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CULTURE'S EFFECT ON COMMUNI- CATION IN A HOTEL RECEPTION

Tourism

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of this thesis is to find out, how the tourists perceive the quality of service based on their expectations due to their cultural background. The research concentrates on a hotel reception area, where much cultural interaction takes place. This thesis was conducted with the aim of improving the customer satisfaction of foreign tourists in Finland, and to help the reception staff to avoid cultural misunderstandings.

The research was made using qualitative methods. The respondents are people from different cultural areas, and they were presented with a questionnaire with open ended questions. The responses were then analyzed by using coding and constant comparative analysis. Secondary data was also used to increase the reliability of the study.

The results are presented by cultural areas, reoccurring codes and through Hofstede's cultural dimensions. In conclusions it is shown that the cultural background does have an effect to service expectations, but it is not as grand as could have been expected. Also discussion about the validity and reliability of the thesis is included to the conclusions. In the end there are some suggestions for further research as well.

TIIVISTELMÄ

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Tämän lopputyön tarkoituksena on selvittää, millaisena turistit kokevat palvelunlaadun heidän kulttuurisen taustansa luomien odotusten perusteella. Tutkimus keskittyy hotellin vastaanottoon, missä monet kulttuurienväliset kohtaamiset tapahtuvat. Tavoitteena on parantaa ulkomaalaisten turistien asiakastytyväisyyttä Suomessa, ja auttaa vastaanottotyöntekijöitä välttämään kulttuurista johtuvia väärinkäsityksiä.

Tutkimuksessa käytettiin laadullisia menetelmiä. Tutkimuksen osallistajat ovat eri kulttuurialueilta kotoisin olevia ihmisiä, joille jaettiin kyselylomake, jossa oli avoimia kysymyksiä. Tämän jälkeen vastaukset analysoitiin käyttämällä koodausmenetelmää ja jatkuvaa vertailevaa analyysiä. Myös toissijaisia lähteitä käytettiin lisäämään tutkimuksen luotettavuutta.

Tulokset esitellään kulttuurialueittain, toistuvia koodeja ja Hofsteden kulttuurisia ulottuvuuksia käyttäen. Johtopäätöksistä käy ilmi, että kulttuurisella taustalla on vaikutus palveluodotuksiin, mutta se ei ole niin suuri kuin voisi olettaa. Lopputyön oikeellisuutta ja luotettavuutta käsitellään myös tässä kappaleessa. Viimeisessä kappaleessa esitetään ehdotuksia mahdollisiin lisätutkimuksiin.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

TIIVISTELMÄ

LIST OF APPENDICES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	7
1.1	Tourism culture	7
1.2	Research Problem and the Aim of the Thesis	7
1.3	Structure of the Thesis	8
2	CULTURE.....	10
2.1	Culture in General.....	10
2.2	Hofstede's definitions of culture	10
2.2.1	Power Distance.....	11
2.2.2	Masculinity vs. Femininity	12
2.2.3	Collectivism vs. Individualism	12
2.2.4	Long vs. Short term orientation	13
2.2.5	Uncertainty Avoidance.....	13
3	HUMAN BEHAVIOR	15
3.1	Expectations Theory	15
3.2	Cultural Backgrounds	16
3.2.1	Finland (the host culture)	19
3.2.2	Sweden (culturally close).....	20
3.2.3	India (culturally distant).....	20
4	THE TOURIST-HOST INTERACTION	22
4.1	Stereotypes	23
4.1.1	Positive and Negative Stereotypes	23
4.2	Ethnocentrism	24
5	INTERACTION AND COMMUNICATION.....	25
5.1	Verbal and Non-verbal communication.....	25
5.2	Quality of Service	26
5.3	Intercultural communication	27

5.4	Multicultural Competence	29
6	COMBINING CULTURE AND SERVICE EXPECTATIONS	30
7	THE RESEARCH	31
7.1	The Research Problem	31
7.2	Method Choice.....	31
7.2.1	Analyzing	32
7.3	Implementation	33
7.4	Target Group.....	33
7.5	Expected Results.....	34
8	THE RESULTS	35
8.1	Findings.....	35
8.1.1	The Respondents	35
8.1.2	Codes.....	36
8.1.3	Protestant Europe	37
8.1.4	South Asia.....	38
8.1.5	Power Distance.....	38
8.1.6	Individualism vs. Collectivism.....	39
8.1.7	Masculinity vs. Femininity	40
9	CONCLUSIONS	42
9.1	Perceived Quality of Service	43
9.2	How to develop the service?	44
9.3	Validity and Reliability.....	45
9.4	Suggestions for Further Research	45
	REFERENCES.....	47
	APPENDICES	50

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. The questionnaire

1 INTRODUCTION

Nowadays people travel a lot and it is quite important for those in customer service businesses to be aware of the cultural differences of their international customers. Especially people working in a hotel reception encounter international people every day. The cultural background of the customer always has an effect on their behavior, and if misread, it may cause misinterpretations between the receptionist and the tourist. This thesis is conducted to see the culture's effect on the tourists' behavior and whether or not it is something that the receptionists should pay more attention to.

1.1 Tourism culture

The tourism culture is created by both the host culture and the tourist's own culture. Both sides bring some elements from their own culture to this new one, but since neither of them is in their natural environment, they have modified their actions to some extent. Therefore the tourism culture is different in each destination, simply because the host and the tourist are different as well. (Reisinger 2003: 10)

This kind of scenario occurs for example in a hotel reception, where the receptionist represents the host culture and the guest represents a foreign culture. In this thesis the research will be conducted in this kind of circumstances.

1.2 Research Problem and the Aim of the Thesis

In this thesis the focus is on the tourist-host communication. This interaction between the tourist and the host is reviewed from the cultural point of view. The aim is to study, how the tourists perceive the quality of service based on their expectations. The cultural background of both parties has an effect on the interaction. Behavior, that may seem perfectly appropriate from the host's point of view, can feel rude to the tourist. Then again, the tourist might expect the host to act in a certain way because that is what he or she has gotten used to in his or her own culture.

During the research, these matters will be regarded through Expectations theory and Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions. The entire theoretical framework is based mainly on books by two authors: Hofstede and Yvette Reisinger. Their works present rather widely, how the cultural background affects people's behavior and their expectations about other people's behavior.

These observations are presented in a questionnaire that was given to people from target cultures to either verify or to deny them. Based on the questionnaires the conclusions will be drawn: does the cultural background have any effect on service expectations, and if so, is the effect big. This way the people working in the customer service business can see if there is something they could do to make the international customers feel more welcome.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis starts by introducing the research problem and the aim of the thesis. At first, the theoretical background is introduced, then comes the empirical part and at the end comes the findings of the research along with the conclusions.

The theoretical part includes culture, human behavior, tourist-host interaction, and interaction and communication. The culture part presents culture in general and more specifically Hofstede's cultural dimensions. In the third chapter, which is called human behavior, the expectations theory and the cultural backgrounds of the target areas are presented. The tourist-host interaction chapter describes how these two parties see each other, and how bad interaction may in a worst case scenario lead into stereotyping or even ethnocentrism. The last chapter of the theory part includes different kind of communications: verbal, non-verbal and international communication. In addition, definitions of service quality are being discussed.

The empirical part consists from the research problem, method choice, implementation and target group. Some expected results are also presented in this part. The result chapter then again shows the results of the questionnaire and the most important matters that came up in it. In the conclusions is described the solution to

the research problem. The validity and reliability of the research is discussed along with suggestions for possible further research.

At the end of the thesis is the list of references, which includes both books and electronic resources. As an appendix there is the questionnaire.

