevalainen had to evacuate from the Russian border due to the Winter War. Risto Nevalainen continued the farm after his father passed away and he started shifting to organic farming in late 1980s. The farm used to be owned solely by the couple Risto and Ulla, but they mutually agreed in 2017 to transform it to a co-operative model since they were getting older and wanted to share the responsibilities with Susanna and Mikko. Unfortunately, Risto passed away one year later, therefore the co-operatives are looking for another active member at the moment. (Mäkinen, personal communication on 19.4.2021.)





Picture 1. Co-operatives of Saaren Luomuosuuskunta (Website of Siksesparasta 2021.)

The farm has five hectares of land of which half is dedicated for berry farming and the rest for vegetables, herbs, root crops and potatoes. It employs the three co-operatives seen in Picture 1. as well as some trainees and a dozen of summer workers in the high season. The farm goes for hibernation from November until early March when they start growing the seedlings for garden markets and the full-on berry season starts in June and lasts until end of August normally. Saaren Luomuosuuskunta has a farm store and a café that offers local ice cream and coffee for customers during the summertime. The building where the store and café are got financial assistance from Leader Karhunseutu back in 2017.

They have their own brand called Ullan Uniikki which manufactures berries into juices and jams, vegetables into various preservatives, as well as herbs into blend of teas or seasonings. They also offer other services such as pressing juices for customers and cutting apple trees and gardening for households. Saaren Luomuosuuskunta's main sales channels are big supermarket chains like Prisma and Kodin Terra, Porin Kauppahallin Luomupuoti, Reko and other small events as well as individual customers that come to the farm shop. (Mäkinen, personal communication on 19.4.2021.)

This spring 2021 the co-operative organized three seedling workshops for the customers, and they are hosting organic farm tours for families and other small groups in a result of an internship by the author. There are few chickens, a rooster, three sheep and two cats at the farm as well as a big green house, farm store and coffee shop. One person from the co-operative is also hosting Airbnb guests in a detached cottage in close proximity of the farm as a test run for future plans, and so far, it has been a success. (Mäkinen, personal communication on 7.7.2021.)

## 2 AGRITOURISM

Agritourism is one of the most rapidly growing form of tourism all over the world. Agritourism can be defined by nearly all the activities a visitor does at a farm or in other agricultural setting by either participating in agricultural processes for leisure or recreational purposes, or simply just observing the farm landscape. It can entail various activities such as hunting and fishing for a charge, daily visits, wildlife, and nature watching, recreational self-harvesting or other outdoor activities. Regional development merged with sustainable agritourism concentrates on boosting rural capital and encourages local economy. (Pavić, Pažek, & Pavlovič 2018, 243.)

Pezzi, Reid & Faggian (2020, 4–5) state that agritourism is a manifestation of tourism that relies on agricultural economy that focuses on producing value from tourism via local agricultural structures. Therefore, it can be described as type of tourism where tourists stay with local people in the countryside and pass their time on ranches or farms, experiencing their daily lives and activities with recreational objectives. Agritourism is essential element in tourism development in peripheral areas because agriculture is commonly known from its ability to mold the regional and economic development of rural areas and is often matched with strongly rooted sense of place. Agritourism has lately increased its innovative approaches that do not only depend on technology, but also on the form of business such as co-operatives, and variety of food and raw materials produced, and they have stronger focus on sustainability. Local products and cuisines, as well as agricultural systems do in fact give an opportunity to generate extra value to areas that are not so economically significant otherwise.

Phillip, Hunter & Blackstock (2010, 754–756) argue that agritourism is not the same as rural tourism, instead it is a special component of rural tourism as a wider concept. The research proposes a framework of agritourism types that are based on three debates such as is the activity on a working farm, the nature of interaction between the activity and visitor, and the level of authenticity in the experience. The typology presented in Figure 1. divides agritourism in five different categories starting with non-working farm agritourism, for example accommodation in former farmhouse. Second and third categories are based in interaction meaning is the working farm with passive

contact like guesthouse on the farm or working farm with indirect contact such as bed and breakfast. Last two categories are built on authenticity, that is the working farm with direct contact to the customer, but in a staged setting like farm demonstrations, or is the working farm with direct contact in authentic setting such as participating in farm duties.

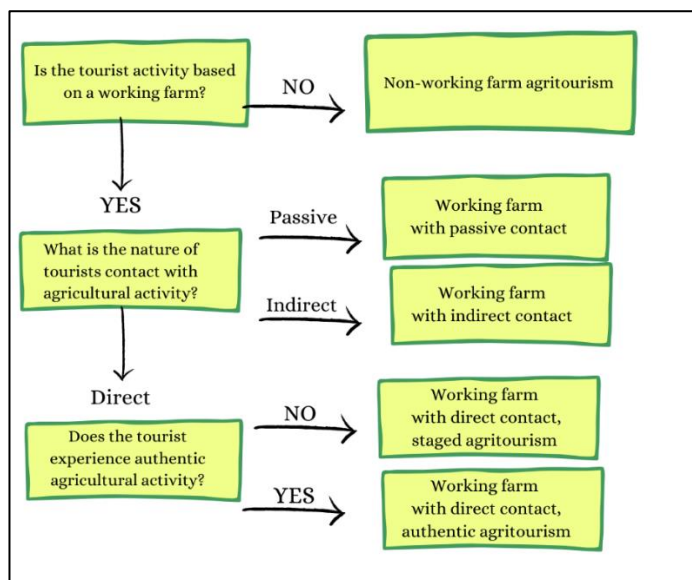


Figure 1. A typology for defining agritourism. (Phillip et al. 2010, 756.)

The global market is rising swiftly due to the government strategies focusing on boosting the revenue from agriculture and tourism industry. The key motivator of the market is the growing demand for economical, nature-based, and sustainable tourism. Additionally, the increasing number of agritour projects, ventures and programs by governments, associations and organizations boost the agritourism market growth. The global agritourism market size was estimated at United States Dollar (USD) 69.24 billion in 2019 and is forecasted to stretch to USD 117.37 billion by 2027 whereas European agritourism market size was in USD 32.59 in 2019 is predicted to double by 2027. (Website of Fortune Business Insights 2021.)

## 2.1 Organic agritourism

Organic agriculture is a cultural transformation rooted in the environmentalist culture. There is an increasing demand for quality healthy foods with limited use of chemicals which organic farming represents. Organic farming and agritourism are closely

connected to one another, as well as nature and food tourism play a significant part in the development of rural areas. (Donatella 2009, 4.)

The framework of organic agritourism resembles the traditional agritourism, although there is an additional emphasis on preservation of environment and natural resources. The environmental aspect works as a sustainability strategy for the services and products offered, as well as for the transport and road networks. The entrepreneurs must commit to responsible and sustainable actions with the objective of conserving the environment, historical and cultural heritage, redeeming and rehabilitating rural areas. The management of organizations should be focused on energy saving and reasonable use of resources by producing and utilizing alternative energy sources and recycling of effluent water. The mode of transport for visitors should also be considered carefully and aimed towards ecological ways or promoting slow moving. (Donatella 2009, 6.)

Kuo and Chiu (2006, 565–566) differentiate organic and traditional agritourism based on various components. Organic agritourism's activities are built on organic farming and managed by following the principles of ecotourism whereas traditional acts as growth of income for the farmers and provides new forms of employment. Other separators are that organic farming is always certified by official body and the emphasis is on environmental protection and natural conservation of landscape, instead the traditional uses rural environment and agricultural activities as tourism resources. Traditional agritourism is designed so that tourists can experience agricultural life whilst organic agritourism provides more health, safety food and recreation services and aims to promote and sell organic food products.

The organic agritourism enterprises also appear as educators for increasing awareness of the environment amidst youth, which is crucial for conserving, valuing, and discovering nature and the works and culture of mankind. Therefore, organic agritourism can be understood as a unified strategy that executes tourism activities in rural areas. Although, many of the activities and notions in organic agritourism are extracted from traditional agritourism. The organic aspect is often only visible in food products. (Donatella 2009, 6.)

The variety and quality of the services and products offered determine the competitiveness of an enterprise. Therefore, the development of organic agritourism can offer an alternative for boosting earnings and potential economic viability for small farms. (Donatella 2009, 11.)

## 2.2 Agritourism in Germany

Tourism is important in Germany as it adds regional value, employment in rural areas and counter shrinking. Tourism as an alternative source of income, contributes to the maintenance of agricultural estates and guarantees the increased agricultural landscape. It is estimated that there are around 138,000 beds in 10,000 accommodation establishments in Germany with notable relation to agriculture, as well as 17,000 places to sleep in camping areas and 3,000 overnight possibilities in hay hostels. The number of newcomers in agrotourism was dropping slightly due to the structural change in crop cultivation and unsettled farm successions. Moreover, the growth is expected in the future for agrotourism, as it was stated in 2017 that quantitatively and qualitatively it is in a postal growth phase. (Ebert, Haarhoff, Stecker, Möller, Bengsch, Deckert & Schröder 2017, 5.)

A progress in the market is forecasted to happen where the smaller and older accommodation suppliers will leave the market, although new capacities by the newcomers are also unlikely to happen. The committed and qualitative agrotouristic suppliers will remain as they have put the tourism in priority and are not afraid of the challenges of the future. According to other studies the demand segment “vacation on the farm” has reduced since the middle of the 1990s that has affected the target group families with small kids to shrink. Even if it seems that agrotourism is losing its popularity, it still remains one of the most important attractions in rural areas for recreational, leisure and holiday regions. (Ebert et al. 2017, 5.)

The agrotouristic providers represent the core of nature tourism whose gradual loss through declining number of agriculture estates would strip tourism in rural areas of its most important unique selling propositions and competitive differentiators. Therefore, the aim in support should be in the quality and core of agrotourism by the

public and non-public institutions. There are several programs and ventures in agricultural structure politics to support diversification, especially in agrotourism. Although, during the years 2007 until 2013 the individual investments were not recorded as originally expected due to the multi-layered, endogenous, and exogenous reasons such as decline in agricultural holdings and administrative obstacles. (Ebert et al. 2017, 5.)

### 2.3 Agritourism in Finland

The success factors of agritourism lie on the versatile offerings provided by the rural environment for different types and forms of tourism. The supply of services in rural areas in Finland is diverse and broad, often provided by family-owned businesses, or small and medium sized enterprises. The offerings can vary from accommodation and cabin rentals, meal and banquet services, conference and event services, camp schools and different types of nature trips and memorable experiences. Agritourism puts emphasis in individuality that is supported by tourism megatrends, such as consumption pattern changes towards individuality and the appreciation of nature. (Edelheim & Ilola 2017, 85.)

The development of quality in agritourism have been a topic in Finland for years, a good example for this is Maakuntien parhaat label that is used nationwide to recognize quality products from small farms, and in tourism there are many strong role players acting as retailers and marketers. On the other hand, there are several obstacles in developing agritourism in Finland, for example the lack of participants in society-funded development projects due to the vagueness of objectives and fragmentation. Secondly, the statistics based on the number of beds and industry classification excludes a large number of rural businesses and business volume, as well as the classifications used do not support the versatile grouping and reporting of rural business supply. Also, the increasing incoming foreign tourists bring an extra challenge for the small entrepreneurs' language skills and knowledge of foreign cultures. Rural enterprises need supplementary business activities to remain profitable and sustain infrastructure due to the seasonal and summer-focused character of tourism. New solution models and new markets are needed to improve the readiness

and accessibility of the tourism service product. As we can see, there are still few challenges, even though the future of agritourism seems bright internationally and nationally. (Edelheim & Ilola 2017, 85–86.)

The traveler in Finland faces organic products mainly in dinner table at a restaurant, if even there. Organic as a tourism brand has not been used a lot in Finland, although it has been widely recognized in Central and Southern Europe, especially in Austria and Italy states the researcher, Hanna Mutttilainen. (Mutttilainen & Väisänen 2021, 17.)

The project *Lähde Luomun Matkaan* was a study conducted in 2017 until 2020 in Southern Savonia to clarify what kind of organic agritourism experiences are potential in the region and the added value of organic status. Organic sauna experience and organic forest trip were commercialized for the study with the co-operation of eighteen tourism and hospitality enterprises in Southern Savonia. The forest experience consisted of an educative two-hour tour about organic wild herbs and the meaning of organic in general, as well as an organic picnic lunch with the making of herbal tea from the collected herbs, and lastly calming and relaxing one's mind. Secondly, the sauna experience included a typical sauna moment with organic pampering products for face and body and organic dinner after the sauna. (Mutttilainen & Väisänen 2021, 18.)

The results of the study were clear and indicative for the future of organic agritourism. The most important factors were the educative knowledge about organic products and farming, and the organic theme throughout the experience, as well as the increased attractiveness of sustainability and the added value of activities like cooking or something else that encourages wellness. The study forecasted that the main customer groups would be international tourists, as they value organic more than the Finnish people do, also they find organic status attractive and familiar. (Mutttilainen & Väisänen 2021, 33.)

