

# **The Effect of a Customer's Cultural Background on Service Experience**

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Bachelor's Thesis

March 2017

School of Business and Service Management

Degree Programme in Hospitality Management

Author(s) Portaankorva, Saara	Type of publication Bachelor's thesis	Date March 2017
	Number of pages 77	Language of publication English
Title of publication <b>The Effect of a Customer's Cultural Background on Service Experience</b>		
Degree programme Degree programme in Hospitality Management		
Supervisor(s) Hukkanen, Anita		
Assigned by Rastela, Linda, Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki		
Abstract  <p>The main purpose of the thesis was to examine the effects of a customer's cultural background on service encounters and value creation. The aim of the study was to create ways to recognise cultural differences and improve international customers' satisfaction with the accommodation business.</p> <p>A survey for international customers of Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki was conducted to find out their values and preferences regarding to their hotel stay and overall experience. The aim of the questionnaire was to test the hypothesis according to Hofstede's cultural theory and measure the customer satisfaction of the international guests of the hotel. Besides, systematic literature review of former studies on the relation of cultural differences to service was conducted in order to gain wider and more reliable results about the topic. The questionnaire was analysed using quantitative methods as regression analysis. The data of systematic literature review was coded and analysed by using the content analysis method.</p> <p>The results of the systematic literature review supported the hypothesis that a customer's cultural background influences on his service experience in the accommodation business. The differences in culture should especially be considered in communication, but they also affect the customer's value creation. The results of the quantitative survey did not support the hypothesis in the same way as the literature review, which was caused by the small number of respondents.</p> <p>The results can be used for future development of accommodation companies so that they would be able to respond to the needs and wants of international customers with different cultural backgrounds.</p>		
Keywords/tags ( <a href="#">subjects</a> ) Culture, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, Intercultural Communication, Service Quality, Perceived Quality, Hotel Business, Systematic Literature Review		
Miscellaneous		

Tekijä(t) Portaankorva, Saara	Julkaisun laji Opinnäytetyö, AMK	Päivämäärä Maaliskuu 2017
		Julkaisun kieli Englanti
	Sivumäärä 77	Verkojulkaisulupa myönnetty: x
Työn nimi <b>Asiakkaan kulttuuritaustan vaikutus palvelukokemukseen</b>		
Tutkinto-ohjelma Palvelujen tuottaminen ja johtaminen		
Työn ohjaaja(t) Anita Hukkanen		
Toimeksiantaja(t) Linda Rastela, Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki		
<p>Tiivistelmä</p> <p>Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli selvittää asiakkaan kulttuuritaustan vaikutusta palvelukokemuksiin ja asiakkaan arvon muodostumiseen. Tutkimuksen päätavoite oli luoda tapoja huomioida kulttuurierot ja kehittää kansainvälisten asiakkaiden tyytyväisyyttä majoituspalvelualalla.</p> <p>Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljongin kansainvälisille asiakkaille tehtiin kyselytutkimus, jonka tavoitteena oli selvittää heidän arvojaan ja mieltymyksiään, jotka liittyvät hotellivierailuun ja kokonaispalvelukokemukseen. Tutkimuksen oli määrä testata Hofsteden kulttuuriteorian pohjalta muodostettuja hypoteeseja, sekä mitata hotellin kansainvälisten asiakkaiden tyytyväisyyttä. Systemaattinen kirjallisuuskatsaus aikaisemmista, kulttuurierojen suhdetta palveluun mittaavista, tutkimuksista tehtiin täydentämään tuloksia ja lisäämään tutkimuksen luotettavuutta. Systemaattisen kirjallisuuskatsauksen materiaali koodattiin ja analysoitiin sisällönanalyyssimenetelmää käyttäen.</p> <p>Systemaattisen kirjallisuuskatsauksen tulokset todistivat odotetusti, että asiakkaan kulttuuritaustalla on vaikutusta hänen palvelukokemuksiinsa majoituspalvelualalla. Kulttuurierot tulisi huomioida erityisesti kommunikaatiossa asiakkaan kanssa, mutta niillä on vaikutusta myös asiakkaan arvon muodostumiseen. Määrällisen tutkimuslomakkeen tulokset eivät tukeneet hypoteesia, kuten kirjallisuuskatsaus, mikä johtui vähäisestä vastaajamäärästä tai matkailukulttuurista.</p> <p>Tutkimustulosten pohjalta voidaan kehittää majoitusyrityksiä vastaamaan paremmin kansainvälisten, eri kulttuurista tulevien, asiakkaiden tarpeisiin ja toiveisiin.</p>		
<p>Avainsanat (<a href="#">asiasanat</a>) kulttuuri, Hofsteden kulttuuriset ulottuvuudet, kulttuurienvälinen viestintä, palvelun laatu, koettu laatu, hotelliliiketoiminta, systemaattinen kirjallisuuskatsaus</p>		
Muut tiedot		

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# 1 Introduction

There are many different cultures around the world which value and experience the world in various ways. Cultural encounters have grown greatly during the years when traveling and moving to other countries have become more common. Some encounters pass off well as people are understandable and the differences are not too large. Still, cultural collisions have also caused problems both on personal and global levels. In the service industry, the experiences of individuals create a big pallet that affects customer satisfaction and the success of a service company. The thesis deals with the main cultural differences between a hotel visitor and the host culture which influences intercultural customer service situation and customer satisfaction.

The thesis was written from a Finnish point of view where the Finnish culture was the host culture to which the other cultures were compared. The main purpose of the thesis was to collect information about different cultural preferences and inconveniences in service situations, find the newest research on the topic and test if the same aspects came up in the Finnish case hotel. The goal is to find ways to increase the customer satisfaction of international customers and avoid inconvenient situations during the service process at a hotel.

There were 1 186 million international tourist arrivals in the world in 2015 according to the World Tourism Organization. It means that over a billion trips were made from people's home countries to another country last year. Nowadays, tourism is the largest and fastest-growing business in the world. Tourists also leave their mark on the economies of the visited countries by using money in the destination. In 2015 the tourism receipts were approximately 1260 billion US dollars worldwide. (Tourism Highlights 2016, 2 - 3.) Understanding the cultural differences between the tourist and the host country is one of the most important aspects to consider when developing successful international tourism (Reisinger & Turner 2003, 31).

Tourism is expected to increase about by 3.3 % in a year and the growth of tourism in Northern Europe was 7 % from 2014 to 2015. There were 2 622 000 tourists who visited Finland in 2015 but it was still 4 % less than in 2014. (Tourism Highlights 2016, 2 - 4, 8.) This might be due to for example the flights, HUBs, weather conditions, trends and changes in prices. Moreover, the experiences that the tourists have about the

Finnish customer service influence the tourist flows to Finland. The thesis concentrated on examining ways to please international customers in hotel service and to give them better customer satisfaction.

The main objective of the study was to present theories about different cultural norms and customs which appear in the service environment. The aim was to find out how to keep and make international tourists satisfied by taking their cultural background into account in hotel service. Reaching the aim demanded recognizing differences between cultures and becoming acquainted with the studies conducted about the topic. The thesis collected and combined cultural theories and built a hypothesis for a survey. The hypothesis is that a customer's cultural background affects on his service experience. Finally, the survey based on these theories tested the hypothesis at a hotel in Jyväskylä, Finland. In addition to the results of the survey, the classical cultural theories were compared with studies conducted about cultural differences in service situations by using a systematic literature review.

The service at the case hotel Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki is already highly valued. Most of the customers are satisfied according to customer satisfaction surveys and feedback, but the opinions of the international customers have not been studied separately. (Rastela 2016). About 8 percent of the hotel customers come from abroad, hence in the general feedback their opinions might not be as visible as needed. Still, they are an important group of customers and the hotel hopes to serve them as well as possible. (Majoitustilaston kuukausikysely 2016; Rastela 2016.) The special needs and wants of the international customers were studied also for the future development of the hotel.

## **2 Methodology**

The research method of the thesis was supposed to be a quantitative survey for the international customers of the case hotel. The purpose was to analyse the survey material and create a prediction and generalisation based on the data. The generalised data was supposed to create the answers to the research questions. Due to the small amount of answers from the customers, the research was combined with systematic literature review. The method used secondary sources which help to achieve better reliability and validity for the research. In the thesis, a survey and qualitative

analysis of systematic literature review were used to understand the phenomenon; in this case the effect of the cultural background on customer service and service experience. The principle of the study is “a little from a lot” which means that information from many earlier studies about the subject is placed into a smaller and more specific environment when the method is deductive (Kananen 2011, 40). The main cultural theories gave preconception about the differences between cultures for the study, which was conducted as a literature review of the former studies about the topic and as a survey at the hotel.

The data of the literature review was collected and combined from existing research. According to Baumeister and Leary (1997), the goal of a literature review is to develop, widen and evaluate the existing theory. A literature review builds a big picture about the topic and may find problems in the existing theories. As other research methods, a literature review is also a systematic, specific and repeatable method. It recognises and combines the existing research material into a new summarised form. There are different types of literature review, but the best for the thesis was a systematic review. It summarises the interesting and important secondary sources. It is a good way to test the hypothesis and evaluate the consistency of the former studies. (Salminen 2011, 3, 5, 9 - 10.)

The main theory used in the thesis was Hofstede’s cultural dimensions. These dimensions are one of the most widely-known theory about cultural differences and the basis of many other studies. Cultural theory was combined with the theories of service situations and service experiences, which made it possible to create a hypothesis of the relation of culture and a service experience. The existing theories were utilized to create a survey for the international customers of the case hotel with the purpose to test if the hypothesis was true or not true in that service environment.

## 2.1 Research Questions

Different cultures have different customs and roles in service, which should be considered when offering services in an international environment. It seems that these aspects have not been taken into account sufficiently neither at the universities of service industry nor among the service providers. The thesis displays studies in the



literature review about the topic and tested the hypothesis rising from the theories at the case hotel with a survey for international customers.

The research problem of the thesis was: “How should cultural differences be considered in the service business?” An attempt to answer to the problem was made by combining different former studies and by survey for international customers of the case hotel. The more precise and defining research questions are:

- What kind of cultural differences exist in a service situation?
- How do cultural differences influence on the service experience of an international customer?
- What kind of cultural differences should particularly be recognised in order to increase the customer satisfaction of international customers and avoid inconvenient situations during the service process at a hotel?

### **Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki in Brief**

Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki is known for its excellent service culture in Jyväskylä. Their customers in total have been very satisfied with the service which has, according to the feedback, often exceeded the expectations of the customers. The hotel has also won awards because of its high-quality service. The case hotel Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki has already good customer service and satisfaction in total, but its international customers have not been studied separately yet. It is interesting to find out how do the international customers feel about the service which the Finns have considered excellent as well as to see how the existing theories support the outcome of the survey. (Rastela 2016).

Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki is considered a middle-sized (Brännare, Kairamo, Kulusjärvi & Matero 2005, 12) or a large hotel (Rautiainen & Siikonen 2009, 23). It has 170 rooms and it is located in Lutakko, next to Lake Jyväsjärvi, in Jyväskylä, Central Finland. The hotel is part of the Sokos Hotel -chain which has over fifty hotels around Finland, Estonia and Russia. The chain is divided into three different types of hotels: Original, Break and Solo by Sokos Hotels. (Are You Planning a Trip? n.d.)

As the name of the hotel says, Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki is one of the eight Solo Sokos Hotels around their operational environment and the only Solo hotel in Jyväskylä.

At Solo hotels, the customers can enjoy luxurious materials and furniture which guarantee a high-quality overnight experience. The attentive staff gives the customers Le Patron service that is seen in small details. For instance, an extensive minibar and a safety box in all rooms as well as coffee made according to the customers' wishes and served to the table at breakfast emphasize the quality of the service product compared to the Original Sokos Hotels. (Solo by Sokos Hotels n.d.)

Besides the good service, the location of the hotel is very good for both business and leisure customers. Both the railway station and the bus station of Jyväskylä are located only 200 meters away from the hotel entrance and so is the port. There are many events organized around the year in front of Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki in Lutakonaukio and in the Paviljonki congress centre next to the hotel. Moreover, three different business centres of Technopolis are located around the hotel.

There are plenty of foreign visitors at Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki. During the previous year (September 2015 - August 2016) over 8 % of the customers of the hotel were from abroad, and almost 15 % of the sold nights of Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki were slept by international customers during the same time frame. The service of the hotel has already won awards and attracted attention, but different needs of the international customers have not yet been studied. (Majoitustilaston kuukausikysely 2016.)

## 2.2 Data Collection

The survey to test the hypothesis was conducted by using quantitative research methods. The research form was chosen since the goal was to obtain answers from international customers to test the hypothesis built on the basis of cultural theories. The purpose of the survey was testing the correlation of cultural background and service experience as well as what kind of needs and wants the customers considered important. The questionnaire wanted to raise differences between customers from various countries in valuing certain parts of the service at the hotel. (Kananen 2015, 65 - 66.) A quantitative survey is easy to fill in since it does not take a great deal of time, and anyone can choose to fill it or not. Few hotel guests want to spend their holiday in an interview, and most of the business travellers are too busy to have time for a research appointment thus interviews would have been hard to organize and

inconvenient to the customers. The decision of the research method was made together with the hotel since they had the facts about customers' customs. The international customer survey of Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki was available both online and as a paper version from 1<sup>st</sup> of October to 7<sup>th</sup> of November 2016, 38 days in total.

The survey was mainly formed by using the cultural partition based on Geert Hofstede's dimensions. Professor Hofstede has found six ways to compare cultures with two different extremities. Only a few of the cultures represent totally the extremities of the scale, but the scores the countries have in different dimensions describe well the norms of the culture. The questionnaire was made according to the differences that Hofstede had found and situated in the hotel visit context. (Hofstede 2001, 24, 29; Hofstede, Pedersen & Hofstede 2002, 161.)

The hotel had promised to collect answers from its international customers and use the informational stand made by the researcher in the lobby (Appendix 2). After all, the stand was not used and only two answers were collected by the hotel. Hence, the researcher collected as many answers as possible at the hotel after noticing the problems in delivering the questionnaire. There were 16 (N) answers in total. Unfortunately, the hotel was not able to give the exact number of international customers staying at the hotel during the 38 days when the survey was available. Even though it was not possible to count, the response rate was very low. Despite the effort given for the research, there was not sufficiently data to make any generalisations nor was it possible to achieve statistical results.

The qualitative part of the thesis was chosen additionally since the amount of quantitative data was too small for making any generalisations. The purpose of the literature review was to find earlier studies about the topic and compare the existing research results about cultural differences in service situations with the ones in case hotel. The systematic review was conducted by using the model of Fink (2005) and analysed by using qualitative methods. (Salminen 2011, 10 - 11.)

### **Systematic Literature Review**

The literary review research process followed the model of Fink (Figure 1). The first stage of the model was to set the research question. The research problem of the thesis was "How should cultural differences be considered in the service business?".

The second step was choosing the database where the information was researched. The chosen databases were EBSCO Hospitality & Tourism where it is possible to find international studies and academic articles related to the topic and Doria where the Finnish studies and academic publications are found. On the third step, the researcher had to choose keywords with which the information was searched. In the research the keywords were cultur\*, international, service, dimension, hospitality and tourism as well as some of the same words in Finnish: kulttuur\*, kansainväl\*, palvelu and matkailu.

On the fourth stage, the references were collected by using a customised selector which were set suitable for the purpose. The selector could be for example content, period or language. In the thesis, the references were all made in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the oldest article used was from year 2003. The accepted languages were English, Finnish, Swedish and Spanish. Other languages were cut out since the correct understanding of the article was not guaranteed. Also, many studies focused on cultural differences only in business and therefore were omitted. The literature review was limited to cover culture in a relation to service. After creating the selectors, on the stage six the researcher did the review itself. (Figure 1; Salminen 2011, 10 - 11.) The chosen articles were read by using SQ3R method. First the text was Surveyed to obtain the big picture, then the researcher formed Questions for the text to reach more details. After that, the article was Read carefully and the main points Recalled. Last, the text was Rewarded to make sure that the chosen points were significant for the thesis. (Ridley 2012, 63 - 64.) On the seventh and the last stage of Fink the results were analysed and reported which is described in the chapter 6 and 7. The synthesis is the reported text where the results were explained and the quality of the research described. (Figure 1; Salminen 2011, 10 - 11.)

