Marketing solutions and trends surrounding in MICE tourism industry in Helsinki

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Abstract

Traveling to different destinations around the world with the purpose of achieving business or employment related goals has become a significant part of the modern society, making business tourism a relevant division of tourism industry. Attending a Meeting, Incentive, Conference or an Exhibition is among the most common goals of business tourists. Therefore, MICE tourism industry is still growing but already one of the crucial tourism sectors.
Destinations worldwide are hosting MICE Tourism activities. However, for the destination to be capable of holding MICE tourism without damaging itself and meeting the wants and needs of business tourists, the town or the city must obtain certain characteristics and implement proper management and marketing.

The main goal of this report is to suggest improvement solutions in order to improve the marketing development of MICE tourism of Helsinki. The objectives of the work start from the analysis of the current state of the industry in the destination and identification of factors that need improvement, distinctive features, opportunities and threats through the secondary data analysis and one interview, in order to establish marketing opportunities, followed by the discussion of the collected data in application to the theoretical background with the research method close reading. Finally, in the conclusion, based on the collected information, marketing suggestions are presented and explained.

After the interview and secondary data analysis, the most relevant to the research findings were established. Among the strongest sides of Helsinki, strong network inside the destination, balance of the urban environment and nature in the city and archipelago, infrastructure and the variety of accommodations, transportation methods inside and to the destination, the international environment of the city and many more. Regarding the aspects that require improvement from the marketing perspective, the improvement of the awareness about Helsinki, creation of the proper image of the destination and erosion of the misconceptions regarding the destinations.

The results of the research has led to the formulation of the following marketing suggestion: actions within the destination are required, particularly regarding marketing strategy, creation of the positive perception about Helsinki and establishing clear picture of Helsinki, creation of marketing channels with the focus on international customer segment, trending strategies, in addition to traditional ones, can open new perspectives and encompass larger group of customers.

Keywords/tags (subjects)

MICE, tourism, business tourism, meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions, development, improvement, international tourism, Helsinki, tourism destination, destination marketing, marketing, trends

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Description

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For example, the confidentiality marking of the thesis appendix. See Project Reporting Instructions, Section 4.1.2.

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Matkailu- ja palvelutuotannon tutkinto. Opinnäytetyö

Lupa avoimeen käyttöön: kyllä

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Abstrakti

Matkustaminen eri matkakohteisiin ympäri maailmaa tarkoituksena saavuttaa bisnekseen tai työllistymiseen liittyviä tavoitteita voidaan nähdä yhtenä tärkeimmistä osista nykyaikaista yhteiskuntaa. Tämä kasvattaa bisnes turismin roolia yhtenä matkailualan kulmakivistä. Tapaamiseen, insentiiviin, konferenssiin tai esittelyyn osallistuminen on yksi bisnes matkailijoiden yleisimmistä tavoitteista. Siitä syystä MICE turismi on yhä kasvava ala, mutta jo nyt yksi keskeisimmistä matkailun sektoreista. Matkailukohteet ympäri maailmaa järjestävät MICE turismin aktiviteetteja. Kuitenkin, jotta matkailukohde on kykeneväinen ylläpitämään MICE matkailun virtaa vahingoittamatta itseään ja lisäksi vastaamaan asiakkaiden tarpeisiin ja odotuksiin on kaupungin omattava tiettyjä markkinointiin liittyviä ominaisuuksia, sekä ylläpitää toimivaa johtamista ja markkinointia.

Tämän raportin päätavoitteena on tuoda esiin parannusehdotuksia parantaakseen Helsingin MICE turismin markkinointi kehitystä. Tutkimuksen tavoitteet alkavat matkailukohteen tämänhetkisen tilanteen analysoinnista liittyen aiheisiin kuten kehityskohteet, erilaiset piirteet ja mahdollisuudet, sekä mahdolliset uhat haastattelusta ja kirjallisen datan perusteella. Tätä seuraa keskustelu-osio, jossa kerätty data hyödynnetään käytännössä teoreettisen pohjan kanssa käyttäen tarkennetun lukemisen metodia. Viimeiseksi johtopäätös osiossa kerätyn tiedon perusteella tulokset esitellään ja selitetään tarkemmin.

Haastattelun ja kirjallisen datan tutkimisen jälkeen keskeisimmät tulokset esiteltiin yksityiskohtaisemmin. Jotkut Helsingin suurimmista vahvuuksista ovat vahva verkostointi kohteen sisällä, urbaanin kaupunkikuvan ja luonnon tasapaino, saaristomaisemat, infrastruktuuri ja majoitusvaihtoehtojen monipuolisuus, sekä julkisten kulkuvälineiden toimivuus kaupunkiin saapuessa ja sen sisällä. Tämän lisäksi kaupungin kansainvälinen ilmapiiri ja moni muu aspekti lukeutuvat Helsingin vahvuuksiin. Suurimpia kehityskohtia markkinoinnin näkökulmasta ovat muun muassa Helsingin tunnettavuuden parantaminen, kohteen kunnollisen imagon luominen ja vääränlaisten mielikuvien vähentäminen.

Tutkimuksen tulokset ovat johtaneet seuraavien kehitysehdotusten muodostamiseen: vaadittavat toimet kehityksen edistämiseksi liittyvät erityisesti markkinointi strategiaan, Helsingin positiivisen ja selkeän yleiskuvan luontiin, markkinointikanavien luomiseen keskittyen kansainvälisiin markkinoihin, trendien hyödyntämiseen strategioissa perinteisten tapojen lisäksi. Nämä antavat mahdollisuuden luoda uusia perspektiivejä ja mahdollistaa suurempien asiakasmäärien tavoittelun.

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Description

Avainsanat (aihepiirit)

MICE, matkailu , bisnes turismi, tapaamiset, insentiivit, konferenssit, esittelyt , kehitys, kansainvälinen turismi, Helsinki, turistikohde, turistikohteen markkinointi, markkinointi, trendit

Salassapidettävät (Salassapidettävä tieto)

Contents

Figures

Tables

1 Introduction

Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism is a significant division of tourism, particularly business tourism (Stainton, 2022), activity of traveling to the destination with the purpose of achieving a business goal through attending an event.

Followed by the general globalization, MICE tourism has become a significant sphere that provides the connection and possibilities for the business development in a plenty of ways. Internalization, professional development, new connections, expansion and other opportunities are among the variety of goals, that are sought to be achieved by those, engaging in business tourism.

MICE tourism engages a vast number of travellers, making trips for a variety of purposes. Tourism destinations around the world provide the environment for the tourists to achieve their business or other employment related goals. Each destination obtains organizational actors, that make it possible for the destination to welcome the tourists and provide an experience, that could meet the wants and needs of the visitors.

Cities and towns all over the world hold Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions. MICE tourism destination must be capable of holding the activities and providing experience, that business travellers are searching for. Thus, business tourism destination is required to obtain certain characteristics and proper industry management, to meet the needs of the travellers. Business tourism destination must be able to approach the difficulties associated with the industry and provide innovative solutions in accordance with the circumstances of industry's current state and trends.

1.1 Perspective of the research

This research studies the MICE tourism industry from the perspective of the destinations' organizational actors, that are responsible for creating better opportunities for Helsinki to expand as a MICE tourism destination both in terms of local and international travel. Specifically, as the focus of this research is on the marketing field, the destination's marketing management sector obtains the primary perspective in this work. The purpose of the study is to implement development solutions and improvement suggestions that are to be used by the marketing sector of the destination in question. The development perspectives are created based on information, gained by the authors through the implementation of the qualitative research and secondary data analysis, specifi-

cally the identification of the weaknesses and distinctive features of Helsinki. The definition of advantages and disadvantages related to the destination assisted in the formulations of the problems and points that require improvement.

1.2 Objectives and research questions

With constant internalization, globalization and population growth, the need for already fast-developing MICE tourism is likely to expand even further, encompassing many more participants, actors and destinations. Thus, consistent and innovative development processes are required in order to keep the relevancy of the destinations in relation to the MICE tourism.

The goal of this research is to create marketing suggestions to support and improve the marketing development of MICE tourism industry in Helsinki, with the focus on internalization. The objectives of the study encompass analysis of the current state of the marketing of MICE tourism of Helsinki, definition of the distinctive features, opportunities and weaknesses of the destination that can possibly influence marketing activities of the destination, and, lastly, creation of improvement suggestion, which in the future can be utilized by the marketing actors of the destination in question, based on collected data.

Therefore, main research question was identified:

What marketing solutions and trends should be considered in the development of MICE tourism in Helsinki?

In order to achieve the purpose of the project of producing environment for the future, this research examines current state of the MICE tourism, the strategies and approaches in the industry, from the perspective of the organizational actors in the industry in Helsinki.

To gain a thorough understanding on the matter, supporting questions were established:

What are the distinctive features of helsinki?