According to *Matka Maalle* there are six farm tourism destinations in Satakunta, although one could argue that more exist, but perhaps they have not wanted to pay the membership fee of 100 euros. The six destinations displayed are Anttilan tila,

Koivuniemen Herra, Korsuretket, Loma-Raiso, Niinirannan lomamökit and Vuojoen kartano. (Website of Matka Maalle 2021.)

Anttilan tila is a berry farm in Kokemäki that has a hostel attached to it, as well as small museum, farm shop, juice press and lemonade factory. They offer tours around the farm, venue rentals, evenings in their traditional smoke sauna as well as horseback riding and canoe trips in co-operation with other nearby farms. Koivuniemen Herra is a livestock farm in Merikarvia that focuses on participatory farm tasks, shows and other farm activities directed mainly towards families and groups of children. In addition, they have a guesthouse for overnight stays and a small café. Korsuretket is a company located in Jämijärvi that offers nature trips, venue rentals, accommodation, sauna, program- and catering services. Catering co-operates with local farmers to create local, seasonal, and clean meal entities, and nature trips include kayaking, hiking, competitions, pampering and green care trips. Loma-Raiso is located in Karvia and their offerings consists of venue rentals, catering, conferences, sauna, accommodation, nature park- and bird watching trips. Niinirannan lomamökit is situated in Kankaanpää and they are concentrating in cottage accommodation with rowing boat, barbeque hut, sauna, and access to lake Vihteljärvi. Lastly, Vuojoen kartano is a historical estate built in 1837 that offers accommodation, food, and venue rentals in rural environment in Eurajoki. (Website of Matka Maalle 2021.)

There have been many ventures in Satakunta area over the past years. Currently Leader Pohjois-Satakunta and Leader Suupohja are running a project together to develop skills of local food and farm tourism businesses in the area by end of 2021. The target group and beneficiary of this venture is the local food and farm tourism entrepreneurs, as well as producers and sellers of local food products. The co-operators of the venture are Sommenbygd-Vätterstrand from Sweden and Associazione di Promozione Sociale Insieme si puo from Italy. The aim is to seek and convey the latest information, skills, and models from the best practices in Finland and internationally. Open information and discussion events are held in Finland to support the communication, as well as company visits to partner countries and to local businesses involved to get to know the successful practises. Every traveller that visits the area uses other services as well, therefore, local food, natural environment and culture go hand in hand. The co-operation between the companies and service offerings strengthens the regional



development and attractiveness of the place. The objective is to increase the attractiveness of local food and farm tourism in the area to attract domestic and international tourists. (Website of Satafood 2021.)

#### 2.4 Agritourism trends

European countries have experienced an increase in domestic agritourism since the 1980s according to Barbieri's research. Primarily the city people are seeking for recreational and leisure activities from neighboring countryside areas to get away from the busy hubs. Visitors usually come for day visits, weekends or for short vacations. (Barbieri 2019, 149.)

Agritourism provides the opportunity to learn about livestock farming, food production, conservation, and sustainability of natural resources. Families are particularly keen on supplementary entertainment activities like seasonal markets, amusement parks and education in nearby areas to spend a day or two. The trends are in sustainability, protection of climate and nature, domestic holidays and in quality time to experience authentic and genuine leisure activities in rural areas, ranches and in nature. Domestic travelling in Europe has increased enormously due to Covid-19 pandemic, but it is still unsure to say is it an emerging change in touristic behavior or just a passing trend that will wear off when the epidemic is over. (Bosmann, Hospers & Reiser 2021.)

The statistics from 2019 show that that the individual length of stays decreases in Europe and this behavioral pattern in Germany is due to increasing mobility, lifestyle changes and shifts in leisure and working time behavior (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2019). The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) stated in 2018 that the world has approximately ten years to restrain climate change to 1.5 degrees, if not, the extreme weather conditions will significantly worsen. On that account, people are becoming more environmentally conscious due to the increasing awareness of global warming and based on online survey made in 2021 stated that 83 percent of tourists worldwide think that sustainable travelling is vital. (WTTC 2021.)

The main buyers of agritourism products are predicted to be millennials due to their active participation in farm tourism activities for recreational purposes and their buying behaviour with farm products. The study also proposes that the focal point will be in product innovation and entering new markets, as well as promoting through social media networks and marketing campaigns. (Website of Travel Daily News 2021.)

One of the trends in agritourism in Finland is the increasing diversity of products and services, even the farthest and less attractive destinations and environments, and the local stories connected to them can attract travellers. Recognising these resources and utilizing them innovatively are interesting themes for the developers and researchers of agritourism. (Edelheim & Iloa 2017, 86.)

Finland's pull factors are safety, security, cleanliness, and quietness. Therefore, it is no wonder why Finland is one of the top nature destinations in Europe. According to Kristiina Hietasaari from Visit Finland says that the nature attractions, everyman's right, sauna and the nature of Finnish people interest foreign travelers, and based on their opinion Finns are considered genuine, friendly, warm, and hospitable. The tourists that travel to Finland want to experience something unique and special, they have often already travelled a lot and are no longer interested in regular sightseeing. Although, Finland has its issues related to poor public transport in rural areas, scattered information online about the visitor attraction and its services, and lack of travel packages and luxury attractions. (Hako 2021, 19.)

The year 2020 was very difficult for tourism businesses due to the travel and other general restrictions related to corona virus, although a slight rise amongst domestic travelers was discovered. The pandemic increased the need of pampering holidays and short daytrips as well as the rising awareness of the climate change strengthened the trends of responsible and local tourism. (Hako 2021, 18.) Finnish travelers desire nature experiences, adventures, pampering themselves with good food and spa treatments, and history and culture. They are ready to spend in services and experiences, however, they must be customized according to Finnish lifestyle, for example a Finn is often comfortable going to the forest alone without a guide, whereas

a foreign tourist requires it. (Honkanen, Sammalkangas & Satokangas 2021, 88–89.) Kelola wonders, that perhaps, interesting entities that are connected with culture, storytelling, history and traditions would work better (Hako 2021, 19).

Overall, the year 2020 highlighted the domestic tourism possibilities and existing destinations in Finland. There is lot of interest and demand from Finns, as well as new opportunities and developments suggestions for the tourism companies for the future. Honkanen stated that Finland can maintain its current position as interesting domestic destination even after the pandemic, if it will grasp this opportunity now. Finnish destinations can remain permanently alongside with trips abroad. (Honkanen et al. 2021, 96–97.)

The latest reports by Visit Pori (2021) reveal that the summer 2021 was one of the most successful regarding to domestic tourism in Pori area. Pori hotels occupancy rate was 95 percentage in July which was 21 percentage higher than last year and counted overnight stays were almost 62000. The number of day visitors were also increasing due to the low capacity in accommodations, therefore there is a need for more accommodation providers in the area. Yyteri sand beach is still the biggest attraction with 350 000 visitors during the summer 2021. Additionally, it is noteworthy that the off-season months are much busier than before which could indicate to extended season.

## 2.5 Farm experiences

Farm experiences can be described as the activities that happen on the farm or by exploiting the agriculture for recreational or educative purposes. (Phillip et al. 2010, 755.) Therefore, there is no simple terminology for what can be considered as a farm experience. The farm experiences mentioned here are in result of the author gathering information from the benchmarked farms and their experiences as presented in the Figure 2.

Accommodation	Venue rentals & events	Food & beverage	Domestic animals	Outdoor activities	Farm shops	Workshops & courses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guesthouses</li> <li>• Airbnb</li> <li>• Hostels</li> <li>• Bed &amp; Breakfast</li> <li>• Farmhouses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conferences</li> <li>• Birthday parties</li> <li>• Weddings</li> <li>• Meetings</li> <li>• Celebrations</li> <li>• Live music</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wine- &amp; beer tastings</li> <li>• Restaurants</li> <li>• Cafés</li> <li>• Catering</li> <li>• Barbeque bags</li> <li>• Farm breakfasts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cows</li> <li>• Sheep</li> <li>• Goats</li> <li>• Horses</li> <li>• Donkeys</li> <li>• Chicken</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hiking trails</li> <li>• Children's play areas</li> <li>• Cycling</li> <li>• Disc golf</li> <li>• Kayaking</li> <li>• Bird watching</li> <li>• Horseback riding</li> <li>• Farm tours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vegetables</li> <li>• Fruits</li> <li>• Butchery</li> <li>• Dairy</li> <li>• Bakery</li> <li>• Winery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cheese workshops</li> <li>• Making preserves</li> <li>• Recognizing butterflies and birds</li> <li>• Cooking classes</li> <li>• Courses for professionals</li> </ul>

Figure 2. Farm experiences based on the analysis

Based on the analysis of the most commonly known farm experiences as displayed in the Figure 2. are accommodation, venue rentals and events, food and beverage, domestic animals, outdoor activities, farm shops, courses and workshops. Accommodation includes guesthouses, Airbnb, hostels, bed and breakfast and farmhouses whereas venue rentals can be anything from a conference to different kind of parties and live music evenings in various settings. Food and beverage can comprise wine- and beer tastings, restaurants, cafés, catering, barbeque bags and farm breakfasts. Domestic animals were mostly cows, sheep, goats, horses, donkeys, and chickens that were mainly exploited to produce commodities, only as a secondary for petting. Outdoor activities consisted of hiking trails, children's play areas, cycling, disc golf, kayaking, bird watching, horseback riding and farm tours. Most of the benchmarked farms had farm shops that sell their own commodities as well as nearby farms' products but almost always limited to fresh products only. Courses and workshops varied a lot from families making their own cheese to professionals learning how to breed seedlings for their farms.

### 3 EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

Experience management is the foundation for tourism and hospitality experiences. The main objective for experience management is to create solid customer experiences and is regarded as a vital part of the marketing and management strategy. (Baker & Kim 2020, 150.) Marketing in tourism have been focusing on experiences and experientialism for several years. It has been used in the hope of additional sales and

increased interest from the customers. Pine and Gilmore (2011, 8–9) stated that as much as an experience is differentiated from a service, so is service is from a commodity. The identifications factors of an experience are the tailor-made experiences, drama, and themed design. Services are offered to a customer, but the buyer of an experience is treated as a guest. Also, the staff in experience economy are as if they are working on a stage or part of a scene in the nominated role where instead service economy employees are the guides, waiters, and sellers. According to Baker & Kim (2020, 150) destination's competitiveness is measured by the company marketing themselves as offering memorable experiences as they supply opportunities for destinations and organizations to boost their identities, enhance customer satisfaction and drive tourist demand.

### 3.1 Experience design

Experience design focuses on how to face, encounter, and address the guest, whereas the focal point is in the offerings in service design (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 8–9). Studies of service experience design support the idea that the main reason of customer experience design is to improve customer retention and loyalty which means that customers want to experience the touchpoint journey again of a given company or brand by shifting from post-purchase to pre-purchase. (Homburg, Jozic & Kuehnl 2017.)

It is important to design, manage and stage experiences to make them successful. Examples of well-designed experiences are places like Disney World and SixSenses Resorts. Experience design process's focal point is in interpreting customers' needs and aspirations into products or services that can meet these expectations. In addition, it is vital to take in account the wishes and capabilities of that specific organization or business to establish how they are making it happen within their limitations. In tourism experiences the role of design is highlighted among the design methodologies, approaches, principles, and methods reported, although there are great number of differences but also some similarities. These differences are linked to the interpretation of the terms design and experience. (Smit & Melissen 2020, 131.)

There are four strategic ways for customer experience design starting with thematic coherence, logic, connectivity, and lastly, context sensibility of touchpoints. These strategies work as objective for the strategic decision making and therefore capture the degree of loyalty in customer experiences as they are developing. Strategic directions have more straightforward approach on various marketing tasks and the front-end of customer journey which can lead to the realization of the customer-firm exchange, whereas the cultural mindsets mainly only effect on the behavioral attributes of staff members. Therefore, companies' strategic directions advocate non-physical, exchange-based and resources, if they are able to direct marketing missions to the strategically wanted customer-firm exchange. (Homburg et al. 2017.)

The design process is a complex method that involves several different theories, techniques, and models to aid in the creation of new products, services, and the customer relationship. Some methods are very punctual, calculative, and quantifiable like design of information technology equipment, whereas others resemble a more free-flowing method where the emphasis is in identifying opportunities for new or enhanced products or services, such as website design that often requires swift prototyping processes. Although, there are various methods, most scholars and professionals agree that step-by-step process is essential for experience design process for creating new and upgraded products or services. Design approaches can be separated between descriptive and prescriptive models. Descriptive model's foundation starts with vaguely defined problem or opportunity that will lead to developing new concepts and product innovation opportunities, also known as design thinking. Prescriptive model refers to generating a solution technique early in the process that can be used to collect and analyse feedback and later to assess the prototype to further refine and determine the issue or opportunity to make a second version of the solution technique. (Smit & Melissen 2020, 133.)