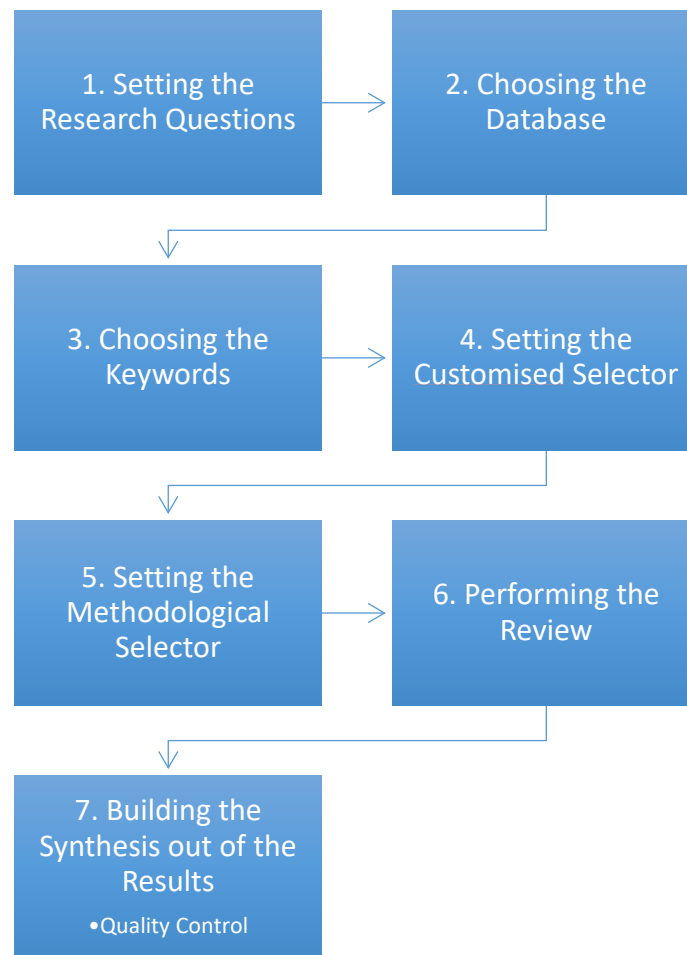


Figure 1. Systematic Literature Review Retold from the Model of Fink (2005)

### Survey

The survey (Appendix 1) was mainly formed by following Hofstede's cultural theory and adjusting it to the hotel visit context. The survey started with demographical questions (questions 1 - 6) such as age, gender, the main purpose of the trip and if the person was travelling alone or with someone. Nationality and the country of residence was asked in the beginning of the questionnaire too. The answers of these questions gave possibility for comparison and finding correlations with answers to the later questions. Asking both the nationality and country of residence give information about the culture the person is from as well as in which culture he is living now.

The next two questions (7 and 8) were related to the service language: In which language was the person served at Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki and in which language would he have liked to be served. There were six different language choices in both questions as well as “other, what?” -option. The language options were English, Swedish, German, French, Spanish and Russian; the most common languages to study in Finland. In the first one of the language questions it was possible to answer with multiple choices since the service language might have changed depending on the language skills of the customer servant, as well as, an open space after all the answers to explain in which situation the language was used.

The next question: “At any hotel, how important do You consider these claims?” measured the attitudes of the customers towards given claims. The form of the question was a numeric matrix with the scale from 1 = “not important at all” to 5 = “very important”. There was also an option 0 which meant that the customer did not have any opinion to the claim. There were 21 claims, sorted to three different categories in the question: “Before Arriving”, “During the Stay” and “Contact with the Customer Servants”. These three titles had different numbers (9 - 11) so the instructions were sufficiently clear in the electronic form as well. The claims in order as in the survey are seen in Appendix 1, since next they are presented related to the cultural dimension they measure.

Two out of these 21 claim measured individualism versus collectivism. It tells about the relation between an individual and a collective, such as family or other group, in the society. The claims related to the dimension were: “No need to share a table at breakfast” and “Possibility to meet other customers”. In the first claim answer 1 defined collectivistic and number 5 individual mind-set as in the second question answer 5 was collectivistic and 1 individual. (Hofstede 2001, 209 - 210, 227, 236.)

There were three claims related to power distance but one of them also represented masculinity versus femininity -dimension. Power distance tells about the importance of hierarchy, for example the relation between a parent and a child or a boss and an employer (Hofstede 2001, 79). The claims that represented these dimensions were: “Formal communication”, “The staff carries Your luggage to the room” and “Live contact with the customer servant instead of technology”. First two claims told about

the different roles of the guest and the customer servant. In high power distance cultures, a person in a lower position must show respect for the person in a higher position. Formal language is one way to show respect in the service situation as well as carrying customer's luggage. (Hofstede 2001, 84.) The latter claim had also relation to masculine cultures since in these cultures women do not carry heavy items (Hofstede 2001, 280). "The staff carries Your luggage to the room" -claim was also interesting in the point of view of the hotel. Solo Sokos Hotel does not offer the bellboy service which is very common in good hotels abroad. The hotel would like to know if the service would rise the satisfaction of the international customers. It is said by Geert Hofstede that low power distance cultures have more need for technology when the high-power distance cultures prefer having less technology. The larger the answered number to the claim: "Live contact with the customer servant instead of technology", the higher power distance the culture has. (Hofstede 2001, 118.)

Masculinity dimension not only describe the roles of man and woman but also the valuation of either masculine or feminine behaviour. Equality is highly respected in feminine cultures. Answering 5 to the claim "Equal service for everyone" tells about respecting feminine values. Equality can also be related to low power distance cultures. (Hofstede 2001, 107, 279, 284.)

In questions 9 - 11, there were 4 claims related to uncertainty avoidance, Geert Hofstede's fourth dimension. "Knowing about all the services of the hotel [before arriving]", "Knowing about the culture of the destination [before arriving]", Possibility to try something new [during the stay]" and "No unexpected changes to the original plan [during the stay]". In high uncertainty avoidance cultures people want to know about future. Uncertain and unknown situations cause stress so people would also like to know about their destination beforehand. In both "before arriving" -questions answer 5 told about uncertainty avoidance as well as in the claim about unexpected changes. In cultures with low uncertainty avoidance people tend to live day to day and try new concepts. That is why in the last claim related to the dimension, answer number 5 told about low uncertainty avoidance. (Hofstede 2001, 145 - 146, 160, 181.) The third claim under "before arriving" -title was: "Having a planned agenda for the stay in the destination". It was related to the long-term orientations, the fifth Hofstede's cultural dimension. In long-term oriented cultures people plan the future

and save for becoming matters on the contrary to short-term oriented cultures where quick results are expected and spending is more valued than saving. Giving a low number as an answer to the claim told about short-term orientation and an answer 5 about long term orientation. (De Mooij 2011, 49 - 50; Hofstede 2001, 360.) There was also a claim concerning indulgence. In an indulgent culture people tend to do more sports and spend time outdoors. The question asked how important it is for the customer that the hotel has a "good outside environment to do exercise". A high score told about indulgent and a low score about self-restraint culture. (Jandt 2016, 174 - 175.)

Eight other claims in these questions (9 - 11) asked the customers' opinions about certain services hotels could offer and the service customs which might differ depending on the culture. Under the title "During the stay" there were four claims about typical situations in a hotel and four claims were associated with "Contact with the customer servant". First four claims were: "There are no queues", "A customer servant is available at all times", "Possibility to read international newspapers" and "Feeling and seeing local culture". The claims related to the customer service situations were: "Personal service", "Small talk", "Eye contact" and "The staff helps You with Your plans". These claims asked matters that could help the case hotel or another Finnish hotel to improve its service for international customers. When there is information about the customers' priorities and valued service aspects, it is easier to improve it. "There are no queues" told about the importance of the correct amount of staff and fluent service as "A customer servant is available at all times" was related to the need of 24 hours' service and feeling safe. Safety is the second important need in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, straight after physical needs as food and sleep (De Mooij 2011, 159). Generally, in Finland people from other countries should feel safe since it is the safest country in the world according to the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2015 (34).

The question number 12 (Appendix 1) was a claim where the customer needed to answer by which gender he prefers being served. He needed to choose one option out of three: a female, a male or either gender. The gender preference is based on the cultures masculinity or femininity as well as cultural norms. In different cultures, there are jobs considered feminine or masculine. The division depends a lot on the



time and culture but usually a receptionist work is considered feminine. Women are more service-oriented and able to empathize. Bellboys are considered to be men since in masculine societies women do not carry heavy items. (Hofstede 2001, 313 - 314.)

Questions from 13 to 16 were related to the service experience in Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki. Question number 13 was: "How do You evaluate these claims based on Your experience at Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki?" Again, the form of the questionnaire was a scale selection matrix where the options were from 1 to 5 or 0 if the customer did not have an opinion. Four out of the nine claims under the question were about the pre-information given for the customer before arriving and the five others concerned contact with the customer servant and other customers. The claims were similar to the claims in the questions 9, 10 and 11 which gave the customer an opportunity to tell how important these aspects are at any hotel and how well they are taken care of at the case hotel.

Question number 14 was: "How do You feel about these claims at Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki?" There were also an introduction to specify or explain why did he choose the answer to the open space after the evaluation. There were ten different claims in the question which were partly the same as in the questions 9 - 11. The claims were related to customer service situations, feelings the customers should achieve during the stay, Finnish culture and the service experience in total. The claims related to the feelings of the customer were based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The customer should feel understood, respected, and the most importantly, safe since safety is one of the basic needs according to Dr. Abraham Maslow (1943). (Schiffman, Kanuk & Hansen 2012, 115 - 116.) The customers were asked earlier in the survey how important it is to feel and see the local culture so in the questions 14 there were claims considering the customer's feelings and visions about the Finnish culture. The last claim in the question was: "The service exceeded my expectations". The claim was in the positive form since the customer service at the case hotel has been considered excellent. Still, the customer had a chance to completely disagree with the claim and write the explanation to the answer if felt so.

Question number 15 asks about the usage and the importance of the additional services of Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki. The mentioned services in the question were

breakfast, sauna, gym, rentable bicycles, restaurant Trattoria Aukio, Business Center, Meeting Rooms and Pre-Purchased services such as bathrobe in the room. The questionnaire ended to two open questions; “Which facilities or services would You like to add to the service selection of Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki?” and “Other comments”. This way the customer could express the missing facilities and services as well as give free feedback, comments and greetings.

The survey was available both online as a Webropol survey and as a paper version, which also had the QR-code to the online form. The survey was supposed to be mentioned and given to customers already at check in at the hotel. The guests who answered the survey were offered a free drink by the hotel whereupon more answers were expected. In practice, the survey was not mentioned to the customers and the informational stand about the study and the free drink was not used in the lobby. Due to that, the researcher went personally to collect answers to the survey when possible during the breakfast hours.

## 2.3 Data Analysis

### **Systematic Literature Review**

The material of the systematic literature review was analysed by using qualitative methods. A meta-analysis was not formed since it is not required in systematic literature review nor was it possible in this case. The studies about the exact topic and their results were too different for forming a meta-analysis. (Blundell 2014, 102.) Instead, the material is analysed by using the content analysis method. It is a good method for theoretical research, just as a systematic literary review. The aim of a content analysis is to combine the main aspects of different resources and put them into a new, understandable form. (Kananen 2008a, 94; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 123.) According to Salminen, there are different forms of meta-analysis, and a qualitative meta-synthesis is very similar to content analysis. In both methods, the aim is to combine the material and find similarities. Thus, the method which was used for the thesis could also be called a meta-synthesis. (Salminen 2011, 12 - 13.) Coding is used as a method in a content analysis. Coding is a technique which is used to summarise the information into an understandable form. (Kananen 2008a, 88 - 89.) The material was coded based on its themes as seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Coded Material

Research	Level 1	Level 2
Dortyol, I. T., Varinli, I. & Kitapci, O. 2014. How Do International Tourists Perceive Hotel Quality? An Exploratory Study of Service Quality in Antalya Tourism Region. <i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i> . 2014. Vol. 26, Issue 3, 470-495.	Service quality dimensions	Perceived service quality
Magnini, V. P., Kara, D., Crotts, J. C. & Zehrer A. 2012. Culture and Service-Related Positive Disconfirmations: An Application of Travel Blog Analysis. <i>Journal of Vacation Marketing</i> . Jul 2012, Vol. 18 Issue 3, 251-257	Service related positive disconfirmations	
Tsaur, S-H., Lin, C-T. & Wu, C-S. 2005. Cultural Differences in Service Quality and Behavioral intention in Tourist Hotels. <i>Journal of Hospitality &amp; Leisure Marketing</i> . 2005. Vol. 13, 41-63.	Service perception and behaviour	
Sizoo, S., Iskat, W., Plank, R. & Serrie, H.2003. Cross-Cultural Service Encounters in the Hospitality Industry and the Effect of Intercultural Sensitivity on Employee Performance. <i>International Journal of Hospitality &amp; Tourism Administration</i> . 2003. Vol. 4(2), 61-	Intercultural sensitivity	Intercultural communication
Wang, C-Y., Miao, L. & Mattila, A. 2015. Customer Responses to Intercultural Communication Accommodation Strategies in Hospitality Service Encounters. <i>International Journal of Hospitality Management</i> . Oct 2015, Vol. 51, 96-104	Communication accommodation	

The information inside the chosen articles was analysed and categorized in order to find answers to the research questions (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 123 - 124). The articles were different in many ways; in three out of five studies the method was a quantitative questionnaire when one of the studies used a systematic literature review and one was an empirical study. Some of the researchers studied behaviour and valuation of hotel customers when some paid attention to employees. Due to the different forms of the studies and the information gained from them, a quantitative meta-analysis was abandoned as an impossible analysis method (Blundell 2014, 102). Furthermore, combining the information of the studies according to themes could give us important information about cultural encounters in an international hotel service situation.

### Survey

The survey was analysed using quantitative analysis methods. For the correlation analysis, a regression analysis was made. The regression analysis gives the r value which tells us whether or not there is a correlation between the variables. If the r is

0, there is no correlation and if the  $r$  value is 1, the correlation is complete. The -1 value tells about a complete negative correlation. The trustworthiness of the regression is tested with the square value of the  $r$  ( $r^2$ ). If the  $r^2$  is between 0.5 - 1 (50 - 100 %) the residual is well explained by the correlation. (Kananen 2008b, 60 - 65; Kananen 2011, 118 - 123.)

A T-test is made to ascertain that the results are not only caused by coincidence. The results of a T-test are p-values which tell how trustworthy the correlation is. (Valli 2015, 67 - 69). When the p-value is under 0.001 the result is statistically highly significant, under 0.01 means significant whereas a p-value under 0.05 tells about slightly significant results even though the scale can vary slightly depending on the research. If the p value is over 0.05, there is an over 5 % chance that the result is wrong. (Kananen 2011, 107 - 110; Nummenmaa, Konttinen, Kuusinen & Leskinen 1996, 42 - 43.)

## 2.4 Reliability and Validity

A study should be objective but researcher's subjective preconception, valuation and beliefs affect on the results of the study. Often quantitative study is considered more objective than qualitative study, but it is also vulnerable on subjective point of view. There can also be mistakes on planning the questionnaire, collecting data, coding and analyzing. The research becomes objective when the subjectivity is recognized. Reliability refers to the repeatability and consistency of the research. The measurement and research results should be the same and not depend on the researcher. Validity means studying the correct aspects and achieving results which answers to the research questions. (Kananen 2008b, 121 - 122; Kananen 2011, 66 - 67.)

### **Systematic Literature Review**

In the thesis, the systematic literature review is made in a qualitative way and the research is conversation between the texts and the researcher. In qualitative research it is harder to measure reliability and validity than in quantitative research. Still, the qualitative research is valid when it studies the meant aspects. External validity refers to generalization of the results and content validity to flawlessness of the interpretation and concepts. Reliability is understood as repeatability of the study. (Kananen 2008b, 121 - 122; Kananen 2011, 66 - 67.)

The systematic literature review of the thesis wanted to be considered reliable and valid so the researcher prepared by creating very strict selection criteria. There were not many studies about the exact topic of the thesis so that another researcher would have chosen the same resources. Moreover, the research articles used in the systematic literature review were reliable since the chosen timeframe was exact, and the environment related to the topic had not changed greatly since the studies were conducted. The resources were from five different international academic journals of hospitality and tourism. The articles were all published in English by researchers from universities in Taiwan, USA, Turkey and Austria. Due to the international researchers, the results of the studies were not written from only one cultural point of view.

On the other hand, the research methods of the articles were varied and the results could not be analysed numerically by using meta-analysis. This may have had an effect on the results since the researcher coded and analysed the material by picking the themes and main points from the texts by using her own frame of reference. That can affect on validity since another researcher may pay attention to partly different aspects.

### **Survey**

The questions of the survey were formed mainly by using Hofstede's theory, which makes the questionnaire valid, in other words, it should measure the aspects that the researcher wanted to measure. Furthermore, the questionnaire was also read and answered by three persons from different cultures and native language groups in order to make it correctly understandable for all before starting to collect the answers. Almost all the answers were collected by the researcher, which can have an effect on the material. A couple of the answers were collected by the staff of the hotel. The possible differences in answers because of the collector were not taken into account when analysing the results.

The results of the survey could not be considered valid since the number of the answers was too small. The aim in quantitative research is to generalize, which was not possible with only 16 answers. The respondents were from eight different countries which gave more possibilities to analyse different cultures but lowered the validity since one person could not represent the whole country or cultural group in any case.

### 3 Culture in Everyday Life

Culture is based on the ambience one is living and growing in (De Mooij 2011, 34). Culture is sometimes hard to define according to Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1985) who have found over 160 definitions for the term (Reisinger & Turner 2003, 4). Culture influences people's beliefs and values as well as customs, attitudes, norms and roles. These aspects define how people are supposed to live and what they consider important in life. (De Mooij 2011, 40 - 41.) Culture can also modify material aspects such as items, buildings and technology as well as art (Uusitalo 2009, 20).

