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SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE

A guide to sustainability communications for KIDE Hotel by Iso-Syöte and Ski Resort Iso-Syöte

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the sustainability communications of Ski Resort Iso-Syöte and KIDE Hotel by Iso-Syöte. The overall purpose of this thesis was to produce a sustainability communications guide for the commissioner to develop their sustainability communication level to meet the growing demand for these kinds of actions. The goal of the authors was to develop their own understanding and expertise in this field.

The thesis consists of a theory section introducing the sustainability matters in tourism and sustainability communications, and a qualitative research section. The theoretical background is based on Business Finland's Sustainable Travel Finland program, Kotler & Keller's marketing communication model, and other relevant literature. The research was based on qualitative interviews. The interviewees were selected in order to provide the authors a wide perspective of the phenomenon. The interview questions were designed individually for each interviewee to best mirror their expertise.

The results of the research indicate that there is a need for more concise and cohesive communication considering sustainability actions from the commissioner. The results revealed factors regarding content, channels, and challenges of sustainability communications, based on which the final product was formed. The final product is in the form of a PowerPoint and PDF file and is attached as an appendix in this thesis.

The research results correlated to a large degree with previously attained knowledge. The theoretical background of this thesis is in line and supports the research findings. Further studies could be done to investigate the extent to which consumers make purchase decisions based on sustainability factors, and also how communicating about sustainability matters possibly affects the purchase decision.

Keywords: Sustainability, tourism, communications, sustainability communications

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1 INTRODUCTION

The demand for sustainable actions is increasing and it is significant for each individual and company to be aware of the changing environment. The climate crisis and sustainably conscious consumers are a major part of the reason for companies to begin to identify and develop their sustainability communications and operations (Business Finland 2021). Society expects companies to take on a variety of responsibilities. In addition to financial responsibility, such as making a profit, companies are also expected to be socially responsible, so that the company also produces well-being for society. In addition to economic and social responsibility, companies must take responsibility for the environment, for example by seeking to minimize the environmental impact of their business. (Nylund 2018.)

The value of responsibility in the ski resort and tourism industry has risen in recent years (Nylund 2018). This thesis aims to find solutions for sustainability communications in Ski Resort Iso-Syöte and KIDE Hotel by Iso-Syöte. The premise for this thesis was the commissioner's intention to develop a deeper understanding about sustainability communications regarding their field of expertise, thus a guide for sustainability communications was found as the solution that would serve the commissioner's needs in the best possible way. The thesis was conducted as a commission in the spring of 2022.

The research problems of the thesis are exploring the reasons and importance of sustainability communications and also the affecting factors on this market within Finland and also internationally. The research questions of the thesis are the following:

1. What is sustainability communication?
2. Why should a company communicate about sustainability matters?
3. What are the factors to consider when communicating sustainability to stakeholders?

The ski resort has been functioning since the 1980's, Terentjeff family purchased the resort in 2000 and have been running it ever since. During this time the family has determinedly developed the company's operating methods towards a more sustainable way. Then again, KIDE Hotel by

Iso-Syöte, completed in 2019, has been designed right from the start to meet the criteria of a sustainable apartment hotel. (Iso-Syöte 2022.) This is the reason why the commissioner found it important to create guidelines that support their journey towards a goal of responsibility and most importantly that those guidelines are also easy to develop over the years.

1.1 Introduction of the commissioner

Ski Resort Iso-Syöte was founded in 1980 and it has been functioning at some level ever since. Iso-Syöte is a ski resort for families and active enthusiasts in the southernmost fell of Finland, next to Syöte National Park. The ski resort is a family business, where the owners and management of the company are active skiers and snowboarders themselves. Hence, slope operations and services are constantly being developed and the owner's passion towards both winter and summer activities can be seen in high level and constant maintenance of the slopes, snow parks and in the summertime, the bike parks. (Iso-Syöte 2022.)

KIDE Hotel by Iso-Syöte, project supported by European regional development fund and Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment first started in 2018 and was completely finished in the spring of 2020. The hotel is a sister company to the ski resort and both companies are private and run by the Terentjeff family. KIDE Hotel by Iso-Syöte was awarded the best ski hotel in Finland in the 2021 World Ski Awards. (Iso-Syöte 2022.)

1.2 The aim of thesis

The aim of the thesis is to produce the content of the sustainability communications guide. The purpose of the guide is to help and encourage both companies to communicate about their sustainability work. Both the ski resort and the hotel aim to develop and maintain their way of communication about sustainability matters and form a perception of the demand set by stakeholders, international and national customers. By creating guidelines that both companies can follow the commissioner wishes to reach a point where communication about every form of their sustainability actions is part of both companies' daily operations.