A study about experience design in agritourism products in 2020 revealed that the experiences and conceptions are directly connected to the particularity of agritourism offerings, which supply experiences such as taking part in different kind of workshops like making preserves or dishes, getting to know the secrets of herbs and the opportunity to work on the farm. Five elements of tourist experience were identified in the context of agritourism that are entertainment, escapist, educational, aesthetic and

comfort. These elements should be considered holistically in experience design, even though there were some variables between gender and age like aesthetic experience relied on gender mostly. Emphasis must be put in cultural aspect as it influenced the memorable tourist experience positively which can be directly translated into revisits and recommending the farm to others. The agritourism providers should take local cultural heritage as a vital part of the experience including specifically culinary and cultural events. Furthermore, the intensity of the experienced activity is comparative between the inherent culture of the tourist and the culture of the destination. On that account, it is crucial that the farm culture is authentic and notably different from global or urban culture, so it can provide a unique experience that is closely connected to the rural area. The limitation of the research was that it was conducted with Polish agritourists only, insinuating that the results might have been different in other countries. (Sieczko, Parzonko & Bienkowska-Golasa 2020, 181.)

### 3.2 Customer experience in tourism

Every tourism business's goal is in experiencing, which is why the studies of experiences are a vital part of tourism research. The experience is the fundamental in tourism industry as well as the quality of the experiences according to current knowledge in tourism. In addition, tourism businesses set down tourism experience as the core of their products and services by putting emphasis on the creation and management of quality experiences. According to Ooi in 2003 tourism experience can be separated into five categories starting with cognitive psychology of tourism experiences, to effect of the experience and thirdly, the depth of experiential engagement to phenomenological approach, and lastly the gap between tourism experiences and everyday life. (Sundbo & Dixit 2020, 19.)

Tourist experience can be described from the psychological point of view as mentioned above, although, tourism context must be taken in account. Tourists relocate from their usual surroundings to experience something different that they do not have at home, otherwise they would not be interested to travel and to pay the costs incurred. At the fewest, some components should vary like the surroundings, for example watching an opera show in a castle instead of the home theatre. The motives for people to travel

might be related to sensualism and self-gratifying, although there are various other reasons as well like the need of relaxation, wanting to know more about other cultures or even live within these cultures. The scholars have found out that the experiences and tourism should have a purpose, for example acquire a meaning of life in the form of political, religious, or mental insight or generating the opportunities for charity and assisting other people. (Sundbo & Dixit 2020, 20.)

Previous studies by Gilovich (2003) have already concluded that experiential purchases bring more happiness compared to material purchases. Gilovich stated three different reasons for this such as experiences are more open to reinterpretation, and they aid in more advantageous social relationships as well as they are forming a part of person's identity. The latest research done by Gilovich and Kumar revealed that people are more inclined and invested talking about their experiences even before and after and they get more satisfaction from the experience whilst sharing it with others. It also disclosed the importance of hedonic benefits from experiences that will lead towards improved well-being, and happier and healthier society. The study suggested to encourage people to share their stories about their experiences and guide their way towards choosing experiences over possessions, for example maintaining hiking trails and public parks. Marketers should highlight the experiential elements of the products through online forums, review sites and other feedback channels to increase the enjoyment that their customer obtain from their experiences. (Kumar & Gilovich 2015, 1328–1329.)

The essence of memorable experience is the tourist's feelings and emotions experienced within a particular activity. Memorable experiences can provoke positive experiences, although, every tourist assesses their experiences individually. It can be questioned that is every tourism experience memorable. Memorable experience is the one that passes the memory creation process from all of the set of experiences like transportation, food and beverage, entertainment and other related services. Normal tourism experience is determined as the mental state of a person throughout the use of a service or product, although not every tourism experience is saved in tourist's memory. The memorable experience seems to be formed when it provokes shared experiences, ample service options, unexpected occurrences, and substantial services. (Coelho Freitas & Sevilha Gosling 2020, 89.)



### 3.3 The Sweet Spot

According to Pine and Gilmore (2011, 46) experience can be analysed in four different categories where the common dimension is in the tourist's participation as its displayed in Figure 3. The participation can be active or passive, in active the tourists engage in the activity by making something concrete, and in passive they are just bystanders. In vertical scale the tourist's emotional and physical participation is analysed with absorption and immersion by defining is the experience fascinating to follow or joining as part of the event.

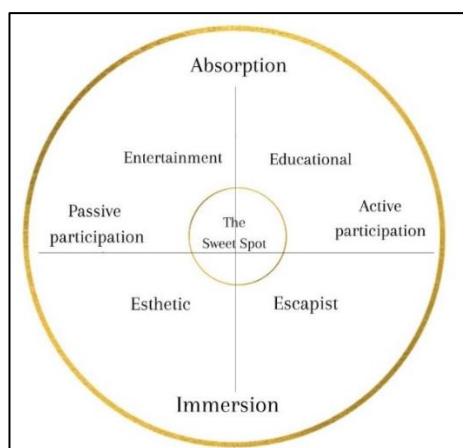


Figure 3. The four realms of an experience, The Sweet Spot. (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 46.)

Educational experiences can make one to rethink how we position ourselves into this world, and entertainment experiences can reshape our view of the world. Esthetic experiences can evoke a sense of wonder, beauty and respect, whereas escapist experiences can boost personal characteristics and abilities to new levels. Although, the most engaging life-transforming experience is reached when multiple elements from all four aspects are combined together, which Pine and Gilmore call “The Sweet Spot”. (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 46–47.)

### 3.4 Experience Pyramid

Experience is positive, memorable, and meaningful and it can result to a personal change. How does one separate meaningful experience from a regular experience, and

what elements should be involved for it to lead for something memorable. Experience Pyramid model by Tarssanen & Kylänen offers answers to the questions above in a form of a pyramid as displayed in the Figure 4. The model enables to understand and analyze experientialism in tourism, culture, and entertainment products. The pyramid can be used as a tool to find critical points and deficiencies to develop and research the product to gain competitive advantage. A perfect experience product would touch all the elements and levels in the Experience Pyramid model. It is still impossible to guarantee a meaningful experience to all participants, however by including certain elements the customers are more likely to have a meaningful experience. (Tarssanen & Kylänen 2009, 10.)

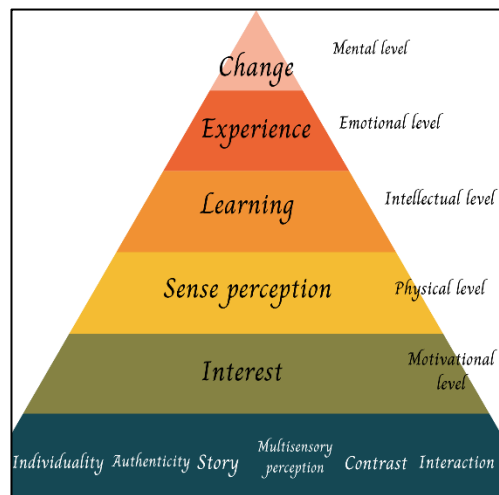


Figure 4. Experience Pyramid model. (Tarssanen & Kylänen 2009, 11.)

Experience Pyramid consists of six elements and five levels of the experience that are presented in Figure 4. In the model the elements represent the content of the experience whilst the levels are unveiled from the customer's point of view. The elements horizontally displayed in the pyramid are as follows, individuality, authenticity, story, multisensory perception, contrast, and interaction, whereas the levels are presented vertically as motivational, physical, intellectual, emotional, and mental. (Tarssanen & Kylänen 2009, 11.)

### 3.4.1 Elements

*Individuality* describes the uniqueness of the experience, and how it can be customised to each individual user to fulfil their personal preferences. The product can be tailored almost indefinitely, although, the more customised product, the higher the costs are. The real challenge lies on designing customised products that's basis can still be easily copied. Good example of individuality is a physical exercise experience like rafting where the instructor shows several examples with various difficulty levels so everyone can do it according to their own skill levels. (Tarssanen & Kylänen 2009, 12–13.)

*Authenticity* refers to the authentic and genuine feel of the experience and it is determined by the customer himself. It also presents the credibility of the product, the service's or product's foundation should always be based on local culture so that the manufacturer considers it as a natural part of their local identity. Every representation and replica seen from a specific culture will change the original conception, which is why the cultural ethical sustainability is an important part of the experience. Ethical product does not violate ethnic or other cultural communities, neither does it seek to benefit in their expense. (Tarssanen & Kylänen 2009, 12–13.)

*Story* is closely connected to the authenticity of the product, and it is used to motivate the customer and explain what will happen and in which order. It is vital to combine all the different elements into a coherent story that allows the experience to become immersive and compact. Believable and genuine story gives social significance and content for the customer and a reason to experience the product. A good story always contains elements of fiction and facts, such as old tales or legends combined with local knowledge. Also, the story lures the customer to participate in emotional level which enables the guest to experience it in intellectual and emotional level. The story should be well planned out to match the target audience's needs to ensure the effectiveness of the twists in the plot, and that the details do not collided with one another. (Tarssanen & Kylänen 2009, 12–13.) Pine and Gilmore (2011, 73) call this harmonizing and theming the experience. Consistent theming is the heart of the experience, and the themes must be present in every step along the way starting from the marketing until experiencing and post-marketing.

*Multisensory* means that the sensory stimuluses are carefully designed to strengthen the desired theme and to support the captivation of the product. The entity might suffer if there are too many stimuluses, or they are too disruptive. *Contrast* on the other hand, describes the difference of the experience from the customer's everyday life. The customer needs to experience something new, exotic, and out of the ordinary. Experiencing something new allows the customers to see themselves from another perspective and different in unfamiliar surroundings which allows them to disengage from the normal daily routines and habits to see things differently. Although, one must pay attention to the customer's nationality and culture whilst producing contrast, because what is interesting and exotic for some, might be normal for others. (Tarssanen & Kylänen 2009, 14.)

*Interaction* is the successful communication between the customer, the product, provider, and other participants. Essential part of interaction is the sense of community, experiencing something together as part of community, group, or family. Therefore, it is important to introduce all participants to each other, unless they know each already. Moreover, one can experience by themselves as well, but communality is strongly affiliated with the awareness that the experience is generally accepted and valued. This way the experience can raise the participant's social status or link them more tightly to a specific group. (Tarssanen & Kylänen 2009, 14–15.)

### 3.4.2 Levels

The Experience Pyramid vertical axis describes the customer experience starting from awakening the interest to actually experiencing, processing the knowledge from the experience and emotionally engaging with it, which will lead to transformation as displayed in Figure 4. Well-designed experience product involves all of the elements from the pyramid in every level of the way. (Aho 2001, 35–36.)

*Motivational level* describes the first step to motivate and raise the interest of the customer, as well as creating the expectations towards the product, for example by marketing. The marketing of the product should already touch as many elements as

possible like individuality, multisensory, authenticity, contrast, story and interaction. (Tarssanen & Kylänen 2009, 15.)

*Physical level* refers to the step where the customer experiences and acknowledges the product through senses (LaSalle & Britton 2003, 9). Physical senses aids us to be aware where we are, what is happening and what are we doing. In this level the product ensures a pleasant and safe experience for the participants, for example nobody is too cold or hot, nor too thirsty or hungry, not to even mention a physical threat. The only exceptions to the previous are extreme experiences like skydiving, where the fear of death or injury, as well as playing with danger and surviving from it are a vital part of the experience, although the real risk is always minimized. (Tarssanen & Kylänen 2009, 15.)

*Intellectual level* relates to the processing of sensory stimulations provided by the environment which enables us to function, learn, think, apply knowledge and form opinions. In intellectual level the level of satisfaction is determined. A well-designed product offers learning and training experience, possibility to learn something new, develop and gain new knowledge either consciously or unconsciously. (Tarssanen & Kylänen 2009, 15.)

*Emotional level* represents the actual experience experienced with feelings. It is hard to predict individuals' emotional reactions beforehand, but if the product has already taken into account the other elements of experience, it is highly likely that the customer will have positive experience with joy, laughter, happiness and triumph. (Perttula 2004, as cited in Tarssanen & Kylänen 2009, 15.)

*Mental level* is the final level, and it opens up the possibility for a mental transformation. The positive and powerful reaction from an experience may lead to a mental change, that leads to semi-permanent changes of the person's lifestyle, or physical or mental state. At this point the individual feels changed and developed as a person or adopted something new as part of their persona. Through an experience one can adopt a new hobby, way of thinking or even find new resources in themselves. Previously timid person can see themselves as brave after a skydive jump, materialistic

person to find new values for life from desert hike or a couch potato can find spark in exercising. (Tarssanen & Kylänen 2009, 16.)