The thesis concentrates on the immaterial values and beliefs and their effect on people's lives. David Cannadine (2013) states that the regulators of life and identity are religion, nation, class, gender, race and civilization. These six aspects form the cultural identity which gives people the norms of how to live (Jandt 2016, 4). Behaviour is an inseparable term from culture so that besides the norms, it also gives people definitions of the situations and circumstances where different acts belong (Reisinger & Turner 2003, 6). Culture is learned, and it is usually hard to determine and describe before learning to know other cultures. People need a frame of reference in order to be able to compare the similarities and differences between cultures. (Martin & Nakayama 2014, 31 - 32.) Cultures are place oriented and even the climate has its effect on them (De Mooij 2011, 33; Jandt, 2016, 5).

#### 3.1 Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Nowadays, there are different opinions about the division of the dimensions related to culture. The most known partition is the one represented by Dutch researcher Geert Hofstede. Hofstede shares culture into six different dimensions. With the dimensions it is possible to find differences between cultures. Originally, there were only five of Hofstede's dimensions: individualism, masculinity, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation, but later, he also added indulgence to the five former dimensions. The dimensions help people to observe and understand cultural differences. Even though his theory was published already in 1960s and completed in 1970s, it is still one of the most important intercultural research concepts. (Hofstede, Pedersen & Hofstede 2002, 161.)

## **Individualism**

Cultures can be separated by having either an individualistic or a collectivistic mindset. This Hofstede's dimension tells if people define themselves as individuals or as part of a group. It refers how loose or tight the social framework is for a person. The difference can be seen both at home and at work, and it gives the base to the social communication and values. (Hofstede n.d.c; Jandt 2016, 162 - 163.)

In the individualistic cultures people use more word "I" than "we" and are more interested in their own success than the achievements of a group (De Mooij 2011, 47 - 48.) Individualistic persons are supposed to push their limits which makes them more stressed but also sometimes more creative (Hofstede, Pedersen & Hofstede 2002, 94 - 95). People set their own goals and work to achieve them individually. They also express more private thoughts. People in individualistic cultures define themselves by what they have done themselves, not with the family or group as in collective cultures. They only take care of themselves and their immediate family. Individualistic people prefer adventure and variability to congruence. Self-actualization is highly valued in an individualistic culture and people are taught to protect themselves. (De Mooij 2011, 47 - 48; Jandt 2016, 162 - 163.)

About 70 - 80 % of the world's population belong to collectivistic cultures. Especially countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America have collectivistic cultures. They are more group related and their family conception is significantly larger than in individualistic cultures. People want to avoid loss of face since it affects the whole group's welfare as well as their own. People from collectivistic cultures are not used to mention their own wants and needs in verbal communication. (De Mooij 2011, 47 - 48; Jandt 2016, 162 - 163.)

Individualistic culture has a strong correlation with wealth of the country. Most of the individualistic nations are located in the Western Countries with good economy and geographical location in colder areas than collectivistic countries. Most of the collectivistic nations have higher birth rate and tend to have greater families than the individualistic ones. That is a logical consequence since the family is highly valued in collectivistic countries. (Jandt 2016, 162 - 163.)

## **Masculinity**

The second of Hofstede's dimensions is masculinity versus femininity. It defines which are the roles of women and men in a society and how different sexes are expected to perform. Hofstede has found out that the role of women has more variety depending on the culture than the position of men. (Jandt 2016, 167 - 168.) The dimension describes which values are dignified and it is sometimes called "Tough Versus Tender" instead of masculinity versus femininity. (De Mooij 2011, 48; Hofstede n.d.c)

In masculine cultures the roles of women and men are very different and have not changed much from the former days. It is thought that men should be assertive, tough and families' breadwinners while women are tender and take care of homes. Material success and competition are highly valued in masculine countries and failing is a disaster. Usually the best of the group sets the norms since achievement and success describe the valuation of the person. (De Mooij 2011, 48; Hofstede, Pedersen & Hofstede 2002, 101 - 102; Jandt 2016, 167 - 168.)

Countries with colder weather have more feminine culture. In these cultures, the roles of men and women are closer to each other. Society is more consensus oriented and puts high value on feminine traits as well as quality of life and caring for the weak. In feminine cultures people are used to solve problems by negotiating and making compromises, and the society itself is tolerant. (De Mooij 2011, 48; Hofstede, Pedersen & Hofstede 2002, 103; Jandt 2016, 167 - 168.)

## **Power Distance**

Power distance dimension tells how large is the gap between the poor and the rich as well as how inequalities are dealt with. The differences can be seen in how people treat each other when they represent a different position. (Jandt 2016, 168 - 169.)

In high power distance cultures, salary gap is significant and status defines the position in the society. Wealth and power are highly valued which builds the hierarchy naturally. People with good status have a good position in hierarchy which gives them many privileges. In these cultures, the form of communication is very formal and a person in lower position must show respect to a person in higher position. For example, a child needs to be dependent on his parents and respect them as well as



subordinate needs to respect his boss. (De Mooij 2011, 46 - 47; Hofstede, Pedersen & Hofstede 2002, 103; Jandt 2016, 168 - 169.) Countries with the largest power distance are Malaysia, Guatemala and Panama (Hofstede, 2001, 87). In total, nations with big populations have large power distance as well as countries with Romance language (Jandt 2016, 171).

In low power distance cultures equality is highly respected. The salary gap is small and the form of communication is informal. Employees and leaders can communicate casually and the responsibility is shared. Status and power are not very important and sometimes people can even be ashamed of their power. The society tries to offer equal opportunities for everyone and organizations are democratic. Low power distance cultures are the most common in the Nordic Countries. (De Mooij 2011, 46 - 47; Hofstede, Pedersen & Hofstede 2002, 103; Jandt 2016, 168 - 169, 171.)

### **Uncertainty Avoidance**

Uncertainty avoidance describes how people feel about unknown situations. It states the degree of discomfort in uncertain and ambiguity conditions. In some cultures, people try to control the future and in others they just let factors happen, which is one of the differences between the cultures with low and high score in uncertainty avoidance. (Hofstede n.d.c; Jandt 2016, 171.)

In cultures with high uncertainty avoidance, people want to know and control what will happen. People are active, emotional, compulsive and intolerant. They have a need of clear norms and belief in experts. At moment of an unknown situation, people from these cultures may express stress. (De Mooij 2011, 49; Jandt 2016, 171 - 172.)

In cultures which score low in uncertainty avoidance, people are tolerant, relaxed and accept personal risks. They do not express their emotions or their aggression. They are result oriented instead of concentrating on the course of processes. They believe in common sense and accept that not even the experts know everything. Chinese-speaking cultures are used to score low in uncertainty avoidance. (De Mooij 2011, 49; Hofstede, Pedersen & Hofstede 2002, 105 - 107; Jandt 2016, 171 - 172.)

### **Long-Term Orientation**

Long-term versus short-term orientation was added to Hofstede's dimensions in 1987 in cooperation with Michael H. Bond from the Chinese Culture Connection. The former name of the dimension was Confucian Work Dynamism. The fifth factor includes thrift, tenacity and sense of shame and it refers to people's intelligent commitment and loyalty. (De Mooij 2011, 49 - 50; Jandt 2016, 174.)

Confucian work dynamism, ergo long-term orientation, represents motivated individuals who can think about the future. People from these cultures are responsible and loyal for their organization. They plan the future and save for becoming challenges. (De Mooij 2011, 49 - 50; Jandt 2016, 174.)

Short-term oriented cultures are related to living today and not worrying about tomorrow. People from these cultures do not save for the future, instead, they prefer spending now and keeping up with trends. They are keen on having quick results and knowing the absolute truth. (De Mooij 2011, 49 - 50; Jandt 2016, 174.)

### **Indulgence**

The newest dimension is indulgence versus self-restraint. There is not as much data about the indulgence as the other dimensions yet, but some differences have already been seen between the two groups of cultures. Indulgent culture gives high importance to leisure and friendship. It is important to have friends and live a happy life. Families are also more satisfied and people do more sports in these countries. The death rate of cardiovascular diseases is found to be lower in indulgent nations. (Jandt 2016, 174 - 175.)

Self-restraint countries have higher death rates and a lower percentage of happy people than indulgent countries. People from self-restraint culture are also more pessimistic, cynic and neurotic. In these cultures, gender roles are strictly defined. The gratification of people tends to be hampered by firm norms and regulations, and they put a lot of effort to the order of a nation. (Jandt 2016, 174 - 175.)

## 3.2 Intercultural Communication

It has become more important to understand the ways of intercultural communication during the years. Intercultural communication means communication between representatives from different national or ethnic cultures. It requires that workers in the hospitality field are multilingual and able to understand cultural differences in communication, too. Besides the language and the verbal communication, it is important to know at least the basics about differences in non-verbal communication of cultures around the world. (Kielbasiewicz-Drozdowska & Radko 2006, 76, 78 - 80, 83.)

Politeness is one of the most important aspects in communication, furthermore, it is one of the hardest aspects to learn in a foreign culture. It includes affective interaction and it is highly related to cultural framework and context. It is expressed both nonverbally by facial expressions, positions and movements of body, and verbally in spoken language. (Paulston, Kiesling & Rangel 2012, 206 - 208.) Humour is another aspect of language that should be used very deliberately in other culture. Humour is usually based on history and precise cultural expressions, which make it hard to understand for people without the cultural frame of reference. Forms of humour, for example sarcasm, are used in diverse ways around the world and in some countries, they are not used at all. That makes understanding humour in other cultures nearly impossible, especially online, when the tone of voice is missing. (Martin & Nakayama 2013, 411; Martin & Nakayama 2014, 151.)

### **Verbal Communication**

The biggest barrier in verbal intercultural communication is language. Cultures create different forms of verbal communication to express values, beliefs and perceptions, that hardens it for other to understand. (Reisinger & Turner 2003, 9.) Learning to communicate in another language does not only require knowing the grammar rules and the vocabulary but also adapting a new frame of reference. Many words and concepts cannot be translated directly to another language. Usually these aspects are culturally very important, so expressing oneself in a foreign language might make a speaker feel insecure and stressed. There are also phenomena which have different states and forms in some languages, for example snow in the Nordic Countries.

(De Mooij 2011, 219 - 221; Hofstede, Pedersen & Hofstede 2002, 18; Mikluha 1998, 7.) Furthermore, the manners to speak and write vary a lot between languages. Knowing the language includes understanding cultural competence. It is extremely important to know what to say, where, when, how and to whom expressing it. Already in the beginning of the conversation people need to have studied how to address another person so that he is acting by cultural norms of politeness. (De Mooij 2011, 219 - 221.)

Finns are sometimes considered rude in verbal communication since there is not a word used like English "please" in Finnish language. Even if a Finn has a great vocabulary in English, he might sound impolite since English language is usually spoken in politer way. It is very common for Finns to forget to say "please" and address people in an informal way because of their native language. In many cultures, people should be addressed formally, and using an informal form is considered rude. This is very important for example in German speaking countries, France, Japan and China. Especially customer servants need to pay plenty of attention to their use of different languages so that the service is not considered disrespectful. (Mikluha 1998, 16; Tervomaa 2015, 25.) Another aspect which might make Finns sound rude is that no kind of "white lies" are accepted and honesty is highly valued in Finnish culture. In many other cultures people more likely tell a little lie or avoid the facts than tell the truth to be politer in certain situations whereas in Finland that would be considered distrustful in all situations. Moreover, the customer servants in Finland might express themselves too straight on the contrast to many other cultures so they do not sound as polite as elsewhere. (Isotalus 2009, 26.)

English is nowadays a lingua franca and used in most international communication situations. In business world, the manners and polite expressions are widely agreed around the Western countries. Since there are many business customers from all over the world staying in Finnish hotels, the staff of the service provider companies should be aware of these norms and use them fluently. It is not possible to thank the other person too much so giving thanks and polite expressions to the other person should be a big part of a conversation in a service situation. On the other hand, giving too many commendations to a Finnish person might make him feel uncomfortable and embarrassed. (Nieminen 2004, 9 - 13.)

In Europe, there are many small and wealthy countries where people tend to speak more than one language but it is not the same all over the world. The opportunities to learn another language are very uneven. (Hofstede 2001, 425.) At Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki the service is always available in Finnish and English. There are receptionists with more language skills as well but the hotel cannot guarantee having always someone who speaks other languages than English and Finnish on the shift. (Rastela 2016).

### **Nonverbal Communication**

Nonverbal communication is communication in other ways than by language (Martin & Nakayama 2014, 174 - 175). Nonverbal communication styles have a great variety depending on linguistic features, proxemics, kinesics and haptics. Linguistics mean the way of speaking and includes intonations, stress, phrasing, speed, tone and pauses of speech. These aspects have already a great variety in relation to personality but also to cultural background. In some cultures, silence must be avoided, so in these cultures pauses in a conversation are short and mostly considered awkward. (FitzGerald 2002, 79.) Proxemics means the distance people have between each other when communicating and how they use the distance. It varies a lot and there are four distance zones everyone has: intimate, personal, social and public zone. The limits of the zones have significant variety and everyone has his own distance which he finds the most comfortable with other person. In Nordic Countries, the distances are relatively long and in contrast, for example in Latin American countries they are very short. (FitzGerald 2002, 79 - 80; Martin & Nakayama 2013, 47.)

Kinesics signifies the positions and movements of body and face. These small movements tell much about the attitude of the person. In most of the cultures smile describes positive feeling and satisfaction. It usually has a relation to polite manners as well. On the other hand, in China, Japan and many other Asian countries smile can also tell about confusion, embarrassment and fear. In Western cultures nodding means "yes" and that the person understood the message while in Japan the same movement signifies only that the person is listening, not that the message is understood. These differences can easily cause misunderstandings. (FitzGerald 2002, 79 - 80; Martin & Nakayama 2014, 174 - 175; Nieminen 2004, 15.) Haptics describes how much people are allowed to touch and in which situations. There are many

forms to touch as well as different significations for the touch. In some cultures, touching is only allowed between couples and in others it is a significant part of casual communication. A lot of attention is needed when interpreting nonverbal means, especially when the other person comes from another culture. (FitzGerald 2002, 79 - 80; Martin & Nakayama 2014, 174 - 175.) In some cultures, it is very important to look the other person in the eyes whereas in other cultures it is prohibited. In Australia eye contact is expected but for example in South Korea and Japan it is polite to look downwards when communicating with a person in a higher position. (Liu, Volčič, & Gallois 2011, 78; Lucas 2009, 208.)

There are differences in nonverbal communication also between genders. Women tend to stand closer and express more feelings with their faces than men. They also touch more and lean more forward towards the talker. The fact that not everyone even in the same culture acts the same way might make following the cultural norms slightly harder. Besides the culture, personality and sex effect on the forms of communication as well as many other aspects in life. (Lucas 2009, 100 - 101.)

### **High-Context versus Low-Context Communication**

Cultures can be shared to high-context and low-context cultures. Edward T. Hall has created the partition based on the different communication habits of cultures. In high-context cultures everything is not expressed directly verbally and the nonverbal signals in relation to the culture need to be known as well, to understand the message completely. Eastern and Latin American cultures tend to be high-context cultures. Especially negative answers are usually not expressed directly since it is considered rude to say no. Negative issues are expressed by saying for example "maybe" or avoiding the question. (Frisk & Tulkki 2005, 21 - 22; Kulttuureja ja käyttäytymistä – Aasia 1998, 26, 32, 46; Kulttuureja ja käyttäytymistä – Amerikka ja Australia 2000, 13, 31, 72.)

In low-context cultures the message is clearly said by words. Verbal messages are specific and tend to be easy to understand. Low-context communication is common in Western countries where words demonstrate high value and positive attitude. Moreover, an argumentation and direct speaking are more common in low-context cultures. In these cultures, it is much more important what is said, than how it is said compared to high-context cultures. A typical way of low-context communication

comes from the United States of America. Being talkative and using plenty of small talk is considered polite whereas silence means negative thoughts. (De Mooij 2011, 43 - 44; Frisk & Tulkki 2005, 22; Salminen & Poutanen 1996, 70.)

Even though Finland is a Western country, it has many features from high-context culture. Finns are neither used to heavy politeness nor plentiful questions in communication. In Finland silence is considered normal and it is not needed to be avoided like in low-context culture. Sometimes, Finns expect the other person to understand the message without expressing it completely but usually Finns are very straight in verbal communication. It is easy to see how western and eastern manners blend in Finnish communication culture. (Salminen & Poutanen 1996, 70, 96.)

### 3.3 Cultural Partition

It is hard to make a cultural partition since all the people from the same country are not completely similar. Still, it is possible to find coterminous features since the people have grown up in the same environment and culture, which give them the national norms. The norms lead the way of thinking and acting differently around the world. The personality, and different subgroups as gender, age and race create differences also inside the culture. There are personalities that fight against the national norms such as talkative Finns and silent Spanish but still the form of thinking and understanding other people is led by the culture. (Lucas 2009, 194.)