1.3 The structure of the thesis

The theoretical part of this thesis consists of two parts: sustainability in tourism and sustainability communications. These two sections provide the reader with an understanding of the topics and creates the foundation to understand the actual product of this thesis being the sustainability communications guide.

After the theoretical part the steps of the data collection process are explained and also the aims and reasons for the data collection are defined. The results contain the key issues and topics discussed during the interviews conducted for this thesis. This strongly supports the final product by providing both an internal and external view of the commissioner's sustainability communication endeavors in the present moment. The thesis concludes with the conclusions reached during the work and the proposals for further action, as well as the evaluation of the thesis process and one's own learning.

2 SUSTAINABILITY IN TOURISM

Sustainable development is development which satisfies the needs of today without depriving future generations of satisfying their needs. It means sustainable travel companies take into consideration current economic, socio-cultural, and ecological impacts in a way which makes sure travelers', tourism companies', tourism destinations', the environment's, and local community's needs are met now and in the future. Studies show that sustainable tourism companies have higher customer satisfaction rates and experienced quality. Sustainable tourism companies also experience significant energy cost savings through optimized energy usage. Sustainable development is typically divided into three different dimensions: ecological, economic and socio-cultural sustainability. (Business Finland 2022.)

One of the most important drivers at the moment for sustainability actions in tourism is the United Nations' (2015) Agenda2030, with 17 main goals and 169 sub-goals which guide partner countries on the path of sustainability. These goals include for example reduced inequalities, affordable and clean energy, no poverty, climate action, and responsible consumption and production. (UNDP 2022.) The United Nations World Travel Organization (UNWTO) has also encompassed the Agenda2030 goals into their strategic goals, and emphasizes that a suitable balance between environmental, economic, and socio-cultural sustainability is the key to guaranteeing long-term sustainability. They also highlight that sustainable tourism development practices are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, from developed to developing locations and niche to mass segments. (UNWTO 2022.)

Business Finland has launched the Sustainable Travel Finland program which aims to inspire and encourage companies in different travel destinations around Finland to take part in developing their sustainable operations. It has been developed in order to make sure that with increasing demand in the travel industry, companies are able to meet this demand in a sustainable way to conserve the future. The purpose of this program is to provide companies with the tools and information they need in order to commit to sustainable development from all perspectives: ecological, economic, and socio-cultural sustainability. (Business Finland 2022.)

The Sustainable Travel Finland program has encouraged the commissioner of this thesis to focus on the sustainability of their own business operations, and make sure they are in line with the requirements of the program guidelines. This program has had a large effect on the commissioner's need for a sustainability communication guide, as participating in the program requires affiliated companies to communicate about the steps they are taking towards sustainability.

2.1 Ecological sustainability

Ecological sustainability encompasses all aspects of the sustainable activities within the company's operating environment. This means making sure the business operations conserve the ecological environment which surrounds it and which it operates in as well as possible. Concrete examples of ecological sustainability include businesses recycling their waste, aiming to minimize accumulated waste, reducing energy consumption, reducing the use of fossil fuels, reducing water usage, producing services which do not harm the surrounding nature, reducing food waste, and educating staff to be more environmentally conscious. It also includes increasing organic and vegetarian food products and meal options, the use of environmentally friendly cleaning products, and measuring the company's overall carbon footprint. (Business Finland 2022.)

Making optimal use of environmental resources, maintaining essential ecological processes, and helping conserve natural biodiversity are issues which the United Nations World Travel Organization (UNWTO) states as key factors in ensuring long-term ecological sustainability. The organization also discusses the tourism industry being extremely vulnerable to depletion of environmental resources and areas, while being one of the largest global contributors to climate change. Threats are diverse ranging from extreme weather events to biodiversity loss. Taking action is vital in order to ensure conservation of the environment for future generations. (UNWTO 2022.)

When designing the KIDE Hotel by Iso-Syöte, the commissioner wanted to make sure that the hotel meets the criteria of a sustainable apartment hotel. The hotel uses geothermal heating, all the showers, taps and other bathroom and kitchen utensils use less water, the toiletries are refillable, and the hotel does not use small room cosmetics, as the packaging is left unused or partially used. (Iso-Syöte 2022.)

During the year 2021 Ski Resort Iso-Syöte invested almost one million euros towards new, more efficient system for snowmaking, LED-lights and two new snow groomers. The new snow cannons use only 40% of energy compared to the old snow cannons, and the new LED-lights consume more than 30% less electricity than before, even though the light output is higher. The ski resort is constantly developing its sustainability actions, aiming for the most efficient outcome. (Iso-Syöte 2022.)

