

# IMPROVING LAPLAND'S CUSTOMER SERVICE FOR FRENCH VISITORS

Creating cross-cultural training material for Ylläs region

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Bachelor's Thesis  
Degree Programme in Tourism  
Bachelor of Hospitality Management

2022

Restonomikoulutus  
Restonomi (AMK)

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<b>Ohjaaja</b>	Sisko Häikiö		
<b>Toimeksiantaja</b>	Visit Ylläs		
<b>Työn nimi</b>	Ranskalaisten asiakkaiden asiakaspalvelun kehittäminen Lapissa: kulttuurienvälisen perehdytysmateriaalin luominen Ylläksen alueelle		
<b>Sivu- ja liitesivumäärä</b>	41 + 6		

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Opinnäytetyön aiheena oli Ylläksen alueen ranskalaisten asiakkaiden asiakaspalvelun kehittäminen. Toimeksiantajana oli Visit Ylläs, joka hoitaa Ylläksen alueen markkinointia. Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli kehittää Ylläksen alueen ranskalaisten asiakkaiden asiakaspalvelua hotellien vastaanotossa. Opinnäytetyön tehtävänä oli luoda kulttuurienvälistä perehdytysmateriaalia, jonka avulla hotellien vastaanottovirkailijat oppivat ymmärtämään ranskalaista kulttuuria ja toimimaan tehokkaammin ranskalaisten asiakkaiden kanssa.

Opinnäytetyön tietoperustan muodostivat asiakaspalvelun määrittelemineen, erityisesti hoteleiden vastaanottovirkailijoille. Henkilöstön perehdyttämisen hyödyn osoittamisen jälkeen määriteltiin kulttuurin konsepti Hofsteden ja Lewisin teorioiden avulla. Aihetta syvennettiin kertomalla kulttuurienvälisestä perehdytyksestä, sen historiasta, määritelmästä ja mahdollisista esteistä. Opinnäytetyö oli luonteeltaan kehittävä. Opinnäytetyön toteutus oli menetelmältään haastattelut, autoetnografia ja kysely. Aineistoa kerättiin kysymällä toivomuksia perehdytysmateriaalin sisällöstä Ylläksen päävastaanotonpäälliköiltä ja tutkijan henkilökohtaisesta näkökulmasta saadun kokemuksen kautta. Kolmas näkökulma saatiin mahdollisilta ranskalaisilta asiakkailta verkkokyselyn avulla.

Opinnäytetyön tuotoksena laadittiin kulttuurienvälistä perehdytysmateriaalia. Haastattelu-, autoetnografia- ja kysely- menetelmien kautta saatiin tiedot perehdytysmateriaalin luomista varten. Toimeksiantajan avulla materiaali muodostettiin ja laitettiin verkkoon.

Työn prosessin aikana on huomattu, että tällä hetkellä Ylläksen alueella ei ole kulttuurienvälistä henkilökunnan perehdytystä. Opinnäytetyön tuloksista ja tuotoksista voivat hyötyä Ylläkseen tulevat vastaanottovirkailijat. Lisäksi perehdytysmateriaalin mallia voidaan käyttää apuna tehtäessä lisää kulttuurienvälistä perehdytysmateriaalia toisista kulttuureista.

<b>Avainsanat</b>	perehdytysmateriaali, henkilöstöperehdytys, kulttuurienvälinen viestintä, kulttuurienvälinen perehdytys, Ylläs
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Degree Programme in Tourism  
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<b>Title of Thesis</b>	Improving Lapland's customer service for French visitors: Creating cross-cultural training material for Ylläs region		
<b>Number of pages</b>	41 + 6		

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The subject of the thesis was about improving the customer service for French customers in the Ylläs region. The commissioner was Visit Ylläs, which oversees the marketing of Ylläs region, the fell region of Western Lapland. The goal of the thesis was to improve the customer service of French customers of Ylläs, at the hotel reception level. Its task was to create a cross-cultural training material designed to help the hotel receptionists to know a little better their French customers' culture and learn how to deal with them more efficiently.

The theory base of the thesis first consists of defining the customer service, especially for hotel receptionists. After showing the usefulness of staff training, the concept of culture is defined, using Hofstede and Lewis theories. The report then discusses cross-cultural communication and cross-cultural training, with its history, definition, and potential obstacles. This thesis is development oriented. It is achieved by means of interviews, autoethnography and a survey. The interviews of Ylläs' main reception managers gather their wishes for the training material, and the author's own perspective through experience adds another standpoint. A third point of view is given through an online survey by potential French tourists.

From the three different points of view, the interviews, the autoethnography and the survey, were gathered the information required to make the cross-cultural training material. With the help of the commissioner, the material was then put into shape and made available to all on their website. During the process it was noticed that cross-cultural training was almost non-existent in Ylläs. Therefore, this research product could be useful to future hotel receptionists of the region. In addition, this model can be used to create more cross-cultural training material concerning other cultures.

**Key words** training material, staff training, cross-cultural communication, cross-cultural training, Ylläs

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable that the world of tourism is changing. The ever-growing globalisation brings people from different cultures closer in the business world, but also in the leisure world. The employees in the hospitality sector need to be properly internationally trained in order to be able to respond to the demands of their ever-growing international clientele. While cross-cultural trainings are used worldwide, it is rarely found in Lapland. From personal experience, it is not yet found at all in the region of Ylläs, an international touristic ski-resort in Western Lapland.

Hotels receptionists have a key role in the customer service cycle. They usually are the first and the last person that a tourist sees and interacts with. It is a receptionists' responsibility to listen, fulfil and anticipate the customers' requests. To be able to do so, they need to be familiar with their customers' culture. Culture is a vast concept. In this research, the focus is on Hofstede's definition of culture and his theory of the six dimensions of culture (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010, 53–298). As for cross-cultural communication, the attention is on Lewis' theory and his model composed of linear-active, multi-active and reactive cultures (2018, 24–31). As this thesis is introducing the concept of cross-cultural material to the region, problems linked to the acceptance of such training is explored through Bennett's scale (2017, 1–8).

The goal of this thesis is to help the hotel receptionists of Ylläs to improve their cross-cultural knowledge and from it, enable them to better serve their customers. This thesis only concerns the French culture and the French customer for two reasons. Being a French person myself, I partially use my own knowledge in this research. The second reason is that the scope of this thesis cannot regroup many cultures as it would be too wide of a subject.

The task of this thesis is to make a training material for the Ylläs region hotel receptionists about main French cultural traits and tips on how to better serve French customers. This material was produced with the help of the commissioner, Visit Ylläs, who is responsible for the layout and for making it available through its website.

The content of the training material is elaborated by compiling the wishes of Ylläs' main hotels' reception managers, wishes gathered through interviews. Through autoethnography, as a French hotel receptionist working in Ylläs, I also give my input on the content of the material. In addition, some information from a group of potential clients helps give a third point of view as to the relevance of the content for such material.

## 2 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Visit Ylläs as Commissioner

The commissioner for my thesis is Visit Ylläs. Finland's favourite National Park is Pallas-Yllästunturi with 700 000 visitors in 2021. Ylläs has the largest network of ski trails in Finland, with 330 km of trails. It also has the country's largest winter cycling trails network and about 600 rental bikes. As shown in Figure 1, the area of Ylläs regroups seven fells, Yllästunturi (719 m), Lainiotunturi (613 m), Aakenustunturi (565 m), Kesänkitunturi (535 m), Pyhätunturi (490 m), Kukastunturi (477 m) and Kuertunturi (446 m). Ylläs is also a ski resort as the highest fell, Yllästunturi, has two ski stations, on each side of the fell. Ylläs has about 10 hotels and a very large network of cabins. During the summer, about 90% of the cabins are rented out. During the year, unfortunately only 17% of the overnight stays are registered but most of Ylläs' foreign visitors are from Great Britain, France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Germany. Before the covid pandemic, about half of Ylläs visitors were foreigners. From 2021, Ylläs is seeking to be a year-round destination, investing in their cycling network. A gondola lift to the top of Yllästunturi fell is the starting point of the extensive Ylläs Bike Park. (Visit Ylläs 2022a; Ylläs alue esittely 2022.)