Who are the weaknesses of the destination?

What are the current marketing and trend related strategies of MICE industry of Helsinki?

What are international and domestic travel states in the destination?

1.3 Research topic choice

Helsinki is one of the most fast-developing tourism destinations. The city has a wide growth potential, especially in MICE tourism sector, due to its suitability to this type of business tourism. Helsinki offers a unique experince for its visitors: the balance of the modern city and authentic natural resource, which is so apprecaited by MICE tourism participants.

However, there are a variety of misconceptions worldwide regarding Helsinki and Finland in general and, still, a lot of travelers are not even aware of the destination. Thus, the aim of this work is to analyse the marketing approach of the destination towards the creation of its image and creation of awareness. In addition, the approach of the destination towards trends is studied, in order to clear the relation to the traget segment.

2 MICE Industry as part of business travel

In this literature review, MICE tourism is presented by explaining the concept, describing the industry, analyzing the operational environment and its influence area. This chapter consists of the data retrieved from two sources on business tourism: “Business Travel: conferences, incentive travel, exhibitions, corporate hospitality and corporate travel” by Davidson and Cope (2003), and “Business travel and tourism” by Swarbrooke and Horner (2001). Additionally, articles, statistics and a thesis, analyzing local industry, are used to support the creation of a theoretical background for the research.

2.1 Business travel: MICE

According to Davidson and Cope (2003, p.3), business travel - trips associated with travelers' employment and business interests, in order to contribute into the actual implementation of the work process, develop employee's professional skill, or provide the employee with an incentive.

"The Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions (MICE) industry is specifically designed for individuals and organizations whose main travel objectives are networking, lead generation, volume sales, sourcing, and knowledge transfer" (Disimulacion, 2020, p.1).

MICE tourism includes four crucial niche areas:
Meetings: gathering of two or more participants, in order to achieve business development or employment related goals. Meetings vary depending on the format, number of participants and the purpose of assembly.
Incentives: rewarding trip organized by the companies for the employees for the high-performance and achievement of organizational goals. Incentives exist in a variety of forms: recreational, educational, entertainment activities and more.
Conferences: event, gathering of the professionals of a certain industry, dedicated to the learning and discussion about a particular topic, problem-solving and achievement of solutions. (Stainton, 2021)
As shown in Figure 1, Swarbrooke and Horner (2003, p.4) divide business travel into two segments and highlight the difference between them; individual business travel is defined as a mandatory part of the employment, includes chosen destination and usually solo traveling, while business tourism, or the MICE tourism (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions), encompasses travels which have a voluntary nature, usually are group trips, flexibility regarding destinations and venues.

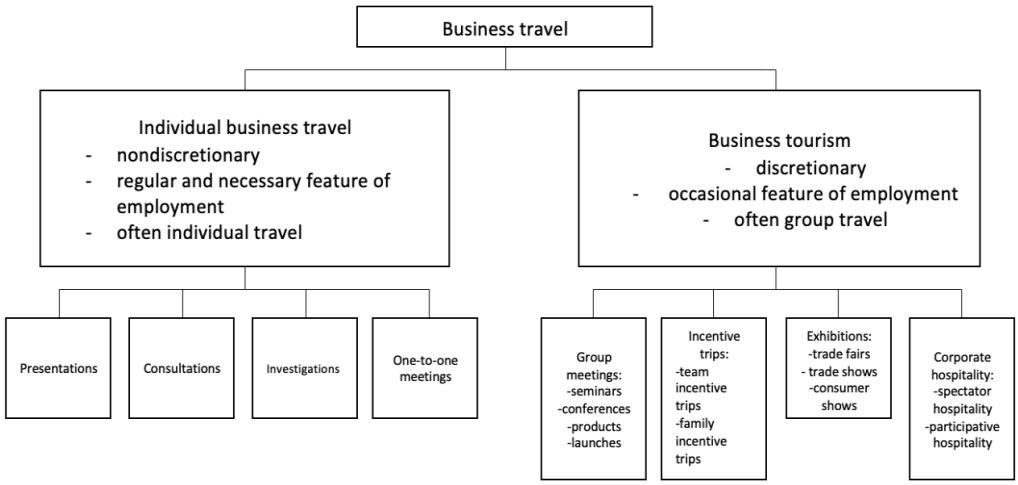

Figure 1/ Business travel sectors (Davidson, Cope, 2003)

2.2 State of MICE tourism industry and perspectives

Globally its value accounted for $805 billion in 2017, $916 billion in 2019 and it is projected to reach $1,439 billion in 2025 and $1,780 billion in 2030. So the global market shows a continuous growth – with a dip in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic" **("The European market potential for MICE tourism"**, 2021)

Due to the restrictions, halting of all travel, social distancing and other measures taken to prevent the spread of the disease, most of the companies were forced to either cancel or postpone any meetings, conferences and such. This brought the level of gained income into a much smaller level. Due to the loss of income and profit, some of the businesses, especially smaller ones, couldn't handle it and were shut down either temporarily or permanently.
As mentioned before, most meetings had to be postponed or completely cancelled, and according to The Centre for Exhibition Industry Research statistics presented by Disimulacion (2020), approximately 72,6% of event scheduled for early 2020 were cancelled. This resulted in a 15,1% decline in income compared to the previous year, which meant monetary losses of approximately 144,9 billion USD.
It is crystal clear that the MICE sector has an added value by organizing live and face-to-face events. It is their task to argue, to defend, and to develop live encounters into very special moments. This will also be the challenge for any event organizing party in the future. After the corona

pandemic I think we will not automatically switch back to the old normal. The MICE sector needs to pay a great deal of attention to careful planning, facilitation and moderation of live encounters, in order to maximize the benefits of meetings.

The ability of the industry to adapt to the circumstances and changes and develop innovations in order to maintain the demand and offer are crucial. Critical decision making of the industry's actors defines the success rates and the development paths.

2.3 Structure of MICE tourism

DEMAND

Intention to travel to the destination due to the business development aim, results in the emergence of the **demand** for MICE tourism. Individuals, companies and associations that seek for the development opportunities through attending a meeting, incentive, conference or exhibition perform as the foundation of the business tourism, as customer and consumer of the products and services provided by the business tourism sector.

SUPPLY

Therefore, demand creates **supply, or products and services, which** are provided by the cities and towns, that perform as business tourism destinations. A wide variety of suppliers are involved in the creation of the services and products that are consumed by MICE tourism travelers. Transportation, accommodation, entertainment, and many more sectors combined create an environment that satisfy the wants and needs of the tourists.

INTERMEDIARIES

Connecting channel of demand and supply are **intermediaries**, which associate two sectors and are responsible of the organizational process and experience creation. Intermediaries, the crucial actors of the industry, are responsible for the organization and management of the industry. Business travel agents, conference placements and handling agencies, exhibition companies, event management companies, incentive travel agencies and destination marketing and management agencies (Swarbrooke, Horner, 2001, p. 7) create commination which leads to the implementation of MICE tourism. Thus, the importance of transparent and inclusive communication cannot be underestimated.

Complicated organizational structure of MICE tourism combines a variety of actors and processes, which aim to meet the needs of business tourists. Figure 2 describes the actors from particular sides of organizational structure of MICE Tourism process.