2 CULTURE

2.1 Culture in General

There are several different kinds of definitions of culture. In fact Yvette Reisinger and Lindsay W. Turner state in their book, that there are more than 160 definitions of a culture in the world (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1985). The classic definition of culture was introduced by Tylor in 1924. According to this definition culture is a “complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (1924). (Reisinger 2003: 4-5)

Depending on which point of view is used, the word *culture* has many different aspects. Usually the word culture means a model of human behavior in a certain civilization and/or religion. World’s biggest and most well-known civilizations are Sinic (Southeast Asia), Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Orthodox, Latin American, Western and African. (Reisinger 2009: 86, 102-103, 114)

In the tourism field cultural differences usually appear in intercultural communication. The meaning of this communication is to simply understand the wants and needs of a person from a different culture, not to achieve agreement or create shared meanings. In her book, Reisinger quotes Mishler (1965:555) when saying that in “intercultural communication, tourists and hosts are ‘confronted with a culture different from their own in terms of customs, values, standards and expectations’” (2009). These elements are the ones that often cause misconceptions in intercultural communication. (Reisinger 2009: 167-168)

2.2 Hofstede's definitions of culture

Geert Hofstede has also based his studies of culture on Kluckhohn’s theories. He summarizes the theories by saying that culture is “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (2001). Culture is built on layers of different thinking models that manifest themselves through people’s behavior. (Hofstede 2001: 9-10)

Hofstede has used an “onion diagram” to show the levels of a culture. In the deepest circle there are the values according to which the people in a certain culture live. Next are the rituals. Some of them might seem unnecessary to an outsider but to the people within the same culture it is just normal social conduct. On the third layer there are the heroes. These heroes can be either real or imaginary ones, but the fact that makes them heroes in a certain culture, is that they have skills or features that are admired in that specific culture. On the top layer of the diagram there are symbols. Even if all the cultures in the world would know the same symbol, it has a different meaning everywhere. These meanings can only be understood by people living in the same culture. All these symbols are then shown in the everyday actions and practices, in the way people behave. (Hofstede 2001: 10-11)

Hofstede has divided culture into five dimensions. These dimensions are power distance, masculinity vs. femininity, collectivism vs. individualism, long vs. short term orientation and uncertainty avoidance. (Hofstede 2010)

2.2.1 Power Distance

Power distance (PD) means the gap between the employer and the employee. This distance differs in different countries. There are three points that define the distance; are the employees afraid of the employer, how autocratic or paternalistic the country is, and the employees’ preferences of the work environment. (Hofstede 2010: 60-61)

In small-power-distance countries the emotional distance between employers and employees is relatively little, which means that the employees find it easy to approach the employer. Likewise the employers often consult their subordinates on important matters instead of making the decisions by themselves. (Hofstede 2010: 61)

In large-power-distance countries the matter is completely different. The employees are very unlikely to approach their managers directly. According to Geert Hofstede the power distance in these countries is described as "the extent to which

the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (2010). This basically means that the institutions, such as schools, and organizations like work places, are the basic elements of society in these countries. (Hofstede 2010: 61)

2.2.2 Masculinity vs. Femininity

There are several biological differences between men and women but only few of them are related to their social role. Some behaviors are more often related to women and others to men but depending on culture these behaviors can be related to either one. (Hofstede 2010: 137)

Masculinity and Femininity are the most debated areas of cultural dimensions. In some ways this issue is almost like a taboo, especially in masculine cultures. On the other hand it is controversial area since it has practically nothing to do with national wealth unlike the other dimensions: there are approximately same amount of poor and wealthy people, both men and women, in different countries. (Hofstede 2010: 144-145)

The gender equality is the biggest question in this area, and therefore makes it controversial. Although, studies show that the more educated the women are, the more equal the genders in the country in question are. This then again is related to national wealth, which makes masculinity and femininity an important part of cultural dimensions. (Hofstede 2010: 144-145)

2.2.3 Collectivism vs. Individualism

Most of world's population lives in collective cultures. In these cultures "family" includes all the siblings, parents, grandparents, cousins and so on. People from this type of cultures think themselves as part of a we-group and they are very close and loyal to their family. (Hofstede 2010: 90-91)

The rest of the world belongs to individualistic cultures. In these cultures family is a so called nuclear family, which consists only from parent(s) and siblings. The

people living in these cultures are more independent and they do not rely that much on others, they think of themselves as I, not we. (Hofstede 2010: 90-91)

The differences are also shown on working life. In individual cultures people try to find a work field according to their own interests. Then they need to convince the employer, that they are qualified for the job. In collective cultures the we-factor is always part of the process of finding a suitable job. The employer wants an employee who he or she believes to have the same interests as the company and its workers. This often leads to the fact that the companies prefer to hire relatives, whether or not suitable for the job. (Hofstede 2010: 119-120)

2.2.4 Long vs. Short term orientation

People who are short term oriented are usually more concerned about keeping or losing their "face", they respect traditions and expect fast results from their efforts. Long term oriented people then again have quite the opposite opinions. They believe that traditions are not that important if they do not fit the circumstances, losing the "face" is not that big deal if one has a sense of shame. (Hofstede 2010: 243)

In working life the short and long term orientation shows as well. Short term orientated think that leisure time is important, and the importance is on this year's profit. They also believe on a universal idea of what is good and evil, and the rather black and white way of thinking that if one is true then the other must be false. In long term oriented thinking these things are again the opposite. The leisure time is not as important for them and the importance is on the profits that are achieved ten years from now. The thought of good and evil also depends on the circumstances, and the fact that one is true, doesn't mean that the other cannot be true as well. (Hofstede 2010: 251)

2.2.5 Uncertainty Avoidance

The term uncertainty avoidance means the way people in different cultures deal with the fact that one cannot be certain of what will happen in the future. The

thought of not knowing what will happen creates anxiety, but people have created different ways to ease it. (Hofstede 2010: 189-190)

The feeling of uncertainty is learned and obtained from the culture one lives in, as are the ways to cope with them. The roots of these feelings and their coping mechanisms are non-rational and, therefore, as Hofstede states "[t]hey lead to collective patterns of behavior in one society that may seem aberrant and incomprehensible to members of other societies" (2010). (Hofstede 2010: 189-190)

3 HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Depending on the cultural background people behave differently in different situations. This is something that may be difficult to understand sometimes, especially when travelling abroad. Since we are all humans, we expect everyone to behave in the same way. When that does not happen, the unfortunate incidents of misunderstandings will occur. (Storti 1989: 66-68)

As children we have all been taught to behave in a “normal” way. Of course “normal” means the things that are accepted in a certain culture. Then, when travelling abroad where people do not behave “normally”, it is difficult to understand it, even though they are only behaving in the way that is “normal” for them. Therefore, people should stop expecting that everyone behaves similarly everywhere. (Storti 1989: 66-68)

Reisinger and Turner have collected several definitions about culture and how to relate it to other theories. According to the book, behaviouralists and functionalists have argued that behavior and culture should be seen as one, since culture determines our actions, and it helps us to understand and expect certain behavior. Therefore many of our actions are based on our culture, and when cultures differ, all the patterns differ as well. (Reisinger & Turner 2003: 6)

Most cultural differences among people can be seen through behavior. The biggest differences are between Western and Eastern cultures. The openness and informality when socializing which is more or less normal to the Western societies, for example in The US, is considered rude and impolite in Eastern cultures, such as Japan. This is simply because of the fact that the norms are the exact opposites from each other in these countries. (Reisinger & Turner 2003: 28-29)

3.1 Expectations Theory

According to the Expectations theory by Miller and Steinberg (1975), people’s behavior and communication are affected by the expectations of other people’s behavior. This is mainly how the stereotypes and prejudices develop. Without ad-

equate information, the negative attitudes will easily spread and give false information to those, who would actually be willing to learn how things really are. In order to get the correct information, people should interact with different cultures freely and share opinions so that all participants will see the same thing from each angle. (Reisinger 2009: 52-53)

Hofstede's dimensions are also included to the Expectations theory. For example the power distance is a dominant feature in Japanese culture. In this country the social status defines who you are, and other people will assess you based on it. If your business card says you are a manager they will treat you as one: You are most likely wealthy, from a good family and you have high authority over your subordinates. (Reisinger 2009: 52-53)

3.2 Cultural Backgrounds

This thesis involves two cultural areas: Protestant European and South Asian. The host culture is Finnish and it is compared with two other countries' cultures from those areas, Sweden and India. Finnish culture, however, does belong to the same Protestant European cultural area with Sweden along with other Nordic countries, Germany, Switzerland and Netherlands. In addition to India, the South Asian cultural area then again includes for example Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia. The idea is to see the difference in opinions concerning the service in Finland, when the tourists come from close to the host culture (Sweden) and far from it (India). In this study, these cultures are paralleled by three of the dimensions created by Hofstede. These dimensions are power distance, individualism vs. collectivism and masculinity vs. femininity. (World Value Survey 2008)

The following scales will indicate the differences in the dimensions between the host culture and the two cultures that will be studied. In the first scale there is power distance. The higher the bar is, the more substantial the PD is in that culture. In the second table is shown the level of individualism in the culture. The higher the bar is, the more individualistic the culture is. The last scale shows the masculinity level, hence the higher the bar is, the more masculine the culture is.