## 4 RESEARCH METHODS

Method used in this thesis is qualitative research method and more specifically theme interviews, benchmarking, and SWOT strategic analysis. The primary data is collected from theme interviews with three of the benchmarked farm representatives and one from the co-operative's that visited the benchmarked farms and has her own farm stay. Supplementary data is gathered by observing benchmarked farm's websites and social media channels and creating an overview of their offerings. SWOT analysis is made from Saaren Luomuosuuskunta by assessing their farm as a potential visitor attraction. The interview data will be analysed with thematic analysis method where the themes mostly rise from the interview material.

### 4.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research refers to a method that usually reviews the material as whole, as it is thought to open the structure of an entity that is logical internally and believed to be unique. Arguments cannot be built from the differences in the individual's variables nor the statistical links to other variables, not even when the material consists of separate research units like individual interviews. Qualitative analysis requires absoluteness meaning that all the facts and figures that are considered reliable must be able to be clarified so that they do not conflict with the presented interpretation. The amount of interviews in qualitative method is usually rather low because even one unstructured interview could potentially produce thirty transcribed pages, therefore it makes no sense to do a large number of interviews, and also the resources are often limited. Qualitative analysis consists of two phases, reduction of findings and solving the mystery. (Alasuutari 2011.)

The objective in reduction of findings is to narrow down and find the most important discoveries. Material is always assessed from theoretical methodological viewpoint to discover the relevant information for the research. After subtracting the relevant material, one needs to group together the observations found and once again reduce the amount of unnecessary findings. Solving the mystery is the interpretation of the findings meaning the understanding of the phenomena in question based on the produced leads and clues available. (Alasuutari 2011.)

The aim for qualitative research method was to find out the answers for the research questions and to gain comprehension of the dominating elements and levels in agritourism products. It was used to obtain in-depth knowledge of the respondents reasonings and motivators, as well as to understand the subject in detail based on the interviews, benchmarked farms, SWOT analysis and theory.

## 4.2 Interviews

Experiences are predominant research subjects since without them numerous areas of life would be left outside of studies. Researchers do not always have access to certain meetings such as political conferences nor they can always be present which is why it is crucial to raise social topics through interviews. It is vital to acknowledge the entity of an interview, and that merely by preparing good questions will not be enough, ultimately, an interplay it is lot more than simply asking questions. (Hyvärinen, Nikander & Ruusuvuori 2017, 1.)

There are four distinct types of interview methods that are structured, semi structured, thematic, and unstructured. Structured is a formal way of an interview where the questions are pre-made and identical for all participants and in the same sequence. Semi-structured method is where almost the same or alike questions are used for everyone, although the order can be altered. It is often used in study projects where there are pre-planned themes with particular questions. On the other hand, thematic interview is more casual with specific themes, but there are no pre-planned questions. Unstructured interview is an open interview that resembles a normal discussion where there is a subject, but not necessarily the identical themes for all. Its main goal is to

gain in-depth knowledge from the interviewees and requires a lot of time. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006, 53–55.)

Thematic interview is a good example of semi structured interview and one of the most used methods. The interview method is ideal for studying subjects that we know very little of and describing empirical experiences. It offers an opportunity for the interviewer and interviewee to have a comprehensive and versatile interaction. Interviews are a good research method when the answers are unknown and when they are based on the interviewees' own experiences. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000, 47–48.)

The questions in theme interview are not written down, but there is a theme to follow in desired order that works as a checklist for the interviewer. It is important to select the right interviewees to support the research objective and also, to familiarize yourself with the topic. Thematic interview is aimed for specific types of topics and one of the main features is that the interviewees have empirical experiences of alike situations under the same topic. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000, 47–48.)

Thematic interview was chosen for this study due to the broad and multiform topic that focuses on Experience Pyramid's elements and levels in agritourism products. Furthermore, it seemed like the best option to get internal expertise and to describe empirical experiences like workshops, farm stays and tastings on the farm. The objective was to gain understanding of the predominant elements and levels of customer experience in farm experiences which led to choose the themes according to Experience Pyramid model. Experience Pyramid's levels and elements can be understood in various ways which made it impossible to draft pre-planned questions.

Themes that were created for this interview followed the Experience Pyramid's components added with organic as an added value and current trends. The Experience Pyramid's elements are *authenticity*, *individuality*, *story*, *multisensory*, *contrast*, *interaction*, and the levels are as follows *motivational*, *physical*, *intellectual*, *emotional* and *mental*. In addition, each participant named the most popular activity, and the questions were altered by that and the perspective of the interviewee. The themes were kept in the same order for all interviewees to avoid the changes in the style of interaction and to keep them equivalent. The emphasis in all of the interviews were



from the farm's point of view, but two of the interviews also touched the customer's viewpoint. On top of all that, theme interview suited best for the objective and purpose of the research.

All of the benchmarked farms were contacted, but only few agreed to an interview. The interviewees were from Dottenfelderhof, Hof Neuseegaard and from Saaren Luomuosuuskunta farm. Margarethe Hinterlang answered questions on behalf of the organic farm Dottenfelderhof, whereas Mr. and Mrs. Mallach were visiting Finland so they were asked questions behalf of their farm Hof Neuseegaard as well as from customer point of view to explore what farm experiences they had in Finland. Ulla Mäkinen from Saaren Luomuosuuskunta was chosen as one of the interviewees because she had visited and participated in experiences in the benchmarked farms in Germany, and also because she has recently started providing an ascetic farm stay accommodation as an individual separated from Saaren Luomuosuuskunta. Table 1. displays the selected interviewees names with their titles and the farms they are from. The interviews were conducted with a video call, and in person over the summer 2021 and all of them lasted approximately for an hour. Themes that were used in the interview are explained in the research methods section, as well as they are listed in the appendix.

Table 1. Interviewees for the theme interview

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Farm</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Margarethe Hinterlang</b>	Senior management in non-profit farm organization	Dottenfelderhof	22.6.2021
<b>Lutz Mallach</b>	Landscape designer and farmer	Hof Neuseegaard	25.7.2021
<b>Gudrun Mallach</b>	Farmer	Hof Neuseegaard	25.7.2021
<b>Ulla Mäkinen</b>	Farm stay entrepreneur and co-operative farmer	Saaren Luomuosuuskunta	11.8.2021

### 4.3 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that aims to identify the themes connected to the research question. The objective is to recognise the central matters and typical features of the subject in question. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008.)

Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2000, 173) state that theming is finding mutual statements and themes made by the interviewees when analysing the content. The analysis is often made from the interview material, but one needs to remember that the themes in the interview are not always the same as the themes that occur after analysing the material. The basis can be based on them, but often other themes evolve that are even more interesting than the substructure. The raised themes in the analysis are always an interpretation from the researcher.

Thematic analysis was utilized in this study as an inductive reasoning tool to extract knowledge from empirical investigation and to identify the central themes from the interviews. All recordings were transcribed, coded, and themed following the phases of O’Gorman & MacIntosh (2015, 145) model. First phase focuses on familiarization of the data where the transcribing and reading happens followed by generating initial codes from the material. Thirdly, the themes need to be identified from the codes, and after reviewed and compared with the coding sentences to form a thematic map of the analysis. Fifthly, a further processing and refining of the themes and placing them into an overall story. Last step focuses on writing the analysis and producing the report with extract examples.

### 4.4 Benchmarking

Benchmarking in simple terms is the comparison of performance, management processes and identifying gaps in between two or more variables. Benchmarking is not fixated for the same geographical area, like competitive analysis is, instead it aims to find the best practices regardless of the location, meaning the benchmarker and benchmarkee can be even from different countries. Benchmarking approach involves

the benchmarker, which is the organization carrying out the study, and the benchmarkee that is the organization that is being benchmarked. (Kozak 2003, 1–2.)

Competitive benchmarking falls under external benchmarking and is a method to know where one stands compared to their competitors. It can determine the best techniques, strategies and processes to achieve company goals through set of metrics. One can maintain an advantage and stay on top of trends, when identifying gaps in processes and following how other managers are reaching their aims. Competitive benchmarking can measure how the competitors are performing over time and search for trend data, as well as monitor the competitors' motions and long-term strategies. (Wöber 2001, 5–6.)

Benchmarking was essential component to determine the farm experiences in general, as no such separation is made in the literature, nor such model exist on the subject. The method was used to gain knowledge about the benchmarked farm's offerings and experiences, as well as which elements seem most predominant in them. Competitive benchmarking was the most suitable option as it is not tied to a certain place and the aim was to find out how Saaren Luomuosuuskunta is doing compared to the German farms along with discovering the best farm experiences.

#### 4.5 SWOT analysis

SWOT analysis is a strategic planning method used to identify organization's strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities. Strengths and weaknesses focus on organization's internal factors whereas threats and opportunities aim to recognize the external elements. It can be used for various purposes like evaluation one's own business as an entity, or a single operation or product, as well as competitiveness, or even competitor's operations, techniques, and competitiveness. It is important to limit the area what is being assessed to achieve comparable results. (Lindroos & Lohivesi 2010, 219.)

SWOT analysis for Saaren Luomuosuuskunta is developed as part of the analysis to support the theme interviews and benchmarking method to create thorough

development suggestions for the commissioner. The SWOT analysis is based on the author's observations and discussions with the co-operatives during the thesis process and it aims to assess the farm from potential visitor attraction's point of view. Theme interviews take in account the Experience Pyramid's elements and levels in agritourism products, whereas benchmarking observes the offerings and attractions. SWOT analysis concludes the existing strengths and weaknesses, as well as threats and opportunities to determine the most suitable farm experiences for Saaren Luomuosuuskunta.

## 5 RESEARCH RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Data analysis is collected from the theme interview answers, as well as from the supplementary data by observing and summarizing the benchmarked farms social media channels and websites about their experiences and offerings. SWOT analysis is made from Saaren Luomuosuuskunta to assess their farm's strengths, weaknesses and to examine the opportunities and threats for the future development of them becoming a visitor attraction. The approach is theory driven which means it will be based on the existent Experience Pyramid model to analyze the predominant elements and levels in agritourism products. Theory-driven approach is defined as a mediator which is based on an explicit theoretical model involving the interpretation of the causal link between the mediator and the results (Vanderplasschen & Maeyer 2014).

### 5.1 Analysis from the interviews

Data was analysed with thematic analysis tool where the interview material is analysed and based on it certain themes arise. Interviews were transcribed word by word, and coded after by highlighting the most important sentences and then transformed into themes that were occurring often or were similar than in the other interviews. The interviewees were asked to specify the most popular experience or experiences and the themes were adjusted according to that. The most popular experiences on the

interviewed benchmarked farms were the events that contained culture and food, farm tours and various workshops. The themes that rose after the analysis were *storytelling* and *consistency in a theme, marketing, group size, target group, multisensory, contrast, social interactions, learning, trends, and authenticity*. The analysis follows the Experience Pyramid's themes combined with the interview results and additional themes in the end.

### 5.1.1 Elements

The element individuality was not mentioned by the interviewees, but the interviewer did notice it in the subordinate clauses where it was said that the repetitive customers made a strawberry jam instead of an apple, and that sometimes the customers can even teach new things for the farmer. Mrs. Mäkinen did state that she would not visit the same farms again unless they had something new to offer.

Authenticity was mentioned by all, but from different perspectives. Mrs. Mäkinen took an organic farm tour in Germany and said that the most important and authentic factor was to meet the owner of the farm whereas Mrs. Hinterlang considered the authentic non-staged setting the most crucial point as she calls their farm a paradise which is in an old monastery and has medieval cellar building built with old sandstones. Contrarily, Mr. Mallach had noted that people are seeking for a highlight in an experience meaning that they have a specific perception of authenticity, and if things do not go according to that, they might be unsatisfied. Mrs. Mallach stated that the atmosphere and surroundings are essential when she picks a farm to visit. Mrs. Mäkinen added that the picturesque scenery and quiet surroundings were highlighted based on the reviews her guests had left. Small group sizes were thought to be an advantage as it gives authentic feeling for the customers, and everybody has time to ask questions and the group leader can memorise the participants names.

Storytelling came up in each interview as a motivator for the experience and drawing customers attention during it, and more over the briefing about organic agriculture to educate the visitors. Consistent theme throughout the whole experience was considered as a crucial part, especially Mrs. Mäkinen stated that the organic farm tour

had a sudden downfall when the dinner was in a standard restaurant instead of following the organic theme, and Mrs. Mallach was dissatisfied that all the customers come with private cars instead of public transport which also ruins the organic theme. Mr. Mallach said that the most fascinating experience for the customers was when the traditional eagle handler came with the eagle to talk about his profession.