2.2 Economic sustainability

Economic sustainability means ensuring that business operations are conducted in a way which directs most of the sustained income to the local community and surrounding areas. Concrete ways in which this can be done is by employing locals, integrating the travel industry into the local community, making sustainable investments, thinking of longevity in the business, and honest and open business conduct.

Successful economic sustainability means income to the operating area, careers, jobs, and long-lasting benefits for business owners and stakeholders alike. (Business Finland 2022.)

The UNWTO defines economic sustainability as ensuring long-term economic operations, providing benefits of these operations to all stakeholders, contributing to decreasing poverty, and offering stable employment opportunities to community members. As tourism is one of the driving forces of global economic growth, it plays a vital part in offering job opportunities, and promoting local cultures and products. Local, long-term economic sustainability requires for operations to be conducted in a way which provides for the local communities. (UNWTO 2022.)

KIDE Hotel by Iso-Syöte operates around the year and the Ski Resort Iso-Syöte opened a bike park for downhill biking in the summer of 2020. This has given the ski resort a possibility to employ people also during the summertime. Both companies aim to employ locals and the companies also collaborate with local businesses. (Iso-Syöte 2022.)

2.3 Socio-cultural sustainability

The main principle behind socio-cultural sustainability is conducting business operations in a way which conserves, respects, and preserves the local culture and community. Concrete actions towards socio-cultural sustainability include conserving local culture and heritage, respecting local heritage and using local culture in a respectful manner in operations, communication and openness with the surrounding community, hiring local staff and aspiring for longevity in careers, preferring local food product, and preferring local souvenirs and services. In addition, using local cultural and Finnish aspects in marketing, harnessing local cultural aspects in tourism products, and cooperating with like-minded businesses and stakeholders who share the same core values of sustainability are ways in which a tourism company can sustain local communities and culture. (Business Finland 2022.)

The UNWTO defines sustainable tourism from a socio-cultural perspective. The organization emphasizes respecting the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, the conservation of cultural heritage and traditional values, and the contribution towards tolerance and understanding between cultures. Through these core values, the aim is to enhance local prosperity, generate income to the host area, and give employment for workers without harming the environment. (UNWTO 2022.)

In the spring of 2021 Ski Resort Iso-Syöte has participated a project funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture, supporting the local kids in their hobbies. The ski resort extended their opening hours by two hours every Wednesday so that children from the city of Pudasjärvi were able to enjoy downhill skiing even after spending a day at school. Main goal of the project is to increase the well-being of children by enabling every interested child and young person to have an enjoyable hobby during school days. For the past three years the ski resort has also offered the first graders of the Oulu subregion a day of downhill skiing, free of charge. The day also includes rental equipment in addition to a safe start to downhill skiing under the guidance of a ski instructor. (Iso-Syöte 2022.)

2.4 Sustainability certifications

Studies show that a tourism business may benefit from a sustainability certification by improving their competitive edge in the market. Consumers are becoming increasingly environmentally conscious, which means that demand for certified tourism businesses is on the rise. It is thus important to build a frame for consumers, where it is easy to act in a sustainable manner. Through certifications, communication becomes a key factor in bringing together the company's commitment, and the activation of consumers. (Hirvonen 2020.)

There are numerous certification options on offer for tourism companies in Finland. These include for example Biosphere, Blue Flag, ECEAT Suomi, Ekokompassi, EMAS, EU Ecolabel, Geo Golf, Green Globe, and Green Key. These certifications aim to assist, unify, and help to continuously develop sustainable operations in tourism companies. Many certification programs also assist in initial assessments, support for communications, and a model to making a sustainable development plan. Nearly one thousand tourism companies in Finland are currently holders of a sustainability certificate, which means these companies are committed to sustainable business operations and continuous development of these operations. (Business Finland 2022.)

Biosphere is a program for travel destinations, companies and products. It focuses on the Agenda 2030 sustainability commitments and the continuous development of sustainable operations. It also offers a platform called Biosphere Sustainable lifestyle which enables companies to create personalized sustainable development plans. Blue Flag is an international program aimed for beaches, harbours, and boating businesses. The purpose of this program is to develop the sustainability of businesses working in and at natural bodies of water. Ekokompassi is a practical program which helps measure and decrease the company's impact on the environment.

All sustainability programs are designed and aimed differently, so finding the most suitable sustainability program is essential for the company to be able to achieve the maximum benefits. (Business Finland 2022.) Based on the authors' previously acquired knowledge in the field, it is known that Business Finland and Visit Finland assist tourism companies in making the choice between different certificates. Collective area tourism associations also provide assistance and workshops to help companies decide which certificate would suit them best. The commissioner is taking part of the Sustainable Travel Finland program and the commissioner aims to gain a sustainability certification in the near future.