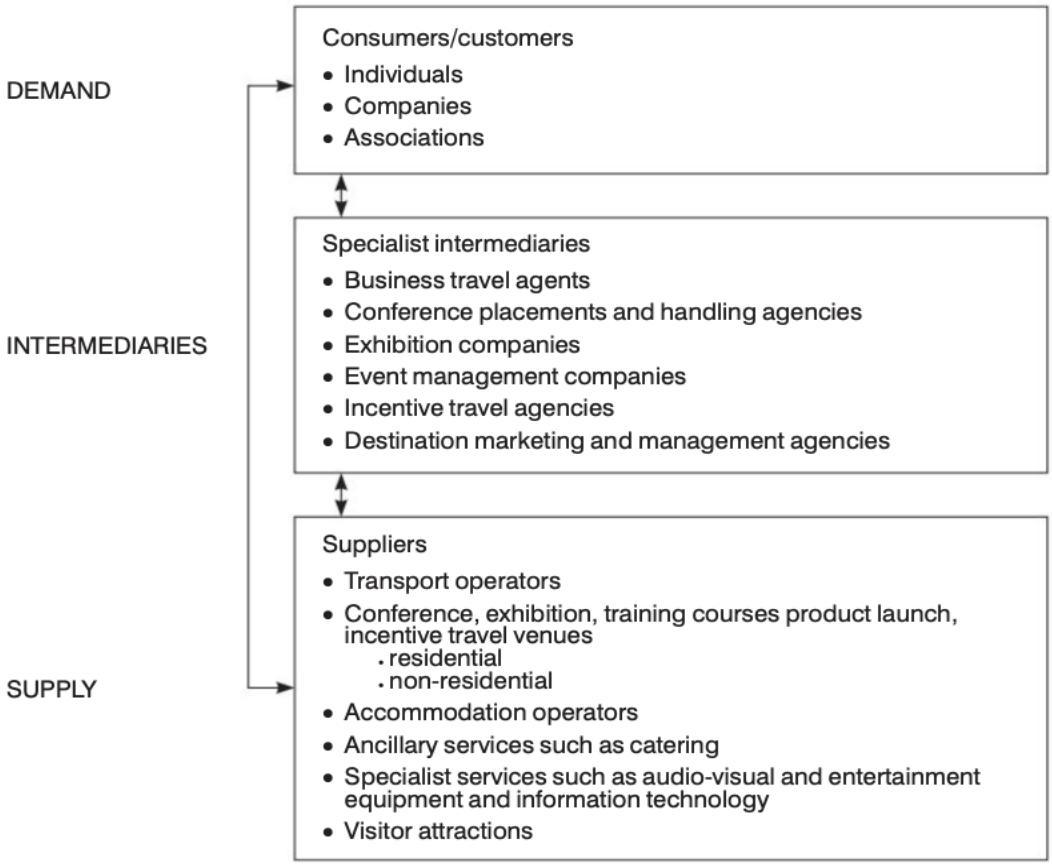

Figure 2/ The structure of business travel and tourism (Swarbrooke, Horner, 2001)

2.4 Business tourism destination

A variety of destinations allows a broad choice for those intending to participate in MICE tourism. The cities and towns, chosen as destinations for business tourists usually obtain certain qualities and an ability to thoroughly provide a traveler with an environment for successful business trip, "commercial and industrial character" of such destinations is a matching environment for business related activities. (Davidson, Cope, 2003, p. 10)

Swarbrooke and Horner (2001, p. 60) determined the combination of factors, that create vibrant environment for the MICE tourism development process. In this paragraph, several points that affect destination's success are introduced:

1. Marketing communication – accessible information regarding the destination and its offer for the target segment, constant availability for communication and transparent customer journey, presence on the market, innovative techniques and approaches, suitable for the target market.
2. Geographical factors – infrastructure of the destination, location
3. Transportation to/within the destination – accessibility of the destination by various types of transportation, convenient transportation services within the destination.
4. Accommodation availability. Accommodation is a foundation for the traveler when experiencing the destination, wide and inclusive offer range is crucial to meet the needs of the business travelers.
5. Cultural attractions. Besides the business, travelers participate in entertainment activities, which might attract those same business customers, but as leisure travelers in the future.
6. Variety of venues. MICE tourism events vary depending on the scale, purpose and goals. The ability of the destination to provide various types of venues is a crucial factor of competitiveness and demand.
7. Technological advances - ability of the destination to provide modern and convenient experience for the customers.
8. Destination management organizations. Credible DMOs attract customers, transparent communication and cooperation with stakeholders and quality experience build long-term relationships.

In the Figure 3 developed by Swarbrooke and Horner (2001) the criteria required from the MICE tourism destinations with specific examples are described.

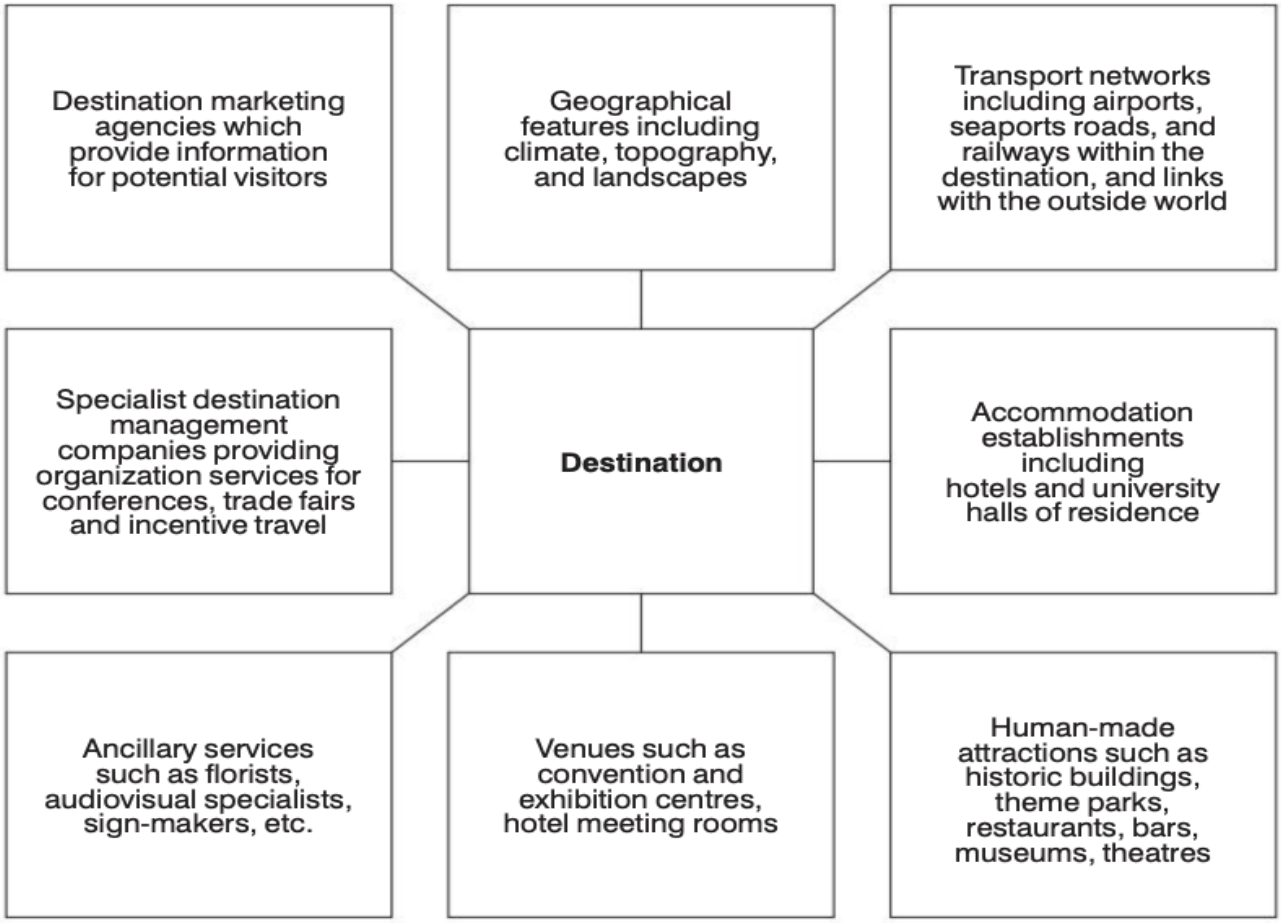

Figure 3/ Figure 3. The element of destination product (Swarbrooke, Horner, 2001)

2.5 The influence of business tourism

The influence of the business tourism is significant, almost all areas of the destination's ecosystems are affected by the implementation of tourism.

As Swarbrooke and Horner (2001, p. 12) remind us: "it (business tourism) is also an activity which is also difficult to manage and can bring costs as well as benefits". Therefore, researchers attempted to evaluate the impact of MICE tourism on economy, social sector and environment of the destinations.

As stated by Davidson and Cope (2003, p.11):

In common with most industries, business travel is affected directly and indirectly by the state of the economy in which those who buy it and sell it operate. At the same time, business travel has a considerable impact upon the economy of the destinations to which its consumers make their trips.

Economy: positive affect of business tourism on the destination's economy, due to the nature of business travelers to spend more during the trip. Furthermore, in case of the successful experience of business travelers, the destinations are granted an opportunity to earn credibility among the target segments for the future, marketing opportunities and general development prospects. (Davidson, Cope, 2003, p. 14-17)

Social sector: support of the local communities by creation of employment spots and ideas for businesses depending on the demand, expenditures of the travelers on local businesses. (Swarbrooke, Horner, 2001, p. 77)

If not implemented in a responsible manner, business tourism could bring a lot of cause to the social sector of the destination, such as: disruptions to the life of the local community by business tourists, the authorities investing more into the comfort of the visitors rather than locals and their infrastructure. (Swarbrooke, Horner, 2001, p. 77-79)

Environment: controversial impact on the environment by the MICE tourism implies in the following: most business tourism activities happen within the downtown of the destinations and do not pollute further located natural areas. Independency from the season prevents over tourism in the destination. (Davidson, Cope, 2003, p. 15)

However, aircraft - the most convenient, fastest and polluting transportation is being used in business tourism activities, business tourists tend to overconsume and create more waste, demand for infrastructure could possibly lead to the destroying of the natural areas. (Swarbrooke, Horner, 2001, p. 77)

The evidence reviewed here seems to suggest a pertinent role of destinations ability to create a strong ecosystem and strategies that are capable to carrying tourism activities without

3 The future of MICE tourism destination

3.1 Trends

SUSTAINABILITY

When looking at recent years, the idea of sustainability has become a prominent factor of customers' decision-making process, acting as one of the main factors that a company must consider in their offered products and services. Sustainability not only comprises of the environmental aspects, but also social. The social part of sustainability is especially important in the marketing of business tourism, on which we will talk more in detail later. In social sustainability things like ethics are important. Moving on to talk about the ecological side of sustainability, companies have the huge pressure to innovate their product to become more sustainable in terms of the production, packaging and in some cases, deliveries.