According to Lewis (2006, 29), it is possible to share people from over 200 nations into three different groups. The terms linear-active and multi-active culture are close to E. T. Hall's partition into high-context (polychromic) and low-context (monochromic) cultures. Lewis added reactive cultures to Hall's partition to complete it. These groups indicate how people in different cultures think and work. (Lewis 1996, 32 - 35; Lewis 2006, 29.) Mäkilouko has shared cultures more specifically into eight different groups based on similar origin, language and religion (Mäkilouko 2003, 29).

The partition of Lewis is good for the topic since it describes a lot about the thinking methods of a person. It also deals with the reasons of prioritisation and valuation of the culture. The partition of Lewis together with partly more specific partition of Mäkilouko enables comparison between cultures of different countries. Mäkilouko's

separations has its base for example on history which gives an important point of view into cultural differences. Hofstede's cultural dimensions offer also the possibility to find the exact research results about the values of national cultures which are used when analysing the research results.

### **Linear-Active, Multi-Active and Reactive Cultures**

Linear-active people like to conduct one aspect at a time. They concentrate on that one aspect very hard and conduct it as scheduled beforehand. Linear-active people are very organised and do not like to have any changes to their plans. They are very conscious about history and tend to talk about past happenings with others. They base their arguments on facts from statistics, reference books, database and other written sources. Linear-active people are oriented to work and do not express their feelings. They are rational and used to follow strict rules. These people do not express a lot with their body and dislike interruptions. There is a limit between social and professional interactions. This culture is found for example in Germany, Scandinavia, USA and Great Britain. (Lewis 1996, 32 - 36; Lewis 2006, 29 – 33; Mikluha 1998, 17.)

On the contrary, multi-active people do not care about punctuality nor strict agendas. They concentrate on reality and do not want to leave conversations unfinished. Multi-active people may postpone meetings or cancel them if they have something else going on which they consider more important at that point. They like to pretend to care about timetables in front of linear-active people but follow still their own way. There are usually problems occurring when these two types of cultures encounter. Multi-active people believe they achieve more things when they do not focus on only one matter at a time. They are people-oriented, emotional and use a great deal of body language. They interrelate a lot and trust oral information hence their conversations may take hours. Multi-active people do not separate social and professional contacts but their business partners are usually also their friends. Multi-active culture is seen easily in Latin America, Africa, Arabic countries, India and Latin Europe as Spain, Portugal and Italy. (Lewis 1996, 32 - 36; Lewis 2006, 29 - 33; Mikluha 1998, 17.)



Reactive people prefer to listen and establish the position of other person first. After that, they can also form their opinion and express it but they rarely start any discussion. They can see the whole picture, not only details as well as use both oral and researched information. In their culture statements are promises and they should be fulfilled. They appreciate honesty and want to keep reliable people close. Reactive people are also people-oriented, like in multi-active cultures, but instead of talkative relations they are quietly caring. They are thoughtful and do not interrupt others. Reactive cultures exist for example in China, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan, Turkey and Finland. (Lewis 1996, 36 - 41; Lewis 2006, 33 - 35.)

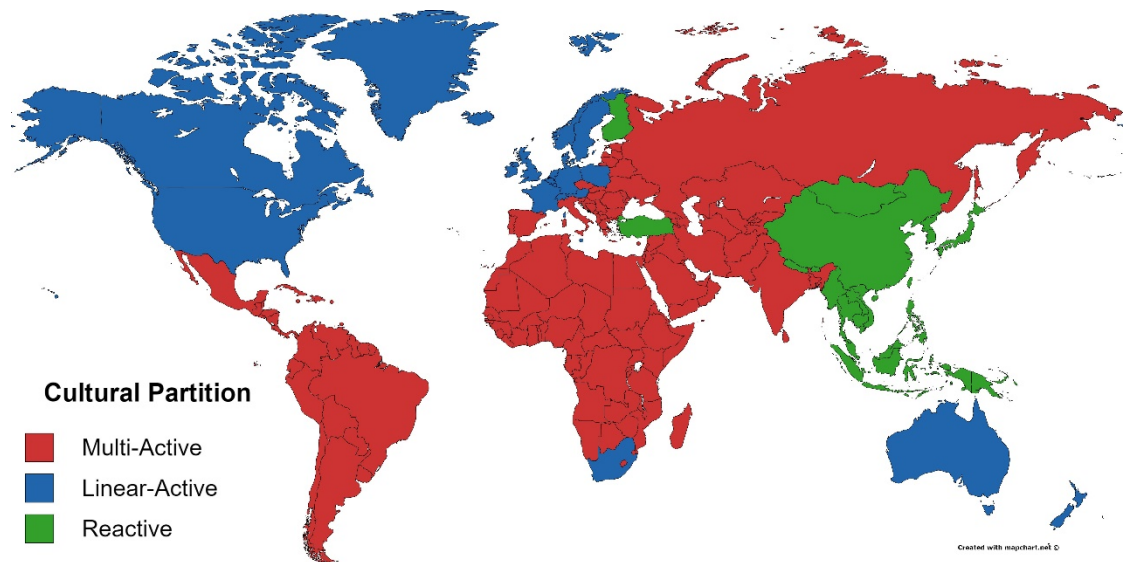


Figure 2. Cultural Partition Retold from the Theory of Lewis (2006, 29 - 35.)

### Cultural Partition by Mäkilouko

Marko Mäkilouko has made a cultural partition where he unites similar nations into clusters (Figure 3). There are eight different groups of nations which usually have similarities in history, language and ethnicity. These groups are Nordic, Germanic, Anglo, Latin European, Latin American, Far Eastern, Arab and Near Eastern.

Mäkilouko has also listed four individual cultures which are not exactly part of any of

the clusters. Still, there are many significant countries, for example China and Russia, which are completely left out of the partition. (Mäkilouko 2003, 29.)

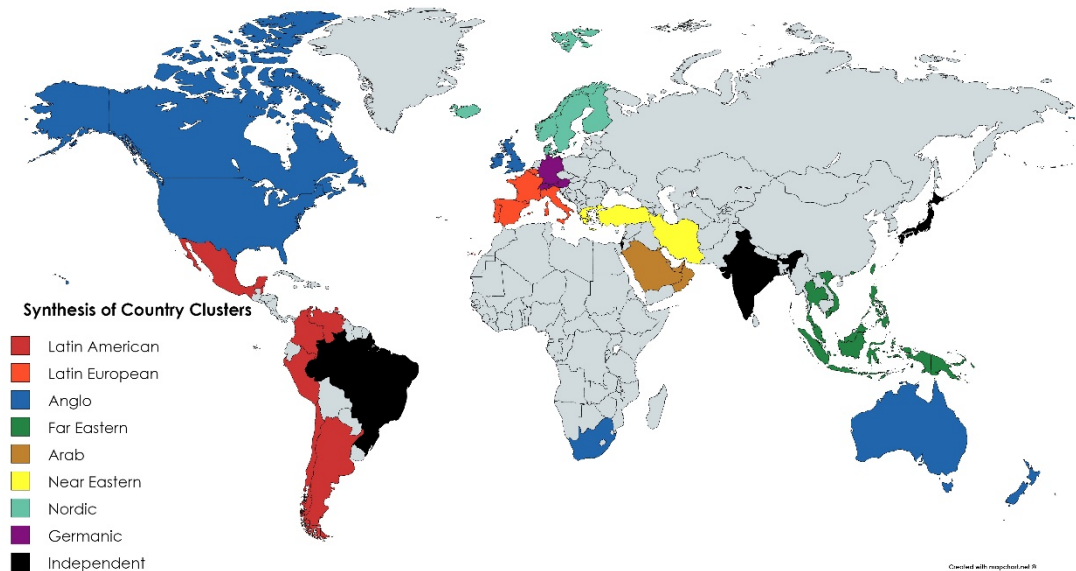


Figure 3. Synthesis of Country Clusters (Mäkilouko 2003, 29.)

### Stereotypes

Separating different cultures into groups is a form of stereotyping. It is all about trying to find similarities and differences between people from different national or ethnic backgrounds. Stereotypes are usually considered negative since people are different personalities and all the features cannot be generalised. That is the reason why stereotyping works best with large groups such as nationalities. It is said that Germans are serious and Japanese shy which does not mean that the Germans do not laugh nor that the Japanese do not speak. The stereotypes define the form and base of thinking which may also be visible on the acts of the person. Stereotypes of other cultures are useful for instance when travelling since they give the tourist a frame of reference how the locals might behave and how the tourist should possibly act. Stereotypes also give the base for the interaction to the host since he should be

able to distinguish the habits and norms of different cultures. Nevertheless, stereotypes should never be taken too seriously since there are also different personalities in every culture. Stereotypes can be either positive or negative but usually negative features are emphasized. People should be careful especially with the negative stereotypes since forming a negative image beforehand may effect on behaviour as well. Stereotypes should never be taken as a complete definition of the representative of the culture. Stereotypes should only give a guideline to communication and a base to interaction with the person from another culture. (Mitchell 2000, 28; Reisinger & Turner 2003, 169 - 172.)

### 3.4 Finnish Culture

Cultures have blended during the years around the world. There have only been few different cultural groups in Finland because of its northern location. The variance of cultures in Finland has been very small. Nowadays, there are more different cultural groups and blended cultures in Finland, but still, the original Finnish culture is the most seeable in the country. (Brännare, Kairamo, Kulusjärvi & Matero 2005, 258.) Finland is the most homogenous country in Europe so far (Wilkins & Isotalus 2009, 2).

Finnish culture is part of the Western culture and it is very individual according to Geert Hofstede (Hofstede n.d.a). Family only consists of parents and their kids, and other relatives are not visited much. People might not even know their neighbors. It is thought that everyone should take care of his own matters but still in an emergency nobody is left behind in Finland. (Tervomaa 2015, 25 - 27, 106.) Nevertheless, Finland has quite high points in indulgence so the Finns appreciate leisure and friendship as well as do plenty of sports. The country scores high in uncertainty avoidance too, which means that people want to plan the future and know what will happen. Experts and professors are valued, and a new situation might cause stress to Finns. (De Mooij 2011, 49; Hofstede n.d.a; Jandt 2016, 171, 174 - 175.) All this is reasonable since in Finland, people are very honest and reliable and surprises are not expected (Tervomaa 2015, 26).

According to Hofstede Finland is also a feminine country as well as other Nordic Countries. The roles of men and women are blended, and usually both genders study

and work outside home. There are not anymore “men’s jobs” and “women’s jobs”. The gender of the customer servant is not important like in some other cultures. Finland is a political democracy and equality is highly valued. There is only one word for “he” and “she” in Finnish language and many other words that do not tell the sex of the subject compared to for example English. It is also rare to use the formal addressing in Finnish since, as said, everyone must be equal. That might cause problems especially in customer service in another language. Many foreign customers expect the servant to use the formal way of speaking since in many languages, for instance in German and Spanish, informal form is only for close friends and family. (Tervomaa 2015, 107 - 111.)

In verbal communication Finns are considered silent, slow and reserved. This has a base in history since first Finland was part of Sweden and later until the independence (1917) part of Russia. Finns always had to be silent in their own language. (Wilkins & Isotalus 2009, 1.) Consequently, Finns do not talk much, and when they do, they say honestly how things are. Promises must become true and lying is very rude. In total, Finns do not speak unless they have something important to say. They do not want to bother others. However, in other countries Finns are known friendly but shy. (Tervomaa 2015, 26 - 29.)

Nature is often related to Finnish culture. It has been said that the coldness of the climate affects also to coldness of people. In Finnish culture the climate does influence on it. Four different seasons and loosely inhabited countryside brings nature to everyday life in Finland. In tourism, Finland is always marketed by its remarkable nature. (Brännare, Kairamo, Kulusjärvi & Matero 2005, 256 - 257.) Cold winter with the Northern Lights, over a 100 000 lakes, large forests and summer nights with the midnight sun interest people from all over the world (Brännare, Kairamo, Kulusjärvi & Matero 2005, 256 - 257; García 2016).

### 3.5 The Effect of Globalization

The word globalization is nowadays found in many languages. It is used in many situations and both in a positive and a negative way, depending on the perspective and the topic. In other words, globalization can be described as connectedness. It has become very hard to live without getting into contact with other’s opinions and actions.

(Samovar, Porter & McDaniel 2010, 2 - 3.) Globalization stimulates the blending of cultures when cultures become more contacted to each other. There are still different points of views to the power and speed of globalization, some people believe in permanence and some in becoming similarity. Permanence hypothesis in globalization means that cultures are resistant to the impacts of other cultures. People are naturally ethnocentric which means that they act by the learned rules and norms. For example, international advertising does not usually work unless the ads are modified to fit in the target culture. (Uusitalo 2009, 21 - 23.)

The opposite hypothesis for the permanence is reaching similarity and standards. This is what the multinational companies try to create similar needs for all the people around the world to be able to sell the same product everywhere. That lowers their costs and makes the business more cost effective. This kind of business started from the fast food chains and is also called mcdonaldization. It impoverishes the original cultures and makes the world become more and more similar. (Uusitalo 2009, 21, 24 - 26.)

The globalization does not only happen due to the politics and multinational companies but also immigration and tourism make cultures blend. People are used to meet more people from various countries and cultural backgrounds. There are people who move to another country to live or their friend, husband or wife comes from another country. International couples even usually move to a third country to live when their children become affected by three different cultures. It is not always easy to define the cultural background of the person anymore. (Frisk & Tulkki 2005, 104.) People also combine elements from other cultures to their own culture which is called hybridisation. This makes understanding intercultural communication even more important but also a lot harder than it used to be when cultures were more separated. (Liu, Volčič, & Gallois 2011, 262.)

## **4 From Service to Accommodation Product**

Service can be understood in many ways. It can consist of the customer service situation or the service product sold to the customer. Customer service signifies the interaction or the performance between the customer servant and the customer, which give extra value to the customer in some ways. The additional value can be felt

as facility, experience, pleasure and satisfaction as well as saving money or time from the customer's point of view. (Rissanen 2005, 18.) According to Robert W. Lucas, the customer servant needs to have the knowledge and capability to deliver products and services to internal and external customers of the company in a way that gives satisfaction to both identified and unidentified needs of a customer (Lucas 2009, 6).

Service product is immaterial and often produced and consumed at the same time. The companies in the service industry cannot produce service before selling it to customers but it usually requires massive investments before starting the commerce. (Rissanen 2005, 18 - 19.) In accommodation business, the product is the stay at the hotel or another pension, including incidental and additional services. The facilities must be built before there can be any customers staying which is a significant investment for the company. Even though the facilities are mandatory to have, the room itself is only a part of the service experience of the customer. (Rautiainen & Siiskonen 2009, 77, 87.)

#### 4.1 Quality of Service

Quality is one of the main aspects on the way to success in service industry as well as a major competitive advantage for a company. Value and quality set also a price for services. The quality is good when a customer's expectations are fulfilled during the service process. Even if the expectations are unrealistic, the quality is experienced low since the service cannot reach the expectations. (Ford, Sturman & Heaton 2012, 17 - 18; Grönroos 2009, 104 - 105.) The expectations of the customers from different cultures might differ a lot which makes it hard to reach them. That might make the customer feel that the quality is not as good as in the similarly qualified hotels of his own country. (Reisinger & Turner 2003, 191.)

Quality of service is an opinion of a customer even though the service provider has its own systems to measure service quality. During the service consumption customers reach experiences and many feelings that define their opinion about the service. A research conducted in the United States of America tells that 68 % of customer loss result from bad customer service and only 14 % consequence of bad technical quality. Functional quality, ergo how the customer is served, is harder to measure than technical quality. The service provider usually measures only the technical part of the

service quality so the results may differ a lot depending on the opinions and earlier experiences of the customers. (Rissanen 2006, 17, 213 - 214.) How the customer feels about the quality of service depends a lot on his background and expectations as well as the services he has used before (Reason, Løvlie & Flu 2016, 54).

### **Ten Dimensions of Service Quality**

There are ten dimensions, found by Berry, Parasuraman and Zeithaml, which describe service quality. First of the dimensions is competence and professional skills of the customer servant. The customer servant needs to have knowledge and skills to serve and deliver service to the customer. (Grönroos 2009, 114; Rissanen 2006, 215.) It also includes the skills of the customer servant to use needed technical systems and machines (Rautiainen & Siiskonen 2009, 69). The second dimension is reliability which means that the customer servant must create trust for the customer and act like agreed. The service must be delivered correctly and precisely on the first time. Credibility is the third aspect, and it signifies that the consumer ought to feel the customer servant is doing the best for him. The image of the company and the personality of the servant effect on credibility. The fourth dimension is accessibility so the consumer does not need to put too much effort on going to the place nor waiting too long when calling to the company. Safety is the fifth dimension. The customer must feel safe when staying at a hotel. Safety is created by promising physical and economical safety as well as reliability. (Grönroos 2009, 114 - 115; Rissanen 2006, 215.) In hotels safety is created by professional staff, security systems such as an access control and a video surveillance as well as with an action plan for emergency situations (Rautiainen & Siiskonen 2009, 69).