3 SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATION

When marketing communication uses language and content related to corporate responsibility, this communication is described as sustainability communication. Sustainability communication is typically digital communication, and it requires a systematic approach in order to be successful. Truthful sustainability communication gives the consumer the possibility to make educated environmental consumption choices. For example, sustainability certifications give a good indication to the company's sustainable actions, as they require reaching certain criteria. (Harmaala & Jallinoja 2012.) Ruka Ski Resort for example showcases their environmental actions and certifications through their website and social media platforms. They also send out information on sustainability matters to partner companies via a regular email newsletter. (Ruka.fi 2022.)

3.1 Communication process

The basic marketing macro-communication process is divided into nine key elements which are involved in producing marketing communication: sender, encoding, message, media, decoding, receiver, response, feedback, and noise. The sender regards the party sending the marketing message, encoding means the formulation of the wanted message into meaningful symbols, the message is the group of symbols, and media regards the channels through which this message is delivered. The conversion of the symbols in the message into meaning by the receiver is called decoding, the receiver is the party which receives the message, the response is the reaction attained from the receiver to the message, feedback regards the part of the response which finds its way back to the sender, and noise means possible mismatches in the way the message ought to be received as to how it is actually received. (Kotler & Keller 2012.)

When developing effective communications, an eight-step process model can be used. This model is a concrete tool with which businesses can use to successfully plan and generate value with their communications. It consists of the following steps: identifying the target audience, determining

objectives, designing communications, determining channels, establishing a budget, deciding on media mix, measuring results, and lastly managing integrated marketing communications, see figure 1 below. (Kotler & Keller 2012.)

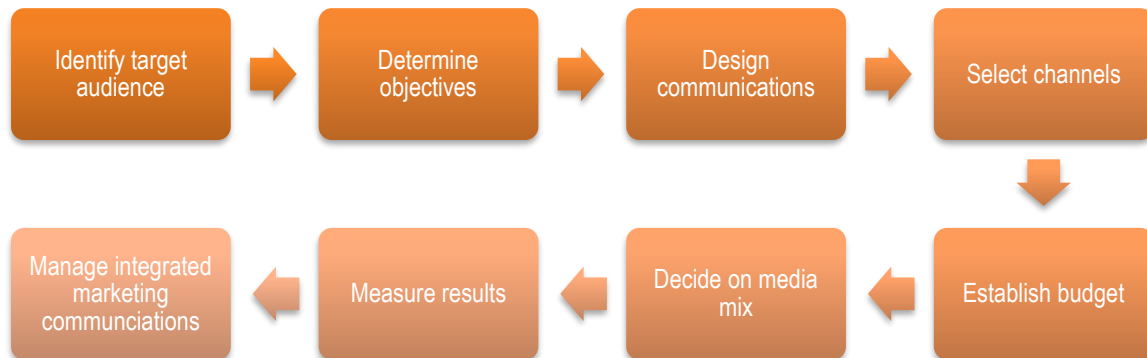


Figure 1. Steps in Developing Effective Communications. Kotler & Keller. 2012.

3.1.1 Target audience, objectives, and communication design

The process begins with identifying the target audience; who does the business want to reach? The target audience should be identified with regards to the target market and also stakeholders of the business. The next step is to establish objectives for the communication; this means determining the 'why' of the communications. The objectives generally vary from building brand awareness to establishing a category need. (Kotler & Keller 2012.) In the commissioner's case, the objective of the communication is to bring knowledge of the sustainability work, processes, and achievements to the target audience. The target audience for communications is most likely international travel agent partners, and direct domestic consumers.

The third step is designing the communications. This step encompasses deriving solutions to what should be said, how it should be said, and by whom. The message strategy should largely consider the previously identified objectives of the communications and deliberate on what should be said in order to achieve these objectives. The creative strategy, or the 'how', is the way marketers translate the message into communication. These can be broadly classified into informational and transformational strategies: informational strategies rely on elaborating on concrete product attributes

and benefits, whereas transformational strategies elaborate on image and not directly product-derived benefits. The message source delivers the message, and should be credible, positive, and attractive. (Kotler & Keller 2012.) From the commissioner's perspective, this means choosing for example to communicate about switching to renewable energy from fossil fuels. The message should be formulated to suit the values and other communication guidelines of the company, and delivered in an honest, transparent way.