Certain customers tend to opt for the more ecological option from all the competing companies. This is directly related to customers values and the effect those have on their decision-making process, thus creating an everlasting situation where companies are forced to better each other in a constant flow to fill and exceed their expectations.

As pointed out by Moyles, Ruhanen, Bec and Weiler et al. (2018, p. 2): ”Bansal also argues that sustainability is a practice that must be measured to determine the effectiveness, and businesses should focus on developing better measures of sustainability.”

Thus, concluding that sustainability is also seen as a measure of effectiveness in the company's image, determined by the actions already taken and future attempts in improving the sustainability of the company. In the business tourism world these measures can be seen in the organizer's choices in marketing, actual arrangement of the event or the services such as catering provided for the attendees of the event.

TECHNOLOGY

In the vortex of constant digitalization, technology and its usage in the MICE industry has become a major aspect. With the covid-19 pandemic restricting the arrangement of face-to-face meetings, the popularity of distant and hybrid events increased rapidly.

According to Disimulacion (2020): restrictions set by nations forced many of the companies to either cancel or postpone their events. This is many companies' cases, later presented themselves as either a hybrid or online event. To explain the difference between the two a little further, a hybrid event is a combination between a face-to-face and online event meaning that some of the participants are attending via online platforms, apps and so on, whereas the other attendees participate to the event at a chosen location.

Contrary to this, an online event is held completely online with all the attendees participating using their mobile phones, tablets, laptops or other devices. While arranging a online/hybrid event complicates the actual planning phase, it can also be beneficial. For instance, more attendees can participate since there are not any restrictions because of a venue only being able to fit a certain amount. Going back to the previously mentioned sustainability, by avoiding face-to-face events, people also didn't need to travel thus decreasing the amount of travel. This positively influenced the number of emissions in a mitigating matter. However, these events also posed difficulties for the arranging companies since they were now faced with the issue of being completely reliant on technology, meaning if the internet connection was to fail or the equipment itself to malfunction, the success of the whole event was at risk.

3.2 Marketing

MARKETING

MICE tourism composites 54% of business tourism and still demonstrates potential of expansion ("How to launch successful MICE marketing strategies", n.d.), leading to the demand in qualified service provision.

Trends: a variety of marketing approaches derivates many different paths, which MICE tourism marketing actors could implement to achieve development. However, high expectations of business tourism customers demand the latest innovations, conveniency and quality. Thus, implantation of the most advantageous trends is crucial to achieve success through marketing actions. As an example, active usage of technology, specifically digital marketing creates wide opportunity range for businesses and organizations seeking expansion in the MICE tourism industry. ("How to launch successful MICE marketing strategies")

Destination management organization: the responsibility of managing and improving the destination in order to develop its perspectives and competitiveness in tourism field.

Destination marketing organization: the responsibility of creating destination image and perception and communicating with the target segments lies with destination marketing organization.

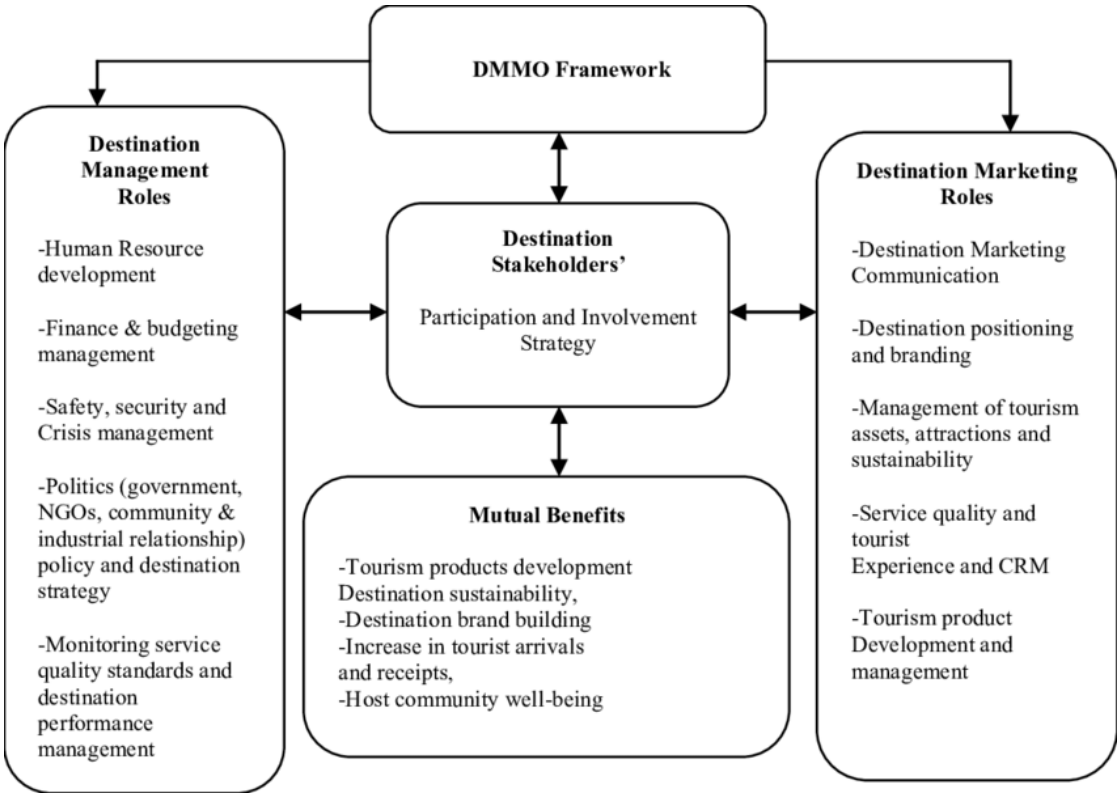

Figure 4/ Figure 4. Destination management and marketing organization framework (DMMO). (Adeyinka-Ojo, Khoo-Lattimore, Nair, 2014)

As shown on the Figure 4, the key differences between destination management organization and destination marketing organization are the initial roles in the industry. While destination management involves such activities as improvement various sectors of the destination itself, such as HR, financing and budgeting, safety and security matters, politics, service quality and destination performance, destination marketing encompasses the selling of the destination to the target segments: marketing communication, positioning, branding, tourism assets, tourist experience, product development and management. (Adeyinka-Ojo, Khoo-Lattimore, Nair, 2014)

CASE: HELSINKI

The MICE tourism destination studied in this report in question, Helsinki – European destination, holding the 29th place in worldwide ranking by number of meetings per city and holding the 17th place among European destinations. (ICCA, 2019) The capital of Finland holds the position of the most popular congress city in the entire Nordic region. In 2018, business tourism generated 4,17 million overnight stays. (Helsinki nousi Pohjoismaiden suosituimmaksi kongressikaupungiksi, 2019) ”This is the result of close cooperation and a great achievement for the whole industry. Helsinki is also the most active city in the world for a congress organizer” (Helsinki nousi Pohjoismaiden suosituimmaksi kongressikaupungiksi, Lassila, 2019)
Helsinki Marketing ltd. is a primary destination marketing organization, creating a public image of the destination, both in international and local markets.

Article “EU Presidency boosts congress tourism to record levels in Helsinki” (2020) describes destination as such:

Helsinki's popularity has grown significantly over the past five years [2015-2019]. According to the latest international survey, Helsinki has become the most popular congress city in the Nordic countries, ahead of Stockholm, Oslo and Copenhagen.* Finland and Helsinki are recognised worldwide as pioneers in sustainable development and this responsibility is now appealing also to international congress and event organisers.

“Helsinki should be a city where you can realize yourself, create opportunities and seize them.”(Helsingin kaupunkistrategia 2021-2025, p.6)
The foundation of the strategy related to marketing is based on networking, cooperation and expansion, creation of inspirational environment for everyone, involved in the destination activities. The city aims to go along with the worldwide devlopement and be the city for living anf visiting. (Helsingin kaupunkistrategia 2021-2025, p.6-10)

4 Research methods and implementation

The main idea of the thesis is to suggest the improvement solutions for the marketing implementation of MICE tourism industry of Helsinki, with the focus on moving Helsinki more towards the international segment.

Therefore, the research question was identified:

What marketing solutions should be considered in the development of MICE tourism in Helsinki?