Multisensory experiences were appraised to be the most successful because people love to immerse their hands in the soil, listen to the farm animals, smell, and see the surroundings and to create something with their hands like jams, juices, and herb tea blends.

The interviewees have noticed that nowadays urban people are alienated from the nature and farm tasks which is why farm experiences appeal and bring contrast to their everyday lives. Mrs. Mäkinen told that some customers did not even recognize fireweed during sheep feeding, which is one of the most common weeds in Finland. Mrs. Mallach, on the other hand, had noticed how animals can work as therapy or meditation tool for visitors instead of going to therapy or yoga. Mrs. Hinterlang stated that bringing too much contrast can harm the experience or at least know your audience if you do so, good example was when they tried a seed breeding course which was way too complicated for the normal customers to understand or even get interested in it.

Social interaction was highlighted by all of the respondents stating that farm experience is always an opportunity to meet likeminded people and there are very rarely silent workshops. Interaction was considered momentous because it brings sense of belonging to the group and good conversations, as well as transmission of information. Post sales, reviews and feedback were non-existent on the farms when asked about contacting customers after the experience. Mrs. Mäkinen was the only exception due to the automatic review policy in Airbnb where her ascetic accommodation is listed. Most of them agreed that there is no time for such, and Mrs. Hinterlang pointed out “that the experiences are competing with the actual farm work”.

### 5.1.2 Levels

All of the respondents informed that they do not have any kind of marketing plan in place, and they are poor users of social media channels, although they realise that it would be important as it would attract new and perhaps younger customers. Mrs. Hinterlang and Mrs. Mäkinen said that sometimes they advertise in the newspaper, although Hinterlang also stated that they really do not need to at the moment as they are fully booked for the next three months. Mr. Mallach added that sometimes farms do not exhibit their unique features enough like being organic or preservative free, which could be an advantage and motivate visitors. Mrs. Mallach said that their motivation to come to Finland came after watching a documentary that stated that Finnish people are the happiest people, so they wanted to see what it means and is it true. They chose Mrs. Mäkinen's farm stay as the setting looked appealing in the photos and it was in an organic farm with café. Mrs. Mäkinen said that important motivator is the location, it needs to be close enough from the main hubs so one can just pop for a quick visit. Mrs. Mallach added that the location is a problem at their farm as it is too far away from public transport and from the main cities.

Multisensory perception seems to be the key to the experience and unites with the physical level. According to respondents' customers want to touch, listen, see, taste, and smell the farm environment and to participate in doing something with their own hands. Physical level appeared vital and common in all of the farms because the customers like to engage with all of their senses, and it makes them memorize the experience better. Additionally, Mrs. Mäkinen felt that it was more intriguing to listen to courses in an outside farm setting compared to auditorium for example.

Experience Pyramid's intellectual level was raised as a topic through workshops because people love to learn something new and take recipes or other manuals to home. Mr. and Mrs. Mallach love to hear how the customers try those new things at home after a workshop and it makes them feel like they succeeded. Mrs. Mäkinen enjoyed the professional tips received in the farm tours as that kind of knowledge can only other farmers give, and it can be directly transferred to her own farm. Mrs. Hinterlang highlighted that their main goal is in developing the biodynamic farming and acting as

an educator for people. In addition, they have kids five-day holiday schemes and “Day at the countryside” workshops that function as a pre-school activity and also expand the parents’ knowledge.

Emotional level did not come up initially, but when asked about visitors’ feelings during the experiences the respondents all agreed that there was lot of laughter and triumph. Mental level, on the other hand, came up twice in the form of customers starting to farm themselves or grasping the organic sustainability approach in their everyday lives. Mrs. Mäkinen concluded from her farm field trip, after all, other farmers as customers are always idealists that are willing to try other techniques and new agricultural products. She also stated, “after we left the winery, we were all so certain that we will start growing our own grapes”.

### 5.1.3 Other themes

Mrs. and Mr. Mallach, and Mrs. Hinterlang said that the main customers are families, group of children and local urban people whereas Mrs. Mäkinen said that the visitors coming to her Airbnb are mainly from the capital although the locals do come to the farm shop. Furthermore, Mrs. Mallach stated that people that consume organic food usually also come to organic farms. Mrs. Hinterlang added that customers are often wealthy or middleclass, even though they would like to be available for all. They all agreed that international visitors are a minor customer segment.

Mrs. Mallach and Mrs. Hinterlang pointed out that current trends are families spending quality time together whilst participating in experiences and combining food and culture as an experience. Hinterlang added that farm day care has received a lot of attention and is amongst the most popular summer experience. Mrs. Mäkinen, on the other hand, stated that rising trends are domestic travelling and farm stays for urban people as she had her Airbnb fully booked in month of July. Mallach and Mäkinen had also noticed a change due to coronavirus, people love to do things themselves now like planting own tomatoes or making preserves at home. They also agreed that it seems that people like to invest in experiences rather than material possessions, although the visitors do almost always buy something from the farm shop end of the experience.



Additionally, Mrs. Hinterlang expressed that she always gives a new experience three shots, and if it is proven to be successful, it stays in the event calendar.

## 5.2 The benchmarked farms

The benchmarked farms were chosen from Germany because they have similar agricultural and tourist season than Finland and also, due to their organic and sustainability approaches. In addition, Germany has the largest organic food market and the number of organic production holdings in Europe. (Official statistics of Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture 2021). The benchmarked farms were carefully selected for this research due to the type and nature of their business and due to the variety of experiences that they offer. The most important was to find small to medium-sized organic farms that offer different experiences between each other and have lengthy history like the commissioner's farm. All of these features aid in the development suggestions for Saaren Luomuosuuskunta as it is easier to implement new experiences from similar types of farms. Furthermore, the commissioner had a farm fieldtrip to Germany in 2017 where she visited nearly 20 farms and she gave useful input and contact details about the best farms and experiences that she had during the trip. After the selection a brief introduction of each farm and their surroundings and activities was done based on website analysis. The activities that the farms offer are displayed in Table 2. in the end of the chapter.

### 5.2.1 Hofgut Hügle

Hofgut hügle is located in Ravensburg, which is a small town in Southern Germany with 50 000 residents. It is situated between Allgaeu and Lake Constance with the scenic beauty of Alps, and it is an attractive holiday destination. (Website of Ravensburg 2021.) Hofgut Hügle is a family friendly adventure farm that offers various experiences and farm activities, as well as accommodation and venue rentals. From agricultural point of view, their focus is on cherry trees. The farm has created cornfield labyrinth for the kids and a play barn, and as a family activity cherry picking

from the beautiful cherry orchard. For outdoor activities they have e-bike rentals with suggested routes, hiking and disc golf. Accommodation is offered in three different locations, at the center of Ravensburg, in the old town and at the farm, on top of that they have dog friendly vacation homes as well. Hofgut Hüggle has several domestic animals like donkeys, horses, wild bees, butterflies, bats, rabbits and guineapigs. Their newest addition is the family spa that offers salt rooms, sauna, ice fountain, foot pools and wellness area for the entire family. Family restaurants offers fine dining in an old barn, breakfast, Sunday brunch, home-made ice cream and barbeque bags when one wants to grill themselves. (Website of Guthuegle 2021.)

### 5.2.2 Oberfeld

Oberfeld farm is located three kilometres away from the city of Darmstadt, and 30 kilometers away from Frankfurt airport. The city is known as science and high-tech city due to its technical university, and one of the largest polytechnics and it is also a home for three Fraunhofer Society research institutions. In addition, the chemical Darmstadtium was named after the city and space organizations ESOC and EUMETSAT occupy the center and it is also an attractive shopping location. (Website of Darmstadt 2021.)

Oberfeld is a “living organism” that has open land and local recreation area which aims to co-operate and promote all stakeholders in the farm community and further develop the area. Private individuals, associations, semi-public and public bodies have connected to form a solid network for funding and co-operating with each other. Oberfeld is used mainly for agriculture and allotment gardeners and it offers voluntary work, construction camps, route of regional gardens, cooking classes, lectures and farm community working groups for landscaping, communication and different events. Hofcafe and Farmshop Hofladen are also located in Oberfeld, the shop sells local farmers products such as organic or biodynamic dairy, pastries, meat, eggs, fruits and vegetables. Oberfeld also hosts a film group that presents movies about ecology, agriculture, environment, and nutrition once a month. (Website of Oberfeld 2021.)

### 5.2.3 Dottenfelderhof

Dottenfelderhof is situated north of Frankfurt between Bad Vilbel and Dortelweil and near the river Nidda with nearly 32000 citizens. The city of Bad Vilbel is recognized as the rising city of the region and its easily accessible by train, airplane and car. Urban redevelopment has upgraded the city centre and other development projects are coming in the near future. The cultural and sports aspects are the attractions of the city with its castle festival, the music school, modern golf course, sports stadium, the Alte Mühle cultural center and many other annual events. Bad Vilbel has recently been named as one of the most desirable residential areas due to its city forest, river Nidda, fruit tree fields, clean cold air and extensive parks. (Website of Bad Vilbel 2021.)

Dottenfelderhof is a farm that grows Demeter certificated grain, potatoes, beets, flax, carrots, clover, alfalfa, berries, pome- and stone fruits, salads and vegetables. Most of the land is occupied by dairy cows and their calves, as well as chicken, pigs, sheep, geese, bees and horses. They have a bakery, confectionary and cheese dairy on the site and also, a farm shop that sells meat and sausages, dairy, natural cosmetics, vegetables, eggs, fruits and readymade salads and freshly pressed juices. Most of the products sold are their own production, and the rest from farms nearby. Dottenfelderhof has a college for biodynamic agriculture that provides education in biodynamic agriculture in the estate, as well as research and breeding department for organic plants. The agriculture operations and farm school co-operate together on the principles of agriculture with the focus on biodynamic seeds. (Website of Dottenfelderhof 2021.)

### 5.2.4 Bauer Etzel

Bauer Etzel is positioned in the north of Frankfurt in the municipality of Hesse and its nickname is Apfeldorf Wehrheim or the Apple Village Wehrheim due to its many apple orchards. The city has nearly 10000 residents and also a long history with many artifacts dated from Bronze Age and well-known museums such as Stadttormuseum and Town Gate Museum. (Website of My German City 2021.)

Bauer Etzel is a family run farm on the seventh generation that was founded in 1811. They switched to organic farming in the end of 1980s and opened a bio farm shop later in 1993. Bauer Etzel offers festival barn for venue rentals as well as workshops and events such as “Refining salts” and “Making ham specialities”. They often have guests from cooking shows and social media bloggers that work as influencers and marketers for the farm. Bauer Etzel has their own bakery, farm shop and domestic animals. The bakery offers everyday assortment of various sourdough breads, home-baked Bundt cake and variety of cheesecakes and pastries, also by order for bigger parties. The farm shop has a large range of specialities such as diverse hams, free-range eggs, fine salts, fruits and vegetables, European wines as well as variety of cheese from own dairy and natural cosmetics. Domestic animals that live on the farm are mainly pigs, cows and chicken that are used for producing the organic meat and free-range eggs. (Website of Bauer Etzel 2021.)

#### 5.2.5 Hof Neuseegaard

Hof Neuseegaard is a nature learning village founded and owned by a couple Lutz and Gudrun Mallach. It is located in the municipality of Husby, the northern parts of Germany very near to the Danish border. The lake Winderatter and the city of Flensburg are in close proximity. The lake is known of its beautiful and diverse landscape, butterflies, birds, wild pasture and good fishing opportunities, as well as its designation as European nature conserve area. The farm offers various activities like trips to the nature adventure garden, events in the orchard, children’s nature birthday parties, wild herb hikes, various workshops, shared nature experiences for the whole family, learning and education opportunities for daycare centers and schools. Their main aim is to teach agriculture and show nature appreciation for future generations to continue farming and protecting the nature. In addition, Hof Neuseegaard offers overnight farm stays with farm breakfast or dinner for additional cost. The farm is committed to the United Nations 17 sustainable development goals that’s purpose is to eliminate poverty and social injustice by 2030, and to protect and conserve our planet including the animals and nature in order to ensure natural livelihood. (Website of Hof Neuseegaard 2021.)

Table 2. Activities on benchmarked farms

Activity	Hofgut <u>Hüg</u> le	Oberfeld	Dottenfelderhof	Bauer Etzel	Hof Neuseegaard
Accommodation	✓				✓
Food & Beverage	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Outdoor activities	✓	✓			✓
Farm shop		✓	✓	✓	
Domestic animals	✓		✓	✓	
Venue rentals	✓			✓	✓
Courses & workshops		✓	✓	✓	✓

### 5.2.6 Summary of the benchmarked farms

All the benchmarked farms offer various farm experiences and the most uniform seem to be food and beverage, farm shop, domestic animals, and workshops. Hofgut Hüg le focuses mainly on the experiences and accommodation, whereas the others have started solely with agriculture and extended it later to experiences. The summary is made from the elements that the benchmarked farms activities show, but the levels of customer experience are excluded as it cannot be evaluated thoroughly based only on websites and social media channels.