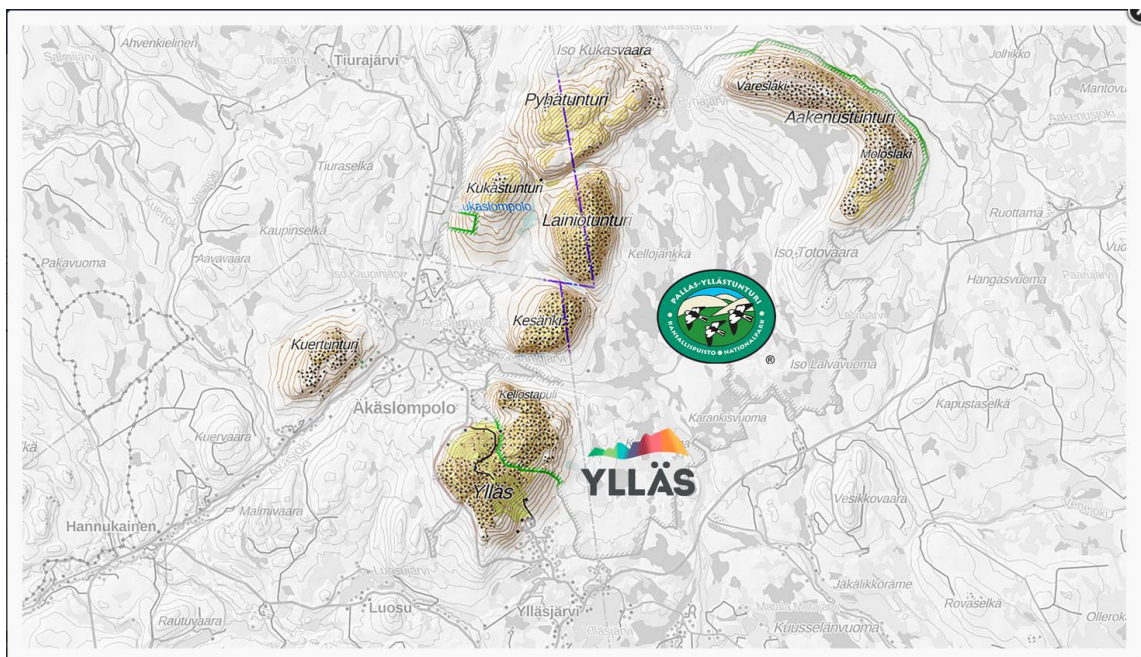


Figure 1. The Ylläs region (Visit Ylläs 2022b)

Visit Ylläs has a budget of about 500 000 € and works with 85 of the 130 companies working in Ylläs (Ylläs alue esittely 2022). My liaison to Visit Ylläs was Kati Vehmas, Visit Ylläs' chief executive officer. She has approved the idea for my thesis from the start and has kindly given me a free hand to execute it. The team of Visit Ylläs has then worked on the design of the final product.

## 2.2 Post-pandemic state of the international customer service in Lapland

According to Hood (2021), the covid-19 pandemic has changed the way people think of holidays. While before, people focused on where to go and what to do, post-pandemic leisure seekers are more attentive to having their personal needs met. "They will have much higher expectations of hospitality service providers and be much more demanding."

Before the pandemic, the overnight stays were higher for international than for domestic visitors (House of Lapland 2021) and should return to this level as of 2023 (Varanka et al. 2021). In their article in the Lapland UAS Journal, Häikiö, Prévost & Rödel (2021) focused on the customer service of international customers, emphasizing the cross-cultural dimension of the service. In order to better address the needs of the more demanding post-covid clientele, an effort should be made on offering cross-cultural training to the staff, in an attempt to provide a better service to the international clients. The article focused on the fact that an efficient and cost-efficient way to do so would be to use the vast knowledge that international students in tourism already have. In their studies, Taylor & McArthur (2006, 12) have found that hospitality management students, in addition to enjoying meeting people from diverse cultures, also understand the meaning and the importance of developing more intercultural competency for their future careers.

## 2.3 Creation of a product as the task of the research

In her thesis (2021), Rödel, a German born student of Lapland UAS, created a new product idea to help a Lappish tourism company attract and better serve Arabic customers. In her work, she offered a detailed material regarding the cross-cultural differences between the Arabic and the Finnish cultures.



In my work, as a French born Lapland UAS student, my objective is to create a product, a basic but efficient training material, which would help my commissioner, Visit Ylläs, and the local hotels, to better serve French customers. As I have worked for several years in the Ylläs region, I have noticed that this kind of material is missing and would be quite useful as all foreigners are treated the same way. In that effect, through my own knowledge from my studies, my observations as a hotel receptionist in Lapland, and the interviews' results of Ylläs' main hotels reception managers, I aim to produce a compact and efficient training material introducing the main French cultural traits in order to help the future hotel receptionists of Ylläs to avoid misunderstandings and better serve their French customers. I decided to seek a commissioner who could reach all the hotels, and potentially all the service producers of the region rather than one specific company. In joining in my work, Visit Ylläs has a chance to enhance the customer service of the region in a way that they may not be familiar with. It also opens the door to them to develop further the product if they choose to.

### 3 CROSS-CULTURAL CUSTOMER SERVICE

#### 3.1 Defining customer service

The customer service is the link between the company and the customer. This is the touchpoint where the customers express their needs, and the company has the opportunity to satisfy them in different ways. (Karjula 2018.)

The service moment starts from the first glance that the customers take on the staff. From their appearances, the customers already form a first impression and evaluate what kind of service they are going to receive. The workers must be well prepared in advance to answer any questions and solve any problems. This is where the staff training is crucial. The workers' demeanour, their listening skills, their abilities to understand the customers' needs and to know how to serve them the best way possible, have a direct effect on the customers' satisfaction level. Only a satisfied customer will use the company's products again. Nowadays, companies cannot afford to neglect the importance of feedback. Whether it is a filled-out paper at the reception desk, or a digital form sent through e-mail after the visit, feedbacks are a great tool for companies to improve their customer service. (Aalto 2016, 5–12.) It is also important to follow what is said about the company on social media as many future customers rely on these reviews to make important decisions.

In the accommodation business, the customer service starts well before the first physical encounter, when the customers make their first inquiries or booking. The receptionist must anticipate the customers' needs and expectations before their arrival, to ensure that, as they step inside the hotel, move towards the reception, and exchange their first words, the customers will already get a positive opinion about the company and the service it provides. During their stay, the receptionist works as a liaison between the customers and the different sections of the hotel. The receptionist must also work as an information centre knowing everything about the area, its services or anything the customers may ask. In addition, the receptionist works as an accountant, billing and taking payments from the customers, and dealing with all the problems that can be linked to it. (Alakoski, Hörkkö & Lappalainen 1998, 10, 64–69, 102–104.)

### 3.2 Need for staff training

Koc (2021, 175) said it very clearly: “Culture eats strategy for breakfast”. Nowadays, it is impossible to ignore the importance of culture in the business and management worlds. Trying to do so would only result in high inefficiency and ineffectiveness for the company. The competitive edge of a company resides in its human element. The human resource has the most impact and responsibility to the success of a company, through its effectiveness and efficiency. This is exceptionally true for the tourism and hospitality businesses. Tourism regroups the accommodation, the transport and the entertainment sectors. Accommodation (or hospitality) regroups the food, drink, and the accommodation sectors; all of these emphasising on service. (Roque & Ramos 2019, 58–59.) Both tourism and hospitality are increasingly international sectors, which include intense and frequent social contacts between the customers and the services providers. When happening, those contact failures result in misunderstandings or conflicts, which makes the customers’ experience unsatisfactory. While 14% of customers do not renew the use of the company’s service because of dissatisfaction with their products, 67% of them interrupt the use of the service because of dissatisfaction with the service provider. (Koc 2021, 175–176.)

To increase the workers knowledge and skills, the company should offer them proper training (Kealey & Protheroe 1996, 145). The culture of the customers always influences the way they interact with the service provider and what they expect of them. Workers need to know about those different ways and expectations to be able to properly serve the customers. (Roque & Ramos 2019, 59). Much research has proven that workers having gone through a cross-cultural training provided better service to their international customers (Koc 2021, 177; Sizoo, Serrie, Shapero 2010, 1, 11). It has a long-term benefit to the company as it generates more satisfied customers, more renewed businesses, a better word of mouth, and more satisfied employees (Sizoo, Serrie & Shapero 2010, 11). This thesis refers to this kind of international training as cross-cultural training, or CCT.

### 3.3 The concept of culture according to Hofstede

When trying to define culture, Hofstede's name comes frequently. Hofstede (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010) has developed a framework made of six different dimensions to describe a culture. A culture can be ranked from every dimension, making it simple to compare different cultures.

The first dimension is Power Distance. This takes into account how much the culture accepts a social distance between people having power and those who do not. Cultures having a high Power Distance index will embrace hierarchy, respect authority, have centralized organizations and have complex hierarchies. On the other hand, cultures more egalitarian will have supervisors and employees seem almost as equals, will involve more people in decisions makings, will be keen on delegating and score lower points on the Power Distance Index. (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010, 53–88.)