3.1.2 Communication channels, budget, and media mix

Determining the communication channels is the next step in the process. As the pool of communication channels is ever-growing, it becomes increasingly more difficult and also the more crucial to choose the correct channel to deliver the intended message. (Kotler & Keller 2012.) In the commissioner's case, channels should be chosen in order to best reach the pre-defined target audience, and also to most effectively deliver the intended message. In the sustainability communication most likely used channels are both personal and non-personal channels.

Establishing the total budget for the communications is the fifth step in the process. This is most likely to be the most difficult step in the process, as marketers need to decide how much money to spend on a specific endeavour. There are various approaches to this such as the affordable method, the percentage of sales method, competitive parity method, and the objective and task method. Each of these methods have their advantages and disadvantages, and these vary greatly depending on industry and objectives. (Kotler & Keller 2012.) Since sustainability communication is in vast majority about raising awareness of the company's actions towards a more sustainable future, the budget can be kept relatively reasonable. In the commissioner's case, the most important aspect is most likely the factoring in of this type of marketing communication and making sure there is enough resources allocated for the activity.

The media mix, or the marketing mix, stage of the process requires marketers to decide which mode of communication would best serve their purpose, or a combination of these. There are eight major modes of communication: advertising, sales promotion, public relations, events, direct marketing, interactive marketing, word-of-mouth marketing, and the sales force.

The chosen marketing mix depends greatly on the message, objectives and target audience of the communications, and there can be wide variance also within industries. (Kotler & Keller 2012.) In their sustainable communications KIDE Hotel and Ski Resort Iso-Syöte are most likely to use digital medias such as their own websites, social media platforms, and direct email contact to deliver their message.

3.1.3 Measuring results and the integrated marketing communication process

Measuring the results of marketing communications is an important task in the process, as it sets the foundation for future communications. The results can be measured for example by reach, number of clicks, engagement, and exposure. These kinds of results may nowadays be derived directly from social media platforms and website service providers. Marketers should also concretely measure the impact of the communications by asking the target audience whether they have seen or recall the message, how they feel about the message, and their attitudes and perceptions towards the company. (Kotler & Keller 2012.) The commissioner should see which result indicators they can find and use from social media platforms, and their website service provider. These results should be used to ultimately improve the effectiveness of the sustainability communications.

Integrated marketing communication means that all contact consumers have with the company or brand is relevant, consistent and portrays the same values and image over time. The marketing communication must thus have a clear, concise vision, which integrates all communications into a whole. (Kotler & Keller 2012.) This aspect of integration is especially important to the commissioner, as they are commencing a new communicational element, sustainability, and need to integrate this into their overall marketing communications plan. In practice this means that the commissioner must take the sustainability communications and make sure it is in line with their overall values and vision, while conducting precisely the type of marketing mix the communication requires.

3.2 Sustainability communication process

The sustainability communication process is divided into five phases by Harmaala & Jallinoja (2012). These phases are defining the goals of communication, defining the target audience, planning the content and procedure, execution and publishing, and collecting and analysing feedback.

This process is an ongoing cycle where the communication is always evaluated again and through the results the goals are also refined and designed. Sustainability communications should also be an integral part of all marketing communications; hence it should be conducted alongside all other marketing communications. In effective sustainability communication all steps of the process are carefully examined and analysed according to the company's overall sustainability strategy. (Harmaala & Jallinoja 2012.)

3.3 Principles and goals

The main principle of sustainability communications is that the communication should be open, truthful, credible. The processes, procedures, sources, and assumptions regarding sustainability communication should be attainable to stakeholders. Informing stakeholders of their role in communication is also an important part of the process. It is also critical to ensure that the language and approach are such which are understandable by stakeholders. (Hiltunen 2016.)

The first step in the sustainability communication process is to clarify the principles and goals of the communication, to which also the management is committed to. Having a clear vision of the desired end results strengthens the overall communication process and adds quality to the results. The communication goals depend on the company's sustainability strategy and the extent to which it has been able to define its most important perspectives and areas of sustainability. Goals may also be affected by sudden events or crises, where the communication is considered reacting or crisis control. The goals should ultimately reflect the company's overall image, vision, and strategy. (Harmaala & Jallinoja 2012.)

4 RESEARCH PROCESS

In order to gain in depth knowledge on the subject, interviews will be used as the main data collection method. The interviews will be conducted individually with each interviewee. By using interviews as the data collection method, the authors are able to collect rich information about attributes, behaviours, preferences, opinions, and knowledge from various perspectives. (Virginia Tech 2018.) This qualitative approach will help better understand and explore the phenomena of sustainability communications. The interview questions are formulated to best answer the research questions of this thesis:

1. What is sustainability communication?
2. Why should a company communicate about sustainability matters?
3. What are the factors to consider when communicating sustainability to stakeholders?