The benchmarked farms share many common elements to their farm experiences based on website analysis such as authenticity, multisensory, contrast and interaction, whilst individuality was not clearly visible. Authenticity is easily achieved because of the farm setting and the basis of local culture where multisensory is evident in most of the activities as they include doing, touching, seeing, listening and smelling. Contrast on the other hand, varies a lot from the customers origin thinking that local villagers

would not see the contrast from their everyday lives whereas people from the city would. The level of interaction cannot be analyzed thoroughly based on the website, but it can be assumed that most of the experiences bring the sense of community due to the surroundings and many of them are executed in groups.

The element story is poorly used in their websites, with the exception of Hofgut Hüggle that has exploited that opportunity with captivating pictures, stories and videos. Four of the farms have social media channels but they are not in active use it seems. Dottenfelderhof has few posts per month, but they are mainly focused on opening hours, vacancies and events without many pictures and very little text (Dottenfelderhof 2021), whereas Bauer Etzel centralized taking pictures of farm tasks every three months (Bauer Etzel 2021). Hofgut Hüggle (2021) has taken advantage of social media and posts every week something captivating like showing kids playing in the corn labyrinth and families picking the cherries together in the cherry orchard. Hof Neusegaard Facebook site was updated over a year ago which indicates their inactivity whilst Oberfeld does not even have social media sites (Hof Neusegaard 2021).

### 5.3 SWOT analysis from Saaren Luomuosuuskunta

Strategic planning analysis was made from the commissioner's farm as displayed in Table 3. below. The author made the SWOT analysis based on observations and conversations made with the co-operatives during the thesis process in summer 2021. The purpose was to pinpoint the best features and deficiencies of the farm from potential visitor attraction's point of view, as well as to recognize the external development opportunities and the possible threats. The study will try to determine suggestions for the farm based on this analysis together with the primary and supplementary data collected in the chapter findings for Saaren Luomuosuuskunta.

### 5.3.1 Strengths

Saaren Luomuosuuskunta's strengths lie on it being a small, unique, and authentic organic farm that has operated as a farm since 1940s, also some old coins were found from the field recently that are dated back to the medieval times. The farm is located only six kilometres away from Pori city centre and two kilometres away from Ulvila centre, also one of the co-operatives has an organic shop in Pori Market Hall that sells the farm's products. Saaren Luomuosuuskunta has a co-operative model in use which means there are many owners and more resources than in a single owned farm. There are also two cats, three sheep and a rooster and chickens that attract many customers alongside with the farm products.

### 5.3.2 Weaknesses

Some deficiencies were identified such as unskilled staff when it comes to farm experiences and tourism, and non-existent marketing plan, signposts and website for new customers to find them. In addition, the variety of products and services mainly focus of vegetables, berries, and preservers, whereas the other possibilities and opportunities have not been utilized. The farm operates in seasonal basis, which means that it is only open from April to September or when the harvest season ends, the seasonality also affects on finding good employees. Saaren Luomuosuuskunta would like to develop themselves as a visitor attraction, but the lack of capital prevents them to do anything too extreme, although the farm cannot continue too long as it is as the revenue is not enough to support all of them. One other issue is with the public transport because it only operates few times a day and the closest stop from the farm is still nearly two kilometres away which is too far away for some.

### 5.3.3 Opportunities

The farm has many great opportunities for the future, first of all the location enables the people from the city to come there easily, and the nearby forest with the nature trail, the river and medieval church offers some extra activity for the visitors, and it

can also be connected to the farm. Thirdly the winter season has not been exploited yet by any nearby farms, which would give them the opportunity to be pioneers in Satakunta. Also, the rising trend of domestic tourism and especially nature- and agritourism provides assurance for creating farm experiences, as well as the lack of farm experiences providers in the area. Fifthly, Saaren Luomuosuuskunta could utilize and co-operate more with other stakeholders like Organic Association, Visit Pori, local restaurants and other small farmers. Lastly, initiative for the public transport could be passed on to the city council to ensure the easy access for those who do not have cars.

Table 3. SWOT analysis of Saaren Luomuosuuskunta

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>	<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Organic</li> <li>✓ Authentic</li> <li>✓ Small</li> <li>✓ Animals</li> <li>✓ Historical site</li> <li>✓ Location</li> <li>✓ Co-operative model</li> <li>✓ Reputation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Unskilled staff</li> <li>✓ Variety of products and services</li> <li>✓ Seasonal</li> <li>✓ Marketing</li> <li>✓ Lack of capital</li> <li>✓ Signposts</li> <li>✓ Website</li> <li>✓ Public transport</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Medieval church</li> <li>✓ The river</li> <li>✓ Nature trails</li> <li>✓ Winter</li> <li>✓ Few competitors</li> <li>✓ Agritourism trend</li> <li>✓ Public transport</li> <li>✓ Co-operation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Emerging competitors</li> <li>✓ Domestic travelling decreasing</li> <li>✓ Legal matters</li> <li>✓ Economic changes</li> <li>✓ Climate change</li> </ul>

#### 5.3.4 Threats

There are some threats and risks that are displayed in Table 3. Above, that Saaren Luomuosuuskunta will have to face starting with emerging competitors, because when other farms see they have created something successful, they might want to replicate or even some new big franchising organizations might appear. The changes in consumer behaviour might arise after covid-19 lapses, which might mean that local



people will be keener to go abroad than continuing domestic travelling. Depending on what kind of experiences Saaren Luomuosuuskunta will pursue might involve legal matters such as planning permission, construction supervision, permit matters with rescue operation, liquor license and food control authorization. Economic changes and recession are always a risk, especially with the changes in consumer buying behaviour or rental prices for the fields. In addition, the climate change poses a great threat to farming and livelihood because it is unpredictable, and it can ruin the whole harvest at worse.

## 6 DISCUSSION

The aim was to find suitable and successful farm experiences for the commissioner through in-depth analysis that included benchmarking, theme interviews and SWOT analysis. Research questions were aiding the target by identifying the Experience Pyramid's most dominant product elements and customer experience levels in agritourism experiences on the chosen farms, as well as linking the current trends in agritourism. The findings of this study were somewhat following the theoretical framework of agritourism and Experience Pyramid, especially the tourism trends were highlighted in the theme interviews.

The study concluded that no singular explanation exists for agritourism nor farm experiences, and that made the study to rely on interview transcripts, observations, and summaries from the benchmarked farms' activities. It also seems that farming is becoming a secondary source of income for small and medium sized farms because they are unable to compete with the large agricultural holdings. Large amount of people have very little contact with agriculture, which is why farm tourism plays a crucial role raising awareness of the crop cultivation and agricultural methods for people. Additionally, the benchmarked farms seem to be far removed from the modern times due to the lack of instant booking systems, prices nor updated websites. They will face a challenge in attracting new customers after the generation x and baby boomers are gone. One other common discovery from the interviews was that most of

the respondents did not know what a farm experience is when asked and they did not see themselves as a visitor attraction even if they would be offering 120 events per year like the farm Dottenfelderhof.

Organic farming's aim is in protecting the nature and letting the earth breathe with crop rotation which means that part of the land does not provide earnings at all. Donatella (2009, 4–6) suggests that the organic agritourism providers should commit to responsible actions starting from the mode of transport to the products offered. The focus should be on utilizing alternative energy sources and reasonable use of resources, as well as creating system to recycle effluent water. Therefore, it can be suggested that organic agritourism should be encouraged worldwide as it is known that climate change would slow down with these kinds of actions. In addition, it boosts local economy and rural capital and that should be considered beneficial for all, especially for the country to remain self-sufficient in the future.

Based on the interviews organic farming comes from the heart, and it seems more like a lifestyle than anything else. It does not seek solely to profit as it puts emphasis to teach the younger generations about farming and conserving the nature. The issues were with upholding the organic theme throughout the experience that included the mode of transport, and how to make organic agritourism affordable for all. Perhaps, a common corporate social responsibility rules for organic agritourism providers could be useful to have in the future, and it might give a better idea for the customers where the price consists of. In addition, it can be suggested that the customers that choose an organic farm over a regular one for an experience have already a sustainable and responsible way of thinking.

The information about agritourism in Satakunta is scattered on the internet and the few pages that group them together asks for membership fees. It is highly recommended that Visit Satakunta, or another public organization would grasp this opportunity and separate the agritourism providers into its own group. They could even be separated amongst regular and organic, or based on the ones that would have sustainability approach, or certificate.

The most popular experiences on the interviewed benchmarked farms were the farm tours, various workshops like making preserves and cheese, and events that contained culture and food. It was very difficult to conclude the three other benchmarked farms' most popular experiences solely based on observing, but the most spoken in their channels were the cherry orchard, corn fields, outdoor activities, accommodation, and courses related to cooking. Workshops were often making jams, dishes, or juices together whereas the farm tours represented a tour to get to know the farm's background, agriculture, and possible animals. Events named were birthday parties, burning a bonfire together, wine and cheese tastings and live music evenings. Most of these experiences were from an hour to two or three hours, but no longer than that because it seems difficult to uphold customers interest longer.

People seem to want very basic experiences from the farms, therefore there is no need to complicate the offerings too much, or rather then separate them towards professionals. Simplest experiences that came across was an experience called afternoon beers which was few visitors sitting next to the fence watching cows and drinking beer. Sometimes the farmers are not exploiting experientialism because they are unable to see the attraction that lies on the everyday farm tasks. One other excellent note from the interviews was that do not sell experiences or services that you know nothing of, the product will lose its authenticity and credibility. Familiarize and orientate the staff thoroughly whatever it is that you are offering.

Location of the farm was crucial, based on the respondents it needs to be close enough to a main city or other hub but still in a rural setting. Hof Neusegard was 12 kilometres away from a main city and they felt it was too far away and it limited the number of visitors. Although, Edelheim & Ilola (2017, 86) state that even the farthest and less attractive destinations can attract travellers in Finland. Augmented services in hope of additional sales are a must because people seem to always buy something after a tour or experience if there is a farm shop or café for example. Moreover, the farmers seem to have a reluctance to learn social media tricks and the beneficial use of internet as part of their marketing strategies. It could be because all of the respondents were middle-aged, and they have not grown into this social media world so they do not give value to it as much as they should.

It can be concluded that agritourism product's attraction lie on theming, learning new things in authentic environment in a small group, conversing with other participants and to be able to actively participate in activities that involve physical doing. In addition, there must be a variety of offerings so that the farm can remain attractive for repetitive customers and customising the experience to match with the level of their skills.

### 6.1 Experience Pyramid

The aim was to identify the most predominant Experience Pyramid's elements and levels in the successful farm experiences. Experience Pyramid's elements were visible in the interviews and on the analysis from the benchmarked farms but the most talked about were *authenticity, story, multisensory perception, interaction, and contrast*. On the other hand, the levels that were discussed were *physical level, intellectual level, and sometimes even mental level*.

Although interviews did not much touch on this subject, *individuality* must still be highlighted especially if the farm wants to offer experiences for domestic and international visitors. In addition, there must be a variety of offerings so that the farm can remain attractive for repetitive customers like in Mrs. Mäkinen's case who would not visit the farm again. The challenge lies on how to create an experience that can easily be copied but also moulded according to the customer. Edelheim & Ilola (2017, 85) also stated that agritourism puts emphasis in individuality that is supported by tourism megatrends, such as consumption pattern changes towards individuality and the appreciation of nature.

*Authenticity* appears to be essential and the reason choosing farm experiences. It can be seen from many angles like meeting the owner instead of the staff in a tour or how the surroundings look, or what is the person's interpretation of a farm activity. After all, an individual always has their own conception of a farm based on their views and experiences, it can be the grandparents small ranch growing potatoes and having two cows or a strawberry field in the neighbours' backyard. Furthermore, the customers might claim they want the real authentic experience but not by jeopardizing it in case

of a natural phenomenon like rain or storm. One needs to be very careful when expanding their farm, the fear is in losing the authenticity if the setting becomes too staged. It can be concluded that smaller the group and the farm, the more authenticity it portrays for the visitors.

*Storytelling* goes hand in hand with theming the experience and it is crucial to have a coherent theme throughout the entire experience so for example if you create an organic theme do remember to follow it in anything the visitors do whether it is food, transport, or the farm. It can also be suggested based on the interviews to add some fictional stories and tales as well, in addition to the facts. The project Lähde Luomun Matkaan in Finland found good results in theming the experience organic, and also telling educative information about organic farming and products as well as adding activities that generate value to the customers like cooking (Mutttilainen & Väisänen 2021, 33). Story as an element in the agritourism products seem like a necessity and it is a crucial part of getting the customers motivated for the experience.