Table 1 Differences in power distance in Finland, Sweden and India. (Hofstede 2001: 87)

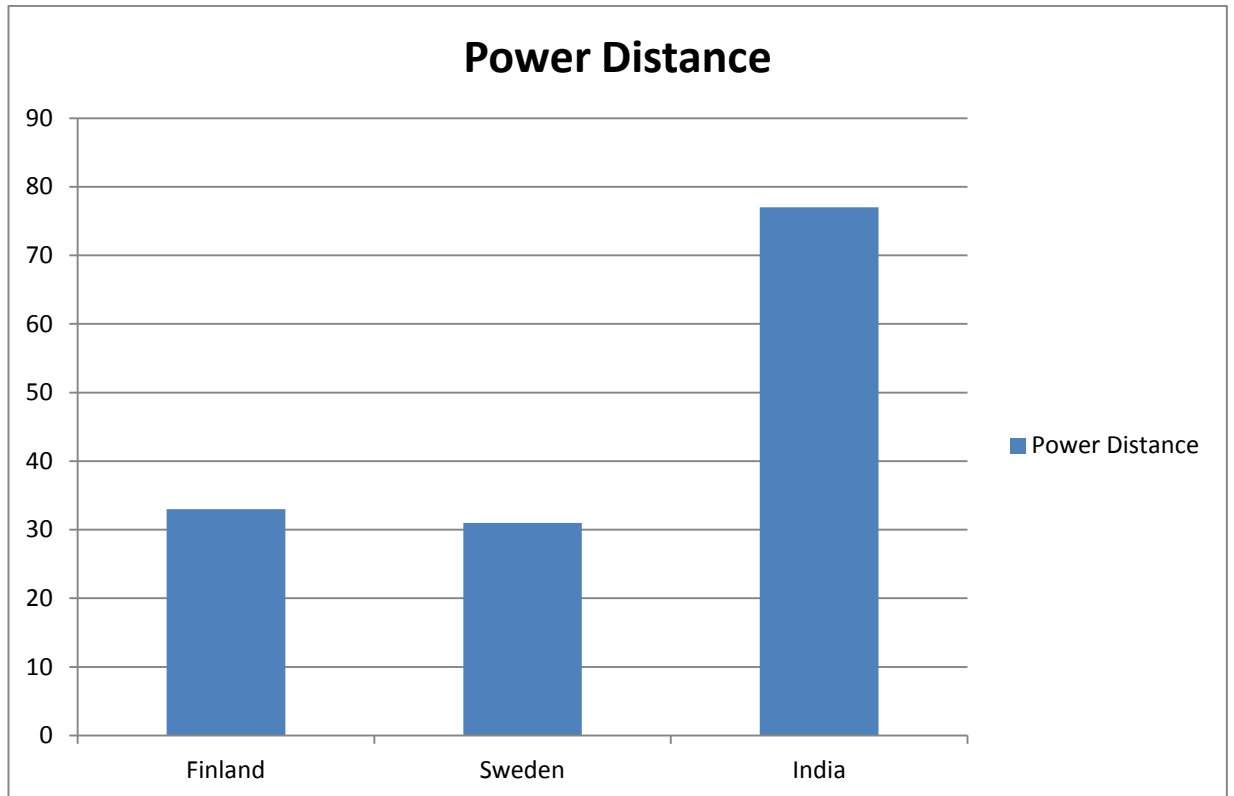


Table 2 The individualism score between Finland, Sweden and India. (Hofstede 2001: 215)

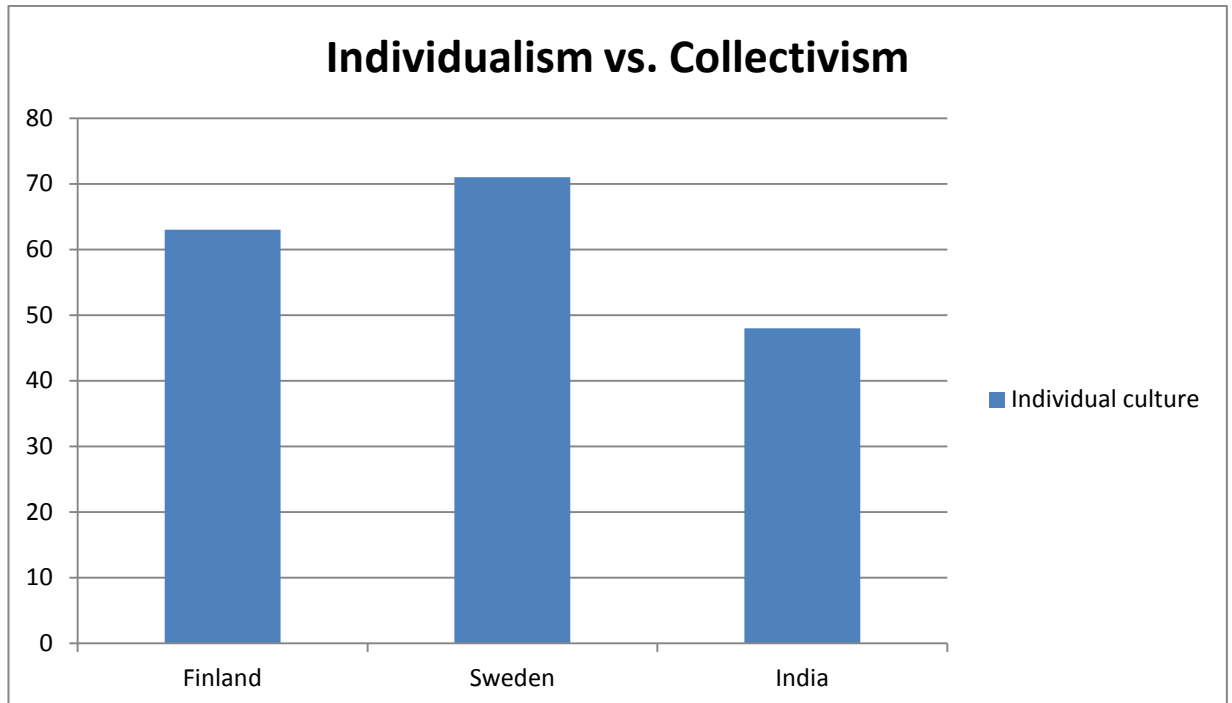
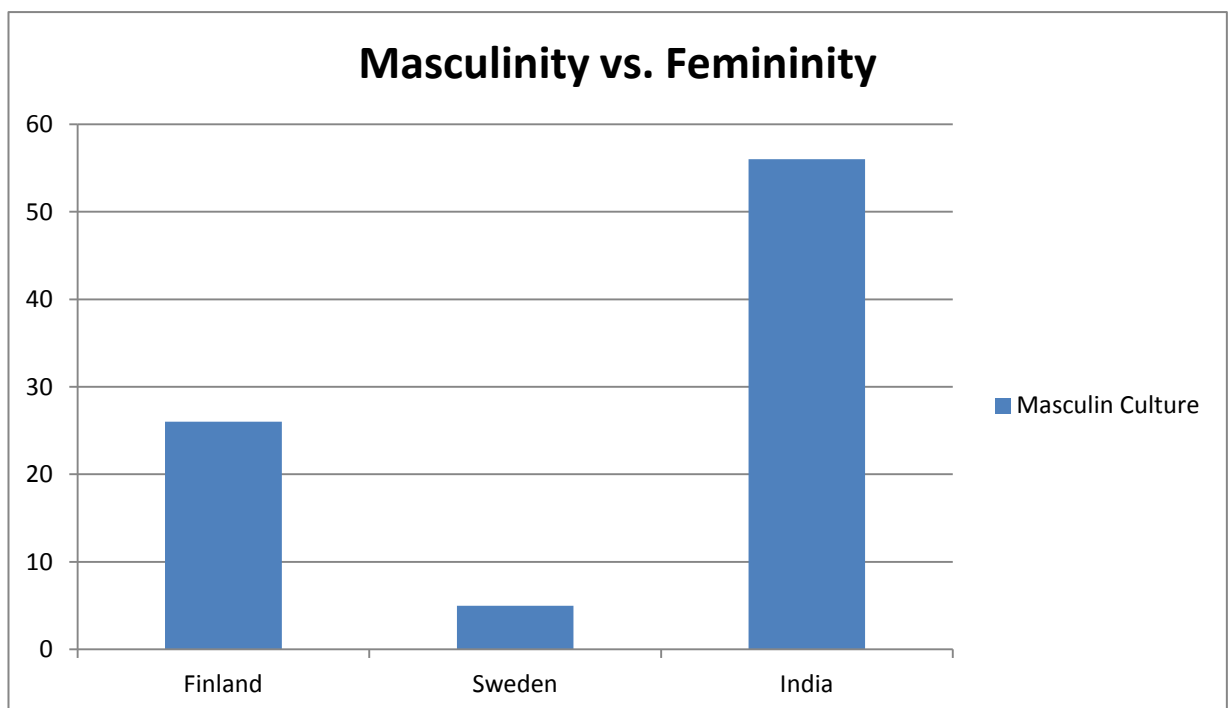