The interviews will be mostly held online, only one interview will be conducted in person. The interviewees are divided so, that one author interviews the international travel agency employee and the other author interviews the personnel and customer of the Syöte area. All the interviews will be recorded to ensure both authors the access to all interviews. This gives the authors a possibility to gain information from the interviews they did not attend. The duration of each interview will be between 15 minutes to one hour.

4.1 The interviewees

The interviewees are one employee from an international travel agency, sales manager of the commissioner, executive director of Syöte Tourism Association, and one consumer from the Iso-Syöte travel area. The interviewees have been carefully chosen to represent the variety of sustainability communications receivers. The international travel agency, Voigt Travel from the Netherlands, was chosen to be interviewed as the international perspective. Although a large majority of the Iso-Syöte travel area tourism is domestic, the authors feel it is important to have an international viewpoint represented in the data in order to achieve an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

The sales manager of the commissioner has been part of the company since May 2019, operating as both the KIDE Hotel's and the ski resort's sales manager. The interviewee's daily duties consist for example of meetings with international and national travel agencies, this means they are able to give the authors information of the company's current actions.

The executive director of Syöte Tourism Association answers the questions more from the area's point of view. The authors find it important that when creating a guide for sustainability actions for one of the area's leading companies, the content of the guide should be in line with the main ideas of the area's future plans.

The commissioner requested one of the interviewees to be a person, who visits the area as a consumer, hence would be able to view the research problems from a different angle. The consumer interviewed has been a regular customer of the area for approximately eight years and the past few years the consumer has also been providing accommodation services through the local booking centre.

4.2 Data analysis

The interviews aim to support the theoretical background of this thesis, discussing the channels and content of the sustainability communication, and the expectations the interviewees have of the communication. The content of the interviews will be adapted to each interviewee in order to specifically reach the target audience's perspective. The interviews were all recorded and transcribed. After the transcriptions, the authors went through their interview notes and observations. After this, the transcribed interviews were analytically discussed, from which a preliminary idea of data themes arose. Based on the preliminary themes, the data is categorized, and the categories are contrasted and compared in order to avoid overlaps. The responses from the individual interviewees are also compared against each other within the categories. Finally, a document was compiled with all data categorized and organized under the determined themes.

4.3 Results

The data gathered from the interviews was manually divided into five different categories based on the four interviewees' answers. These five categories are knowledge and awareness of sustainability actions and communication about them, the content, most important channels for communications, values and challenges.

Knowledge and awareness of sustainability actions

When looking into the knowledge and awareness of sustainability actions and the communications considering these actions, all of the interviewees agreed on how the awareness of the topic has risen significantly. It is still quite challenging to point out if sustainability actions affect the consumers decision to purchase a holiday here in Finland, due to lack of data. Interviewees had their own experiences from Europe and especially Central Europe was used as an example of a leading area in sustainability matters in tourism. This can be seen for example when operating with international travel agencies – most of them require the commissioner to sign a contract agreeing to fulfil the sustainability actions each agency has set as their standards.

It was also brought to the authors' attention how even though the commissioner has done a variety of sustainability actions in the past few years, sustainability is not the main theme that the commissioners' social media presents. Also, consumers in the area are not demanding sustainability actions or necessarily asking about them even if given a chance. The executive director of Syöte Tourism Association mentioned how some sustainability actions are nearly impossible to execute due to reasons out of their control. There have been difficulties in acquiring the facilities to for example recycle biowaste collected from the area, since there are not enough companies that could take part in the process.

Content

The next theme that was found essential to investigate was the content of sustainability communications. Small daily actions were brought up throughout all interviews – it is important to highlight all the actions that are carried out because if the consumer is unaware of, for example, the fact that

the ski resort uses renewable energy, it is likely that the consumer assumes otherwise. Also avoiding so called greenwash is necessary – the actions towards sustainability should be legitimate and done only because they support the company's values.

Channels

All four interviewees agreed on the fact that it is crucial to see sustainability actions as part of the daily operations, not as a separate section. Thus, when considering the channels for sustainability communications, the interviewees emphasized the transparency of communications.

The ski resort and KIDE Hotel are run by one family, who want to for example offer children a safe place to practise winter hobbies. This is why the commissioner provides the first graders of the Oulu subregion a day of downhill skiing, free of charge. In the spring of 2022, the ski resort prolonged their opening hours with two hours every Wednesday night so that the children from the city of Pudasjärvi were able to attend their hobbies even after a day in school. Both of these actions clearly show that one of the main values the commissioner desires to highlight is the importance of offering children a possibility to enjoy winter activities.