The second dimension is Individualism versus Collectivism. This refers to the closeness of the people within their community. Individualistic communities have a higher score, reducing their community to a small core family. They enjoy individual rewards and respect each other's privacy. On the other side of the index, collectivist communities are loyal and responsible for one another within their group and emphasis on maintaining harmony within the group. (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010, 89–134.)

The third dimension is Masculinity versus Femininity. Masculine cultures are high on the index, according attention to strong egos, status, money and achievements. The lower ranking feminine cultures emphasis modesty and prioritise relationships and cooperation. They are more flexible and eager to negotiate. (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010, 135–185.)

The fourth dimension is Uncertainty Avoidance. Cultures prone to anxiety and stress are high ranking. They fear failure, are conservative and rigidly structured. People are allowed to show anger and other feelings. Their counterparts are more openminded, open to innovation and are generally more relax. Respect is given depending on what you do, not on your title. (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010, 187–234.)

The fifth dimension is Long versus Short Term Orientation. Cultures with a long-term orientation are often quite pragmatic and modest, and they score high on the index. They like to know what things are, how they happen to be and see education as a positive value. Low-term orientation cultures prefer to know the “why” of things. They easily criticize and emphasis values and rights. (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010, 235–276.)

The last dimension is Indulgence versus Restraint. Highly ranked indulgent cultures encourage free gratification, let people express their emotions and enjoy themselves. On the other hand, restraint cultures regulate more intensely people’s behaviours and have strict social norms. (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010, 277–298.)

With the help of these six dimensions, it is easy to compare different cultures. In Figure 2, the comparisons concern the cross-cultural differences between Finland and France.

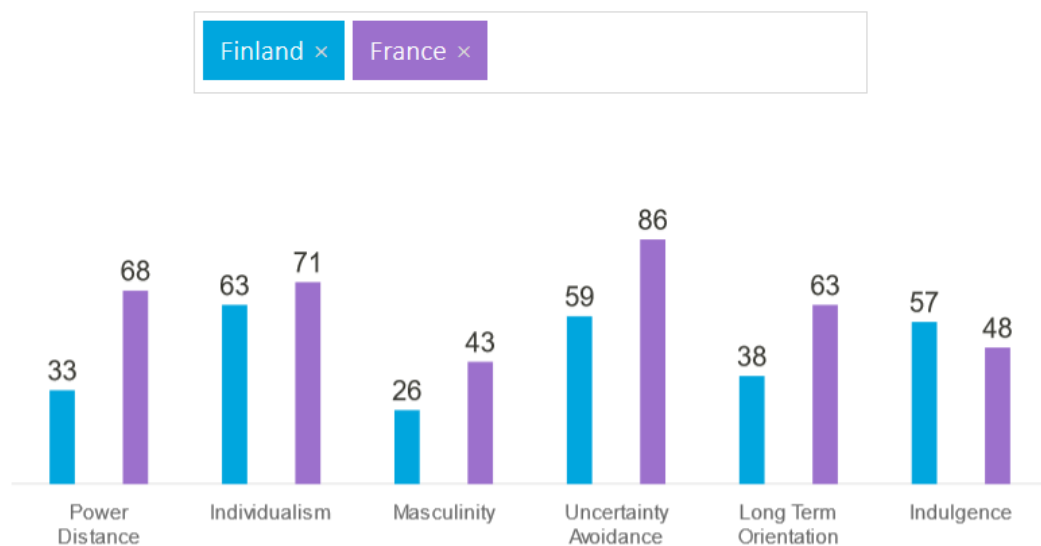


Figure 2. Hofstede’s Country Comparison tool (Hofstede Insights 2022)

### 3.4 Cross-cultural communication and the Lewis Model

Culture and communication are intertwined. In tourism, it is the workers’ responsibility to make sure that the information given is understood. (Albu 2015, 11–12.) The way we think can be seen in the way we speak. This is why when

one learns a language, one also learns about the culture. For example, jokes often cannot be translated because they do not make any sense without the cultural background. (Lewis 2018, 7–14.) In hospitality, knowing a foreign language is essential to be able to properly communicate. When you know the language of your customers, you are able to be polite in the way they expect you to be. You can communicate verbally and non-verbally with them and you are more inclined to engage a conversation. (Kotsaga 2015, 217–218.)

In Lapland, all hospitality workers are required to speak English. It is used as a common language with the customers, regardless of their culture and native language. It is understandable that it would be quite impossible to find hospitality workers speaking four or more different languages. But as language and culture are inseparable, another solution would be to give cross-cultural training (CCT), to the employees, mostly targeting the cultures of the hotels' main customers' cultures.

In addition to Hofstede, another widely recognised theoretician in cultural studies is Lewis (2018) and his model. He regroups the different cultures into three groups: Linear-active, multi-active and reactive.

The linear-active cultures like to do one thing at the time. They schedule everything, are punctual and polite, but direct. They choose truth and logic over diplomacy and conceal their feelings. (Lewis 2018, 24.)

Multi-active cultures like to do many things at the same time. They are flexible with timetables as when they start doing something, they want to do it to the end, regardless of the time spent. They are talkative, show their emotions and prioritise them. Their notion of truth can be blurry, and they value their family, relationships, and hierarchy. (Lewis 2018, 25–26.)

Reactive cultures do not initiate actions. They first listen without interrupting, then think, and finally reply as it is a sign of respect to them. They are not assertive and rather ask again if they are not sure than be blunt or create misunderstandings. To them, silence is part of the discussion, and their body language is too subtle for most to notice. (Lewis 2018, 26–31.)

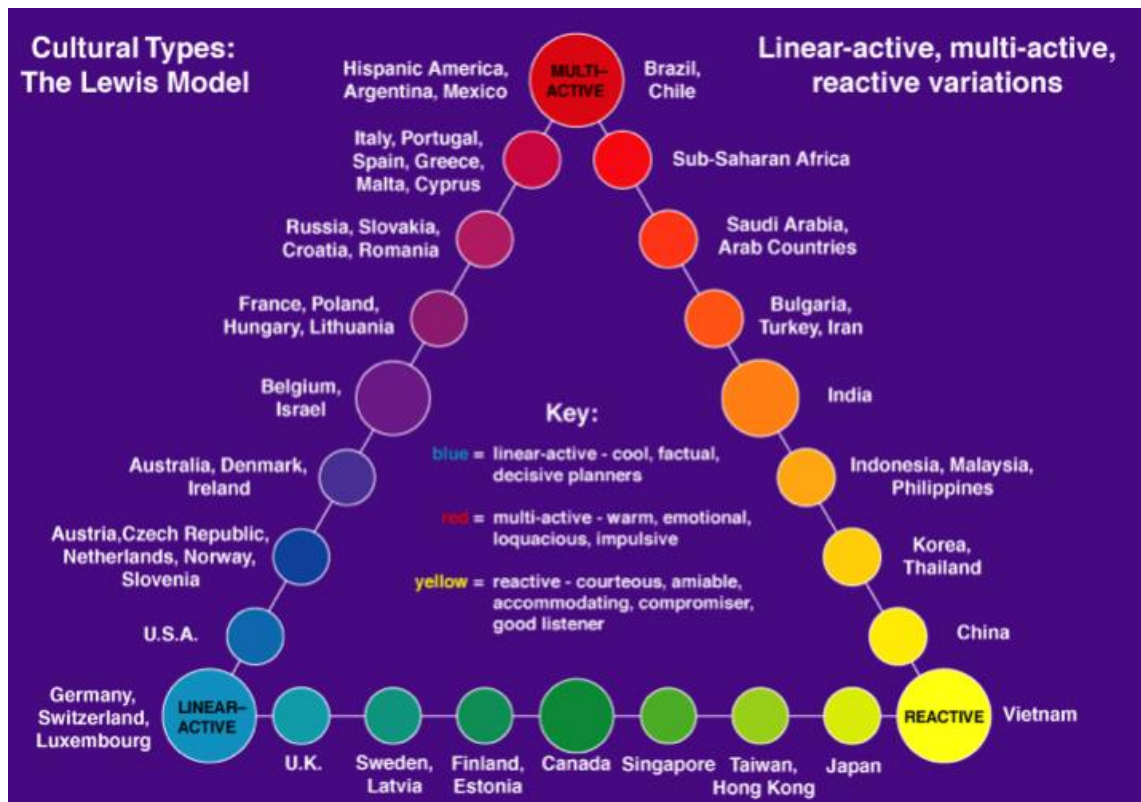


Figure 3. The Lewis Model (cuco\_admin)

As seen in Figure 3, Finns and French are quite different. The French are multi-active, leaning towards linear-active. While Finns are linear active, leaning towards reactive, they are often compared to Asian cultures for this tendency. While both cultures are European, there are some differences that will interfere in the quality of the service given from one culture to the other.