Table 3 The masculinity level in Finland, Sweden and India. (Hofstede 2001: 286)



3.2.1 Finland (the host culture)

As the tables show, Finland has quite low power distance. It has also rather feminine and individualistic culture. However, it is not at the extreme end in any of the tables. This makes Finland an easy place to visit, even if the tourist's own culture would be at one end of the scale or another.

The fact that the PD is rather low in Finland means that for example in workplaces the employees find it relatively easy to approach their supervisors. There is not that big of a gap between them, and thus the communication is quite effective and both parties enjoy mutual respect. (The Hofstede Centre) This also reflects to the communication in customer service. The service provider expects the customer to appreciate their work as well as communicate to them as equals. However, it may strike as odd to people from high power distance cultures that the service personnel talks to them in somewhat informal way.

The individualism level, on the other hand, is quite high which means that people are encouraged to think themselves as individuals rather than as a part of a group. People are expected to figure out their own problems and pursue their own goals in life. (The Hofstede Centre) In customer service this shows in a way that the service provider only gives the guidelines to the customer, so that the customer then can figure out the solution to the problem individually. This, however, might feel strange to a person from a collective culture, if he or she has gotten used to solving problems in a group.

In the masculinity chart Finland is approximately in the middle. It does not have the most masculine culture but it is not that feminine either, which means that both sexes are also quite equal. In certain fields of work there are more female workers than men and vice versa, but it still does not mean that both genders could not work in those fields. (The Hofstede Centre) For example, in hotel receptions there are more often women than men working, but they are not treated any differently based on the gender.

3.2.2 Sweden (culturally close)

In Sweden the power distance is almost the same as in Finland. The Swedish culture, however, is much more individualistic and feminine than the Finnish one.

Due to the low PD in Sweden, the Swedish tourists barely notice any difference in service when they come to Finland. Their behavior is just as formal (or as informal) as the Finnish receptionist's behavior. The same applies also in the individualism context. If there is a problem that can be solved through the phone, the Swedish customer does not even expect the receptionist to come over but to just give advice through the phone. Since the Swedish culture is even more individualistic than the Finnish one, they wish to cope on their own as much as possible.

The masculinity level is very low in Sweden. This means that they do not discriminate anyone based on their gender, and all kinds of traits that are regarded as feminine are completely accepted on men too. This includes also occupations that are more popular among women, for example receptionist. (The Hofstede Centre)

3.2.3 India (culturally distant)

Indian culture is almost the opposite of the Finnish one. The power distance and masculinity level are very high, and their culture is pretty collective.

As shown on the charts, the PD in India is quite high. This means that the Indian people respect their supervisors and employers a lot. They talk very formally and expect formal language in all situations. (The Hofstede Centre) When visiting Finland, it may come as a shock to them, how informally employees talk to their superiors. Since this also applies to reception, it might often feel strange to them that the receptionist is rather informal towards the customers as well.

On the individualism chart India is not as low as one might have expected, but it is still significantly lower than Finland. This means that the family values are highly appreciated and it is more important to be accepted in your community than if you would succeed on your own. The family's support is everything. (The Hofstede Centre) In customer service this shows in a way that they expect more

personal service. If a problem occurs they wish it to be taken care of personally instead just giving directions over the phone.

The masculinity level is very high in the Indian culture. The idea is that men provide living for their families. This also effects on the fact that most high standing occupations are usually given to men. (The Hofstede Centre) If, while visiting in Finland, the Indian tourists need piccolo service in hotel, it tends to surprise them to see a woman carrying the heavy luggage. Or, for example, if the hotel manager is a woman, to them it may seem odd to see a woman in such a high ranking position.

4 THE TOURIST-HOST INTERACTION

The encountering of the tourist and the host has four different contexts: spatial, temporal, communicative and cultural. This thesis primarily focuses on the communicative and cultural parts. Communication in this context refers mainly to the verbal and non-verbal behavior, whereas culture signifies different values and attitudes and the willingness of both parties to share and understand each other. (Reisinger 2009: 206)

In her book, *International Tourism: Cultures and Behavior* (2009), Yvette Reisinger has referred to several authors when explaining the social interaction between the tourist and the host. The encounter is usually a very brief one, since the tourist only stays in the destination for a short period of time. There are also other factors, than the short length of stay that might complicate the interaction; the situation is rather unequal to both parties. For example, both have different roles; the tourist is in the destination often on a holiday (could be on business as well) and there to be served, while the host is there at work and to serve. Due to these circumstances both parties generate divergent impressions about each other, which may be either negative or positive. More often, unfortunately, the impressions the hosts get turn out to be negative. This is because the tourists are usually seen as wealthy people, which causes jealousy among the hosts and creates prejudices towards the tourists. (Reisinger 2009: 206)

What the tourists think about the hosts is a very important part of their satisfaction on a holiday. The host can either make or break the tourists' holiday. If the experience is good and reception is welcoming and friendly, the tourist will most likely come back again. Then again negative impression of the hosts can generate fewer visits to the place. In other words, if the hosts want to have a great tourist flow and good reputation among potential customers, they need to do their best at customer service situations. (Reisinger & Turner 2003: 158-159)

It is hard to describe the exact impressions that the hosts have about the tourists. On one hand the tourists are exploiting the natural resources of the destination, but on the other hand they bring money to the community. The biggest difference oc-

curs when one must decide what can be defined as the hosts; is it the residents of the local culture or the ones providing services to the tourists. The ones working in the business may see tourists as a good thing. They provide income to the hosts and enrich the local culture. Then again the locals may not be as welcoming. They may feel that their own culture is threatened and that the tourists abuse the natural resources. (Reisinger & Turner 2003: 162-163)

4.1 Stereotypes

Another descriptive word for stereotyping would be overgeneralization. It basically means that an entire group of people is defined based on the behavior or personal traits of a few members from that group. Stereotypes can refer to almost anything from occupation to culture or age. People often rely on stereotypes when they meet new people or are in a new situation, where they lack valid information. (Reisinger & Turner 2003: 169)

When studying the interaction between the tourist and the host, stereotypes may be helpful. Considering that the interaction among these two is rather short, both sides usually rely on stereotypes. In these kinds of situations it is rather important that the stereotype or the image of the other culture is positive. A negative image can affect the situation in such way that the tourist decides not to visit the country again. For example in the Middle East women wear clothes that cover them entirely. This is just part of their culture and a normal routine for them. That, however, may strike as odd to Western women who would rather walk around wearing shorts and tops when it is hot weather, and therefore they might not want to go to visit a country with that kind of culture. (Reisinger & Turner 2003: 169)

4.1.1 Positive and Negative Stereotypes

There are both positive and negative stereotypes; unfortunately the negative ones are more common. Some positive stereotypes are, for instance, that the Chinese and Japanese are hard-working, goal oriented and successful. The negative ones, however, tend to be more long-lasting and are difficult to change. The tourist-host example applies here as well. Tourists are often seen as rich and a kind of faceless

strangers who exploit the host community. Then again the hosts are seen as poor, but still having the power to exploit the tourists, who are unaware of the local habits. (Reisinger & Turner 2003:171-172)