The rest five dimensions, which create value for the customer start with politeness. Politeness is important in every communication situation but especially when serving customers. The outcome of the servant should be clean and the consumer needs to feel respected. (Grönroos 2009, 115; Rissanen 2006, 215 - 216.) In addition to correct language choices and good communication skills, the appearance and outfit make the politeness of the customer servant (Rautiainen & Siiskonen 2009, 69). The sixth and seventh aspects are service receptivity and communication. They emphasize that communication of the customer servant must be clear and easily understandable as

well as contact to the customer servant need to be effortlessly available. The customer servant also needs to recognize and understand the needs of the customer, which is the ninth dimension. The servant must know what the customer needs sometimes even without the customer saying anything. The customer should be treated as an individual, and the regular customers should be recognised. The tenth dimension of the service quality is the service environment. The reception of the hotel should be clean and fresh. Furthermore, physical evidence of the service situation and the outcome of the customer servant should be thought carefully. Nowadays, it is also important to take environmental aspects into account when organizing the actions of the company. (Grönroos 2009, 114 - 115; Rissanen 2006, 215 - 216.)

### **SERVQUAL**

Berry, Parasuraman and Zeithaml started to study experienced service quality in 1985 and created a method with which it is possible to evaluate the service quality specifically than earlier. The survey instrument is nowadays often in use in different areas of service business. Usually, SERVQUAL instrument consists of five different factors which relative importance the customers evaluate. Customers also tell about their expectations and experiences so they can be compared. After that it is easy to see in which aspects the service provider should develop marketing or the service itself. (Ford, Sturman & Heaton 2012, 423 - 425; Grönroos 2009, 114.)

The five aspects of SERVQUAL method are tangibles (equipment, personnel and physical facilities), reliability (ability to perform the service accurately, consistently and dependably), responsiveness (willingness to help customers and offer precise service), assurance (employee knowledge, politeness and trustworthiness) and empathy (offering caring and individualized attention). (Ford, Sturman & Heaton 2012, 423 - 425.)

### **Customer Satisfaction**

Service quality is delivered to the customer during many different parts of the overall service experience. These aspects are called moments of truth. The moments of truth show how closely the customer's expectations are met and form the stage of customer satisfaction. Satisfaction is formed in a relation of expectation to experi-



ences which arise from the customer's values and beliefs. Experiences of the customer must exceed his prospects to make him satisfied. Although, when the expectations are poor and the service meets them, it does not create satisfaction. To create satisfaction, the service quality must be considered good. In tourism, the satisfaction consists of the comparison of pre-travel expectations and post-travel experiences. If the customer is satisfied after the trip, it has at least fulfilled or even surpassed his expectations. (Bowie & Buttle 2011, 352; Reisinger & Turner 2003, 176 - 177, 182.)

Customers have different wants and needs which divides them into different customer segments. According to Grönroos (2009) the customers want to be treated as individuals not only a part of a group of people with similar needs. That means that a customer should achieve a feeling that he is an individual customer segment himself, so the service should be differentiated for the individual. (Grönroos 2009, 422 - 423.) The differentiation of the service for diverse customers can create great satisfaction for the user of the service and be profitable for the service provider. Personalised service is also a competitive advantage for the company. (Ford, Sturman & Heaton 2012, 33; Rissanen 2005, 116.)

Mok and Armstrong (1998) found out in their research that the expectations of people from different cultures are dissimilar. There were differences among customers from the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia, Japan and Taiwan. Customers from these cultures had the most significant difference in expectations of empathy and tangibles. It is important to know the cultural differences, when serving guests from other cultures, so that the service provider can achieve the highest level of customer satisfaction among the international guests. (Reisinger & Turner 2003, 191.) The customer will talk about the service experience forward if the service has been extraordinary either in a good or in a bad way (Ford, Sturman & Heaton 2012, 270; Timm 2011, 6). Normally, good service is seldom mentioned to others so the word of mouth does not share the positive image about the service experience. Therefore, dissatisfaction is very bad for the service provider since besides changing the hotel or the destinations, the customer will also talk about his bad experiences to his friends and relatives. That widens the bad reputation of the service provider and gives them a bad image among potential customers. (Ford, Sturman & Heaton 2012, 270; Reisinger & Turner 2003, 181.)

## 4.2 Service Experience at a Hotel

The consumer of the service product reaches the service experience which the service provider should make the experience as good as possible. The service experience in a hotel consists of many aspects, for example restaurant, meeting space, gym and spa services, besides the core product. (Brännare, Kairamo, Kulusjärvi & Matero 2005, 11.) The service experience of the customer depends on his vision, earlier experiences, attitudes, feelings and expectations. Therefore, customers with different cultural backgrounds may receive completely different service experience due to their former knowledge and cultural scheme. (Rissanen 2006, 17, 213 - 214.) Still, the needs of all the customers should be fulfilled during the hotel stay.

### **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

All the sold services are to fill a need of a consumer. Dr Abraham Maslow has created a model of needs of a human being and puts them into an order in the case of importance. He created the pyramid model where the most important needs are in the bottom and they should be fulfilled first. When the needs of the lowest level are fulfilled, the person starts to want to fulfil the needs on the next stage. There are five stages in the model in total. (Kotler, Bowen & Maken 2010, 161; Schiffman, Kanuk & Hansen 2012, 115 - 118.)

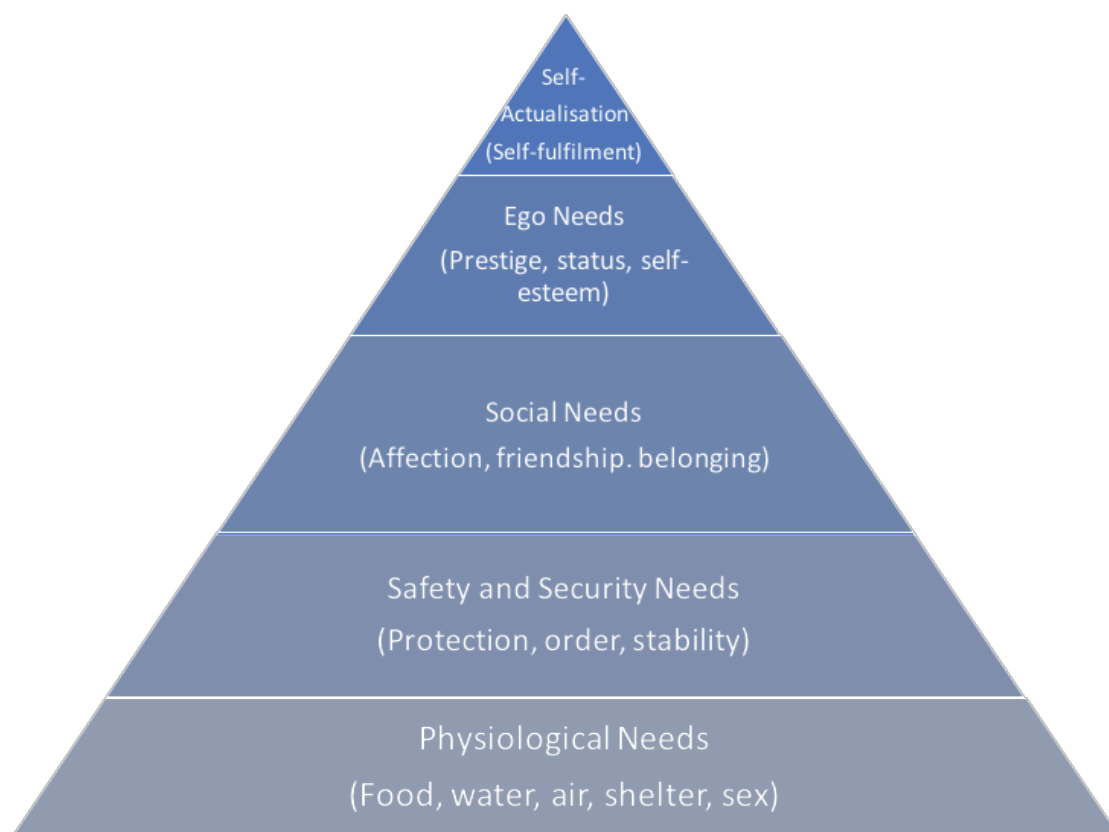


Figure 4. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Schiffman, Kanuk & Hansen 2012, 116)

The lowest, and the most important needs to fulfil are physiological needs such as food, water, air and shelter. These needs are always fulfilled at a hotel since there is a restaurant, breakfast and even a possibility to order food to the room. If the tap water in the country is not drinkable, there should also be water bottles in the room. When these primary needs are taken care of, the person moves to the next stage which are safety and security needs. They consist of physical needs and aspects as protection and stability. In hotels, there is a receptionist available usually 24 hours a day as well as security cameras recording in public areas. The locks of the rooms should work without problems and the room might include a safety box. Moreover, the cleanliness and simplicity of the hallways create safety. (De Mooij 2011, 159; Schiffman, Kanuk & Hansen 2012, 115 - 118.)

Social needs are on the third level. It covers affection, friendship and a feeling to belong somewhere. These needs are harder to fulfil in a hotel. Usually, tourists on holiday have their friends or family with them and plenty of free time to spend together

but for example many business travellers stay at a hotel alone. Still, they should feel welcome and reach the feeling of belonging to the hotel. There should also be a possibility to contact their family and friends via phone or Internet. The fourth stage of the Maslow's model is ego needs. This stage means that people need prestige, good status and self-esteem. The best a hotel can do is to make the guest feel respected and appreciated. That way the staff of the hotel can make him feel important and give him good impression. The fifth and the highest stage is self-actualisation, in other words, self-fulfilment. It means using all the creativity a person has and become "all they can be". (De Mooij 2011, 159; Schiffman, Kanuk & Hansen 2012, 115 - 118.)

### **Customer Journey at a Hotel**

Customers' service experience starts to form already when they make a reservation to the hotel. It is a contract made between the hotel and the customer. As seen in the service blueprint (Figure 5), the customer servant first adds the reservation to the reservation system of the hotel. The work of the receptionist is done backstage since the customer cannot see the actions conducted. Earlier, most of the bookings were made by calling, faxing or visiting the hotel personally but nowadays, majority of the reservations are made online. Customers can make the reservations on the webpage of the hotel or by using online accommodation booking sites. E-mail can also be used when making reservations. (Rautiainen & Siiskonen 2010, 180.)

The customer obtains the first impression of the hotel when stepping into the lobby. It is also called a moment of truth since it gives the customer the first idea of the hotel, which is hard to change afterwards. (Brännare, Kairamo, Kulusjärvi & Matero 2005, 134, 146.) Next the receptionist welcomes the guest and checks him in. The impression of the customer consists of the physical evidence such as the outfit of the customer servant and the style of the lobby as well as the onstage actions of the contact employee at the reception. (Figure 3.) The customer servant gives a key for the customer and explains the hotel policies. Even though the situation may be very fast, it gives the customer an impression about the service at the hotel. Depending on the customer, he might want to obtain a lot of information about the hotel and the destination or just check in as fast as possible. (Rautiainen & Siiskonen 2010, 149.) Before the customer arrives to the hotel, the staff has already worked for his comfortability.

Many supporting services enable consuming the core product. These supporting services at the hotel are for instance a cleaning service and a reservation system. (Rautainen & Siiskonen 2009, 23.)

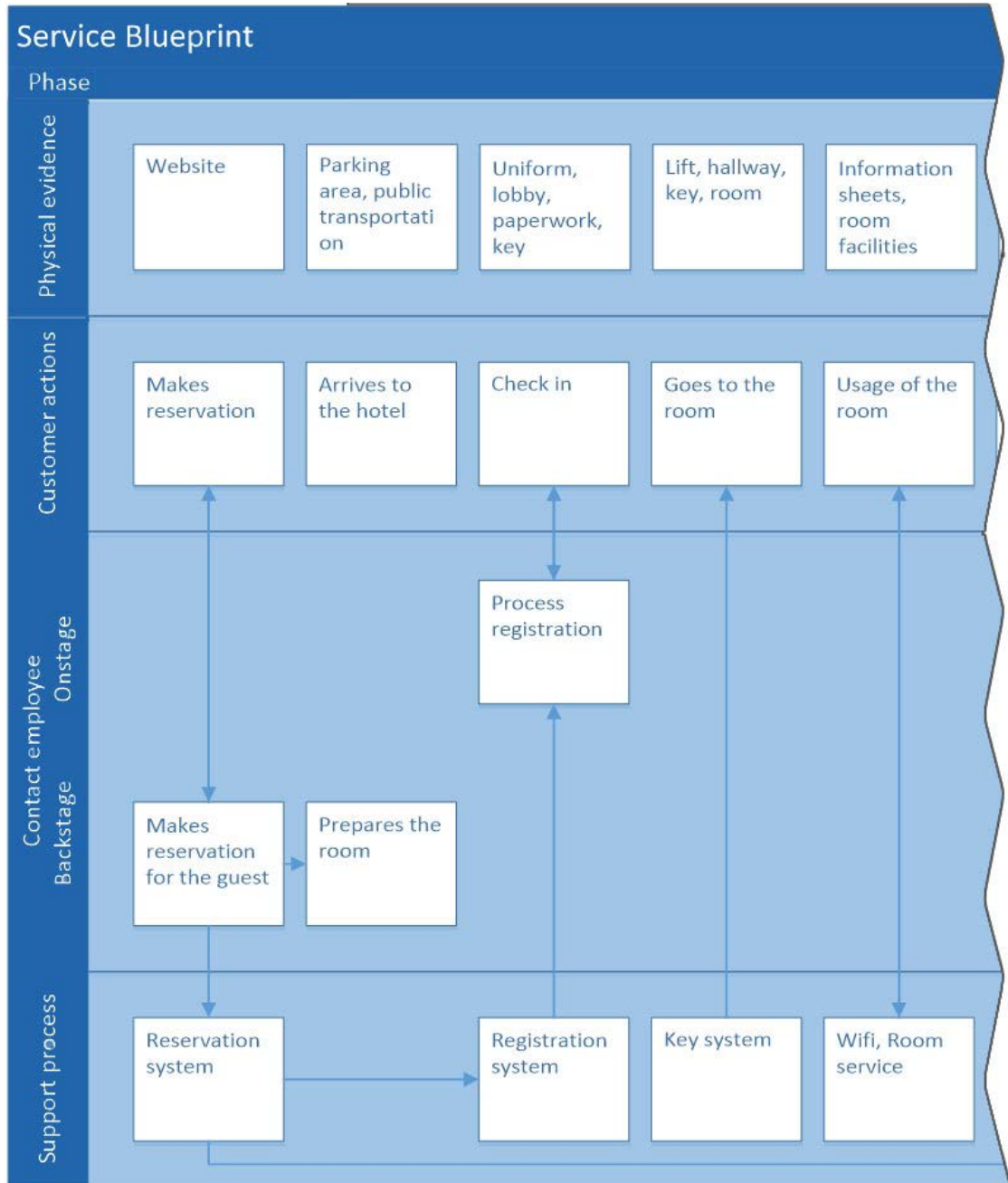


Figure 5. Hotel Stay in a Service Blueprint Part 1

After checking in, the guest goes to his room via the hallways of the hotel. He might also use the staircase or the lift. The customer enters his room by using the key system. (Figure 5.) He has many services inside the room. Usually, a standard hotel room has a toilet, shower or bathtub, bed, TV, radio, phone and minibar. (Rautiainen & Siiskonen 2010, 112.) In Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki, the standard room has also a safety box, air conditioning, ironing opportunity, Wi-Fi connection and over thirty TV channels. (Room details, n.d.) The customer not only uses the services provided inside the room but also additional services of the hotel. In the case of Figure 5 and Figure 6, the customer only used one additional service, breakfast, besides the services inside the room. Additional services give extra value to the core product which is the accommodation service at the hotel. Additional services also make the hotel to stand out and are competitive advantages for the hotel. (Rautiainen & Siiskonen 2009, 23.)

After sleeping the night at the room the guest goes to eat breakfast. Breakfast service at hotel may be either included to the room price or available for an extra payment. Hotel breakfast is usually a self-service buffet but an á la carte breakfast is also possible. (Brännare, Kairamo, Kulusjärvi & Matero 2005, 59 - 60.) At Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki, the breakfast is a versatile self-service buffet but the coffee or tea is served to the table (Breakfast n.d.).

After eating breakfast, the customer returns to his room to take his luggage with or goes straight to the reception to check out. Most of the customers check out around the same time that might make congestion to the reception. The staff should be prepared to the most popular check out times so that all the guests are served well. (Brännare, Kairamo, Kulusjärvi & Matero 2005, 160 - 161.) At Solo Sokos. The hotel contacts customers with the customer satisfaction survey via e-mail if the guest has accepted it. The after mail completes the service experience and hopefully makes the customer tell about his feelings of the service product consumed in the hotel. Their information can improve the service further. (Brännare, Kairamo, Kulusjärvi & Matero 2005, 171 - 172.)