## 4 CROSS-CULTURAL TRAINING

### 4.1 History of cross-cultural training

The first notion of offering some sort of cultural training dates from the 1960s and the 1970s. The idea was that the trainees should first learn to know themselves before being able to accept another culture. This notion has been abandoned as it is quite intrusive to the trainees. (Kealey & Protheroe 1996, 146–147.)

In 1981, Tung described four types of trainings: “educational, cultural, language sensitivity training and field experience”. In the 1990, more cultural trainings research was conducted, but they mostly concern the cultural assimilation of expatriates going to work abroad and describing pre-departure and post-arrival trainings. (Kotsaga 2015, 213–214.)

In 1996, Kealey & Protheroe (146–147) proposed a training divided into two parts to improve the professional and personal intercultural competence. The first part consists of an information-giving training, such as living conditions, knowledge about the area, political, economic, and cultural status. This part of the training is cognitive, given through reading material and seminars. The second part of the training aims at developing cultural awareness. It is as much cognitive as behavioural. It is given using simulation games, role playing, skills practices, video playbacks and language learning. In the same year, Gugykunst et al. (1996, as cited in Kotsaga 2015, 215) also suggested a similar cultural training divided into two parts, first the didactic training (as a lecture or a discussion), then an experimental training (in the field).

In 2004, Harris (558–559) established a list of 10 characteristics used to analyse a culture: sense of self and space, communication and language, dress and appearance, food and feeding habits, time and time consciousness, relationships, values and norms, beliefs and attitudes, mental processes and learning and work habits and practices. His list has been widely used since then in other research in order to analyse, describe and compare cultures. I briefly describe these 10 categories in table 2 as they might show in a customer service setting.



Table 1. Harris' 10 characteristics of culture (2004, 557–559)

1	sense of self & space	closeness, intimacy, personal space
2	communication & language	verbally, non-verbally, body language, gestures
3	dress & appearance	dress code depending on events
4	food & feeding habits	what is appropriate food, how it should be presented, how to eat (utensils)
5	time & time consciousness	is time exact or relative, planning things in advance or spontaneous
6	relationships	between themselves and between themselves and the staff, use of title, French "tu" vs "vous"
7	values & norms	respect of the law, honesty, gift-giving, respect of privacy
8	beliefs & attitudes	religious practices, attitudes toward life, death, and the afterlife
9	mental process & learning	blind obedience, logic, abstract thinking
10	work habits & practices	work individually or in teamwork, career status, recognition

#### 4.2 cross-cultural training

People are sociocultural beings, and they are capable of developing skills and being taught. The enculturation of persons regroups the learning of a culture, their own, and is done naturally. On the other hand, Acculturation is a group of changes that have to be made when learning a new culture, requiring people to do familiar things in another way. (Albu 2015, 9–10.)

A training is an effort planned by the company so that the workers can learn the skills they need to do their job properly. Having skilled employees in today's economy gives a strong competitive edge to the company. There are two kinds of skills: hard skills and soft skills. Hard skills regroup technical competencies and knowledge about the work. Soft skills are behavioural competencies. They involve communication, problem solving, decision making, teamwork and leadership capacities. Before, the focus was on the hard skills, but nowadays, people are understanding the importance of soft skills, mostly in the service industry. In the hospitality sector, a person with poor soft skills or people skills cannot hold a job. (Roque & Ramos 2019, 60.)

There are several types of training. A training only using technologies and having no interaction between the learners and the instructors is the less effective one. Unfortunately, it is also the cheapest and easiest to organise and this is the reason why it is still in use. Classroom trainings are interactive to a certain point. On-the-job trainings are the most common in hospitality. The presence of an instructor during your training, who watches the learner, and after the action comments on it is also a very effective training method. It is also possible to train by observation, the learner shadowing a competent worker, but this limits the practising side of the training. (Roque & Ramos 2019, 61–62.)

Intercultural sensibility (or IS) is the ability to recognise and interact with persons of different cultures, to see things from different points of view. Two notions are included in IS, intercultural awareness (IA) and intercultural competence (IC). Having intercultural awareness means that you are aware that people can have different cultures, different points of view. You are respectful of these differences. Having intercultural competence goes a step forward and means that you are able to interact efficiently with people of different cultures. Having IS is the basis for having IA and IC. IS can be learned, measured, and developed. In the hospitality business, those skills are essentials. Companies should focus on recruiting employees having those skills and training their already working employees to develop those skills. Interculturally sensible hospitality workers are more attentive to their customers' needs and give them better service. (Koc 2021, 176.)

#### 4.3 Obstacle to training

The success of a training can also depend on the individual's level of IS. Bennett (2017, 1–8) has created a Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (or DMIS). The model's purpose is first to determine an individual or a corporation's position regarding intercultural communication, then to see what is the next step to take in the cross-cultural training (CCT) as movement is allowed through the DMIS. Matters that are familiar are internalized as the norm. The DMIS helps define on what level an individual or a corporate is able to experience "otherness".

As shown in Figure 4, the model has six stages, divided into two groups, the ethnocentric and the ethnorelative stages. With the help of CCT, people can move forward onto the next stage. (Bennett 2017, 1–8.)

The ethnocentric stages are Denial, Defence and Minimization. Denial is pure denial of cultural differences. They simply do not exist or are not relevant. The only reality is their own culture. Others are not encountered as real and are dismissed. This way of viewing cultures offers a great stability to the viewer. The second stage is Defence. The world is composed of us as superiors, and them as inferiors. The view of others is always critical and full of stereotypes. The third ethnocentric stage is Minimization. Only similarities between cultures are taken into account. The differences are minimized. What applies to their own culture, like experiences, values, beliefs, also applies to other cultures. If forced to confront other cultures' differences, the individuals might regress to the Defence stage. (Bennett 2017, 3–4.)

The ethnorelative stages are Acceptance, Adaptation and Integration. In the Acceptance stage, individuals are conscious of other cultures and are curious about them. But they have quite restricted knowledge of the intercultural differences and are easily critical of them. The Adaptation stage includes empathy toward different cultures. Individuals are able to experience situations from another culture's point of view. In the final stage, Integration, the individuals are able to move from one culture to another in communicative situations. Their knowledge, acceptance and adaptation of other cultures help them to fluently transfer from one culture to another. (Bennett 2017, 4–5.)

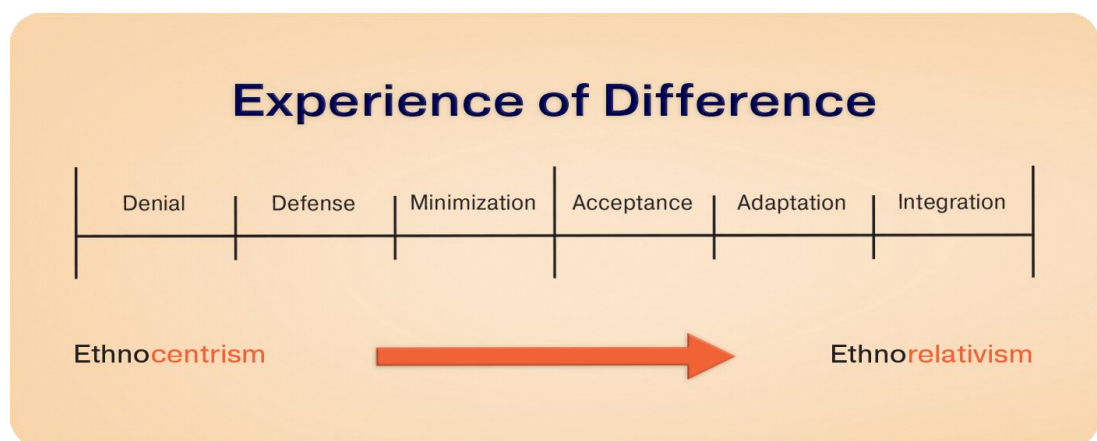


Figure 4. The DMIS Model (Bennett 2014)

## 5 USE OF MIXED METHODOLOGIES TO GAIN MORE DATA

### 5.1 Defining mixed methodology

Different debates on quantitative and qualitative methods have been going on for a long time. While qualitative methods, such as focus groups or interviews, are said to bring deep and rich data, they are also easily subjective and have a narrow scope. On the other hand, quantitative methods, such as general surveys or more precise questionnaires, give generalisable data, but it is often seen as superficial, only numeric, without taking into account the human factor. (Durbarry 2018, 115.)