Additionally, supporting questions are answered during the research, in order to answer the main subject in the most transparent and detailed way.

What are the distinctive features of Helsinki?

Who are the weaknesses of the destination?

What are the current marketing and trend related strategies of MICE industry of Helsinki?

What are international and domestic travel states in the destination?

One semi-structured interview, and secondary data analysis of Helsinki city strategy 2021-2025 were implemented within the research. In the following chapters, the research methods are explained and justified.

4.1 Qualitative research

In this work, qualitative research was chosen as a tool that will most precisely create the vision for future solutions. As described by Rice and Ezzy (1999, p.2): “Qualitative research is more flexible and fluid in its approach than quantitative statistical methods. … the interpretative and flexible approach is necessary due to the focus of qualitative research on meaning and interpretation.”

For the achievement of the goals of this work and the purpose of the answering the main question of the project, which requires a creation of a new concepts and ideas, full and detailed image of the current industry circumstance is crucial. Thus, we aimed to concentrate on creating a complete picture through the implementation of the qualitative research.

In-depth interviews, or also known as semi-structured interviews, give a researcher an opportunity to broadly explore the matter that is being studied, get detailed vision and use the flexibility of the approach to advance.

A good interview is like a good conversation. Good conversation is a two-way affair. One person talks, while the other listens, responds and encourages. In a good interview, who does most of the

talking is the interviewee. While the interviewer asks questions and may talk a little about themselves, most of the time the interviewer listens, and the focus of the conversation is the experience of the interviewee. (Rice, Ezzy, 1999, p.52)

In this project, once semi-structured interview was conducted to get a perspective on the current status of MICE tourism in Helsinki, learn regarding existing strategies and goals, get to know advantages and competitiveness aspects, get the perspective of the key industry actors on tendencies, prospects and future of the destination.

4.2 Secondary data

In addition to the qualitative research, secondary data was used in this research, in order to add reliability and transparency to the work.

Generated through a variety of approaches, both numeric and non-numeric secondary data provide us with broader information and foundation for further investigations. (Smith, 2008) Glaser (1963, p.11) described secondary data analysis as "the study of specific problems through analysis of existing data which were originally collected or other purposes".

In this research, secondary data is used to determine strategical development plan of the destination and develop further perspectives. As a data source, official strategy of Helsinki (Helsingin kaupunkistrategia 2021-2025) was analyzed and crucial factors, relevant to the research were determined.

4.3 Research process

The research process for this work started with the search of the interview respondent, that would be able to provide with the comprehensive description of the destination's MICE tourism industry. The interview process started from contacting marketing organizations in Helsinki, expressing the process that will be implemented and the purpose of the interview. After receiving an answer from the future interviewee, we gave them the questions beforehand to ensure the awareness of the interviewee of the things being asked. The interviewee's professional position takes place in marketing field, particularly related to the City of Helsinki and congress and meeting sector. The interview was scheduled on the 20th of September 2022. Discussion took place in Teams and

lasted 40 minutes. During the interview, the responded provided materials to support the perspective and prove reliability. The materials were used in this research as secondary data and supported the answers to interview questions.
The questions asked during the interview and the invitation, sent through an email, are attached in the end of the report (appendice 1).
Foremost, based on the data collected from the interview and data analysis, the weaknesses and advantages, distinctive features, opportunities and threats of the destination were identified. This was done in order to identify the sectors which require improvement and the aspects, which could be used as the motor to the development.

4.4 Data analysis

During this research, in-depth semi-structured interview and secondary data were combined to reach the goals of the work of, first, developing a perspective on the current circumstances of the marketing field in the destination, and second, innovating improvement seeking solutions. Therefore, close reading data analysis method was implemented in order to answer the main questions of the report.

Close reading consists of analyzing written information and interpreting it, to achieve the most detailed results. (“Close reading”, 2016) This approach requires attentive examination of the data, as the observations are intended to construct a conclusion. (Kain, 1998)

For the semi-structured interview to be appropriate for close reading, the interview conversation was recorded and transcribed, with the permission of the respondent.

4.5 Ethicality

The research has been ethically carried out during each part of the process: collection of the literature review, qualitative research and data analysis. The points to prove the research processes ethicality will be presented in a few points in the chapters below.
In order to implement ethical principles in the literature review, the citations and sourcing were used. Each author and source were mentioned both in-text and in references chapter, after the

usage of data. This was not only done to avoid plagiarism, but also to credit the original information sources as they should.

During a semi-structured interview: the respondent was introduced to the goals of the research, the respondent was able to ask for the clarification of the question if one was unclear, the respondent is aware of the analysis of the given answers in this work and the publication of the work, the respondent was informed about the interview being recorded. For the most possible transparency of the interview and clear provision of the interviewee's perspective, the interview was transcribed. Afterwards, we maintained anonymity as well as pointed out clearly, which part came from our interviewee in order to credit them properly.

We are familiarized with the ethical principles of JAMK University of Applied Sciences and the proper conduction of the research process.

4.6 Reliability

The reliability of the data used in this project is carefully checked and analyzed by the authors. The research contains the usage of a variety of different sources related to the topic in the theoretical background chapter, the semi-structures interview was carried out with the professional from the industry and data analysis contains perspectives based on reliable foundation.

In this literature review numerous educational materials on the topic of business tourism and travel are used: "Business travel: conferences, incentive travel, exhibitions, corporate hospitality and corporate travel" (2003) and "Business travel and tourism. Business travel and tourism" (2001), by well-known authors Davidson and Cope, and Swarbrooke and Horner respectively. Additionally, other researches from different perspectives related to our work, such as trends in sustainability, marketing, international and domestic tourism, supported the theoretical background. Materials regarding the local business tourism circumstances, especially statistics, were used to establish a transparent picture for the reader. Various sources demonstrating the general picture of business tourism in Helsinki assisted in the creation of reliability of theory background.

The interview conducted by the authors within the research was held in a F2F online meeting in Teams. The interviewee received the interview questions beforehand and was able to gather the materials and prepare for the discussion. The interviewee used related materials and as mentioned in the previous research and the possibility to implement chosen data analysis method, the interview was recorded and transcribed.

Finally, the conclusion involves the analysis of the interview in accordance with the materials gathered during literature review process and with the purpose of the answering the main question of

the research. As our analysis method is close reading, careful transcription of the interview was required to receive most transparent results.

5 Results

In this chapter, the answers that were gathered during online semi-structured interview and the secondary data, Helsinki city strategy 2021-2025, will be presented.

5.1 The strategy of MICE tourism in Helsinki

The strategy of Helsinki states that all events play a significant role in the development and growth of the city, each event affects the reputation of the destination. Thus, main operators of Helsinki determined the details that affect productivity and vitality: equality, highlight of the destination's advantages, globalization, improvement of city's infrastructure, sustainability growth. (Kasvun paikka. Helsingin kaupunkistrategia 2021-2025)

"Helsinki is known as a reliable, modern and convenient developer of events. In order to continue improving this reality, one of the most crucial parts of the strategy is network. A broad network that constantly expands and creation of strong connections within and outside the destination benefit MICE tourism field and give major development opportunities." (Personal communication, 2022)

MARKETING STRATEGY

A big part of the marketing strategy is improvement of awareness of Helsinki, general Helsinki marketing. The main action that is being implemented is a customer work, meeting customers and more. "Especially on the congress side, when we talk about organizational work, there is much more of traditional marketing approaches. Digital B2B marketing and influencer collaborations have been implemented, but unfortunately these approaches did not appear very successful." (Personal communication, 2022)

There are certain, old methods of operation that have been around for a long time, and undoubtedly work for the target group. It is largely a face-to-face encounter, which is the best way to implement marketing. The convention bureau currently has a LinkedIn channel, where the destination highlights, for example, what is happening in Helsinki, what new hotels, event spaces are coming. Otherwise, there is no specific marketing strategy for the target group. (Personal communication, 2022)

TRENDS

Regarding the trends, the city if maintaining old-fashioned methods of marketing. However, for example in sustainability and digitalization fields, the trending approaches are implemented according to the values and style of Helsinki. (Personal communication, 2022)
Helsinki aims to be innovative and be a part of the global development, while benefiting the destination and everyone involved there. (Helsingin kaupunkistrategia, 2021-2025, p.10-12)