4.2 Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism means that people in a certain cultural group believe that their culture is superior to others. This often leads to downgrading of other cultures and possibly even ignoring them. It is what stereotyping can lead to in the worst case scenario. (Reisinger 2009: 192)

It is rather easy for people to turn into ethnocentrics. They feel safe when they can predict other's behavior and know that they share the same values. By admitting that other cultures actually exist, these people would need to admit that there are other beliefs and values that might be just as important as the ones they have. Being an ethnocentric makes it hard to understand the customs of other cultures. The same gestures can have a completely different meaning in different cultures. By ignoring these differences the multicultural communication becomes nearly impossible. The people from dissimilar cultures will start to resent each other because they do not understand why the others act in a certain way. In a severe case the situation might even evolve into a conflict. (Reisinger 2009: 192)

5 INTERACTION AND COMMUNICATION

The basic human communication includes the message, the sender of the message, the receiver of the message and the medium through which the message is conveyed. The sender needs to simplify the message by using common symbols and terms in order to make sure that the receiver understands the message in a correct way. Unfortunately there will always be interruptions and some background noises that make the communication difficult, and the message becomes harder to understand. (Reisinger 2009:166-167)

In reception, for example when people are checking in, the communication between the customer and the service provider should be very simple so that both parties will be understood. This of course means that both sides should have some understanding of each other's culture, values and expectations. The language skills are naturally a crucial part of this communication, but in this thesis the emphasis will be on the cultural aspect.

The conversation style effects on understanding as well. In certain cultures, such as Japanese, the conversation is not that direct, but people circle around the topic and do not talk that directly. The Americans on the other hand are quite straight forward and talk rather loudly, since being loud is seen as strength in their culture. Then again in South American cultures people are very expressive, meaning that they talk a lot with their hands. (Reisinger 2009: 178,180)

The cultural background of a person influences his or her behavior. In communication this is shown through different intonations when speaking, body language (like gestures and physical distance between people), and the accents and words people use when describing things. (Reisinger 2009: 119-120)

5.1 Verbal and Non-verbal communication

The differences in verbal communication in different cultures can be seen through variations in the vocabulary, grammar and different dialect. The non-verbal communication then again differs in how people use their body, for example gestures,

facial expressions and eye contact. Other non-verbal differences are the personal space, touching and overall appearance. (Reisinger & Turner 2003:18-19)

When using verbal communication, each party gives meanings to the words based on their own experiences. The situation where the communication takes place has an effect on the meaning as well. For example in a reception both customer and the receptionist use the words that are related to the surroundings: the hotel. But since they might come from different cultural backgrounds, the words used in this situation may have different meanings for both of them. (University of Jyväskylä)

Non-verbal communication is usually only used to emphasize the verbal communication. However, in some cases it may replace the words all together. In different cultures there are certain rules over what kind of expressions and gestures are appropriate. Since many gestures may be seen as multi meaningful, they can be interpreted in a different way than what they were intended to mean. This might cause misunderstandings in a reception. (University of Jyväskylä)

5.2 Quality of Service

The interaction between the customer and the service provider usually determines how the customer perceives the quality of the service. The factors that affect to this interaction are, for example, how easy it is to contact the service provider, what they look like, and how they do their job. Other customers may also affect to this interaction. They might cause background noise which then complicates the actual interaction. The image of the service provider, in this case the hotel, affects to the interaction as well. If the customer has a positive image of the hotel, they might forgive small mistakes. Then again the hotel's image may also have a negative impact. If the customer has gotten used to the standard service of a hotel chain for example in the US, the standard may be somewhat different in Finland. (Grönroos 1998: 63-64)

In his book *Nyt kilpaillaan palveluilla*, Grönroos has a figure that shows how the expected and experienced quality of service is perceived. The actual quality of the service consists of these two parts. The expectations are created by the marketing

and image of the service provider (hotel). The word of mouth can be part of the marketing as well, considering that it is positive, but it may also create negative images. The needs of the customer (tourist) need to be met in order for him or her to be satisfied. The experience is affected by the image, but also by what is done and how. In other words, the quality of the service is good if the expectations of the customer are met and preferably exceeded. However, the customers may often have unrealistic expectations, which make it hard for the hotel to meet, let alone exceed, the expectations of their guests. (Grönroos 1998: 67)

5.3 Intercultural communication

Intercultural communication can also be called international communication (Lustig & Koester: 1993), because intercultural means that the two (or several) people communicating are from different cultures and this usually means that they are also from different countries. From the tourism perspective this often happens in a reception, where the receptionist represents the host culture and the tourist represents a foreign culture. In this kind of situation both parties are trying to understand each other's wants and needs and how to fulfill them. The idea is not to understand the cultural meanings behind the words but just to find a solution to the current problem. (Reisinger 2009: 167)

The difficulties that may rise in these kinds of situations are usually based on the cultural differences. Naturally, the language barrier might be the biggest dilemma, but if the cultural gap between the host and the tourist is very large the communication can become inefficient. Many misunderstandings and misinterpretations occur simply out of ignorance. For example in the Middle East and Latin America people touch each other a lot while having a conversation. To the people from Northern Europe and Asia this feels very uncomfortable, since they do not belong to a similar high-contact culture. In a Finnish reception the hosts might start to resent customers from Middle East, because they feel uncomfortable if the customer comes to stand too close and touches them while talking. Then again the people from the Middle Eastern cultures might feel that the host is rude and not

interested in helping them, if they pull away from the conversation. (Reisinger 2009: 168, 170-171)

Based on the problems that intercultural communication creates, Reisinger raises a question: “Is intercultural communication possible?” (2009). There are numerous ways in which cultures vary from each other and therefore the understandable communication between them becomes practically nonexistent. Even though one may learn the language and grammar of another language, full understanding of that culture will never be possible. The meanings behind the words can only be understood by a person that has grown up in the culture. The only exceptions to the rule, that a person can never fully understand two cultures, are those who are brought up in a bilingual environment. If the parents come from two different cultures the children will automatically grow up into being part of both of them, and are therefore able to fluently communicate with each cultures. (Reisinger 2009: 190)

Then again, according to Heidegger (1962), all people are unique and their experiences are unique as well. This means that communication between any two or more people is nearly impossible. Because everyone has their own singular way of looking at things, no two people can ever have similar experiences, and thus they cannot communicate in a way that both sides would know exactly what the other one means. So, as Nancy (1991) argues, in order to get the feeling of belonging in a community, people adjust their communication and pretend to have similar experiences. (Reisinger 2009: 191)

Since the intercultural communication still does happen, especially between the host and the tourist, it must mean, that in some ways this kind of communication is possible. In the end, it is not really about having shared meanings and similar experiences, but as Reisinger writes, “it is about the ability to see, acknowledge and respect the difference and uniqueness of other people” (2009). (Reisinger 2009: 191)

5.4 Multicultural Competence

Multicultural competence is a term that has many different definitions. It has also been called cross-cultural and intercultural competence. The most agreed upon definition is that a person who has multicultural competence is able to behave in an appropriate way among people from other cultures. This means that multi-culturally competent person is aware, that there are other habits and values in the world than the ones in his or her own culture, and is able to respect these differences. (Reisinger 2009: 378)

There are several aspects that affect a person's ability to be multi-culturally competent. If the person comes from a multicultural background it is naturally easier to adapt to new cultures and their ways of thinking. Another important point is that if the cultural gap between the host and the tourist is very substantial, it becomes harder to adapt and relate to the other persons culture. (Reisinger 2009: 384)

For a person working in a reception the multicultural competence is a crucial ability to have. There are often tourists coming in from culturally very different countries and therefore it is vital to be able to treat everyone in a polite way. A receptionist should therefore have at least some knowledge of all cultural traits that might need to be considered when working in a customer service business. Also those tourists, who do travel a lot, would require some multicultural competence as well, in order to not get offended when meeting people abroad, who are not necessarily aware of their cultural habits.