Nowadays a new methodology is accepted, mixing qualitative and quantitative methods together. This way, the researcher can use the best aspect of both methods, focusing on the problem solving and the pragmatism of the research. (Durbarry 2018, 115–116.)

### 5.2 Mixed method 1: questionnaire & brainwriting

It was initially planned to collect data from Ylläs' hotels' receptionists. Through an online questionnaire, general data would be gathered about their backgrounds and make the subjects aware of the question risen in the research. They would then be gathered in focus groups and through brainwriting, their wishes would have been collected for the research product, a material aimed to help them know better their French customers' culture.

A questionnaire is simply a list of open or closed questions in order to obtain precise answers. The key is in the design of the questionnaire. The researcher must first find out what are the objectives and the hypotheses of the research and define the valuables that will allow to confirm or dispute these hypotheses. At the beginning, it is recommended to introduce the subject of the research and explain the need for the subjects' participation. The questionnaire must have a flowing structure, addressing three main concepts: Who? (name, age, sex...) What? (concerning the main point of the study) and Why? (the most important part, giving explications of behaviours, opinions or attitudes). It is also important to use the right language, not too formal nor too specific. Nowadays most electronic

questionnaires like Google Forms or SurveyMonkey, include an analysis of the results, making them easier to interpret. (Durberry 2018, 99–111.)

Unfortunately, I was not able to obtain answers from Ylläs' receptionists to my questionnaire. I used one with a Facebook group of French potential tourists in Lapland. This questionnaire is described in more details in chapter 6.3.

The brainstorming method is well known and widely used. It consists of verbally sharing ideas in groups. The main attraction to brainstorming is its fulfilment of social interactions between the members of the group. On the other hand, its main criticism is that it does not always allow for equal share of ideas. People who do not think that their idea is good enough, or people waiting for their turn to speak will stay quiet while some others may use more than their given time to speak. It is a problem that can be fixed by using brainwriting. Everybody has the same time to write down their idea. As it is done in silence, everybody can concentrate and cannot compare their ideas with the others. Only after the writing part is done can all the ideas be subjected to feedback. (Heslin 2009, 129–135.)

The main goal was to have the participants develop ideas and see familiar things from a new point of view. There would have been at most two groups of a maximum of 10 persons, most of them being new at their job. Also knowing the Finnish tendency to remain silent and wait for their turn, I decided to use the brainwriting method as it would have given them more reflecting personal time.

Unfortunately, for reasons beyond my control, I did not get any answers to my questionnaire, and consequently could not conduct the brainwriting sessions. The goals were still the same. Since I was not able to get in touch with the hotel receptionists about their training, I decided to go directly to their trainers, the reception managers. This research was conducted during spring 2022, where sick leaves were very high, due to covid and other illnesses. These involuntary absences (theirs and mine) forced me to reschedule the interviews many times.

To compensate with the fact that I could not ask the receptionists about their cross-cultural experiences, I decided to use my own knowledge, with the autoethnographical method. I am a native French and I have been working as a hotel receptionist in Lapland for five years.

### 5.3 Mixed method 2: interviews & autoethnography

#### 5.3.1 Interviews

Using interviews is a good method when the goal is to examine deeper a subject. It helps to get a richer view on the interviewees' thoughts than through a questionnaire. However, interviews cannot be done for a large group of persons as it is very time consuming, from the preparation of the interview, the interview itself and its coding and analysis. Interviews are usually semi-structured, the interviewer having a list of questions to go through. The interviewer should be prepared beforehand by using a language and dress code that is appropriate for the interviewee. At the beginning of the interview, it is good to start with small talk, to relax the mood. The interviewer should make clear what the interview is about and how its results will be useful to the interviewee. It is also important to mention that the given answers will be confidential and ask the permission if the interview is recorded. Unlike note taking during an interview, making an audio recording not only allows the interviewer to focus on the answers during the interview, but gives an opportunity to listen to the answers repeatedly in order to better interpret them, or to transcribe them. (Smith 2017, 129–137.)

I conducted three interviews with the reception managers (or their equivalent) of three hotels in Ylläs regarding the fact that they had the most French customers. The interviewees were former colleagues or working in the same hotel where I had been (and had been told about me). I contacted them by e-mail and / or WhatsApp numerous times before the interviews so they were familiar with the research subject. We conducted the interviews at the hotels and the room was chosen by the interviewees. After a brief small talk, I informed them that the session was recorded but that only I would have access to it. I also informed them that their titles and hotels' names would figure in my work. I then asked them formally if they agreed to it. After a quick check that the audio recording (through the free online recording app [online-voice-recorder.com](https://online-voice-recorder.com)) worked, I started by asking them eight general questions about their reception workers, their trainings, and their language skills. I then explained the intent of my thesis, that is a training

material about French customer service for Visit Ylläs, and indicated that I would ask them their opinion about including 10 different kind of information in the material. The choice of these 10 categories of information is explained in the chapter related to the results, 6.1. The interviews lasted between 15 and 25 minutes.

### 5.3.2 Autoethnography

Ethnography is used when studying a group of people. It goes beyond interviews. It allows the researchers to immerse themselves in the culture. They no longer have an outsider's view on the problem, and the behaviour of the study's subjects become natural to them. Ethnography requires a lot of preparation, of time and good skills at data interpretation. It is a combination of three different methodologies: document analysis, interviews and participant observation. (Durberry 2018, 99.)

Autoethnography differs from ethnography as the interviews and participant observation are conducted by the researcher himself. The researcher is an active participant in the group of people being studied. Autoethnography differs from autobiography as the writer is a researcher, being able to analyse what is happening, the events' causes and effects. As they are part of the group, the researchers are able to experience the human effect and the feelings occurring during the experience. (Durberry 2018, 93–95.) Most autoethnographical research also include interviews of other members of the group, to give different point of views of the same phenomenon. In addition to the practical knowledge, the researchers have empirical knowledge, therefore their points of view are different and must be handled more critically. During the whole process of data collecting and analysis, the researchers must continuously move between their empirical and their theoretical knowledge of the phenomenon. (Haanpää 2017, 47–62.) In tourism, autoethnography can be used to improve customers' experiences. For example, guides of different activities, by living the experiences with the customers, can analyse them and reflect upon improving them.

In addition to being a UAS student who has been trained for several years to analyse situations and data, I am also a foreigner working with Finnish

colleagues. I am regularly confronted with cross-cultural situations and can relate to how the French customers feel in those situations. I have also been a hotel receptionist in Ylläs for three seasons and have received the same training as my Finnish colleagues. I have numerous times observed situations between my colleagues and French customers that could be seen as inadequate due to their lack of understanding of the customer's culture. This is what drove me to do this research. Not having found any existing material to help my colleagues, I decided to combine the knowledge acquired during my studies, my empirical knowledge as a receptionist and my autoethnographical knowledge to make one. For these reasons, I believe that autoethnography is an efficient method for my research.



## 6 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### 6.1 Interviews

As said in the previous chapter, the three interviewees were first asked if they agreed about the use of their answers for the research, as well as the use of their titles and places of employment. Interview A was a receptionist at Lapland Hotels Äkäshotel who was in charge of the training (there was no manager for that season), interviewee B was the front desk manager of Lapland Hotels Saaga Hotel, and interviewee C was the service manager for Safartica Ylläs, regrouping Hotel Ylläsrinne and Ylläs Lake Hotel. It is relevant to notice that interviewee B spoke French and therefore had some knowledge of the French culture. I had worked with interviewees B and C and consequently I am mentioned as a French speaking receptionist in their answers. The interviews had two set of questions; the first one helping the interviewer to get some general information. The details of those first answers can be found in table 2.