5.2 Competitive factors of Helsinki

“Main advantages of Helsinki - nature and archipelago.” If we consider purely event venues and everything else, all hotels and other venues are pretty much the same all around the world. “Generally, there is nothing completely unique. But what Helsinki has, is a unique archipelago. There are about 327 islands in front of Helsinki and more than 100 km of coastline. Helsinki is a good-sized city and the capital, the downtown area is within a 2-3 km radius from the core center, where event organizers can find everything. It is something special that Helsinki is so compact, but also urban, and the archipelago and nature are still around.” (Personal communication, 2022)
For example, if you want to go on an incentive trip, which includes a bit of the business program, but then also various activities, dinners. That way, the customers do not have to worry about having to sit on the bus for 30-60 minutes, but they can get to their location by e.g. boat, directly from the congress venue. Helsinki’s slogan "Nature, space & silence" is such a certain distinguishing factor that when you want to take a breather, you can already do that with us. However, you don't have to go completely into the forest, because it's right next door. (Personal communication, 2022)
“Renovations are planned and carried forward in cooperation with the residents, the nature of the area and characteristics.” (Kasvun paikka. Helsingin kaupunkistrategia 2021-2025, p.32)
The unique feature of Helsinki must be embraced and supported by the sustainable development approaches and quality planning, in order to improve and devlop the unique wnvironment of the city. (Kasvun paikka. Helsingin kaupunkistrategia 2021-2025, p.34)

5.3 Weaknesses of Helsinki's MICE tourism sector

When thinking of an incentive trip, for example, many people want to go to some wonderful exotic destination with sun and a beach. Even though Helsinki can offer the beach, sometimes there is still some sun missing. In general, Helsinki is still not a super well-known destination, there are not many people who have visited. People tend to have a perception of Finland being unbelievably expensive country. However, that is not true. "Often, if you compare Helsinki to other destinations, for instance in southern Europe, what is included in the traveling package in Finland is so much more than what is included in the package there. The package that is offered by Helsinki already involves a variety of attributes, that are necessary to implement any type of event: technology, decorations and more. In many other places, when buying a package, the customer receives basically only the venue, and other mandatory aspects come little by little, for the additional cost. In that sense, Helsinki is not much more expensive than other big cities, that are so popular in the industry." (Personal communication, 2022)

However, MICE trips and such usually include, for instance, a networking event, where the visitors can enjoy wine. Slightly different prices for alcoholic beverages in Finland already in the beginning of the customer journey create rejection and perception regarding overall pricing. (Personal communication, 2022)

5.4 How can Helsinki improve?

"Former Helsinki Business and former Helsinki Marketing have been united into one organization – Helsinki Partners, in order to operate cooperatively. While Helsinki Business has done more of actual business and investment side, of attracting talent, Helsinki Marketing has done more of this visitor marketing. So now that there are joint resources, more impressive things are expected." (Personal communication, 2022) In general, there's a goal of taking Helsinki to the world, and there is no chance to market and gain visibility purely with money. Media visibility is currently one of the development motors. As an example, the virtual gig of JVG on May Day gained a huge visibility in the press-. These are the kinds of things that, when done at the right time and moment, in the right way, get attention in the media. Therefore, it is crucial to establish right channels and right time for the action. Helsinki Partners invests more in people's meetings. Different sales forums and trade fairs are visited, where the network and connections happen. There will be differ-

ent campaigns that will be tried and that will hopefully stick in people's minds. At this point, demand in Helsinki has indeed risen considerably, which is certainly a positive sign and a strong foundation for bigger future. (Personal communication, 2022)

5.5 Practical development solutions

Helsinki possesses a good and still expanding hotel accommodation capacity. Contrarily, the number of event spaces is starting to be somewhat limited. Especially on the MICE axis, incentive and event sectors customers are always searching for something unique and memorable. Basic conference halls function perfectly for their purpose, but if the customer is looking for something different and distinctive, the choice of the locations in Helsinki is not the most inclusive. It is something that needs to be tackled to some extent. As mentioned before, the quality of accommodations offered in the destination is constantly growing. Helsinki has big chain representatives, luxury category hotels, also the development of older hotels, renovations and branding has led to the higher ratings of many hotels. Therefore, the price range is rising, making budget friendly options limited. The destination must have a variety of options to offer for the customers. Additionally, there is a need to attract more investments to the destination. That, in its turn, requires the raise of awareness about the destination in the works: products and services of Helsinki, perspectives of the destination and current state. (Personal communication, 2022)

5.6 The main actors

“The responsibility of developing the infrastructure of the city, internal and external communication, all operations inside the destination and many more functions are implemented by the city of Helsinki and the tourism unit – DMO, making them crucial actors. On the other hand, there is a convention bureau, a visitor attraction operator, which does the sales and marketing work to get that interest here. Managing the destination with knowledge and intelligence is a crucial, communication and connected actions make the best out of the situation, leading to the satisfaction of the customer and growth of the destination.” (Personal communication, 2022)

Hotels obtain a really important position, providing a variety of services, including accommodation facilities, event locations and leisure opportunities. Big international brands like Hilton, Radisson blue that operate in a destination have a role that cannot be underestimated. It is important to find globally known brands, but then there is also, for example, Scandic, which is a Nordic brand, and Sokos hotel, a Finnish brand. Those are crucial in order to create personality of the destination

and differentiation. The event venues are also a crucial part of the actors in the field. For example, when Finlandia Hall has been under renovation for a couple of years now, it has led to the shortcoming in the market. Even though little Finlandia came to replace it, it is a significantly smaller escape space than the main building itself. Following, through DMC operators, business activities are associated with the city. Through them, for example, incentive trips and connections to international tour operators happen. It is therefore important that the destination has enough of them, so that they acquire inclusive information about the destination for the success of the operations inside Helsinki, and when networking with international partners. When it comes to the transportation side, there is constant improvement in transportation connections going, because when it is easy to move around, then it's worth using it. Nowadays, sustainability plays an important role in many ways, there have already been inquiries about fully electric buses, which puts pressure on the transportation companies.Food is also such an important part of business events, where we go to eat. There are good-sized restaurants. And wonderfully, there has been a huge leap forward in the last 10 years. (Personal communication, 2022)

5.7 Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions

In terms of visitor numbers, congress and conference sector of the destination attracts the significant majority. One big event in that field can include from one thousand up to eight thousand participants. Compared to the incentive tourism sector, where one trip normally involves 20-50 people, there is a significant difference.In all probability, the most visible ones are the conferences and others. However, all the sectors, their needs, purposes and goals are so different, it is difficult to define which of them is the biggest or most popular group. (Personal communication, 2022)

5.8 Target segment

“As practice shows, half of visitors of Helsinki arrive to the destination for the purpose of business. Helsinki is equally often visited by both international and domestic travelers. In Helsinki Partners, all activities are aimed at foreign customers, attraction of congress guests, events and tourists. From the city’s point of view, international visitors are the priority, but there are many domestic tourists as well. International travelers are more profitable, compared to the domestic ones. For example, international traveler that visits Helsinki for the purpose of attending a conference, spends approximately 1600 euros in the destination, on accommodation, various conference fees,

food and beverage, shopping and souvenirs. Therefore, even though getting international customers is always more laborious, it is more beneficial for the destination." (Personal communication, 2022)

5.9 Future of the industry

Sustainable growth is a strong goal of the city. In its own pace, the city is slowly introducing modern solution to existing approaches. The plans of the city involve the Chinese market. There is a high interest from the segment, and the number of visitors could easily be obtained because the population of China is so large. However, currently the attention is focused on travelers from nearby areas, like central Europe, because there is already a good network and foundation. Another factor is that close location of those countries to Finland results in easier accessibility in terms of transportation. Here we return to the topic of sustainability, because short traveling time affects the environment less than a longer trip. Sustainability in general plays a pretty big role in Helsinki, after all, the city is supposed to be carbon neutral by 2030. During the pandemic, there was a discussion on the movement of everything to online, but even now it is noticeable, that the industry has largely returned to normal in many ways. Especially in MICE industry, where the purpose of everything is networking and connection, it is hard to replace F2F implementations with online. There are new hotel projects coming to Helsinki, more event venues are needed. The city is developing, and eventfulness is one of the strategic points, because it creates that living city. (Personal communication, 2022)

6 Discussion

In this chapter, the discussion covers the results gathered during the semi-structured interview and the analysis of the secondary data. The outcomes of the conducted interview and secondary data analysis are combined in order to answer the **main** and supporting questions of the research:
What trends and new marketing ideas should be considered in the development of MICE tourism in Helsinki?
What are the advantages of Helsinki?
Who are the weaknesses of the destination?
What is the marketing strategy of the destination?

What are international and domestic travel states in the destination

The questions established in the beginning of the research were answered during the semi-structured interview, some answers were found from the secondary data. (Helsingin kaupunkistrategia, 2021-2025)
Based on the supporting questions, the SWOT analysis in the last chapter of this report was created from the results of the interview and secondary data to define the concrete areas which require improvement and the aspects, which could positively affect the development of marketing of Helsinki's MICE tourism.