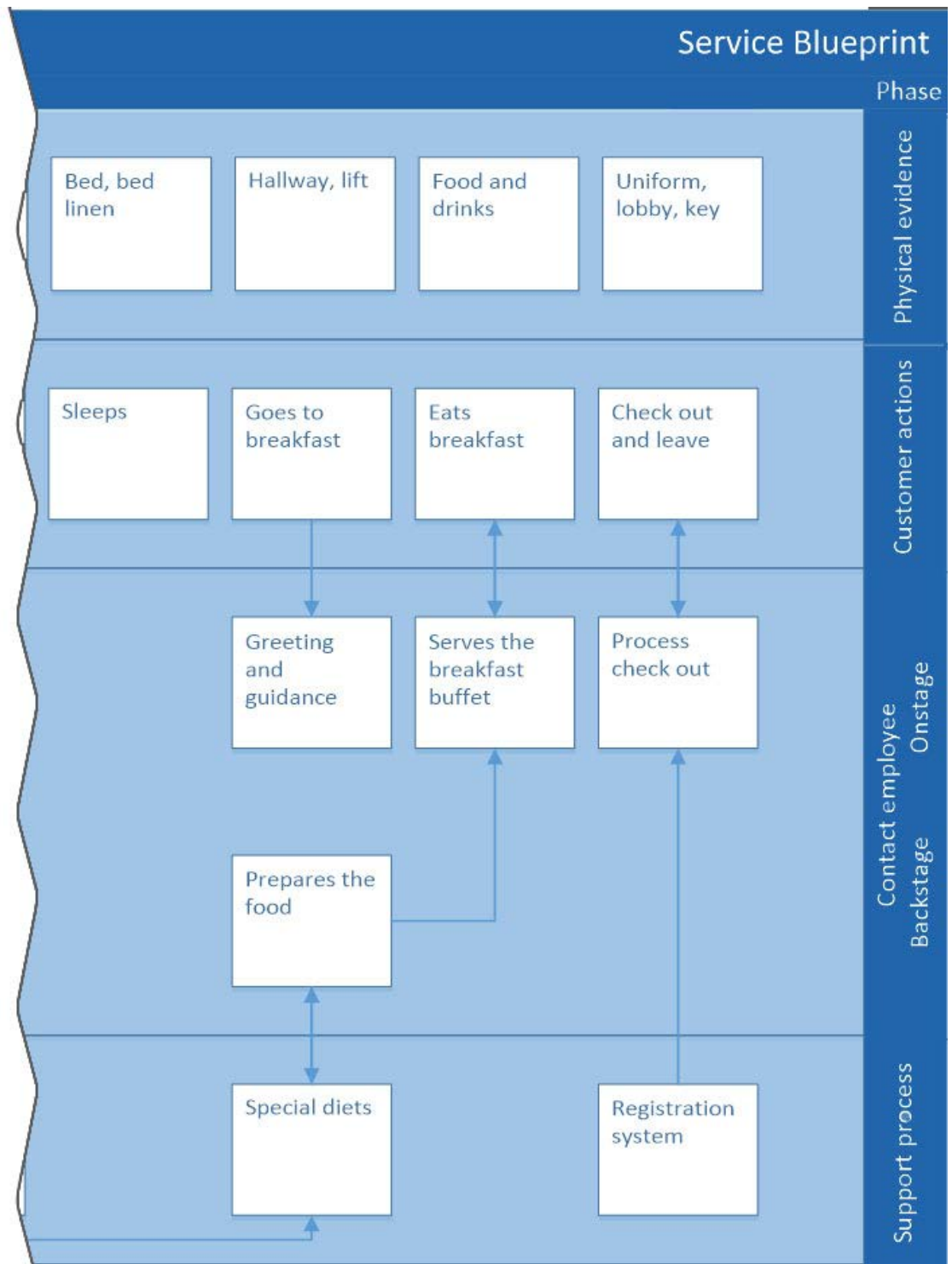


Figure 6. Hotel Stay in a Service Blueprint Part 2

### 4.3 Cultural Knowledge in Service Business

People like to travel and visit foreign countries which gives them a need to understand how to communicate in another culture. Even though increasing travelling shortens the distances of the countries and sometimes even brings cultures closer to each other, during the last years the cultural differences have been taken more into account. It is not only polite to notice person's different cultural background but one of the most important parts of developing international tourism services. The cultural background of the tourist defines his expectations which should be understood by the service provider. Cultural background effects on the way of living as well as values which create customer satisfaction. (Nieminen 2004, 9; Reisinger & Turner 2003, 31.)

Cultural differences between the tourist and the host may occur in service situation. The differences are wider than just the types of food eaten and language spoken. The dissimilarities are also seen in non-verbal communication, religious beliefs, time orientation, social rules, customs, forms of address and privacy limits. (Reisinger & Turner 2003, 31, 43.) Different cultural backgrounds of the customers should be considered as early as possible in the service situation, for example, at a hotel already during check in. There are aspects that could be noticed already before the arrival of the customer. For instance, there are some beliefs about numbers: in Japan number 444 is an unlucky number as 333 in China, in the United States 13 brings bad luck and in some Christian countries 666 is considered as a number of the beast. These number should be avoided depending on the culture for instance when booking the room. (Brännare, Kairamo, Kulusjärvi & Matero 2005, 139.)

Tourists bring their culture with them to the vacation which is called tourism culture. The term tourism culture includes the behaviour of the tourist which usually differs slightly from his normal daily routines so does the behaviour of the host. According to Jafari (1987) also the host behaves differently since he is offering hospitality services for people from different cultures. The host's behaviour combines the host culture with the service culture of the company where the servant is working. Pizam (1999) adds that also tourists' subcultural groups effect on their behaviour in the destination. These subgroups can be, for example, business tourists, backpackers and honeymooners. Even the same person acts differently depending on the subgroup he



belongs at the moment. (Reisinger & Turner 2003, 10.) It is hard for the customer servant to find the correct way to serve the customer since the servant might not know all the cultural groups the customer belongs to and which norms he wants to follow.

## **5 Research Results**

### **5.1 Systematic Literature Review**

There were two themes that the researches in systematic literature review emphasized. These themes are “Cultural Sensitivity and Language” and “Perceived Service Quality”. The results of the main facts of five different studies all published in different academic journals of hospitality and tourism. The effects of cultural differences and cultural knowledge are studied both from the perspective of a service providers and from the point of view of customers. The results prove that it is needed to put effort on being able to notice cultural differences.

#### **Intercultural communication**

Wang, Miao and Mattila (2015) concentrated on the communication accommodation strategies on their research. Service companies had created two types of communication to adapt it to the cultural background of the customer: (1) match the backgrounds of the customer and the service provider and/or (2) use the native language of the customer. The aim of the study was to find out what kind of effects the cultural communication adaptations have on the customers’ service experience in a foreign context. The empirical research itself used videotaped hotel reception check-in situations to test the customers’ reactions from affective (emotional) and cognitive (perceived values) perspectives. Wang and others tested four different communication accommodation types: none, native language, ethnic congruity and both ethnic congruity and native language. The study was made by using Chinese customers since in many countries, they are one of the largest group of international arrivals. The home culture, perceived cultural distance, intercultural communication stress, cosmopolitanism and English skills of the tested customers were controlled. (Wang, Miao & Mattila 2015, 96 - 104.)

The first hypothesis of the study was that accommodated communication will increase feelings of pleasure and dominance as well as decrease arousal. Another suggestion was that communication accommodation will have an effect on customer's rational and symbolic value perceptions which formulates the second hypothesis. The three other hypothesis suggested that intercultural communication accommodation creates more symbolic value to the customer than interpersonal communication accommodation and the value created effects on customer satisfaction in total as well as feelings of pleasure, arousal and dominance created in the customer service situation. (Wang et al. 2015, 96 - 104.)

The results demonstrate that intercultural communication accommodation increased customers' feelings of dominance ( $p < .001$ ) and pleasure ( $p < .001$ ) but did not have an effect on decreasing arousal ( $p < .05$ ). So, two thirds of the first hypothesis were supported. There was not an effect on relational value ( $p = .14$ ) created by the customer but the effect on symbolic value was significant ( $p < .01$ ). Symbolic value created was highest when the customer servant spoke a customer's the native language and had the same ethnic background ( $p < .05$ ). In addition, intercultural communication accommodation created more symbolic value than interpersonal accommodation ( $p < .05$ ). There was a positive effect on encounter satisfaction with greater pleasure ( $p < .001$ ), symbolic value ( $p < .05$ ) and relational value ( $p < .001$ ) when arousal ( $p = .92$ ) and dominance ( $p = .22$ ) did not influence on satisfaction. (Wang et al. 2015, 96 - 104.)

Sizoo, Iskat, Plank and Serrie researched if customer servants with higher intercultural sensitivity can provide better service for their international customers. The research was made in the restaurants of 27 four or five diamond hotels in Florida, USA. The selected hotels have plenty of international visitors and good quality service. There were four points of views to estimate waiters and waitresses work: customer's, manager's, co-workers' and employee's opinions. The 251 tested waiters and waitresses fulfilled a survey of 60 questions asking for example about their work experience, work motivation and intercultural sensitivity. (Sizoo, Iskat, Plank & Serrie 2003, 61 - 77.)

The researchers found very strong correlations ( $p < .01$ ) between the intercultural sensitivity of the employees and the hotel's diamond rating, employees' international work experience and their fluency of foreign language. Furthermore, there was

a correlation ( $p < .05$ ) between intercultural sensitivity and the restaurant type (casual or fine-dining). Customer servants with high intercultural sensitivity also got significantly better results in service attentiveness ( $p = .0001$ ), suggestive selling ( $p = .0007$ ) and interpersonal interactions with their co-workers ( $p = .027$ ) than workers with low intercultural sensitivity. However, the level of intercultural sensitivity did not have a significant effect on work motivation ( $p = .4954$ ). Sizoo and others also measured the tips received by the customer servants and found out that there was not any difference between the servants with high and low intercultural sensitivity ( $p = .9569$ ). (Sizoo et al. 2003, 61 - 77.)

### **Perceived Service Quality**

Magnini, Kara, Crotts and Zehrer (2012) researched positive disconfirmations caused by relation between culture and service. They made a literary review of 334 travel blog posts written by international hotel guests. The object of the study was to find out influences of culture on customer satisfaction. Magnini and others analysed the home cultures of the writers as well as the host cultures and used the blog texts to get to know if exceeding the expectations of the hotel visit was service related. (Magnini, Kara, Crotts & Zehrer 2012, 251 - 257.)

The first hypothesis of the study was that positive disconfirmations were service-related more often by people from individualistic countries than travellers from collectivistic countries. As well, it was expected that service-related positive disconfirmations are more common for travellers from low power distance countries than high power distance countries. The third hypothesis was that travellers, whose home and host cultures have a large cultural distance, experience service-related positive disconfirmations more often than travellers with small cultural distance between home and host cultures. (Magnini et al. 2012, 251 - 257.)

There was a statistically significant difference supporting the first hypothesis ( $p = .013$ ) proving that 21 % of positive disconfirmations of people from individual cultures were service-related when only 7 % of them were service-related by people from collectivistic cultures. Comparing low and high power distance countries, according to the second hypothesis, the numbers were almost the same. People from low power distance countries mentioned relation to service in 21 % of the positive disconfirma-

tions when travellers from high power distance countries related positive disconfirmations to service only in 8 % of the blogs. So, the second hypothesis was supported with statistically significant difference ( $p=.035$ ). The third hypothesis did not achieve statistical significance from the data of the research. There were 20,3 % of positive disconfirmations related to service mentioned by travellers with small cultural distance between their home and host cultures while 14,9 % of positive disconfirmations reported by travellers with large cultural distance were service related. (Magnini et al. 2012, 251 - 257.)

Tsaur, Lin and Wu made a questionnaire for international travellers departing from CKD airport in Taiwan to find out tourists' perceptions of service quality and behavioural intention. They got 282 completely filled responses. The respondents were from 26 different countries that were divided into three different cultural groups: European, Asian and English Heritage. The questionnaire was possible to fill in Chinese, English and Japanese. It was formed using 22-item SERVQUAL scale with five options from "much worse than I expected" to "much better than I expected". Behavioural intentions of the respondents were tested with five different forms to deal with a problem at a hotel: loyalty, switch, pay more, external response and internal response. Again, tourists rated the claims with five-point scale. (Tsaur, Lin, Wu 2005, 41 - 63.)

The results of the study told that travellers with English Heritage had significantly greater means on perceived service quality than the other groups. Still, travellers' detected service quality was significantly different ( $p<.05$ ) between English Heritage, European and Asian groups. People with English Heritage estimated the service quality more by using tangible cues than the other two groups. Travellers with English heritage background also scored higher on "loyalty" (mean 4,275) and "pay more" (mean 3,221) of behavioural intentions. It was found that travellers from feminine cultures favour loyalty towards the hotel when travellers from masculine cultures prefer to switch the service provider. However, the Asian groups preferred "external response" (mean 3,536) more often than the other groups. There were not significant differences between the options "switch" and "internal response" ( $p>.036$ ). Therefore, there were some differences in behavioural intentions between these three culturally different groups. (Tsaur et al. 2005, 41 - 63.)

Dortyol, Varinli and Kitapci (2014) wanted to identify the hotel service quality dimensions and regulate the impacts of the dimensions on customer satisfaction as well as on valuing, recommending and revisiting thoughts. The researchers created a two-parted questionnaire in English, German and Russian and asked the travellers at ICF Airport in Antalya about their perceptions of hotel service quality and their demographical background. The questionnaire was completed well 307 times. (Dortyol, Varinli & Kitapci 2014, 470 - 495.)

It was found out that two of the dimensions, “tangibles” and “food quality and reliability” can explain 14,2 % of variance in the customer satisfaction level. Furthermore, 25,3 % of the value given by customers is explained by the factor “friendly, courteous and helpful employees”. The former two dimensions as well as “interaction with Turkish culture” influence on customers recommending the hotel the most when “level of price” means more that the staff on revisiting the hotel. In a nutshell, according to Dortyol, Varinli and Kitapci the main dimensions the hotel should take care of are “tangibles” and “food quality and reliability” to satisfy the needs of the international guests. (Dortyol et al. 2014, 470 - 495.)

## 5.2 Survey

### **Demographical Questions**

The questionnaire was available for international customers of Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki for the 38 days and got only 16 (N) answers. There were 148 international guests visiting the hotel during October 2016 from 26 different countries. They stayed 289 nights in total at the hotel. Unfortunately, the hotel was not able to give the number of international customers during the first week of November 2016, as agreed. So, there is not an exact number of possible answers. Still, the percentage of answers is very low. The 16 answers gotten cannot provide any reliable information about cultural differences.

Almost all the answerers were in working age: 38 % of them between 30 and 39, 25 % 40 - 49, 31 % 50 - 59 and 1 answerer (6 %) 60 - 69. Fifteen (94 %) of the total 16 answerers were males and only one of them (6 %) was female. Fourteen (88 %) of the guests were on a business trip and only 2 (13 %) of the answerers said that the main

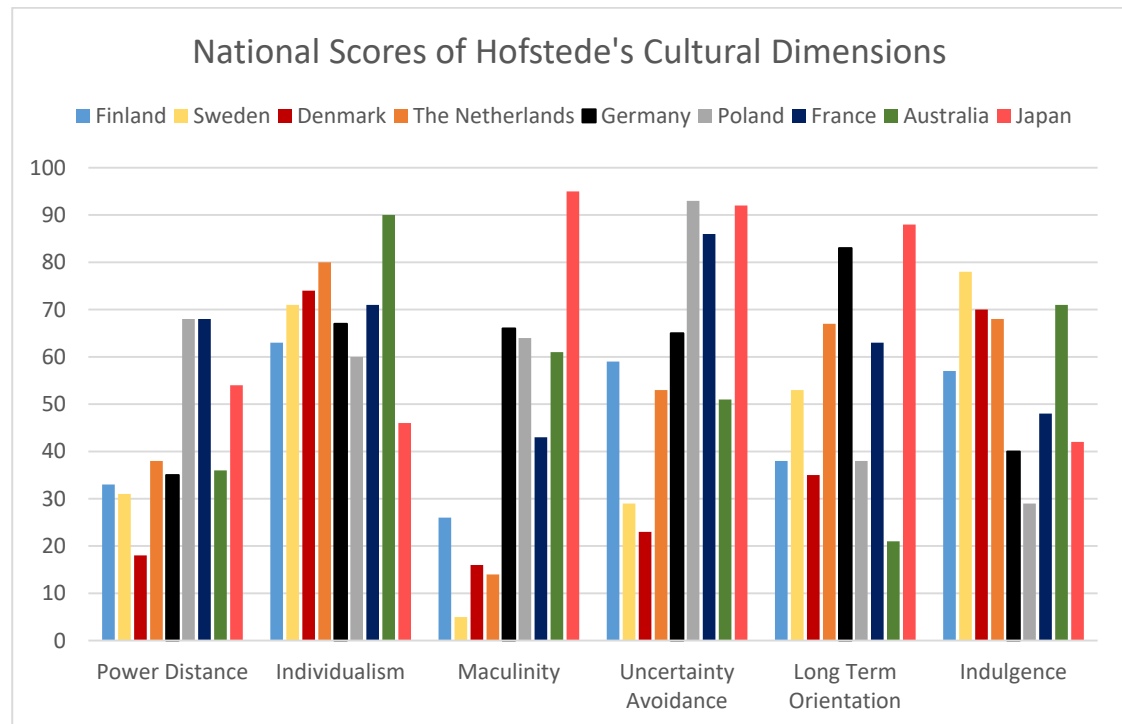
purpose of his trip is leisure. Three (19 %) of the answerers travelled alone and ten (63 %) with someone, for example with a wife or colleagues as the open answers told.