Table 2. Interviewees answers to the general questions of the interview

	interviewee A	interviewee B	interviewee C
For how many years have you had French customers at your hotel?	since 2017	since 2017	first season with big French group
What percentage of your clientele would you say your French customers represent?	in winter 20%	in January-February 50–60%	from mid-December to mid-March 50% in both hotels
For how many years have you been taking care of the reception staff training?	2 seasons	since 2008	for 2½ years
What language do your receptionists usually speak?	Finnish and English	Finnish and English	Finnish and English
Have you had many that spoke French?	1 trainee	interviewee herself and interviewer	interviewer
Have you had many that had prior experience with French customers?	1, the trainee	no	no, but wish for the future
Is it a selection criterion for you?	no	no	yes, from next winter
In your training, do you talk about customer service toward foreigners, especially French customers?	yes, practical information concerning the French groups	yes a little bit, practical information concerning the French groups	no

Through those answers, it is clear that French customers are a large part of the customers at these hotels. Even so, the second last answer shows that having a French speaking receptionist, or even a receptionist knowledgeable of the French culture does not seem to be an important factor when recruiting staff. It is important to mention that in all the hotels, the French groups were joined by a representative of the travel agency, whose task was to take care of the customers' satisfaction. Due to the lack of common language, the French customers preferred to first approach the representative than the receptionist. This explains why it seems that having a French speaking staff does not seem so important to the hotel, since most of the interaction goes through the representative.

The second set of questions concerned the possible information that would be included in the training material elaborated as the product of this research. To choose the different information, I relied of the theories of Harris and Lewis. As mentioned in chapter 4.1, Harris (2004, 557–559) suggested 10 different characteristics to analyse a culture. In his book *When cultures collide* (2018), Lewis describes over 90 countries using a set of categories. Table 3 compares Harris' characteristics with Lewis' categories.

Table 3. Harris' and Lewis' description of a culture

sense of self & space	leadership & status
communication & language	space & time
dress & appearance	communication patterns
food & feeding habits	listening habits
time & time consciousness	behaviour at meetings & negotiations
relationships	manners & taboos
values & norms	values
beliefs & attitudes	
mental process & learning	
work habits & practices	

In table 3, I have colour coded the categories that are close to each other's. In my interviews, I have decided to use Harris' list as it is more exhaustive and thus easier to describe. The interview questions can be found in appendix 1.

Table 4. Interviewees answers to the culture specific questions of the interview

	interviewee A	interviewee B	interviewee C
sense of self & space	yes	no, receptionist behind the desk	no, receptionist behind the desk
communication & language	yes, but representative takes care of the communication	yes, meaningful because no common language	yes, if it is different from Finnish way of communication
dress & appearance	no	no because casual wear at the hotel	no because casual wear at the hotel
food & feeding habits	no because no specific food for French guests	yes, to give the information to the restaurant staff	yes, very important
time & time consciousness	no, because they just follow the timetable given by their travel agency	no, because they just follow the timetable given by their travel agency	yes, because it is useful to know how they behave
relationships	yes, already use man and sir with the French guests	yes, should be aware of the culture differences	yes, so that the staff can be polite with the guests
values & norms	not really, just problem because they smoke even if it is forbidden	the interviewer skipped this question by mistake	yes, so that the staff can surprise positively the guests
beliefs & attitudes	no	why not	no, it is a private matter
mental process & learning	no	it is more of a personal matter than cultural	yes, good to know, how it affects the guests' feelings
work habits & practices	no	no, here the Finnish cultural ways are more important	yes, very interesting as it affects the guests' expectations

From the answers transcribed in table 4, we can see what the interviewed reception managers of Ylläs would like to see in the training material. They do not wish to have information about the French customers view on sense of self and space. It is true that the receptionist is typically behind a large front desk when talking to the customers. In addition, at the time this thesis is written, the world was coming out of the long covid pandemic and the use of plexiglass between the customers and the staff also added distance between them. They do not wish either to know about dress and appearance of the French culture. As the hotels in Ylläs are not especially high end, the casual wear is the norm. Customers are also often seen wearing their overalls since they spend most of

their days on safaris. As the customers follow a tight schedule given by the travel agency and that it is the representative's job that they stick to it, the majority of the managers did not seem to find use in knowing about the French sense of time. There was not much interest either about the French values, norms, beliefs, attitudes, mental process, or work habits, except from the interviewee C. Her reason is more detailed in chapter 6.3.

All the interviewees agreed that they need information about the way French customers communicate, as it is essential to their work. They also wished for more information about relationships and how to interact with the French customers, in order to be polite with them and avoid mistakes. It is interesting that they recognise that they need better tools to enhance their communication skills with their French customers, but at the same time only seek the minimal set of tools to that effect.

## 6.2 Autoethnographical data

As mentioned before, first of all, I am French, making me an expert about French culture. I have also been a hotel receptionist for five years, most of which in the Ylläs region. I have been wanted in hotels where many French customers were visiting, and my managers had seen an obvious difference of the behaviour of the customers whether they were talking to me or to one of my Finnish colleagues. It was actually quite usual to have the guests simply asked when I would be on duty and come then to ask questions to me. I have also seen how my colleagues behaved with French customers. I have noticed behaviours that were too generalised and not as efficient with French customers. This is with the help of this experience that I answered the same interview questions.

The way Finns and French communicate is very different. To French, Finns are seen as emotionless and rude as they do not talk much and do not react when listening, while French are seen as too emotional, talking too loudly, and gesturing in an almost threatening way all the time. In customer service where communication is key, those differences need to be clearly described and accepted for the communication to succeed. I agree with the reception managers that the emphasis should be made on those issues.

I do agree that the contextual dressing code for all the customers is very casual since they are on holiday, consequently there is no need to talk about their dress code. I also approve that no details about the French values, norms, beliefs, attitude and work practices need to be detailed in the training material. But I do think that the issue of their vague notion of the respect of the law, commonly leading to smoking indoor, need to be addressed. This also includes information about their mental processing and relationships. French people are naturally rebellious. It might seem childish to a law-abiding Finn who do not think that laws are meant to be interpreted or broken. To French people, a rule is always open for discussion, depending on if it suits or not their personal interests. In the hotels, it is seen as a non-respect of the hotel rules, but it is also an issue when having to solve a problem, for example a damage caused by the customer during a safari or a complaint from the customer toward the company or a member of the staff. Knowledge on their mental processing is of great use in those instances and should be included in the training material.

In addition, I believe that information about views on food and feedings, and time and time consciousness are necessary, as these views are quite different between French and Finns. Time is an exact notion to Finns, and they are rarely late, while it is a more abstract notion to French people. Adding the fact that they are on holiday but having to follow a tight schedule, ignoring the cultural difference can easily lead to problems. Even though I have lived a long time in Finland, I have to say that my view on food is still very French. It is then understanding that French customers would not either change their views on this important cultural part of the day during their holidays and it needs to be taken into account. A simple example is that the usually Finnish dinner time from 5 to 7 pm does not suit the French, who usually eat around 8 pm, and stay at the table for one or two hours.

### 6.3 Answers from an online survey and other findings

I was also eager to find out if the customers themselves think their cultural differences should be considered during their stay. Asking from the different hotels' customers what quite impractical at the time. Through a questionnaire posted in the French Facebook group "Voyager en Laponie" (travelling to

Lapland) of over 12 000 members, I decided to ask this targeted group about some aspects of their travels. The members of this group are French people having travelled, travelling, or planning to travel to Lapland, therefore they are past or potential customers to Lappish hotels. Being a French speaking group, the questionnaire was in French. The questionnaire was put online from the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2022 for a period of two weeks. 44 persons answered it. The questions and the detailed answers of the questionnaire relating to this thesis can be found in appendix 2.

When asked if they would like to have someone (for example the travel agency representative, a guide, or a receptionist) speaking French onsite, 77% answered yes, and 84% would like to specifically have the receptionist speaking French. 64% would like the receptionist to take into account the fact that they are French. The following open question asked to explain in more details their answers. The recurring answer is the customer inability to speak English, some pointing out that they could manage in English if the receptionist spoke more slowly. In an additional open question, the theme of the communication barrier recurred. Some also commented that even if they could communicate in English, they stripped their communication to a bare minimum. But when facing a French speaking receptionist, they engaged conversations more frequently and on more diverse subjects.

Interviewee C had such an experience. During the high season, she was short on reception staff and asked a French speaking guide, who was well familiar with the company and the hotel, to come to help at the front desk. Even if she could not do as much as a receptionist in terms on using the reservation software, her role was mainly to answer the customers questions. Interviewee C was very pleased by the customers feedbacks on how happy they were to be able to just converse in French and ask about more things.

I have myself had numerous conversations with customers that did not have anything to do with my job description. Questions about nature, Finland, reindeers, or Sami people are quite common, but harder to answer if there isn't a common language. The usefulness of such conversations is first to make the customer happy. It increases the customers' satisfaction, and they might want to

come back, and even talk about the hotel and the company to their friends and on social media. In the mentioned Facebook group about travelling to Lapland, recommendations of companies often include information about the language used by the service provider (French or English). Secondly, a receptionist job description is not only to serve the customers, but also to anticipate their demands and to sell (Aalto 2016, 5–6). For example, while talking about the Sami people living near Inari, a Lapland Hotels receptionist in Ylläs could easily hint that the company has another hotel in Saariselkä and that it would be a nice place to go when the customers come back to Lapland. In addition to satisfying their guests, through such discussions, the receptionist can find more about the customers' interests, and sell more products from their company or from their partners.