*Multisensory* experience aims to enhance the chosen theme, hence most of the workshops mentioned by the respondents had an element of storytelling combined with doing things such as tales of ancient tradition of maturing cheese whilst curdling the cheese. Multisensory perception and *physical level* are grouped together as they represent very similar aspects. It is suggested that customers will memorize the experience better when there are multisensory stimuli like scents, farm noises and beautiful scenery and when it includes physical doing.

*Contrast* is the gap between the customers everyday lives to the farm experience, they would not be interested if it was something that they already do every day, which is why the customers are often urban city people and not the neighbors of the farms. A farm should focus on what is appealing and exotic for locals in case they want to attract both, urban people and the local villagers. It is certainly easier for a farm to design experiences for urban people due to the fact that they are becoming alienated from nature and farm tasks. Urban customers find very simple farm experiences intriguing and fascinating. Local villagers do not see anything interesting in farm tours or workshops that include farm tasks as it does not bring contrast to them, perhaps they

could be keener buying farm products like eggs, veggies, meat or in pampering services like smoke sauna or food and beverage pairings.

The interviewees did notice the importance of *interaction* during the experience but did not follow it through until the end of the customer journey. Reviews and feedback are vital in this sort of a business because one needs to constantly update and develop their offerings to match with the everchanging customer demand.

*Motivational level* was in a minor role, but still worth to mention from marketing point of view. The respondents did see the need for future marketing but felt like they do not have the tools nor skills to do it. Marketing would raise the awareness of the nature and conservation, as Kumar & Gilovich (2015) stated that it is vital to encourage visitors to share their experiences and have experiential elements visible in marketing via feedback channels and review sites to grow the enjoyment that customers acquire from the experiences. Almost all of the benchmarked farms are poor users of any social media channels which should be underlined when they do state that main customers are families. The information seems rather scattered when the farms focus on agriculture and tourism together, one can really see the difference in Hofgut Hugle that focuses solely on tourism. Moreover, the findings from the farms revealed that only one farm has a booking system in place. The accessibility of the product comes from the motivational level, therefore the prices should be visible, and the experiences easily booked. The ideal situation that Dottenfelderhof has that there is no need for marketing is very rare and usually only happens when the farm has existed for decades and has created a solid customer base. Marketing strategy should focus on the unique features of a specific farm to attract the right kind of customers.

*Intellectual level* was spoken and included to many of the experiences, unconsciously or consciously. The level of satisfaction is determined on this level which makes it critical to design the experience to provoke opinions and to offer a learning experience. The benchmarked farms almost always offered a learning experience through workshops, although it could be added to other activities as well like children's birthday parties could include recognising roots. Intellectual level was always present in the workshops aimed for professionals, although the professionals are not the main customer segment. *Mental level* was harder to achieve, but not impossible. Organic

and sustainable approach provide a platform for mental level if used correctly in an experience for example in the form of storytelling. Also, what Mäkinen stated that other organic farmers are idealists by nature and always enthusiastic to try new things. So perhaps, attracting people that know close to nothing about organic farming, or other farmers since they might achieve mental change easier.

Based on the interviews current trends were focused on families spending quality time together, domestic travelling, farm stays, doing it yourself-attitude and combination of food and culture as an experience. Doing it yourself attitude and domestic travelling was in result of Covid-19, because people spent more time at home and started small-scale farming in their backyards or in community gardens, as well as travelling domestically due to restrictions. The trend is still current, but very uncertain will it continue after the pandemic is over. Honkanen (2021, 96–97) stated that Finland can maintain its current position as an interesting domestic destination even after Covid-19 if it will grasp the opportunity now. According to Travel Daily News (2021) the main buyers of agritourism products are predicted to be millennials due to their active participation and buying behaviour. It is suggested that the millennials are also the ones that follow social media and like to post about their experiences, which could be completely free advertising for the farms if they would start focusing more on marketing.

## 6.2 Recommendations for Saaren Luomuosuuskunta

Saaren Luomuosuuskunta has a great potential to be a visitor attraction in Finland based on their existing strengths and opportunities for future, as well as the lack of agritourism providers in Satakunta area that works as their benefit. Furthermore, Saaren Luomuosuuskunta cannot really be compared to the German competitors at this point as their selection of offerings are too narrow in international scale. As Donatella (2009, 11) mentioned the competitiveness of a farm is based on the variety of services offered and agritourism can offer alternative way of boosting earnings especially for small farms. Saaren Luomuosuuskunta has been struggling with finances that are solely based on agriculture and the limitations land-wise which made them interested on developing the farm as an attraction to visit. They already have most of the

resources available, they just need to determine which experiences to focus and execute them together with an excellent marketing strategy.

Summer season is very short in Finland and farmers like the commissioner needs to live the rest of the year from the earning of the summer. Luckily, Visit Pori (2021) has seen a new pattern where the tourists come in off-season months that indicate to an extended season. In addition, there is a lack of accommodation providers in Pori area based on the occupancy rates in summer 2021. Mrs. Mäkinen's Airbnb during the summer 2021 was a great test to see would visitors come to the farm and from where, as well as what kind of feedback they would leave. The fully booked July speaks for itself and gives a green light to Saaren Luomuosuuskunta. They should plan events for the late autumn and early spring, as well as to think about the possibility of providing cottage accommodation, or to co-operate with accommodation providers to create an entity for the customer.

Donatella (2009, 6) stated that organic agritourism providers work as role models to the youth which is crucial for conserving and discovering the nature. Organic as tourism brand has not been used in Finland based on Muttilainen & Väisänen (2021, 17) which gives the commissioner every opportunity to be a pioneer and build their organic brand and attract younger people with the focus on social media channels and overall visibility. Travel Daily News (2021) say that agritourism trends lie in millennials, product innovation, entering new markets and social media campaigns. This gives Saaren Luomuosuuskunta a reason to focus on their marketing strategy and to reach new markets, either domestically or internationally.

Most of Saaren Luomuosuuskunta's weaknesses could easily be turned into strengths, like educating the staff with management courses, extending the season with events, applying financial assistance from Leader Karhuseutu and creating a solid marketing strategy which enables them to be accessible outside of Ulvila. Website and signposts could be a great starter to increase visibility for them. There are multiple opportunities in the surroundings that can be exploited such as the medieval church, nature trails, forest and the river.



Finland's pull factors are in security, safety, cleanliness and quietness (Hako 2021, 9) and the main customer groups are predicted to be international tourists because they give merit to organic more than the Finnish do, and they find it more familiar and attractive (Mutttilainen & Väisänen 2021, 33). Saaren Luomuosuuskunta is rather near the hubs, but still in a quiet countryside spot next to the river and based on Mrs. Mäkinen's interview that is the appeal that brought the urban people to her Airbnb. All of the co-operatives have good English skills and understanding of different cultures due to their background which should encourage them to focus on international customers alongside with Finns. Furthermore, they would need to put emphasis on customising the offerings because a foreign tourist values things differently than we see normal like everyman's right and sauna.

Suggestions are made based on the theme analysis of the interviews together with the observations from the benchmarked farms websites and social media channels, as well as the SWOT analysis and assessment of the theoretical framework. The farm experiences are categorised under sub headers based on the found activities on the benchmarked farms as presented earlier in the Figure 2. The suggested farm experiences will aim to touch the most dominant elements found in agritourism products that were story, multisensory perception, authenticity, interaction, and contrast. The customer experience levels will be excluded at this point, since it would rely solely on assumptions before testing the experiences.

### 6.2.1 Accommodation

Saaren Luomuosuuskunta could build few ascetic cottages to the farm, as it was seen profitable and successful based on Mrs. Mäkinen's test run, and Visit Pori stated that accommodation providers are needed in the area. The investment would be rather small thinking that the cottages would not have running water, heating nor fully equipped kitchen and toilet. Outdoor toilets, shower, and kitchen would be shared and based on the main farmhouse that already exists. The ascetic cottages would be considered as a budget accommodation and nightly prices would be somewhere around 50-70 euros for two people.

Other opportunity or an addition could be to provide tent accommodation as there is lot of land and the authentic setting intrigues the visitors from the capital. It would be advisable to target international tourists and urban people from bigger cities like Turku, Tampere, and Helsinki. In addition, visitors that come to an ascetic accommodation are usually low maintenance as they choose cheaper accommodation without frills for a reason. Both of these accommodation options would touch elements of multisensory, authenticity and contrast, just imagine waking up for the rooster crowing within a picturesque scenery that has a river, forest, farm and animals. Storytelling can be added in form of brochures about the area and history of the island Ulvilan Saari or even a star chart due to the open terrain. To make the experience more luxurious there could be augmented services added like farm breakfast, hot tub and sauna, or barbeque bags. This kind of budget accommodation supports the sustainability approach and strengthens the organic brand. Saaren Luomuosuuskunta already has solar panels that they can use to distribute the electricity to the cottages and the water from the river could be exploited for the hot tub and sauna. Co-operation with nearby accommodation providers to build packages would be encouraged in case Saaren Luomuosuuskunta is not willing to invest to an accommodation yet.

### 6.2.2 Venue rentals & events

Venue rentals and events would open the opportunity to extend the season later to the autumn and to early spring. Saaren Luomuosuuskunta has a magnificent greenhouse that could be exploited for parties, weddings, meetings, tastings, and farmers markets. Medieval festival could be easily implemented due to the old coins found from the land combined with a visit to the medieval church. The farm already has a fully equipped food establishment where they are manufacturing their preserves and juices. Catering or the possibility to use the kitchen would be a nice addition for venue rentals and events. The farm Dottenfelderhof has 120 events per year and that is their main focus in creating experiences.

Harvest party with a bonfire, live music evenings in the greenhouse and an outdoor movie night with a picnic basket would be terrific ideas for the commissioner. Harvest party in the end of the agriculture season could be combined with farmers market

where other farmers would join to sell their products and the evening would culminate to a bonfire. The live music evenings should be positioned in the end of September and October due to the romantic atmosphere with candles, lanterns and haybales to sit on, and the café would sell beverages. The greenhouse can be heated, if necessary, although it gets quite warm on its own if there any many people inside.

Movie night should be outdoors on the strawberry field where visitors could bring their own picnic baskets and indulge whilst watching the movie from the screen. Movies could focus on old-time classics or informative documentaries about climate change, endangered species, or any other aspect of the current situation of the world. The atmosphere at the farm is authentic and brings contrast to the usual meeting places, and storytelling is easily included for all of them in form of a theme. Whether it is renting the venue or coming to an event it will certainly be an interactive gathering where like-minded people meet each other. Multisensory perception will go together with theming meaning that harvest party will have the scents of the vegetables and roots or the season with the bonfire, whereas medieval festival could have activity like forging your own coin and indulging in caramel coated apples and cinnamon almonds.

### 6.2.3 Food & beverage

As told earlier, the farm already has an existing food establishment and a café with a terrace that could be turned into a restaurant. There are multiple possibilities that Saaren Luomuosuuskunta could exploit, but the recommendations here focus on lunch, catering and alcohol. Lunch in a farm setting is still a rare find in Satakunta that the commissioner could utilize. It could be as simple as soup of the day available from 11am until 3pm on weekdays which would be a great addition to the summer workers too. Saaren Luomuosuuskunta could top it up and offer a brunch on the weekends, that could be useful for the ascetic accommodation guests as well. Most of the ingredients would come from their own farm, and all organic naturally.

Alcohol would function as a supplement for the live music evenings and other events. Organic wine or beer tastings would be recommended as well because there is a gap in the market, although there is a possibility that the authenticity might suffer as the

wine would not be produced on the farm and the liquor license does cost around 600 euros. Transport should not be an issue during summertime since the farm is rather near to Pori and Ulvila, and the closest bus stop is one and half kilometers away. Catering would offer set garden menus for venue rentals and for the accommodation guests farm breakfast and barbeque bags. Theming would focus on exploiting the farm's vegetables of the season, organic beverages, local organic meat from butcher nearby and eggs from the hens for breakfast. On the other hand, multisensory would be visible in the colors of the food and the scents, as well as listening to the farm's calmness. To sustain authenticity and to bring contrast the food will be produced at the farm and offered in the café or greenhouse depending on the occasion and weather. The ingredients will be presented to the customers through food theme weeks in the social media and at the farm to create successful interaction.