6 COMBINING CULTURE AND SERVICE EXPECTATIONS

A person's culture consists of his or her beliefs, morals and customs. When people then encounter other people from different cultures, for example in a hotel reception as a guest and a host, they create a new culture called tourism culture. In these circumstances the service expectations may vary quite a lot.

People from different cultures expect different things from service personnel. As Hofstede's dimensions show, for example, the power distance is rather low in some cultures and quite high in others. This affects on people's perception about the service. If the PD is high, people might expect very formal service. In low power distance cultures the service might be more informal, which may then confuse customers from high power distance cultures.

This is mainly what the empirical part of this thesis discusses about. The tourists' cultural background's effect on service expectations is an interesting part of the service situation. In order to be able to deliver good service, the receptionist should be aware of what the customers might expect from him or her. This thesis gives the customer service personnel something to take into consideration, when they meet tourists from different cultures.

7 THE RESEARCH

When conducting a research, the first thing to do is to determine the topic. After that, one needs to draw up a plan how to carry out the research. Once everything is planned out, it is time to get background information about the topic, in other words write the theory. Then, based on the theory, the research itself is implemented, usually through surveys. Finally comes the reporting phase. Often, when the results are reported, new research ideas are brought up, which sometimes leads to new researches about the same topic but from a different angle. (Jennings 2001: 22-23)

There are several different ways to do a research. The two main methods are quantitative and qualitative, but one may also use a mixture of both. When using qualitative methods, there are usually not that many participants, but their answers are more specific, while quantitative approach requires several respondents. (Jennings 2001: 129-131)

7.1 The Research Problem

This research is conducted in order to find out, how the tourists perceive the quality of service based on their expectations. The emphasis is on the cultural background of the tourist. To find out what the tourists expect, one needs to find out where he or she is from, and in what kind of culture he or she has been brought up in. For example, if a person has been brought up in a culturally diverse environment, it is probably easier for him or her to adjust his or her expectations.

7.2 Method Choice

In this thesis the data is collected through qualitative questionnaires. All questions are open ended, so that the participants can freely elaborate when answering. Considering the research problem and the surroundings where the research is done, a questionnaire paper is the easiest way to collect the information needed.

Also secondary data is used to validate the conclusions that are made based on the questionnaire. Secondary data can be for example text that already exists some-

where before starting the research. In this case, these texts are travel blogs kept by people from the countries involved in this thesis. This data may also be referred to as “naturally occurring materials” (Silverman 2001), since it exists whether or not the researcher wishes to use it. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008: 77-78)

7.2.1 Analyzing

The analysis is done by using coding and constant comparative analysis. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) codes can be either straightforward or very complex. Depending on the point of view, codes can have many different meanings. They can be descriptive, interpretive or clear pattern codes. However, according to Strauss (1987) coding can also have different phases. The first phase is open coding, which is when the researcher is collecting the data for the theory. Next phase is called axial coding, which means that the initial information from the open coding phase is analyzed by searching relations between the codes. The last phase is selective coding, and in this phase one needs to limit research into a few selected codes. (Jennings 2001: 198-199)

When using coding in research, one needs to be cautious in order to not overdo it. Therefore the researcher needs to stay focused and keep clear record of the codes, so that the aim of the research will not be lost. Another thing, the researcher should watch out for, is that the method may turn into quantitative, if overanalyzed. (Jennings 2001: 200)

Constant comparative analysis means, according to Janesick (1994) that the theory is based on the information gathered from the participants of the survey. This kind of analyzing allows creating categories for code comparing. The data will be verified by the fact that it comes up repeatedly in the answers of the participants. (Jennings 2001: 203-204)

While analyzing the results of the questionnaire, the theory evolves as well. By using abductive reasoning the hypotheses are drawn and verified based on the information gathered from the respondents. Therefore the theory can be changed as well, since it interacts with the research responses. Abduction could be seen as

reasoning process, in which the theory and practice alternate when drawing the conclusions. (Pitkäranta 2010: 126)

7.3 Implementation

The research is done by giving out a questionnaire paper to approximately five members of each cultural area, Protestant European and South Asian. The survey is done at the Radisson Blu Royal hotel in Vaasa. The time of the study is the spring of 2014 and the respondents are the tourists staying at the hotel during that time.

The questionnaires are given out to the tourists at the reception during the check-in situation and they can return them when they check-out. This way they can freely explore the questions and there will be no rush in answering them. The survey includes questions about the tourist's own cultural background, and what kind of service they might expect based on that background.

Some of the surveys are also done via e-mail to people, who have not stayed in the hotel in question, but have stayed in some other hotel in Finland.

7.4 Target Group

The main target groups of this study are Indian and Swedish tourists visiting Finland. Some of the participants are also people geographically close to those countries, and who share the similar Protestant European or South Asian culture. The groups were chosen by their cultural background. The Swedish culture is close to the Finnish one and Indian then again is distant from it. In this study there is going to be a comparison between these two cultures, and whether they perceive the service differently because of their cultural heritage.

The respondents are the ones, who are staying at the Radisson Blu Royal hotel in Vaasa during the time of this study. Some participants, however, are contacted via e-mail as well. They can be men or women, and the purpose of their visit can be either business or leisure. They are aged between 20 and 60, and are travelling either alone, with a colleague, friend or a spouse.

7.5 Expected Results

Based on the information in the theory, it can be expected that there will be a clear difference between the respondents from Protestant European and South Asian cultural areas. Those from Protestant European area will most likely think that the service is pretty similar to the service they would get in their home country. Then again, the South Asians probably think that the service could be more correct and proper.

The respondents are most likely going to be business people travelling alone or with a colleague. The South Asian ones are presumably all men but the Protestant European respondents can be both men and women. They are approximately 30-50 years old and travel a lot because of their work.

The questions in the interview are planned so, that based on the answers, one should be able to recognize where the person is from. That is, if the answers are consistent to the theory, which is expected. The question number 7 (Appendix 1: The Questionnaire), however, is quite intriguing. Small talk is something that is often expected in reception but it usually depends a lot on persons own characteristics, whether they use it or not. So even if the respondent would answer accordingly to his or her own culture, there are still certain traits that are more personal rather than culture-bound.

8 THE RESULTS

8.1 Findings

As predicted, based on the theoretical background, the culture of the customer does have an effect on the service expectations. However, it does not play as big of a role as assumed. When people are travelling abroad, they are usually prepared that they will not receive exactly the same service that they would back home. This way the expectations are not too unrealistic and they are met more easily.

What was assumed, in the expected results, was that there would be a clear difference between the answers between the two cultural areas. As it turned out, there was a difference, but it was not as substantial as predicted. Some of the responses were very consistent to the theory, but there were few diverting reactions as well.

8.1.1 The Respondents

The participants of the research were from countries from both Protestant European and South Asian cultural area. A few respondents were also people, who did not stay at the hotel in question but had stayed in some other hotel in Finland. Due to the fact that there were not that many respondents, the conclusions that are drawn based on the questionnaires, are backed up by certain Swedish and Indian travel bloggers. The blogs are used as a support to the conclusions presented and based on the answers by the participants.

Since all the participants were not from Sweden or India, the topic was widened to cover not only Swedish and Indian cultures, but the bigger cultural areas that those countries belong to: Protestant European and South Asian.

There were approximately an equal number of men and women answering the questionnaire in both cultures. Most of the respondents were in Finland for business (which was expected), and those who had been in Finland for leisure had been visiting family or friends. In order to get some more background information about the respondents, there was a question about their personal “culture”: Were the respondents brought up in a bilingual culture or were their parents from the

same culture. All respondents, except one Swedish man, had parents from the same culture. Consequently, that man felt that it has been rather easy for him to adjust into new cultures.

8.1.2 Codes

The codes that are considered in this research are the ones that came up repeatedly in the answers of the participants. From those in Protestant European cultures the repeated matters were “Nordic service” and “informal behavior”. The South Asians then again mentioned “positive service” and “informal but respectable behavior”.

The “Nordic service” came up in the answers, when the respondents were asked what kind of service they have received in Finland. This would suggest that the service level is expected to be similar in all Nordic countries that belong to the same Protestant European cultural area. The “informal behavior” then again implies to the low power distance within this cultural area. Since all the respondents from this area felt that they are quite informal when addressing other people, it could be expected that the “Nordic service” is also quite informal. One Swedish woman wrote in her blog about her encounter with a tourist office worker in Norway. The lady in the office was not the most helpful one, but she did not mind, since she was aware that she was asking a difficult thing and it had gotten the lady “off guard”. (Coconuts and Skylines –resebloggen) This is a good example of somewhat informal service, and how it was received as if it was the most normal thing in the world.