## 7 PRODUCTION OF THE CROSS-CULTURAL MATERIAL

### 7.1 Information given in the material

From the chapter 6.1, the reception managers wishes for the training material are information about communication and relationship in regard to politeness. From my autoethnological point of view, I decided to add the need for information about food and eating habits as well as time and time consciousness, respect of the law and mental processing.

“French people live in a world of their own, the center of which is France.” (Lewis 2018, 214). Having a long and richer history and culture than Finland, this is very true and noticeable when talking to them. They do not mean to be rude, but will feel superior to the Finns. It is no reason to be insulted by it, it is just the way they see the world.

When faced with a problem, a long conversation will be engaged to discuss it. They will be loud and overly gesturing as they are Latins. They think aloud, therefore the discussion will be long, exploring all the possible solutions to the problem. The interlocuter needs to do the same; staying silence will only make things worse as French will consider it as a lack of interest and a weakness. The discussion needs to be lengthy and lively. The interlocuter will need to be polite. Only a logical and well-founded solution will be accepted. (Lewis 2018, 214–219; Hammerich & Lewis 2013, 80–84.)

The body language, including facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, and loudness of the voice are an important part of the communication process for French people. The use of any or all of those communication types does not mean that the individual is angry. It is just a normal way to express feelings. On the other hand, Finns body language is very subtle, so subtle that it is invisible to French eyes. (Lewis 2018, 130–131.) Many feelings are felt when seeing a northern light for the first time or going on the husky ride. Finnish receptionists might judge the French excessive use of body language, but it is important to remember that the customers are also judging their apparent lack of it. Not responding to their display of feeling is viewed as rude.

On the scheduling scale, while Finns are on the linear-time side (emphasis on punctuality), French are halfway to the flexible-time side. Being up to 10 minutes late is still considered being on time. (Meyer 2016, 220–221, 227.) When starting something, it is more important to do it correctly than to finish it on time (Lewis 2018, 215). This added to the fact that they are on holidays, French guests are usually a bit tardy.

French and Finns see food and mealtimes quite differently. Finns spend very little time eating and dine early, while for French, eating is a pleasure to be enjoyed. Every meal, from breakfast to dinner, is lengthy, and composed of several servings (they will come back at the buffet table many times and use several plates). Dinner is late and not rushed. (Lewis 2018, 68–69.) Dinner is often preceded by an "aperitif", where French gathered around some drinks and salty treats to talk. From their long gastronomical history, they are used to have food not only taste but also look good. The right name and description in the menu are also important.

As everything is open to discussion, rules that do not seem logic to French can be easily bent. This way of thinking is amplified while on holiday since the focus should be on their satisfaction. This can result in seldom breaking of the rules, most commonly seen in indoor smoking.

## 7.2 The final form of the material

As decided on the early stage of the research with the commissioner, I am in charge of giving them the content of the training material. They then put it into shape as they see fit. The content of the material can be seen below as table 5 and the final cross-cultural training material is added as appendix 3. A Finnish version of the training material was also produced, as most receptionists are Finns. The content of the material is the researcher's property. The final product includes the researcher's name and is free of use and distribution by the commissioner. The final product can be downloaded from Visit Ylläs webpage at <https://www.yllas.fi/media/visit-yllas/yllas-ohjeita-vastaanottoon-ranskalaisten-vieraiden-kohtaaminen-2022-04.pdf>

Table 5. Content of the research product

<p><b>Cross-cultural training material for hotel receptionists:</b></p> <p><b>Some useful tips while dealing with French customers</b></p>
<p>Due to their long history and rich culture, French will always feel superior. It is not meant to be insulting, it's just their view of the world.</p>
<p>French think aloud; therefore, their discussions are always long and jump from topics to topics. You need to be engaged in the conversation and not stay quiet, as it is seen as rude.</p>
<p>For French people, using body language (facial expressions, eye contact, speaking loud, gesturing) is a normal part of any communication process and an ideal way to express feelings. The Finnish typical lack of body language is viewed as rude. Remember to smile, talk and move your hands once in a while to show that you share your customers' enthusiasm for your company's products.</p>
<p>The French English level is usually weak. Remember to speak slowly, clearly and use a simpler vocabulary. The use of gestures and drawings often help.</p>
<p>When disagreeing, French will engage in long lively discussions exploring all logical outcomes possible. Stay polite and engaged in the conversation. For important matters (such as refunds or accidents), it's good to know that hierarchy is important so it might be helpful to ask to come back a little later to discuss the situation further with your superior. The interval also gives them time to think things through.</p>
<p>Meals are important. French "live to eat". Meals are lengthy, composed of many dishes, looking and tasting good. Dinner is enjoyed. Attention should also be paid to describing the food (in menus).</p>
<p>Usually French customers are not very punctual, being 5-10 minutes late is acceptable. It is part of their cultural concept of time. Plan the schedules accordingly.</p>
<p>While it is getting rarer, it is still quite common to have smoking rooms in French hotels. It is also common to smoke inside your own house. As anything is open to discussion, some French smokers on holiday might decide to just ignore Finnish hotels' rules. Emphasizing the monetary punishment for breaking the rule from the start of the stay might help.</p>

## 8 DISCUSSION

In the post covid pandemic time, international tourists are coming back to Lapland. But having had time to reflect, they know what they want and are more demanding. The tourist industry should train their staff accordingly, to be able to serve this new clientele. Efforts can be reduced by using the onsite knowledge of foreign students such as me, being French and a hotel receptionist. The goal of this research was to help the region of Ylläs, through Visit Ylläs, to have better trained hotel receptionists in concern of their French customers. The task of this research was to produce a cross-cultural training material aiming to give important information about French customer service to Ylläs' hotels receptionists. To that effect, interviews of some of Ylläs' hotels reception managers have been done, gathering data on their wishes for the training material. This data has been combined with my personal knowledge of French culture and my personal experience of cross-cultural communication between Finns and French. The result of this research is a cross-cultural training material content that the commissioner put into shape and made available on their website.

This research has been a combination of my interest for cross-cultural communication and my concern for the place where I live and work, Ylläs. Through this study, my goal was to improve my colleagues' competency and Ylläs' future French guests' satisfaction. The planning phase of the thesis was started in the autumn 2021. But as I was also working fulltime and doing some other studies, I quickly noticed that I did not have enough time to do my thesis properly. As I decided that I wanted to do this research correctly, I then chose to postpone my work and continue in the following spring, during which I had no other studies.

Before finding appropriate methods and starting the research, it was important to acquire enough knowledge about the field of research. Through an extended study of different points of view and from different eras, I was able to find the most suitable for my needs and combine them in order to manufacture an adequate material for my survey and my final product.

As this research was done during spring 2022, obstacles presented themselves several times and skills in problem-solving were required. The original plan to get in touch with every hotel in Ylläs would have given a complete view of the situation. Unfortunately, in addition of the workforce in hotels being scarce, most of them had to take sick leaves due to covid infections, giving them very little time to contribute to my research. Even though I visited the hotels to ask the staff beforehand to participate in my research, due to the lack of time, none of them answered my questionnaire. I was quite taken to not get any answers. Still, a new strategy had to be found and I quickly decided to switch to another approach that would give me the same kind of results.

The change of research method made me realise that I had enough knowledge to make it stand on its own. Working in tourism fulltime and being a foreigner, I do believe that my view on the industry and its needs is relevant and can contribute to its improvement. The interviewees represented the two main hospitality companies working in Ylläs and for this reason, I do believe that their answers are valid and representative of the hospitality business in Ylläs. When asking for information through the interviews, anonymity was always maintained and permissions, if needed, asked beforehand. By choosing the three main hotels of the region, choice made from experience of the local hotels' clientele, the reliability of the results was maintained. While the online survey had only 44 answers from a Facebook group of 12 000 members, personal use of the group has shown that only a few regular members contributed to the group discussion, therefore making the number of participants still relevant.

Through the interviews, and this whole research, the situation on how Ylläs' hotel receptionists deal with their French customers has been cleared, as well as its need for improvement. I believe that with the help of this research product, the future receptionists will have a better understanding of their clientele's differences, their needs and how to satisfy them. This research product can also be seen as a steppingstone for a much larger cross-cultural material. As I only deal with French customers, from this model, an adaptation for many other cultures can be added. As mentioned in chapter 2.1, Ylläs' foreign visitors come from Great Britain, France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Germany.