#### 6.2.4 Domestic animals

Saaren Luomuosuuskunta has three sheep, four chicken and a rooster and two cats. At this point that is enough, unless they want to start focusing on producing dairy or meat. However, they should manage the seeing and feeding the animals better and utilizing the opportunity. The animals should be isolated with fences or private property signs so that the visitors understand that they cannot just go and see them on their own. Animal feeding and petting should be part of an experience or a farm tour so that the commissioner could profit from it and also, to monitor what's been fed and that no harm is done to the animals. One option could be to combine the feeding with an educational lesson about sheep and chickens, or afternoon teas watching the sunset and sitting next to the animals. Multiple stories are involved to the animals of the farm and how they got their names, also an educational lesson about organic eggs and what means certified organic in animal production which will fulfil the interaction part. Multisensory perception will be easily achieved with feeding and petting the animals, not to forget about the visual aspect. Farm animals bring contrast to urban visitors and give an alternative and authentic view instead of mass production.

### 6.2.5 Outdoor activities

Due to the ideal location, Saaren Luomuosuuskunta has plenty of opportunities to utilize the surroundings. The closeness to the river enables to build a small sauna or offer boat or kayak rentals during summer or simply just for swimming purposes. The forest and nature trail could easily be combined as a guided walk through the farm into the wild by crossing the pond that used to be a river that separated Ulvila as an island. The forest walks could focus on everyman's rights by picking berries or mushrooms, or recognising animal footprints, or simply a quiet meditative walk listening the sounds of the forest. Alternatively, a history walk starting from the discovery place of the medieval coins continuing to Saarentie mansion and ending to the medieval church. One other aspect could be in farm walks to recognise birds, plants, flowers, and trees, or guided routes for mountain biking.

Hofgut Huggle have made a children's play area out of a cornfield, and they have also productized cherry orchard as a family experience picking the cherries together. Saaren Luomuosuuskunta should take advantage of their existing cornfield as well as strawberry and raspberry fields. In addition, they could create a "puzzle room" as in a farm activity for children to discover clues and solve puzzles which would end in discovering the mystery of Ulvilan Saari. Different stories would be added to every activity, the forest walks could focus more on educational stories whereas the puzzle room, cornfield and history walk would shine the light to old tales. Guided walks, cornfield and berry fields would stimulate all of the senses whilst the sauna and boat rentals would focus on physical participation and admiring the scenery. Authenticity would be evident since nothing is staged, as all of the components exist there already and bring diversity to local urban people. Most of the outdoor activities are done in a group to bring the sense of belonging, and are highly interactive especially when recognising plants, birds, trees, and berries.

### 6.2.6 Farm shop

The current farm shop sells their own vegetables, roots, preserves, juices and local ice cream and coffee. One of the co-operatives has an organic shop downtown which has

not been doing so well over the last two years. The farm shop would benefit on increasing the variety of fresh organic products and focusing also on dry goods. Cooperation with local organic butcher, dairy, flourmill, and bakery is suggested so that the customers would get all the organic necessities from them instead of driving separately to all of the places. Farm shop should add organic beers and wines for a takeaway in case they proceed with the tastings and offering alcohol on the premises during events. Farm shops are not like the normal grocery stores which is why they bring contrast to the usual shopping, they also contain a story within, and interaction is highlighted with the shop keeper, because they have more time on their hands and they know more about the products than a regular cashier. In addition, multisensory stimuli are noticeable because the farm shop brews their coffee, makes the soup of the day and offers tasting of seasonal products to improve the sales. The credibility of the product comes from the natural setting enhanced by the fact that most offerings are produced at the farm.

#### 6.2.7 Workshops and courses

Courses should centralize on farming berries and teaching the use of organic fertilizers and which ways to avoid pests and it should be aimed towards other professionals. Workshops, on the other hand, should be targeted to families as it is trending now, and there the future lies as well. Saaren Luomuosuuskunta could exploit their usual activities like making jams, sauces, preserves, herbal teas, salts, and juices. Customer journey would start from picking the herbs or berries and then continuing to the manufacturing phase and lastly, taking the preserve to home. Individuality would be highlighted between the courses and workshops, as well as storytelling that is the core of an educative workshop. Multisensory, interaction and contrast would play a significant role since everything is done in a group and it always involves physical doing. Contrast is underlined due to the farm surroundings, like Mrs. Mäkinen noticed earlier it was much more interesting to join and listen to courses at a farm instead of an office or auditorium.

## 7 CONCLUSION

Main focus of this research was to discover the most successful farm experiences in Germany and the prevalent elements and tourism experience levels in agritourism products, as well as the current agritourism trends. A perfect experience includes all of the Experience Pyramid's elements and customer experience levels, but the study focused finding out the most dominant in agritourism products.

The study concluded that the most successful experiences were the farm tours, various workshops, and events that contained culture as well as outdoor activities like cornfield labyrinth and cherry orchard. The predominant elements in farm experiences were authenticity, story, multisensory, interaction and contrast, whereas the most prevalent levels of customer experience were physical, intellectual and emotional. Furthermore, there must be a variety of activities so that the farm can remain attractive for recurring customers and the farm must customise the experiences to match with the level of their skills. The contemporary trends that arose were families spending quality time together, domestic travelling, farm stays, doing it yourself-attitude and combination of food and culture as an experience.

The commissioner Saaren Luomuosuuskunta got several suggestions for farm experiences based on the interviews and the SWOT analysis, as well as an insight to organic branding and the agritourism needs in Satakunta area. Saaren Luomuosuuskunta has a great potential to be a visitor attraction in Finland and a pioneer in organic agritourism. There is a lack of agritourism providers in Satakunta area that works as their benefit and organic agritourism is still rather unknown in Finland. Moreover, the commissioner's farm has already most of the resources available to execute new farm experiences, they just need to determine which experiences to focus and implement them together with an excellent marketing strategy.

Future research regarding to the topic is suggested since no singular explanation exist for agritourism nor agritourism products, perhaps a framework model. Future work should also concentrate on certifying and separating organic agritourism clearly from

regular agritourism. Organic farming is certified and audited each year, why not organic agritourism. It would guarantee the energy saving and reasonable uses of resources, alternative options for using energy like solar panels and creating grey water systems to catch the excess.

### 7.1 Feedback from the commissioner

Saaren Luomuosuuskunta's co-operatives gave written feedback in Finnish, that is translated in English below. Overall, they seemed to like the ideas and recommendations with few exceptions.

The ideas of using a greenhouse as a venue for various events are applicable to Saaren Luomuosuuskunta's current operations, especially the use of the greenhouse space for live music evenings and farmers market events sounded good said the co-operatives. Outdoor movie nights could also be held in the greenhouse in case of a rain or bad weather and the harvest party with a bonfire is easily implemented and a nice addition would be the farmers market attached to it. The tastings and catering for small groups with beers or wines are interesting ideas and possible to execute if obtaining permits does not come too challenging, in addition they would suit well for the music and harvest events.

The use of domestic animals as attraction, feeding and part of the educative tours sounds like a good way to productize the farm operations. The surroundings of Vanha-Ulvila with its nature trails, medieval church and the coins will complement the farm tours fantastically. The co-operatives agree that the utilization of the river by building a sauna, and the possibility of swimming and even ice swimming together with the boat rentals for small groups will be taken under serious consideration.

The diversification and expansion of the farm store has been in their minds already, but just requires a bit more effort. Different kind of nature experiences suit well for their operations and mission such as studying and observing birds, plants, trees and berries. The cornfield labyrinth for kids will be definitely implemented next summer, as it does not require that big of an investment. Berry picking for families as an



experience or event will be also executed alongside with the regular berry picking and forecasted to be a hit.

The seedling workshops that were executed during the spring opened the co-operatives eyes for exploiting their knowledge to products. They all agreed that it will stay on their spring schedule annually. New workshops with different themes will come in the future like herbs and further processing of herbs. Noteworthy recommendation was the utilization of the production facility to make preserve workshops. Some suggestions require lot of funding like the ascetic cottages, therefore they feel it is unlikely to execute those ideas at the moment, but perhaps in the future. Overall, the thesis served Saaren Luomuosuuskunta well. They felt like they got now good ideas developing their farm as a visitor attraction for the future.

## 7.2 Limitations of the study

This research was a case study for Saaren Luomuosuuskunta to find out how they can develop their farm as a visitor attraction, and more specifically creating new agritourism products. The benchmarking method and interviews were conducted from farms in Germany so the findings and recommendations might not be suitable for all other farms in the world. However, this study could be useful for other small farms in Finland or even northern Europe, especially farms that share similar issues regarding short season and decreasing income that comes solely from the agriculture.

The interviews were chosen from the benchmarked farms, but the response rate was very low, which might not represent overall farm experiences' elements and levels. A visit might have been in place to increase it if possible. There were some issues in understanding the interview questions, and the author had to open up the elements and levels in detail which could have had an effect on the answers. All of the interviewees were over 50 years old which might give some limitations on the answers compared to younger farm representatives. Moreover, the farm experiences are not defined in theory, which made the study to rely on benchmarked farms' activities and interview answers.

### 7.3 Validity and reliability

Validity describes how well the research methods used in the study measure the features of the phenomenon in question. In addition, validity answers to the question that are the results truthful and are we measuring the correct things that were intended to be measured. Validity is ideal when the study's target group and questions are competent. (Hiltunen 2009.) To rephrase it, validity means how successfully the scholar has been able to transmit the theory concepts used in the study for the interview questions and how well do the interviewees understand them (Vilkkä 2015).

Reliability refers to how credibly and consistently a method measures the desired phenomenon. When same methods used provide consistently same results under same conditions, the measurement can be considered reliable. (Hiltunen 2009.) In other words, it describes the accuracy of the results and gives the ability to have non-incident results. Reliability and validity form an overall credibility of the study when the studied sample represents the general society and there are not many occurrences.

This research aims to provide suitable farm experiences for the commissioner based on the benchmarked farms, SWOT analysis and theme interviews. The SWOT is formed based on the author's point of view and discussions with the co-operatives, which might differ if someone else constructs it. It is impossible to provide an accurate forecast for all of the small and medium sized farms since the recommended activities are strongly based on Saaren Luomuosuuskunta's existing strengths and opportunities. Nevertheless, the study can give good ideas for other farms on how they can develop their farm as visitor attraction, and what kinds of farm experiences are out there and what are the current trends in agritourism.

Validity was taken into account in the interviews to understand the agritourism experiences customers viewpoint as well as the farm's perspective, that is why the interviews had a farm representative that had visited the benchmarked farms. It could be argued that the findings of the experiences might have been different if there was a broader selection of benchmarked farms and different age groups amongst the

respondents. On the other hand, benchmarking method was used to support the interviews and gave an insight to the farms that did not participate in the interviews.

Data saturation point is reached when there are no more new answers that would add value or new information to the study (Vilkka 2015). The point for this research was set on three qualitative interviews but in total there were four interviewees, although only from three different farms. The interview themes were tested before, and possible questions written down to give guidance on the actual interviews. However, the disadvantage was that similar questions could not be used due to the most popular experiences being different in every interview. The interviews were conducted mostly in English, except Mrs. Mäkinen's interview was in Finnish. The other farms representatives' native language was German which might have influenced to the interpretation of the interview questions, sometimes the themes needed to be opened up for them.

The theory used in the study was versatile and from many different sources to gain an overall understanding about the topic and alternative interpretations. Moreover, three research methods were used to get comprehensive answers to the research questions. It can be suggested that the results of the study are transferable to other agritourism settings since the same themes rose from all of the interviews, although, the geographical location must be taken in account.

The reliability of the results cannot directly be compared to anything since no exactly similar study have been done before. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interviews and based on those certain themes arose. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and most meaningful sentences were highlighted to create themes that were occurring often or were similar than in the other interviews. Another author might have highlighted other sentences, unless they also chose the theory driven approach that followed the Experience Pyramid's elements and levels. Furthermore, the open-ended themes can produce variable responses depending on the circumstances and decrease the reliability. Respondents were interviewed during the summer 2021, which is also the high season at farms that might have affected on the number of respondents. The reliability was supported through pre-selected farms that were known to be successful in Germany.

#### 7.4 Reflection

The study offered a great learning experience about the topic of agritourism and agritourism products. It was a long process, and it was difficult to narrow the topic down due to commissioners wants and needs, and the author's craving for a complete and comprehensive study. Gathering the right kind of information was a continuing task throughout the writing process that lasted nearly six months. This study certainly improved the author's skills for the future and gave an insight what an academic study is all about.

Some critical points arose during the study process such as overlapping information and finding the reliable and current references. Furthermore, this research could have studied the elements from the farms point of view and the levels from the customers point of view and execute the interviews in a similar manner. Also, the themes were too difficult and in a professional language for the farm representatives to understand. It is suggested that perhaps a visitation of the farm would have been in place to get more respondents and to experience the farms from a customer point of view.

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INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**Interview themes**

Most popular farm experience or experiences

**Elements**

Authenticity

Individuality

Story

Multi-sensory

Contrast

Interaction

**Levels**

Motivational level

Physical level

Intellectual level

Emotional level

Mental level

Organic as added value

Trends