The strategy of MICE tourism in Helsinki: marketing strategy

The strategy is one of the most crucial aspects in the development process. In Helsinki, a variety of actors from organizational, accommodation, transportation and restaurant fields create an environment, where MICE tourism activities happen. Success of the actors in the destination, in turn, has a positive effect on the destination. As mentioned in the literature review, the destinations tend to have both destination marketing and destination management organizations. In Helsinki, Helsinki Partners is responsible for the global and local sustainable branding of the destination, while the City of Helsinki is in response of the improvement of the destination from the inner perspective.
The strategy of Helsinki aims to achieve global awareness of the city. Traditional and old-fashioned approaches are implemented to attract the attention to the destination. However, trending approaches, such as digital campaigns are occasionally used, and tend to be successful. Consequently, creation of marketing strategy is a relevant part of the strategy of the city. It is relevant to share both
As mentioned by the interviewee and the digital strategy of Helsinki, international customers are the relevant aspect of the development process on the way to the global market and awareness. As stated during the interview discussion: "From the city's point of view, international visitors are the priority. … getting international customers is always more laborious, it is more beneficial for the destination." Thus, in order to attract the international market, Helsinki should implement a customer journey, that would work for the expansion of the city.

Customer journey, as a rule, starts from the marketing. As mentioned in “Competitive factors of Helsinki” paragraph, one of the most reliable and known for Helsinki channels are co-operators. The city already invests in the meetings of people and network, which is a positive sign.

Competitive factors of Helsinki

As discussed in the interview, Helsinki is a versatile destination. When visiting the destination, visitors receive both urban environment with a variety of services, and authentic natural ecosystem, which also provides circumstances for different kind of activities. This feature of Helsinki is a huge distinctive advantage, travellers pay for only one trip, but receive plenty of opportunities. Especially in MICE tourism, where a good combination of business and leisure is highly valued. Hotels also share an important role in terms of offering multiple sorts of services such as accommodation, venues for different sorts of events and activities for leisure time.
Helsinki applied to the element of destination product (Swarbrooke, Horner, 2001)
As destination marketing organization, Helsinki Partners is the main actor, creating the marketing and promotion implementations for the expansion of the destination. The geographical location of Finland allows the country to welcome the travellers during all seasons. The location allows the visitors to accessibly visit Helsinki by a variety of transportations, as well as convenient and diverse transport network inside the city offers a comfortable moving for the residents and visitors. A wide number of hotels suitable for MICE traveling activities are offering their services, along with the venues purposely intended for MICE events. In Helsinki, the companies such as Helsinki convention bureau, Elämys, Confedent International and many more are responsible for the organization of MICE travel activities. Helsinki possess a variety of human-made attractions, however the natural resources of the city and Finland in general still remain to be an attraction, that interests tourists.

Weaknesses of Helsinki’s MICE tourism sector

Helsinki is already a significant MICE tourism destination, especially among the Nordics. However, still many travellers are not familiar with Finland, or have different misconceptions regarding the

destination, for example about location, pricing and offer of the destination in terms of the product and service. Thus, the improvement of the awareness about Finland, particularly Helsinki, is a crucial step on the way to the global market.
There is a variety of approaches to improve the awareness of the destination, however, it is crucial to produce the right image about the destination and avoid creating wrong perceptions.
The digitalization is one of the most relevant trends nowadays and a useful marketing channel. Therefore, this method could potentially expand the opportunities of the city and improve awareness.

The main actors

To summarize the information discussed earlier on in the interview one of the main actors of the industry, who are responsible for aspects such as development of the infrastructure, communication both internally and externally fall on the DMO. This makes them a crucial part of the industry and its future. In addition to this, the convention bureau, who is more responsible for marketing, sales and visitor attraction to get the interest towards Helsinki as a destination. As mentioned in the interview, leading in a knowledgeable and intelligent way, communication and actions in relation point towards the optimal result, which can be seen in improved customer satisfaction as well as overall development of the city. DMCs, whose operation is in relation to the business actions of Helsinki. They are the ones who are directly connected to the arrangement of events such as incentives. They are also the ones in connection with international tourist operators, making them crucial for the city of Helsinki. The amount of DMC's is important, since the lack of them weakens the city's chances of sharing information, making connections and the success rate of operations. If applied to the model "Structure of business travel and tourism" by Swarbrooke and Horner (2001), DMO and DMCs are on on the position of the intermediaries, connecting the travellers to the destination.
The multiple international brands such as Hilton, Radisson Blue etc. which might be a more comfortable option especially for international tourists. However, additionally Helsinki offers its visitors an option to stay in Nordic or Finnish brands like Scandic and Sokos Hotels. These offer a chance for differentiation and bring out the actual personality of Helsinki as a destination.
An obvious contributor to the industry is the actual venues on which the events can be hosted. While some hotels can also offer those, venues which cater specifically for the purpose of events gain a more crucial role. One example of this is Helsinki's Finlandia Hall, which during this moment

is under construction. While the Little Finlandia has been offered as a replacement, it still doesn't add up to the original venue. This can partly be explained due to its smaller size compared to the original as well as the reputation surrounding the actual Finlandia Hall. As mentioned by the interviewee, as a popular event venue, the lack of Finlandia Hall shows up as a hole for the industry posing more difficulties in the choice of already limited venue options. Transportation also shares a role in the main actors, however much smaller compared to the others. Helsinki's diverse transportation options make moving inside the city easy and convenient with the short amounts of distance between places, which is why it is often recommended for visitors to use public transportation. The currently topical subject of sustainability also plays a role in transportation's importance. The inquiries for fully electric buses have created a pressure for the transportation companies, which further pushes for development. According to the same model Swarbrooke and Horner (2001) on the Figure 4, transportation, accommodation and food providers are in the category of suppliers.

Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions

The complexity of the MICE industry cannot be defined too simply; however, it can be divided into four main categories mentioned along way the previous chapters. All the four share similarities but are differing enough to have their own category. Where congresses and conferences can offer the more scientific, informational aspects while in the contrary exhibitions are a way for people to showcase their creativity in terms of art and such. On a totally different note, incentives are more limited, more often invitation-based events arranged for only a limited crowd.

Taking back to previous chapters, comes to question the popularity percentage of said events in Helsinki. Measuring what is supposedly the most popular event form can be difficult, but basing it purely on the number of attendees puts conferences and congresses at the top. As mentioned by our interviewee, especially the international conferences bring more population towards Helsinki in comparison to smaller sized, local events. When comparing the size scale of each of the forementioned event types we can conclude that exhibitions and incentives in comparison to conferences and congresses are smaller scaled. As mentioned previously by our interviewee, incentives usually comprise of maximum 20-50 people, whereas big conferences can include thousands of attendees depending on the venue, is it a domestic or international event and whether it is held face-to-face or by some other form. Exhibitions are rather rare in Helsinki due to the lack of ven-

ues for such. One example mentioned by the interviewee is the non-existent possibility of arranging cocktail parties inside art museums, or the lack of old, interesting and empty buildings in which the venue allows the organizer to transform the space into almost anything.
As described by Davidson and Cope (2003) on the Figure 1, generally MICE events tend to be more massive, encompassing a wider number of the people and making it more beneficial for the destination to host one of them.

Target segment

In the interview, our interviewee mentioned the amount of domestic and international customers to be around fifty-fifty. Especially during the recent years when the pandemic restricted travel, Helsinki as a destination had no other choice than to focus on the domestic customers. However, it has been stated by our interviewee that international customers are more targeted than domestic ones. When talking about the fact that approximately 50 % of Helsinki's overall tourists are business- based, we can see the reason why the city would want to put effort into pulling more business- related customers to visit. This is only supported by the fact, as mentioned by our interviewee, that business- related, international customers spend around 1 600 euros on various things such as accommodation, conference fees, food and souvenirs. Where it might be difficult to attract the said target segment, it can also be seen as more beneficial and profitable for the city itself.
There are a variety of ways to attract the international customers. One of those would be the implementation of trends, especially in sustainability and technology. People tend to be curious about innovations and new experiences, simultaneously with the use of digital marketing approaches, the innovative offers of the city and sustainable behaviour will create a positive perception.

Future of the industry

The development of a destination is vital for it to increase in popularity and gain new customers. This means development both in relation to venues and transportation, as well as technology and accommodation options. A point mentioned by our interviewee, in which the imply that "buying"

customers would not be a successful way of gaining more popularity or visitors to Helsinki. As previously mentioned, sustainability is one of the most topical subjects now. Modern and more sustainable innovations can be seen as one of the goals of Helsinki's development.

Other plans, more in relation to customer attraction are the Asian markets, specifically the Chinese. As the region already has an existing interest towards Helsinki as a destination, more visitors could be obtained due to the large population of the country. However, at the current moment, the plan is to focus more on central Europe as well as other nearby countries. This is supported by the already existing network and foundation in comparison to the previously mentioned Chinese market. The proximity of the main focused areas only supports the decision to maintain them as the main market. A point mentioned by our interviewee brings out that traveling distance and thus the time consumed into it also affects the decision. Sustainability walks together with this since less travel time would mean less emissions, thus giving the opportunity to work towards the city's sustainability goal to be completely carbon-free in 2030.