Additions concerning all those other countries would make a very useful training material for all customer service staff of Ylläs, and beyond.

As I have mentioned before, cross-cultural communication is a subject very dear to me. I have spent more than half of my life living in a foreign country and cross-cultural communication is part of my daily life. Prior to starting my thesis, my knowledge on the field was reduced to some articles I had read and my own intuition. As a result of this research, I have been able to move from a personal interest to a research matter and the making of a tangible product. It has given me the conviction that more can be, and should be done in the matter, by me and others. Even though I am still in the early stages, I hope that by continuing in the same direction, by studying the field in more depth and doing research, I am on my way to become an expert in cross-cultural communication in Lappish tourism.

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## APPENDICES

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| Appendix 1. | interview questions                                      |
| Appendix 2. | Facebook questionnaire's answers relating to this thesis |
| Appendix 3. | Final product  |

## Appendix 1.

## Interview questions 1(2)

(place for the interviewer's notes) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please note that this interview is recorded but that only me, the student, will have access to it. Your name will not be mentioned in my work, but the hotel's name and your title will be mentioned. For example Äkäshotel's reception manager. Do you agree? yes / no

1. For how many years have you had French customers at your hotel?  
Pre-covid and this year.
2. What percentage of your clientele would you say that your French customers represent? Pre-covid and this year.
3. For how many years have you been taking care of the reception staff training?
4. What language do your receptionists usually speak?
5. Have you had many that spoke French?
6. Have you had many that had prior experience with French customers?
7. Is it a selection criterion for you?
8. In your training, do you talk about customer service toward foreigners, especially French customers?
  - a. If not, do you think it should be included?
  - b. If yes, what does it consist of?

## Appendix 1.

## Interview questions 2(2)

In my thesis, I am making a training material about French customer service for Visit Ylläs. What do you think it should include?

1. information about their sense of space (closeness, intimacy, personal space)
2. information about how they communicate (verbally, non-verbally, body language, gestures)
3. information about the importance of appearance (dress code depending on event ex. dinner)
4. information about their views on food and feeding habits (what is appropriate food, how it should be presented, how to eat (utensils))
5. information about their view on time and time consciousness (is time exact or relative, planning thing in advance or spontaneous)
6. information about relationships (between themselves and between themselves and the staff, use of title, French tu vs vous)
7. information about their values and norms (respect the law, honesty, gift-giving, respect of privacy)
8. information about their beliefs and attitudes (religious practices, attitudes toward life and death, afterlife)
9. information about their mental processing (blind obedience, logic, abstract thinking)
10. information about their work habits and practices, which might reflect on your way to work (work individually or in teamwork, career status / recognition)

## Appendix 2. Facebook questionnaire's answers relating to this thesis (questions translated by the author)

Is it important that someone speaks French onsite? (Representative of the travel agency, guide, receptionist...)

Est-il important d'avoir quelqu'un qui parle français sur place (représentant de l'agence de voyage, guide, réceptionniste...)

Réponses collectées : 148 Questions (répondre) : 15



Yes: 77 %

No: 23 %

Have you encountered a French speaking receptionist at the hotel?

Avez-vous déjà rencontré en Laponie un(e) réceptionniste à l'hôtel, qui parle français?

Réponses collectées : 148 Questions (répondre) : 15



Yes: 39 %

No: 61 %

Would you like to have a French speaking receptionist at your hotel?

Aimeriez-vous que la réceptionniste de votre hôtel parle français?

Réponses collectées : 148 Questions (répondre) : 15



Yes: 84 %

No: 16 %

Would you like that your receptionist takes into account that fact that you are French (in the way s/he speaks to you / give you instructions,...)?

Aimeriez-vous que votre réceptionniste sache prendre en compte le fait que vous êtes français (dans la façon dont il / elle...)

Réponses collectées : 148 Questions (répondre) : 15



Yes: 64 %

No: 36 %



*Cross-cultural training material for hotel receptionists*

## Some useful tips while dealing with French customers

Due to their long history and rich culture, **French will always feel superior. It is not meant to be insulting**, it's just their view of the world.

French think aloud; therefore, **their discussions are always long and jump from topics to topics**. You need to **be engaged** in the conversation and not stay quiet, as it is seen as rude.

For French people, **using body language** (facial expressions, eye contact, speaking loud, gesturing) is a normal part of any communication process and an ideal way to express feelings. The Finnish typical lack of body language is viewed as rude.

**Remember to smile, talk and move your hands once in a while** to show that you share your customers' enthusiasm for your company's products.

The French English level is usually weak. **Remember to speak slowly, clearly and use a simpler vocabulary**. The use of gestures and drawings often help.


When disagreeing, French will engage in long lively discussions exploring all logical outcomes possible. **Stay polite and engaged in the conversion**. For important matters (such as refunds or accidents), it's good to know that hierarchy is important so **it might be helpful to ask to come back a little later to discuss the situation further with your superior**. The interval also give them time to think things through.

Meals are important. French "live to eat". **Meals are lengthy**, composed of many dishes looking and tasting good. **Dinner is enjoyed late. Attention should also be paid to describing the food** (in menus).

Usually French customers are not very punctual, **being 5-10 minutes late is acceptable**. It is part of their cultural concept of time. **Plan the schedules accordingly**.

While it is getting rarer, it is still quite common to have smoking rooms in French hotels. It is also common to smoke inside your own house. As anything is open to discussion, **some French smokers on holiday might decide to just ignore Finnish hotels' rules. Emphasizing the monetary punishment for breaking the rule** from the start of the stay might help.

*Text: Nathalie Prevost*



## Neuvoja kommunikointiin ranskalaisten matkailijoiden kanssa

Pitkän historiansa ja rikkaan kulttuurinsa takia **ranskalaiset vaikuttavat aina korkea-arvoisemmilta. Tarkoituksena ei ole olla tyytyväisiä.**

Ranskalaiset ajattelevat ääneen, joten **keskustelut ovat aina pitkiä ja aiheet vaihtuvat. Sinun odotetaan osallistuvan keskusteluun.** Hiljaa oleminen voidaan tulkita loukkaavana käytöksenä.

**Kehonkieli** (ilmeet, katsekontakti, ääneen puhuminen, eleet) on ranskalaisille keskeinen osa kommunikointia ja sopivin tapa ilmaista tunteita. Suomalaisten kehonkielen vähyys tulkitaan loukkaavana. **Muista hymyillä, puhua ja liikutella välillä käsiäsi** näyttääksesi asiakkaalle, että jaat hänen innostuksensa yrityksen tuotteista.

Ranskalaisten englannin kielen taso on usein heikko. **Puhu hitaasti, selvästi ja käytä yksinkertaista sanastoa.** Eleiden ja piirrosten käyttö auttaa usein.

Ilmaistakseen erimielisyytensä ranskalainen aloittaa pitkän ja rönsyilevän keskustelun, jossa pohditaan kaikkia mahdollisia lopputuloksia. **Pysy kohteliaana ja osallistu keskusteluun.** Keskusteltaessa tärkeistä asioista (kuten palautuksista tai onnettomuuksista) on hyvä pitää mielessä, että hierarkia on tärkeää ranskalaisille. Asiaa saattaa auttaa, jos pyydät asiakasta palaamaan keskustelemaan asiasta hetken päästä uudestaan esimiehesi kanssa. Pieni tauko antaa myös aikaa asioiden pohtimiselle.

**Ruoka on tärkeää.** Ranskalaiset "elävät syödäkseen". Ateriointi kestää pitkään ja koostuu useista maittavista ruokalajeista. **Illallinen nautitaan myöhään. Kuvaile ruokailistan aterioita huolellisesti asiakkaalle.**

Yleensä ranskalaiset eivät ole täsmällisiä. **5–10 minuutin myöhästyminen on soveliaista.** Tämä on osa ranskalaisen kulttuurin aikakäsitettä. **Suunnittele aikataulut tämän mukaisesti.**

Tupakkahuoneet ovat vielä yleisiä ranskalaisissa hotelleissa, vaikka tapa onkin vähenemässä. Tupakanpolto kodin sisällä on myös yleistä. Koska ranskalaisten mielestä säännöt ovat sovittavissa, jotkut ranskalaiset **saattavat olla välittämättä hotellin säännöistä. Sääntörikkomusten rahallisen korvauksen korostaminen heti loman alussa saattaa auttaa.**

Sisältö: Nathalie Prévost, käännös suomeksi: Johanna Talmi, Juuso Ritarl

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