The answerers were from 8 different countries: Australia, Denmark, France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland and Sweden. All the others had the same country of residence except the French who lives in Finland and the Australian who lives in the United Kingdom. 94 % of the answerers were served at the hotel in English but one of the Germans (6 %) has used only German with the staff. Besides English, one of the Swedes (6 %) and the French (6 %) knew some Finnish and were partly served in Finnish at the hotel. Another Swede had also used Swedish (6 %) when communicating with the staff. 67 % of the answerers were happy to be served in English but two of them (13 %) would prefer service in Swedish, one (6 %) in German, one (6 %) in Polish and one (6 %) in Japanese.

#### **Value questions and Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions**

For the value questions the nationalities of the guests had been analysed by the scores of Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Table 2) The correlation between the points of Hofstede's dimensions (power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation and indulgence) and the answers of the questionnaire had been counted in a relation to the topic measured by using regression analysis. For example, the claim "The staff carries Your luggage to the room" under the question 9 was tested by using the national scores of power distance.

Table 2. National Scores of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede n.d.b.)



Two of the 21 claims measured the dimension individualism versus collectivism. As seen in the Table 2, almost all the nationalities of the answerers are more individualists than collectivistic. Japan is the only exception which scores 46 out of a hundred in individualism and is more collectivistic than individual culture. There were not any significant correlations ( $r=0,22$ ,  $p=.4723$ ;  $r=0,02$ ,  $p=.9363$ ) found between the dimension and the answers to the claims (Table 3).

Table 3. Individualism Claims (N=16)

Individualism Claims	r	r <sup>2</sup>	df	p
No need to share a table at breakfast	0,2299	0,05	10	0,4723
Possibility to meet other customers	0,0247	0,00	11	0,9363

There were four questions related to the power distance of the culture. It is seen in the Table 4 that there was only one statistically significant result. The claim “Formal Communication” did not reach statistically significant results since the p value should be less than 0.05 (alpha  $p < .05$ ) but it is seen that there was a hint of correlation ( $r = 0,54$ ) between formal communication and low power distance of the culture. Furthermore, the answers to the claim “Live contact with the staff instead of technology” ( $r = 0,8$ ;  $p = 0,0008$ ) told that it is more important for the high power distance cultures to have face-to-face service than for the cultures with low power distance. In other words, low power distance cultures preferred technology in service more than high power distance cultures. The square of the r told that 65 % of the residual was explained by the correlation.

Table 4. Power Distance Claims (N=16)

<b>Power Distance Claims</b>	<b>r</b>	<b>r<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
The staff carries Your luggage to the room	0,1343	0,02	9	0,6939
Formal Communication	0,5482	0,30	11	0,0524
Equal service for everyone	0,3487	0,12	10	0,2667
Live contact with the staff instead of technology	0,8076	0,65	11	0,0008

There were not any statistically significant findings in masculinity related questions (Table 4). The claim “Equal service for everyone” was put under both masculinity and power distance dimensions since it is an important aspect in both cases. Still, none of the results was significant ( $p < 0.1$ ). Furthermore, the question 12 which asked preferences in a gender of the servant did not give statistically significant results even though the p value was close to the limit  $p < .05$ . Still the correlation was only  $r = 0,56$ . None of the answerers preferred male customer servant, 5 (42 %) wanted her to be female and the rest 7 (58 %) answerers did not mind the gender. The p value was counted by using the masculinity score of the nation and putting the answerers into two groups: female or either gender. Even though the result was not statistically significant ( $p = .0561$ ), it is visible that there was some correlation between masculinity



of the culture and the preference of customer servant's gender. In Table 6 and Table 7 it is visible that the results did not give any statistically significant information.

Table 5. Masculinity Claims (N=16)

<b>Maculinity Claims</b>	<b>r</b>	<b>r<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
Equal service for everyone	0,1673	0,03	10	0,6033
I prefer a female / (a male) / either gender serving me	0,5640	0,32	10	0,0561

Table 6. Uncertainty Avoidance Claims (N=16)

<b>Uncertainty Avoidance Claims</b>	<b>r</b>	<b>r<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
Knowing about all the services of the hotel	0,2395	0,06	12	0,4095
Knowing about the culture of the destination	0,1915	0,04	12	0,5120
Possibility to try something new	0,3727	0,14	11	0,2098
Information about the local culture	0,4063	0,17	11	0,1683
Feeling and seeing the local culture	0,0943	0,01	11	0,7592

Table 7. Indulgence Claims (N=16)

<b>Indulgence Claims</b>	<b>r</b>	<b>r<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
Good outside environment to do exercise	0,2649	0,07	10	0,4054

Table 8 shows which aspects the international customers valued the most during any hotel stay. The mean values were counted by eliminating "no opinion" -answers which were also reduced from the amount of answers. There were no considerable differences in answers in relation to nationality. Due to the small amount of answers, the differences were not considered. Table 8 and Table 9 present the results as an overall opinion of international customers. As noticed in Table 8, having a bellboy who carries the luggage to the room was not important at all. Eight of the answers

(73 %) were 1, which means not important at all and none of them was over 3, which gave the mean value of 1,36. The other claims which scored under 3 and consequently were not important for the international customers of the hotel were "Possibility to meet other customers" (mean = 2,23), "A customer servant is available at all times" (mean = 2,38) and "Possibility to read international newspapers" (mean = 2,67). The claim about the importance of meeting other customers was not considered very important but still two of the answerers marked 4 to the questionnaire, which means that they would appreciate the possibility to get to know other guests of the hotel. There was no correlation between business and leisure travellers ( $r=0.1094$ ,  $p=0.7219$ ) but seems that the answerers who stayed at the hotel with someone would had liked to meet other customers more than the guests who stayed alone ( $r=0.5803$ ,  $p=0.0478$ ).

On the other hand, under the title "Before arriving" one of the claims was considered more important than the others. The customers who answered the survey, liked to have an agenda for the time in the destination (mean = 4). There were many aspects under the title "Contact with the customer servant" which were considered very important (mean  $\geq 4$ ). "Equal service for everyone" was rated the most important (mean = 4,41). Moreover, the guests appreciated staff who helps them with their plans in the destination (mean = 4,15). It was preferred to have live service instead of using technology (mean = 4) even if it would take a little more time. The customer servant needed to have an eye contact with the hotel guest (mean = 4).

Table 8. The Results of Questions 9, 10 And 11

<b>Claims of Questions 9, 10 And 11</b>	<b>Answers:</b>	<b>Mean:</b>
<b>Before arriving:</b>		
Knowing about all the services of the hotel	14	3,29
Having a planned agenda for the stay in the destination	13	4
Knowing about the culture of the destination	14	3,21
<b>During the stay:</b>		
There are no queues	10	3,5
The staff carries Your luggage to the room	11	1,36
A customer servant is available at all times	13	2,38
No need to share a table at breakfast	12	3,33
Possibility to meet other customers	13	2,23
Possibility to try something new	13	3,15
Possibility to read international newspapers	12	2,67
Information about the local culture	13	3,31
Feeling and seeing the local culture	13	3,46
No unexpected changes to the original plan	13	3,69
Good outside environment to do exercise	12	3,83
<b>Contact with the customer servant:</b>		
Personal service	13	3,92
Formal communication	13	3,69
Small talk	13	3,31
Eye contact	13	4
Equal service for everyone	12	4,42
Live contact with the customer servant instead of technology	13	4
The staff helps you with your plans	13	4,15

Table 8 shows how the answerers rated the claims at Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki. Question 13 asked how the customer evaluates the claims on a scale from 1 = “very poor” to 5 = “very good” when question 14 asked how the guest feels about the claims from 1 = “definitely disagree” to 5 = “agree completely”. Eight out of 19 claims scored over 4 which means that the aspect was well presented at the hotel. “Information given at the reception” (mean = 4,5) and “Eye contact with the staff” (mean = 4,46) got the best results. The other claims about the contact with the customer servant that scored over 4 were “Formal communication” (mean = 4,08) and “Personal service” (mean = 4). In addition, the customers felt themselves safe (mean

= 4,46) understood (mean = 4,29) and respected (mean = 4,43) when staying at the hotel. Only one of the claims scored the mean value under 3. It was “Possibility to meet other customers” with mean value 2,71. For the claim “Service exceeded my expectations” the visitors gave score 3,71 which is almost an “agree”. Still, the hotel could not exceed all the expectations but got none “definitely disagree” answers and only one “disagree”. Half of the answerers chose 4 which means that they “agree” with the claim.

Table 9. The Results of Questions 13 And 14

<b>Claims of Questions 13 And 14</b>	<b>Answers:</b>	<b>Mean:</b>
Information given before arriving	10	3,7
Information given at the reception	12	4,5
Information inside the room	12	4
Information given about Jyväskylä	11	3,55
Personal service	13	4
Formal communication with the staff	12	4,08
Small talk with the staff	11	3,82
Eye contact with the staff	13	4,46
Possibility to meet other customers	7	2,71
Equal service for everyone	9	3,89
No queues	12	3,75
A customer servant is available at all times	9	3,89
The main information about Jyväskylä is given without asking	15	3,07
I feel understood	14	4,29
I feel respected	14	4,43
I feel safe	13	4,46
I get a feeling of Finnish culture	11	3,18
I see Finnish culture	12	3,33
The service exceeded my expectations	14	3,71

Question 15 asked about the importance of the services of the hotel as well as if the customers had used them. All the services listed were considered quite important. All the answerers had eaten breakfast at the hotel. They also gave high importance for it

as it got the mean of 4,67. The other services with high importance were the restaurant (mean = 4,1) and the business center (mean = 4) even though none of the answerers had utilized the business center. Moreover, rentable bicycles were quite valued (mean = 3,63) although none of the customers had rented bikes from the hotel. Only one of the answerers (11 %) had used the sauna of the hotel. It did not reach very high importance for the international customers (mean = 3,44). The gym was considered the least important service of the hotel with mean value 3,17.

Table 10. The Results of Questions 16 And 17

<b>Services of Question 15</b>	<b>Used:</b>	<b>Answers:</b>	<b>Mean of Imortance:</b>
Breakfast	12	15	4,67
Sauna	1	9	3,44
Gym		6	3,17
Bicycles		8	3,63
Restaurant Trattoria Aukio	7	10	4,1
Business Center		5	4
Meeting rooms		5	3,4
Pre-Purchased services		5	3,4

The last two questions of the survey were open so the customer was completely able to describe his wishes and give feedback. The first of them asked which facilities or services the customer would like to add to the service selection of the hotel. Seven of the guests answered the question; two of them (29 %) wished to have radio with clock in their room, one (14 %) wished to have international television and other one (14 %) wished to have swimming pool in the hotel. One (14 %) answered "Ironing" which probably means an ironing service since there is an iron in all the rooms (Room Details n.d.). Two of the respondents' answers (28 %) said that they would not add anything.

The last question was “Other comments” and people answered for example:

- “Lovely hotel.”
- “Good hotel!”
- “Thank you for all”
- “Excellent distance to fairground”

Furthermore, one answered “Nothing” and one of the Swedes told that he knows some Finnish.

## 6 Conclusion

Norms how to live are created by the culture as well as identity is formed in a relation to the living environment (Jandt 2016, 4). Still, it is hard to separate cultures since everyone is an individual. Even though growing up in the same culture and environment forms the way of thinking and acting, there are personalities who act against the norms. (Lucas 2009, 194.) Furthermore, according to Uusitalo (2009, 21 - 23) globalization blends the cultural limits since nowadays different cultures receive more contact to each other and people are becoming more international. Due to that, defining one’s cultural background has become harder than before (Frisk & Tulkki 2005, 104). When travelling, tourists can also follow norms of so called tourism culture which includes a behaviour of tourist that is usually different than daily routines of the person. In addition, business tourists, honeymooners and backpackers tend to behave differently. (Reisinger & Turner 2003, 10.)

However, the main job of the service provider is to fulfil or even exceed the customer’s expectations and by doing so, create good quality service (Ford, Sturman & Heaton 2012, 17 - 18). The encounter between customer and the customer servant can create extra value for the customer for example by increasing feelings of dominance and pleasure (Rissanen 2005, 18; Wang, Miao, & Mattila 2015, 99 - 100). Even though people are all individuals and have different personalities, intercultural communication accommodation creates more symbolic value for the customer than interpersonal communication accommodation (Sizoo, Iskat, Plank & Serrie 2003, 69 - 72).

The results of systematic literature review proved that it is needed to take cultural differences into account in service situations when the cultural differences can occur in non-verbal communication, religious beliefs, time orientation, social rules, manners, forms of address and privacy limits (Reisinger & Turner 2003, 31, 43). As supposed, based on the theory, people from various cultures tend to act and react differently which must be noticed also in customer service situation. The results of the questionnaire did not bring up as many cultural differences as expected, which may tell about tourism culture that compensates the differences of national cultures. Still, the results of the survey were not reliable since only 16 people answered the survey.

### **Communication**

Differences in communication are easily visible in service situation both in verbal and non-verbal ways. As Wang and others showed with their research results, accommodating the communication during intercultural service encounters has a significant effect on guests' pleasure, arousal and dominance which rises customer satisfaction levels as well. The best results were gotten when both the ethnicity and language were the same as the customer's. (Wang et al. 2015, 100 - 102.) Moreover, results of the survey showed that giving service in customer's native language is appreciated. Over a third of the answerers would have liked to be served in his native language, when a native English speaker is not even counted in. The answerers were business tourists so their English skills are expected to be at least on basic communication level and the preference is not a consequence of lack of language skills. (Figure 7.)

Besides verbal communication, also non-verbal communication has its effects on service situation. Tsaur and others found out that hotel visitors from individualistic countries prefer having distance between themselves and the customer servant in service situation which is solved by putting more attention to concrete tangibles. It decreases the closeness of the communication situation. (Tsaur et al. 2005, 52). The result follows the theory about nonverbal communication habits, for example, in individualistic Northern Countries the distance between people when communicating is very long compared to collectivistic cultures as people with Latin heritage. (FitzGerald 2002, 79 - 80.)

In communication situations in Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki the eye contact during the service situation was considered important (mean = 4) and very good at the hotel

(mean = 4,64) which gives the customer an interested impression. It is the number one rule for service basics to “look everyone in the eyes and smile“, according to Ford, Sturman and Heaton (2012, 121.) Avoiding the eye contact can create a negative impression and is usually associated with shyness, dishonesty and lack of interest. Still, some Asian cultures do not tend to look the other person in the eyes. For example, in Japan an eye contact can be considered rude or disrespectful. When Asians look in the eyes, they prefer giving a peripheral gaze. (Jandt 2016, 110; Samovar, Porter & McDaniel 2010, 262 - 263.) Interestingly, the Japanese guests answered 2 and 5 to the eye contact claim, which tells that one of them considers eye contact very important and the other one not important. Even though usually the eye contact is preferred in service situation, the customer servant should be culturally sensitive and avoid making the customer feel offended.

### **Cultural Sensitivity**

Nevertheless, the customer servant does not always need to have the same ethnicity nor the same language than the guest, but already cultural sensitivity skills can help him in service situation. Cultural sensitivity makes him more attentive and better in suggestive selling for the customer. Not only the customer receives better service experience when the servant was culturally aware but also the worker receives more satisfaction from interacting with international customers. (Sizoo et al. 2003, 72 - 73.) The result makes sense since in suggestive selling the customer servant must read the customer and find out what else he would like to buy besides the core product (Gary 2015). Cultural knowledge helps the servant to understand the consumer better. Furthermore, culturally sensitive servants became more satisfied out of the service situation with international customers which caused better service for the customers. Hence, training for staff should not only concentrate on operational aspects as what is said (standardized service scripts) and performed (customized service offerings) in the service situation. In its place, training should give true cultural understanding for the staff with which they can create greater pleasure and perceived value for the customer. That improves satisfaction in intercultural service encounters. (Wang et al. 2015, 102.) The results proved that hotels with plenty of international customers should hire culturally sensitive servants with good language skills.



Hotels can also organise cultural education for the staff or support their language learning. (Figure 7.)