The same question, to which those from the Protestant European area had answered “Nordic service”, the respondents from the South Asian cultural area answered “positive service”. Mostly they wrote that their experiences of the service in Finland have been positive, which can be interpreted as that they have received good service. However, they do not clearly state that the service would have been good, which then again could mean that something was missing, but they are too polite to say it directly. The other part, about “informal but respectable behavior”, suggests that the power distance in their own cultural area is somewhat higher

than in Finland. This means that, even though the respondents would see themselves as informal, they do have certain respect towards people who are older or in a higher position than them; meaning that they act more formally around that kind of people. Due to this reason, it could be assumed that the “informal Nordic service” is a little too informal for the tourists coming from South Asian cultural areas.

8.1.3 Protestant Europe

When going through the answers, it is rather easy to tell which culture the respondent is from. Those from the Protestant European area were quite unanimous with their responses. Based on the questionnaire (Appendix 1), the results of those questions that had gained similar answers are presented here.

According to the tourists from the Protestant European area the receptionists should downplay their own cultural traits, because they work in an international environment. They feel that they get similar service as they would at their home country. When the receptionist says “I’ll take care of it...” instead of using the “we-form” it is seen as more personal service. Small talk was not seen as necessary, since the customers are often very busy or tired when going to check-in or checkout. All respondents saw themselves as rather informal and therefore they do not really care about the other person’s (with whom they might have a conversation) status, they wish to treat everyone in the same way. However, if a person is from another culture, they try to be cautious when choosing a conversation topic before they get to know the person well. For the last question the answer was the same with all respondents: The local people make the biggest difference in a destination. If the locals are rude, why bother coming back again. If the hotel staff is rude, the hotel can always be changed.

There were a few questions that had received one divergent answer as well. For example the most common answer to the gender question was that it does not make any difference. One Swedish man however, mentioned that he would prefer a female receptionist. This could be seen as a cultural trait, since Sweden has a rather feminine culture. Also one Danish woman wrote that she would prefer

“we’ll take care of it...” instead of the “I-form”. This made her feel like there were more people taking care of her “case”.

8.1.4 South Asia

The answers from the South Asian area were more scattered. The main points were similar but there were several questions that had at least one divergent response.

All the South Asian respondents were brought up in one culture, meaning that their parents were from the same culture. All of them also travel often to Europe (mainly on business) so the Protestant European culture is not that unfamiliar to them either, and they have had positive experiences in Finland as well. Some of the respondents thought that the receptionists should downplay their own cultural traits but others felt that the traits should be emphasized because that is something that they want to see when they visit another culture. The use of “I” and “we” when talking with a receptionist divided opinions as well; some preferred one and some the other. However, as long as things get done it does not make that big of a difference. Small talk was definitely preferred among the South Asians. They also saw themselves as quite informal but only after they got to know the other people they are talking with.

8.1.5 Power Distance

In the questionnaire (Appendix 1) there are three questions that are directly related to power distance. Questions 3, 8 and 9 all discuss people’s behavior when they meet new people, who are possibly from another cultural background. Question number 3 is closely related to the hotel environment, and the receptionist’s behavior. The other two questions, however, approach the power distance matter more directly.

All the respondents, regardless of where they were from, had the same answer to the question about the receptionist’s behavior. Everyone thought that the receptionist had been friendly and helpful. Those from the Protestant European area most likely felt like that, since the service was very similar to their own culture.

As one Swedish man mentioned; “Nordic behavior works for me”. Those from South Asian cultures probably also felt that they were treated well, but there is a possibility that they just say so in order not to offend anyone. In the South Asian area it is very important not to “lose one’s face” by saying something bad. The fact, though, that everyone felt that the receptionists in Finland have been very friendly, indicates that the power distance in this country is rather low.

The other two questions consider the respondents behavior rather than the receptionist. The respondents were asked if they saw themselves as formal or straight forward, and if it is important for them to know the status of the person they are addressing. All those from the Protestant European area said that they were quite informal and that the status does not really play any role for them, since they address everyone equally. The ones from the South Asian area were more careful with their responses. All of them also considered themselves as rather informal, and that the other person’s status would not play that big of a role for them. However, when meeting new people for the first time, they would start out more formally until they get to know them better. One Indian man wrote that since he has been visiting this certain hotel so many times he can be more open and informal when talking with the staff. Another Indian woman, then again, mentioned that to her the status and formality is not that important as long as people are polite when talking with each other.

8.1.6 Individualism vs. Collectivism

The individualism and collectivism concept is mainly handled in question 6 in the questionnaire (Appendix 1), but it can also be related to four other questions. The question number 6 asks, how the tourists feel if the receptionist uses the word “I” or “we”. Since the South Asian cultures are very collective, it could be expected that they would prefer we-form, and those from the Protestant European area, which is quite individualistic, would prefer I-form.

The results do support the theory and expectations, but there was at least one clearly different opinion in both cultures. Most of the respondents from the Protestant European area felt that “I” is better than “we”, which shows the indi-

vidualism quite well. According to one Swedish respondent “I” is more accountable and gives a feeling of personal service. It is not just a random person figuring out the problem, but the one who he has spoken with. However, one Danish woman did prefer we-form, because it made her feel like there were more people taking care of her problem.

From South Asia there was also only one respondent who had the opposite answer to the others from the same area. Most of them did not really care if it was “I” or “we”, as long as their issues were taken care of. The one, who preferred the I-form, thought that it is more effective, that his matter would be taken care of faster when it is “I” taking care of it. The fact that they did not pay that much attention on who was taking care of their problem, as long as it did get solved, reflects the collective culture. If a problem occurs in a hotel, it is the hotel’s duty to figure it out; it does not matter if it is a receptionist or a housekeeper, who takes care of the problem, as long as it gets done.

8.1.7 Masculinity vs. Femininity

The masculinity and femininity part is not discussed that widely in the questionnaire (Appendix 1). There is only one question that is directly related to this issue. Question number 5 handles the matter of whether the receptionist’s gender has any impact on the customer’s behavior. This field of work is usually dominated by women, and there are not that many male receptionists. For those from very masculine cultures, it might seem strange to see a man working in such feminine field. As the scales on the theory part show, India, along with other South Asian cultures, is rather masculine. Therefore, it could be expected, that the tourists from that area would act differently if they had a male receptionist serving them. The Swedish culture, then again, is at the other end of the scale, and the people from that cultural area are most likely more accustomed with the idea that men are working in a feminine field.

The results of the study, however, show that neither the tourists from the Protestant European nor South Asian area would act any differently with a male or a female receptionist. This could be interpreted so, that the customers do not

care who is serving them, as long as everything is done well. There was one answer though, from a Nepalese man, which also explains this a little; he had only encountered female receptionists, so he did not have anything to compare with. Also another man from the same cultural area mentioned that he preferred female receptionist, especially in Finland, since he felt that the “women are more talkative, helpful and friendly” compared to Finnish men. This, of course, is a generalization of men in Finland, and does not apply to all the men; not all women are that talkative either. Since, this man comes from a masculine culture, his answer is completely understandable. In his culture the women are probably the ones who take care of everyone and are helpful, while men provide the financial support.

In the end, the gender of the receptionist does not play a very big role in the communication between the tourist and the host. If misinterpretations occur in their communication, it most likely is not due to the gender.

9 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this research was to find out if the cultural background of a tourist affects his or her service expectations. According to the theory, all people behave differently depending on the culture they have been brought up in. Based on that background, they also judge people who are not from the same culture. This research was conducted by using Hofstede's dimensions to study the expectations that tourists may have towards the service in Finland.

Based on the theory, it could be expected that cultural differences create many misunderstandings and misinterpretations. The study area was hotel reception, where problems often occur: between the receptionist and the tourist. The language barrier would definitely be one of the problems, but it is not necessarily a cultural issue. The dimensions used in this study (power distance, masculinity vs. femininity and collectivism vs. individualism) are more culturally related matters. As the figures in the theory part show, the power distance is higher in India than in Finland, therefore it could be expected that Indian tourists feel that the service in Finland is too informal. This, then again, might have such impact that they do not want to visit Finland again, because the service made them feel uncomfortable.