The data from the interviews showed that it is important to communicate sustainability through various channels and mediums, such as print, social media, public relations and events. All of these channels should convey the same core message and values, while considering the norms and regulations of the respective channels.

Values

The values of the commissioner were also one of the main topics of all four interviews. The ski resort and KIDE Hotel are within a walking distance of each other and the rest of the area's activities are also close by. Thus, it is easy to utilize this as a ground for the customers to act in a sustainable way – customer can travel to the resort with an electric car since the KIDE Hotel provides charging points. The car can stay on the parking lot during the customers whole stay, since the ski resort, grocery store and variety of restaurants are just few hundred meters away. And if the customer wants to visit the other fell few kilometres away, there is local public transport alternatives.

The encounter between individual and company values is important. From this the sales manager of the commissioner provided a great example: he, as the sales manager, should not spill the engine oils of his car in the backyard without colliding with the values of the company he works for. Also, the authors had discussions with the interviewees about the communication of values in any occasion, when it happens forcefully. This, according to the interviewees, may seem repulsive and create an atmosphere the consumer does not want to support.

During the interviews, it was brought to the attention of the authors that there was variety of opinions about measuring the carbon footprint. The sales director perceived the matter as perhaps even a little abstract for a particular customer base, while the chairman of the tourism association saw the measurement of the carbon footprint as a very important factor in the development of sustainability actions.

Challenges

As the challenges of the communication there were some examples highlighted. One of these was the correct usage of terms when addressing gender minorities and sexual minorities. Another challenge pointed out by the consumer of the area was that no matter what the circumstances, the commissioner is unable to make sure that each individual visiting the area respects the surroundings by for example putting their trash where it belongs instead of just leaving it to the nature. It is crucial to provide the facilities for the customers to make sustainable choices, but in the end of the day, the customers are ultimately responsible for their own actions and choices.

5 CONCLUSION

In today's world, it is becoming increasingly crucial for companies to be able to not only concentrate on sustainability in their operations, but also to communicate about these matters to their customers and stakeholders. In addition to making profit and operating a financially sustainable business, companies are expected to carry a certain level of social and environmental responsibility as well. (Nylund 2018.) In light of this, the commissioner's aim from the thesis was to gain a sustainability communications guide to be implemented and used in their company, see appendix 1.

After collecting the theoretical base for the research, the authors chose interviewees and formulated interview questions, which best could answer the research questions of the thesis. After the interview data was analyzed, the sustainability communications guide was formulated, see appendix 1. The results from the interviews supported the theories discussed in the earlier part of the thesis, the theoretical background. The in-depth views and opinions retrieved from the interviews provided useful details and viewpoints to the final product. The variety of the interviewees, the interview questions, and the data analysis showed that the research process was successful and fruitful. Based on the research, the authors believe they have been able to formulate a useful tool for the commissioner of this thesis, as well as develop their own expertise in the field.

The process of developing the final product began with planning. The authors discussed the needs of the commissioner, and the key points were formed from the theory base and research. The idea was to create the guide in PowerPoint format, which would make it possible for the commissioner to make changes as they saw fit. The authors also wanted to make the guide visually appealing and opted for a darker background with light features. The content of the guide was derived from the key factors from the interview data as well as the theory base.

The thesis answers the research questions set at the beginning of the thesis. The concept of sustainability communications is discussed in the theoretical section, and the reasons why a company should communicate about these matters is discussed both in the theory section as well as in the qualitative research. The factors which should be considered in communications are also thoroughly explored through background theory as well as the research itself. Overall, companies should communicate their sustainability actions in an open, honest way, integrating this into their general strategy. The communication should be formulated respectfully to different channels and towards different audiences, and it should reflect the values and beliefs of both company and staff.

6 DISCUSSION

The thesis writing process was challenging but fruitful to the authors. The choice of topic for the thesis was spot on, as it was a topic which is interesting and important to both authors. Throughout the process, we feel this was one of the key factors in sustaining motivation.

Although the topic was familiar and comfortable, defining the scope of the thesis took some time. The challenge was to not overreach but reach wide enough to gather all relevant information and detail. In the end, we are satisfied with how the scope of the thesis eventually fell in place. It was important for us to be able to discuss sustainability in Finnish tourism as a separate section, and from there narrow the perspective to sustainability communications.