Going back to talking about the pandemic, it also initiated a discussion whether everything should be moved online or not. Due to the noticeable return- rate of the industry to its supposed normal state as well as customers' need for face-to-face networking and connecting overall, completely replacing f2f implementations with online or hybrid forms became unlikely.

Previously mentioned in the weaknesses of Helsinki, the hotel offering of Helsinki is still largely in need of development. Due to this, the city is also launching new hotel projects to match the need of the customers. Our interviewee also mentioned that the addition of event venues and their diversity is also something that the city eventually would have to tackle. Overall, via the development Helsinki wants to bring out eventfulness.

7 Conclusion and development ideas

In this chapter, foremost, the main question of the research will be answered and the development suggestions for the MICE tourism field in Helsinki will be provided. To achieve the most transparent results, crucial aspects of the development process are highlighted and explained. The suggestions and solutions for the marketing sector of Helsinki were established based on the results of the interview, secondary data (Helsingin kaupunkustrategia, 2021-2025) analysis and theoretical background.

For the clarity of the aspects used as a foundation, the SWOT analysis was created based on the collected data from the interview and secondary data (see Figure 5).

Strength	Weaknesses
Balance of the modern city and nature Good infrastructure Safe travel Strong network inside the destination Wide variety of accommodation, especially hotels International environment The most affordable destination in the Nordics Unique archipelago	A lot of people are still not aware of Helsinki and what it has to offer Wrong perception in the world: too expensive Alcohol tax The lack of exact marketing strategy
Opportunities	**Threats**
The marketing in global MICE sector with the highlight on the diversity of the things that traveller receives while visiting Helsinki Marketing towards the regions especially interested in Europe and Nordics, e.g Chinese market Digital marketing in general	Switching to luxury accommodation, leading to the lack of affordable options The expansion of the wrong perceptions reagrding the pricing in Helsinki The misunderstanding regarding the packages that Helsinki offers among the MICE tourism segment The similarity of venues, not too many outstanding venues

Figure 5/SWOT analysis

8 Marketing

A**ctions within the destination:** creation of the marketing strategy and sharing to the network of all field actors within the destination. It is important that everyone has a big goal of developing the destination and a vision, what the development process consists of.

Creating positive perception about Helsinki and establishing clear picture of Helsinki: target segment must be aware of what is Helsinki, what is the offer: the main advantage of Helsinki – balances combination of the modern city and authentic natural resources, highlight of the most affordable pricing among Nordics, create conveniency for travellers: transparent customer journey.

Creation of marketing channels with the focus on international customer segment: some have a wrong image about Helsinki: overpriced, not as good as other MICE tourism capitals, too far and many other misconceptions. Thus, provision of the detailed description of the offer (Helsinki) is vital.

Presence for the customer is one of the key factors. For some countries Finland is something that is not very known and located very far. Letting everybody know that Helsinki is constantly open for new connections is a way to expand the network.

Finding suitable cooperators is a huge boost for the development process. Tour operators, marketing organizations and other travel companies that focus on organization of MICE tourism trips obtain wide connection network with businesses around the world. For Helsinki, it is an opportunity to transparently communicate with the potential customers through such channels. It is important to introduce the destination as detailed as possible, especially since Helsinki is still a growing destination.

Creation of packages based on market research of the cooperators that are going to be the channels, description of the offers and what the traveler is going to receive when visiting Helsinki, particularly with the highlight of the most outstanding factor of the city – balance of the modern city and nature.

In addition to traditional marketing approaches, trending strategies can open for Helsinki larger opportunities. For instance, traditional marketing, such as connection of marketing organizations of the destination to the similar destination marketing companies in other cities and tour operators, participation of the destination's representatives in fairs and tourism business events, along with digital marketing implementations, such as involvement of target segment through trends related to the advantages of Helsinki, services, events and individuals.

Trends. Helsinki, as a product and a tourism destination, is picked by the customer among other destinations during their customer journey. People tend to choose something that is close to their values, at the same time searching for new memorable experiences. In such case, implementation of trends in sustainability and entertainment sectors are crucial.

Thus, sustainability and entertainment fields are given a responsibility of analyzing the perspectives of Helsinki's target segment, their wants and needs, and satisfy those along with brining benefit to the destination. Therefore, market research is one of the crucial parts of the development process. In entertainment sector, what are the innovations that interest the target segment and what are the estimated budget groups. In sustainability field, the most crucial part is to achieve a better outcome for the destination while bringing the best possible experience for the customer. As a bonus, a lot of customers these days tend to choose more eco-friendly options.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview questions

What is the current general strategy in terms of Helsinki's business tourism industry, and what is the goal that is to be achieved with this strategy?

Sub questions to question: What is the marketing strategy?

2. What makes Helsinki stand out from other MICE tourism destinations?

3. What are the weaknesses of Helsinki as a MICE tourism destination?

Sub question: What would be needed for Helsinki to become more desirable for tourists?

Sub question: Do you now have some practical ideas of the aspects affecting MICE tourism's development in Helsinki?

4. What sector of MICE is the most popular: meetings, incentives, conferences or exhibitions?

5. Who is the main customer of MICE industry in Helsinki and what are their needs? (Customer portrait: international or domestic, goals and expectations)

6. How do you expect the industry to grow in the next decade? (What kind of trends and innovations)

7. What are the main actors of mice tourism industry in Helsinki? (Destination management organisation, transportation, venues, marketing)

Appendix 2. interview invitation

Hei,

Opiskelija-kollegani ,Kira Soloveva, Jyväskylän ammattikorkeakoulusta oli yhteydessä teihin muutama kuukausi sitten koskien opinnäytetyötämme. Vaikka valitettavasti emme saaneetkaan teistä komissioijaa kyseiselle työlle, halusimme tiedustella olisiko mahdollista haastatella teitä tutkimus-osiotamme varten. Opinnäytetyömme keskittyy erityisesti Helsinki alueen MICE-industrian kehittämiseen, jonka vuoksi uskomme, että juuri teidän haastattelemisenne olisi meille hyödyksi. Mikäli kyseinen haastattelu onnistuisi, olisiko mahdollista tehdä se joko puhelimitse tai esimerkiksi teams:in välityksellä.

Ystävällisin terveisin,

Inka Valkonen ja Kira Soloveva

-

Hei Inka,

Kiitos paljon viestistä kollegalleni. Mielellään vastaan tähän tutkimushaastatteluun. Oletteko minkälaisella aikataululla liikkeellä? Tämä viikko on melko kiireinen, mutta torstai-iltapäivällä olisi aikaa. Ensi viikolla on huomattavasti parempi tilanne kalenterin suhteen.

-

Hei!

Ensiviikko sopisi meille oikein hyvin. Sopisiko sinulle esim. tiistai? Voimme halutessasi lähettää kysymykset sinulle jo etukäteen, ne ovat tosin englanniksi, joten toivon ettei siitä ole vaivaa.

Ystävällisin terveisin,

Inka ja Kira

-

Hei Inka,

Hienoa, tiistai käy kyllä. Tällä hetkellä kalenteri on vielä täysin ilman merkintöjä.

Ja hienoa jos voit laittaa kysymykset etukäteen, niin ehtii vähän kerätä ajatuksia. Ja englanti on täysin ok, koska teemme täysin kansainvälisiä toimenpiteitä.

-

Loistavaa! Olisimme vapaita tekemään haastattelun klo 13:00, mikäli se vain sinulle sopii. Ohessa vielä kysymyksemme:

What is the current general strategy in terms of Helsinki's business tourism industry, and what is the goal that is to be achieved with this strategy?

Sub questions to question: What is the marketing strategy?

2. What makes Helsinki stand out from other MICE tourism destinations?

3. What are the weaknesses of Helsinki as a MICE tourism destination?

Sub question: What would be needed for Helsinki to become more desirable for tourists?

Sub question: Do you now have some practical ideas of the aspects affecting MICE tourism's development in Helsinki?

4. What sector of MICE is the most popular: meetings, incentives, conferences or exhibitions?

5. Who is the main customer of MICE industry in Helsinki and what are their needs? (Customer portrait: international or domestic, goals and expectations)

6. How do you expect the industry to grow in the next decade? (What kind of trends and innovations)

7. What are the main actors of mice tourism industry in Helsinki? (Destination management organisation, transportation, venues, marketing)

Ystävällisin terveisin,
Inka ja Kira

-

Hei Inka,
Kiitos kysymyksistä. Ja kello 13 käy. Laitatko vielä kalenteri/teams kutsun?

-

Hei!

Pahoitellut myöhäisestä vastauksesta. Laitan kutsulinkin vielä varuulta tähän. Mikäli ongelmia ilmenee jostain syystä, niin koitetaan selvittää. Mukavaa alkavaa viikkoa! :)

Ystävällisin terveisin