The results of the study, however, show, that this is not the case. Even though the cultural background is an important matter to take into consideration in a reception, it is not a deal breaker. The sample of the study consisted mainly from business people who travel a lot for living, so the cultural differences are not so striking for them. They usually try to get to know the country and culture beforehand, so that they would have at least an idea of where they are going. Those who did not travel for business were also quite aware of the local habits. As one Indian woman had answered to the question 4 in the questionnaire (Appendix 1) "I would love to see & know new cultural traits when I am in a new country". So even if something unexpected happens to the tourists, they do not get offended that easily, but shrug it off as a local habit.

9.1 Perceived Quality of Service

The quality of service in Finland was generally seen as good. All the tourists taking part of this research thought that the service personnel had been friendly and helpful. Naturally the cultural differences were shown in the responses, as can be seen in part 7.1.2 Codes, but the general opinion was the same. As mentioned in Daily Mail's internet pages, the Finnish hotel staff really is the friendliest hotel staff in all Europe, at least according to the hotel.info's recent research. (Daily Mail)

Tourists from the Protestant European cultural area mostly expected to receive similar service as in their home country. For example, when it comes to the need for small talk, people from this area do not expect it. When they check-in or -out, they are only interested in the facts, not that much about the weather conditions of the day. As one Norwegian man mentioned in the tripadvisor.com about the check-in situation in the Radisson Blu Royal hotel in Vaasa: "The check-in and check-out time is one of the fastest I ever experienced" (2007), which is obviously a positive thing for him. However, the Protestant Europeans do feel that if the small talk fits into the situation, it is fine. As one Danish woman wrote; "If a guest wants to small talk he will show you". Generally people from this area are not accustomed with having a small talk, so it does not come naturally for them. Since Finland does belong to this same area, the tourists also expect that the receptionist only tells the facts and wishes them welcome, instead of starting a conversation.

Those from the South Asian cultural area also expect friendly service. Because these tourists are from completely different cultural background, they usually try to learn in advance some things about the culture they are about to visit. One male respondent, who was brought up in Mauritius, mentioned that he has studied the culture of various countries in order to know what to expect from people when he visits a certain country. The question about small talk caused the biggest differences in service expectations. While Protestant Europeans do not expect any small talk, the ones from South Asia feel much more comfortable, when receptionists

use small talk as an icebreaker instead of going right away to the facts. Naturally, they also mentioned that if they are in a hurry, small talk is not necessary.

As the Expectations theory suggests, and the results of the survey confirms, people's behavior is affected by the expectations of other people's behavior. Since receptionists work in a customer service business, they are expected to be friendly and helpful. Therefore the customers usually see them that way as well, and perhaps that is what makes the receptionists easy to approach.

9.2 How to develop the service?

Based on the information gathered during the research, there are a few things that people working in a reception should take into consideration. These matters do not cause any massive changes in general, but are a great way to add value to the service in a hotel.

First of all the receptionist should always be friendly and helpful. Whenever there is a problem, the one solving it should show to the customer that he or she is fully committed to help. Using "I" instead of "we" often means more to the customer and assures them that there is that one specific person taking care of them. Most customers usually see themselves as rather informal people, so there is no need for the service person to feel pressure about getting everything right at once; many things can almost always be laughed off. It is not necessary to be able to speak every language and know all different cultural traits there is. As long as the receptionist is aware that there are different customs and respects them, there should not appear any major difficulties. Even though a Finnish receptionist may not be used to engage in small talk, and they might not even need to use it with all the customers who come from the same cultural area, they should know that many international customers do appreciate it. If you work in a customer service business, it would be good to come up with a couple of discussion topics, so you will not be left speechless with such customers who value small talk.

However, every customer is an individual and they should be treated as such. Even if it is customary for business people to act in one way and leisure tourists to

act in another way, every customer require their own singular type of service. By being perceptive the receptionist usually notices what kind of service each customer wants and needs. If the customer does not seem to be in a hurry, the receptionist could start with small talk, then again if the customer arrives in the middle of the night and only wants to go to sleep, it is better to keep the check-in situation short and simple. In other words, by being aware, open and paying attention to the customer and the situation, a receptionist can create a great service experience to a customer.

9.3 Validity and Reliability

Validity means the correctness of the research. In order for a research to be valid it needs to have enough material, in this case enough responses. There has to be clear explanation for why certain responses are accepted and others are not. Also the references that are used in the study must be clearly stated. The reliability of the research, then again, could be increased by including the responses to the research. This way the readers can see themselves what kind of answers there has been and why certain conclusions has been made. (Silverman 2000: 185-186, 188)

Due to only a few respondents (four from Protestant European area and five from South Asian area) the results suffer from lack of validity. However, the similarity of the answers of these respondents does increase the reliability. The references are also clearly stated and easily accessible, which increases validity as well. Since there were only a few respondents, two travel blogs are used to back up the results. The blogs were reviewed through the questions in the questionnaire (Appendix 1), and based on the responses already acquired. This was done in order to increase reliability, since the original response papers are not included to this thesis.

9.4 Suggestions for Further Research

This study was quite small scale and therefore it leaves many possibilities for further research. What can be concluded in this research is that the cultural background of a tourist does have effect on their service expectations to some extent.

Based on that information, further researches could be done for example through: including different cultures, defining which areas of the culture create most misinterpretations, including the language aspect, using quantitative method, or turning the idea the other way around by observing the host culture and how they behave when they meet tourists from another culture.

By including several cultural areas into a research, one could get more broad knowledge about cultural backgrounds and their effects. By using quantitative methods, one could chart the specific areas that have the biggest effect on service expectations, or expectations in general. That way the customer service could be improved, especially in hotel receptions.

If, however, the idea would be turned completely upside down, one could observe the local people and their reaction towards foreign tourists. As question 11 in the questionnaire (Appendix 1) shows, the local people affect on the tourists' experience as well. Most of the respondents in this research wrote that the local people play bigger role in the successfulness of their visit in a destination than the hotel staff. As one Swedish man put it "The people I meet on the streets probably have a bigger influence on my thoughts. But bad treating people on the hotel would make me stay at another hotel next time". Basically this means, that the behavior of local people is more important than the hotel staff's, since hotels are disposable. Therefore, studying the locals might create an interesting point of view.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The Questionnaire

The Questionnaire

Background info:

-Male/Female?

-Where are You from?

-Business or leisure?

-Were Your parents from the same culture? Have you been brought up in one culture or bilingual culture?

1. How much do you travel abroad? Do You think You travel a lot abroad?
 - a. What countries do You usually travel into? What kind of countries would You like to travel into?
 - b. Can You effect to the destination choice? (Somebody else determines the destination i.e. boss/other people travelling along)
2. What kind of service have You gotten in Finland? Have Your experiences been positive or negative and why?
3. How was the receptionist's behavior?
 - a. Too friendly/Distant?
4. In some cultures people have very distinct habits (Gesturing/physical distance/expressions). Do You think that the receptionist should downplay this kind of cultural traits because they're working in an environment, where other people do not necessarily understand them? Why?
5. Does the receptionist's gender affect Your behavior? How?
6. If the receptionist says "we'll take care of it" or "I'll take care of it" is there a difference to You? (More personal service?)
7. How do You feel about small talk? Would You prefer small talk before addressing the actual matter? Then again, in a reception one should use

quite simple language. If You want to be sure that You will be understood in the reception, is there room for small talk?

8. Some people appreciate openness and informality; others then again are more formal and not so straight forward. What kind of behavior do you have and why?
9. In some countries it is important to know the other people's status (manager/low level employee) before addressing them. Would you want to know the persons status you're talking to? Is it important to You and why?
10. If a person You meet is from a different culture, how does it affect Your behavior? Are there some matters that might affect to Your willingness to learn about new cultures?
11. Which one has bigger effect on Your visit:

The people working in the hotel/restaurant that You visit, or the local people You see on the street minding their own business? (If You are treated well in the hotel but the locals are rude or if the locals treat You well but the hotel staff is rude.) How do You form Your own perception of the destination?