The final product was successful in our opinion. The commissioner wanted a guide for their sustainability communications, and this is what they received. The company can use the guide internally as a tool to aid communicators in delivering their messages about sustainability. It was also discussed with the commissioner that they prefer to have a set of guidelines which can also be easily adjusted over time, and the PowerPoint format gives them this option. The guide does not entail any hard rules or specific actions one must take, but rather outlines the principles to sustainability communications. The guide was derived from the theoretical background and the interviews combined.

The research methodology we chose to go forward with was qualitative research. We felt interviews from selected individuals would give us the most thorough insights into the phenomenon. The most interesting part of the thesis process was the analysis of the gathered data. This was tedious work, but it was well worth it as the separate interviews began to form data which we were able to utilize in this thesis to a satisfactory level.

Overall, the thesis process has been a learning experience. The timelines and schedules did not necessarily hold as initially intended, but us authors can now stand behind this production with confidence. The modification of schedules has, in our opinion, made this outcome better.

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A dark, moody photograph of a forest floor. The scene is filled with lush green ferns and moss. In the center, a mushroom with a light-colored cap and a dark stem is visible. The lighting is low, creating a sense of mystery and depth. The overall tone is natural and earthy.

Vastuullisuusviestinnän opas

Miksi, mitä ja missä?

Miksi viestiä vastuullisuudesta?

- ✓ Asiakkaat enenevässä määrin kiinnostuneita vastuullisuudesta
- ✓ Viestinnän kautta integroidaan vastuullisuus myös näkyvästi osaksi yrityksen kokonaisstrategiaa
- ✓ Sidosryhmä ja asiakas tietää vain sen, mitä heille kerrotaan.
 - ✓ Kerro heille siis se, mitä haluat heidän tietävän!



Kaikesta tulee viestiä,
sillä ilman viestintää sitä
ei ole olemassa

Viestinnän sisältö

- ✓ Viesti läpinäkyvästi! Älä jätä epämääräisyyksille tai arvailuille sijaa
- ✓ Viesti rehellisesti ja avoimesti, toivota kysymykset tervetulleeksi
- ✓ Pienet teot ovat tärkeitä, viesti siis niistäkin
 - ✓ On tärkeää, että henkilöstön ja yrityksen arvot kohtaavat. Näin tuotetaan rehellistä ja läpinäkyvää vastuullisuusviestintää
 - ✓ Vältä viherpesua ja painostamista
 - ✓ Muista konkreettisuus:
 - ✓ Ekologisuus: vedenkulutus, energiankulutus, kierrätys, uusi lumetusjärjestelmä
 - ✓ Taloudellisuus: energiankulutus, vedenkulutus, kannattava liiketoiminta
 - ✓ Sosiokulttuurisuus: paikallinen työvoima, paikallisuuden ja kulttuurin vaaliminen
 - ✓ Kiinnitä huomiota hyvään kuva- ja videomateriaaliin

Toimenpiteitä
tehdään siksi,
että niitä
halutaan
tehdä!

Viestinnän kanavat

- ✓ Viestintää tulee tehdä kaikissa kanavissa kohdeyleisö huomioiden: esimerkiksi uutiskirje ja sosiaalinen media sisällöltään ja asiakaskunniltaan erilaisia, yhtä tärkeitä
- ✓ Arvojen tulee kohdata kaikissa kanavissa, viestin tulee olla yhtenevä kanavasta riippumatta
- ✓ Viestinnässä kanavissa tulee käyttää kokonaisvaltaisesti niin somea, printtimateriaalia kuin verkkosivujakin
- ✓ Kanava tulee valikoida halutun viestin, kohdeyleisön ja viestinnän tavoitteiden kautta

Mahdolliset haasteet

- ✓ Viherpesun ja painostamisen välttäminen on kaiken A ja O
- ✓ Viestinnästä huolimatta välinpitämättömät asiakkaat → muista, että tähän et voi vaikuttaa!
- ✓ Sosiaaliseen inklusioon kuuluvan sateenkaariterminologian käyttö voi olla haastavaa
- ✓ Itsestä riippumattomista hankaluuksista viestiminen
- ✓ Henkilöstön sitouttaminen ja sisäinen viestintä

Muista siis:

- ✓ Viesti avoimesti ja läpinäkyvästi
- ✓ Vältä viherpesua ja painostamista
- ✓ Viesti konkreettisista teoista kaikilla vastuullisuuden eri osa-alueilla, valitulle kanavalle sopivalla tavalla
- ✓ Yrityksen arvojen tulee kohdata kaikessa viestinnässä, kaikissa kanavissa
- ✓ Viestinnän tulee olla sisällöltään kokonaisvaltaista ja kohdeyleisölle ymmärrettävää
- ✓ Ajattele vastuullisuusviestintää osana viestinnän kokonaisuutta