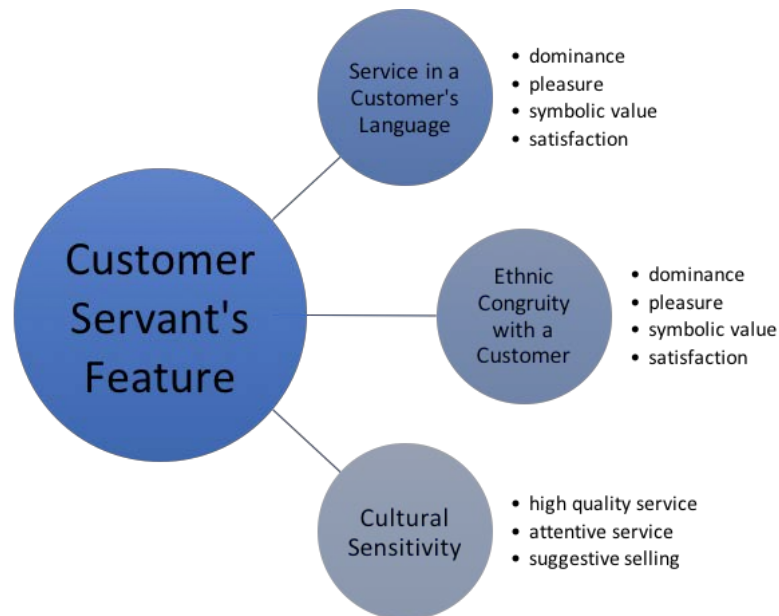


Figure 7. Customer Servant's Feature Influences on Customer's Service Experience

### Service Experience and Value Creation

Customer service refers to the interaction between the customer servant and the customer which creates value to the customer (Rissanen 2005, 18). The customer servant needs to have capability to give satisfaction for the needs of the customer (Lucas 2009, 6). Magnini and others got the result that the quality of service exceeded the expectations of people from individual and/or low power distance countries more easily than expectations of travellers from collectivistic and/or high power distance countries (Figure 8; Magnini et al. 2012, 254 - 255). This may have been a consequence of the valuation of equality. People from low power distance cultures are not tend to communicate very formally nor requiring special treatment even in higher position which might make them value good service more than people from high power distance countries. In high power distance countries, the upper class that

travels more, is tend to being respected and treated well also in everyday situations. (De Mooij 2011, 46 - 47; Jandt 2016, 168 - 169, 171.) Many individual countries also tend to have low power distance and these cultures can also be called linear-active. Linear-active cultures like to concentrate on one thing at the time and live as planned which can cause the result. (Lewis 2006, 29 - 33.) They tend to be very organised and probably appreciate good quality service because of that. They can trust the service provider to fulfil their plans, not to change them. Still, the results of the survey tell that the claim "Formal Communication" did not reach statistically significant correlation with high power distance cultures as expected.

Tsaur and others found out that people with English heritage got higher perceived value in total, as well as from tangibles in service than Asian and European groups. It means that they experienced better service than the other groups. The English group also put more attention to tangibles when European and Asian groups would have needed more to give as much value for the concrete aspects they see and feel during the service process. (Tsaur et al. 2005, 45 - 46.) Consequently, for people from Asia and Europe, the concrete aspects and the design of the hotel should be on higher level to create them as much value as for customers with English heritage. "Tangibles" and "food quality and reliability" can explain one seventh of variance in customer satisfaction so it is important to try to please everyone (Dortyol et al. 2013, 485). (Figure 8.)

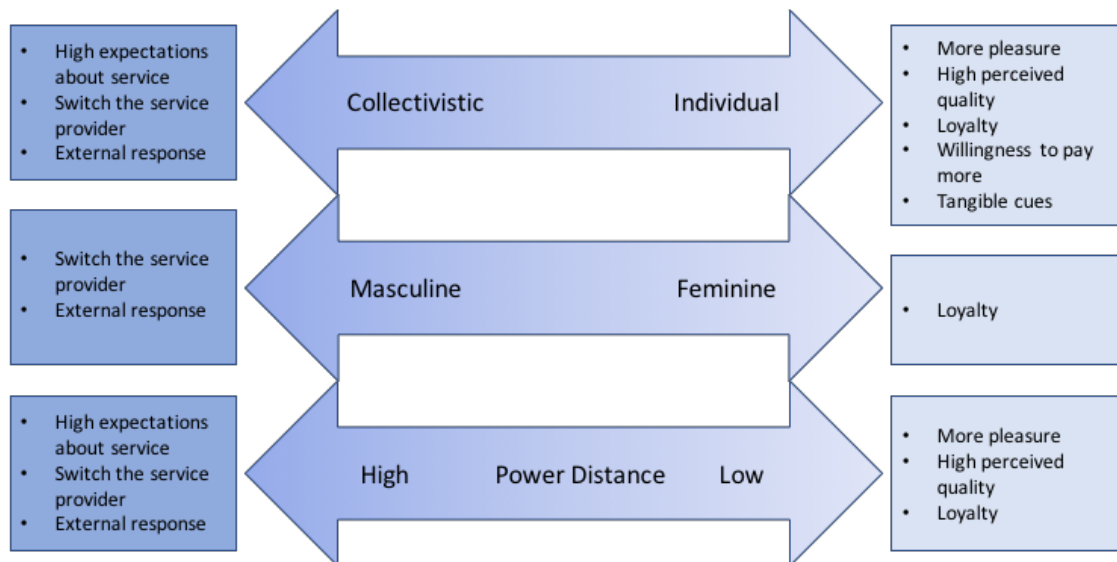


Figure 8. Customer's Culture Influences on Service Experience and Behavior

The customers of Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki gave the mean value of 3,46 for the importance of seeing and feeling the local culture which signifies that it is more important than the neutral opinion. They evaluated getting a feeling (mean = 3,18) and seeing (mean = 3,33) the Finnish culture at Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki with almost a neutral opinion. Thus, the hotel could put more effort on these aspects which create the experience and could make the customers recommend the hotel forward. Already, Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki has invested on Finnish design both in rooms and in public spaces even though it is not visible in the answers (Room details n.d.). It should effect on pleasing customers by tangibles and making all customers to see Finnish culture (Tsaur et al. 2005, 45 - 46).

### Behavioral Intentions

When any problem or bad experience occurs, the customers have different manners to react. European travellers and travellers with English heritage, ergo individual and low power distance cultures, tended to be loyal to the service provider and not switch to another company. Tourists with English heritage would have more likely even paid more than switch the hotel. On the other hand, Asian tourists used an external response or switched the service provider more often than the other groups. So, feminine cultures tend to be more loyal than masculine cultures. Asian guests

were used to complain to other customers when they see a problem in service due to their collectivistic mind-set. Consequently, the staff of the hotel should act even more carefully with them to correct the mistake and compensate the failure. (Figure 8; Tsaur et al. 2005, 54.)

When customers talk about the service afterwards, it has been extraordinary and for recommending the hotel, the service experience must have been special in a good way (Ford, Sturman & Heaton 2012, 270). The most important aspects for a customer recommending the hotel are “interaction with Turkish [local] culture”, “friendly, courteous and helpful employees” as well as “tangibles” (Dortyol et al. 2013, 485). Furthermore, Tsaur and others (2005, 58 - 60) found that tourists who feel that helpful servants with kind attitude make them feel comfortable, will spread their good experience and recommend the hotel in the future. The results of the study of Dortyol and others prove that the attention should be on staff, tangibles and how to interact with the host culture so also hotels in Finland should put effort on these aspects.

### **Conclusion**

As the results showed, being culturally sensitive and putting attention to communication with an international customer can help the servant to exceed the expectations of the customer. The customer servant needs to know how to address the guests by following cultural norms and how to be polite in intercultural communication situation. Politeness depends on the cultural norms but also the context (Paulston, Kiesling & Rangel 2012, 206 - 208). Additionally, the host acts differently than normally when he belongs to a subgroup of customer servants. The servant mixes his national culture and the service culture of the company while working. (Reisinger & Turner 2003, 10.) Probably, the customer servants are politer at work when the customer must be respected. Consequently, the servants should use English in politer ways than Finns in total since Finnish people are not good at using the word “please” nor using formal language. (Tervomaa 2015, 25.) At Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki international customers sensed the politeness and willingness to good service of the customer servants. They got personal service and good eye contact with the staff as well as felt themselves understood, respected and safe. There were not any large variety

in the answers which means that the service culture of the hotel seems to work for all the representatives of nationalities who took part to the survey.

Cultural differences should be considered in service business by noticing the differences and knowing the cultural norms. That helps customer servants to understand individuals as well when he knows the cultural schemes the customer has. Moreover, the language skills of the customer servant can create positive effects on customer satisfaction by increasing symbolic and perceived value (Wang, Miao, & Mattila 2015, 99 - 100).

Most of the cultural differences exist in communication but differences occur also in valuation and value creation. Individual and low power distance cultures are easier to satisfy with good service and people with English Heritage are got more value from tangibles than Asian and European tourists (Magnini et al. 2012, 254 - 255; Tsaor et al. 2005, 51 - 53). Customers always compare the overall service experience to their expectations and earlier experiences. This may influence a lot on customer satisfaction. The service provider cannot effect on the earlier experiences of the customers but most of the expectations are created by marketing. Marketing should be suitable for different cultures. It should only promise concepts the hotel can guarantee for the customers. Most of the international customers of Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki answered that the hotel service exceeded their expectations, so it seems, that the marketing the hotel has performed fits well to the service experience itself.

## **7 Discussion**

The objective of the research was to study relation between cultural differences and service experience. The main themes of the thesis were accommodation service and culture but also communication, service quality and value creation were in focus and got more significance during the study. The purpose was to find ways to create more value for international hotel customers as well as develop customer satisfaction by taking customer's cultural background into account. Customer satisfaction is commonly determined at hotels but often attention is not put into customer's cultural heritage. Therefore, the study wanted to concentrate on the part of customer satisfaction which has not yet been studied the same way worldwide and almost not at all in Finland.

Due to the changing world towards globalization, the cultural differences have been forgotten during past years. It is expected that everyone is willing to speak English and receive similar service which is considered good somewhere. Even though the world has become easier to access, the national cultures have not disappeared. Some people even say that globalization can separate cultures and make them even more different they used to be. The quality of service is always measured by the customer and compared to his earlier experiences so the service provider must consider customer's cultural scheme in order to provide him as good service as possible.

The quantitative research method was chosen since a quantitative questionnaire was hoped to give generalizable material and exact statistical results to find correlations between customer's cultural background and his experience and valuation.

Unfortunately, the quantitative research failed as the amount of the answers did not reach the criteria to create reliable research results. There are a few reasons for the backfired research. The questionnaire form may have been too long for the customers to fill it. The unsuccessfulness of the study may be partly a consequence of communication problems between the researcher, the hotel manager and the staff of the hotel. The staff may have not been willing to follow the instructions to collect the answers. Data collection would have been easier if the researcher had worked at the hotel herself. Since that was not possible, it would have been essential for the researcher to give instructions straight to the staff instead of communicating only with the hotel manager.

To develop reliability and validity of the study, systematic literature review was added to the thesis. It helped to achieve reliable research results and answers to the research questions. The results of the systematic literature review are considered reliable and valid since the material selection is done carefully and the researches which were not exactly about the topic were left out. The chosen material is read and analysed precisely by using qualitative method. The results of the review created answers to the research questions and supported the theoretical part of the thesis.

The results proved that taking customer's cultural background into account can help hotels to create more value for international customers and thus improve also customer satisfaction. The national culture of the customer should be noticed especially in both verbal and non-verbal communication but also in tangibles. The

easiest cultural group to please seems to be guests from English Heritage who are also loyal to the service provider and willing to pay more. Asian tourists easily switch the service provider after an unhappy experience and spread the word about the failure. All in all, the international customers of Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki were quite happy with the service. Still, the hotel could offer service in other languages as well as personalize service regarding to customer's cultural background.

There were time limitations during the research. The questionnaire was supposed to be available for a month but the time was extended to 38 days, which was absolutely a maximum amount of time because of the thesis schedule. It took on average one hour for the researcher to collect one answer which is not reasonable way to collect material to quantitative research. Hotel customers arrive and leave various times and it was impossible for the researcher to reach more answerers. The researcher was working elsewhere during the thesis process so she was not able to attend the hotel anytime. In systematic literature review the most significant limitations were language and databases. The accepted language were Finnish, English and Spanish which eliminated some resources out of the study. As well, there were only two databases used in the research.

In the future, it would be interesting to reconduct the research in Finland to receive more answers to the survey. The survey could be conducted in well qualified hotels in Finland. The answers would create generalisable data which could give essential information about cultural preferences for Finnish hotels. The topic could also be studied in different contexts as in restaurants or in another host culture. The results could improve Finnish service culture from a foreign point of view.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Survey

I am a hospitality management student from JAMK University of Applied Sciences and this survey is part of my thesis research. I would be very pleased if You had about 5 minutes to answer the survey. The answers will be handled confidentially.

You can also fill in the survey online: [www.tinyurl.com/surveypaviljonki](http://www.tinyurl.com/surveypaviljonki)



Please mark an x between the brackets.

( ) = one option only, [ ] = one or more options, \* = mandatory question

#### 1. Age \*

18 - 29 ( )  
30 - 39 ( )  
40 - 49 ( )  
50 - 59 ( )  
60 - 69 ( )  
70 - ( )

#### 2. Gender \*

Male ( )  
Female ( )  
Other ( )

3. Nationality \* \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Country of Residence \* \_\_\_\_\_

#### 5. Main Purpose of the Trip

Business ( )  
Leisure ( )

#### 6. Who are You travelling with?

Alone ( )  
With someone ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

#### 7. In which language were You served at Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki?

If the languages vary, please specify in which situation.

English [ ] \_\_\_\_\_  
Swedish [ ] \_\_\_\_\_  
German [ ] \_\_\_\_\_  
French [ ] \_\_\_\_\_  
Spanish [ ] \_\_\_\_\_  
Russian [ ] \_\_\_\_\_  
Other, what? [ ] \_\_\_\_\_

#### 8. In which language would You have liked to be served?

English ( )  
Swedish ( )  
German ( )  
French ( )  
Spanish ( )  
Russian ( )  
Other, what? ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

#### At any hotel, how important do You consider these claims?

1 = not important at all, 5 = very important, 0 = no opinion

#### 9. Before arriving:

Knowing about all the services of the hotel	1	2	3	4	5	0
Having a planned agenda for the stay in the destination	1	2	3	4	5	0
Knowing about the culture of the destination	1	2	3	4	5	0

### At any hotel, how important do You consider these claims?

1 = not important at all, 5 = very important, 0 = no opinion

#### 10. During the stay:

There are no queues	1	2	3	4	5	0
The staff carries Your luggage to the room	1	2	3	4	5	0
A customer servant is available at all times	1	2	3	4	5	0
No need to share a table at breakfast	1	2	3	4	5	0
Possibility to meet other customers	1	2	3	4	5	0
Possibility to try something new	1	2	3	4	5	0
Possibility to read international newspapers	1	2	3	4	5	0
Information about the local culture	1	2	3	4	5	0
Feeling and seeing the local culture	1	2	3	4	5	0
No unexpected changes to the original plan	1	2	3	4	5	0
Good outside environment to do exercise	1	2	3	4	5	0

#### 11. Contact with the customer servants:

Personal service	1	2	3	4	5	0
Formal communication	1	2	3	4	5	0
Small talk	1	2	3	4	5	0
Eye contact	1	2	3	4	5	0
Equal service for everyone	1	2	3	4	5	0
Live contact with the customer servant instead of technology	1	2	3	4	5	0
The staff helps You with Your plans	1	2	3	4	5	0

#### 12. I prefer ( ) a female, ( ) a male, ( ) either gender serving me.

#### 13. How do you evaluate these claims based on Your experience at Solo Sokos Hotel Pavijonki?

1 = very poor, 5 = very good, 0 = no opinion

Information given before arriving	1	2	3	4	5	0
Information given at the reception	1	2	3	4	5	0
Information inside the room	1	2	3	4	5	0
Information given about Jyväskylä	1	2	3	4	5	0
Personal service	1	2	3	4	5	0
Formal communication with the staff	1	2	3	4	5	0
Small talk with the staff	1	2	3	4	5	0
Eye contact with the staff	1	2	3	4	5	0
Possibility to meet other customers	1	2	3	4	5	0

**14. How do you feel about these claims at Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki? If needed, please specify why did You choose the answer.**

1 = definitely disagree, 5 = agree completely, 0 = no opinion

Equal service for everyone	1	2	3	4	5	0	_____
No queues	1	2	3	4	5	0	_____
A customer servant is available at all times	1	2	3	4	5	0	_____
The main information about Jyväskylä is given without asking	1	2	3	4	5	0	_____
I feel understood	1	2	3	4	5	0	_____
I feel respected	1	2	3	4	5	0	_____
I feel safe	1	2	3	4	5	0	_____
I get a feeling of Finnish culture	1	2	3	4	5	0	_____
I see Finnish culture	1	2	3	4	5	0	_____
The service exceeded my expectations	1	2	3	4	5	0	_____

**15. Which services have You used at Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki? Mark an [x], please.**

**How important do You think it is to have the service at the hotel? Use the scale from 1 to 5.**

1 = not important at all, 5 = very important, 0 = no opinion

Breakfast	[ ]	1	2	3	4	5	0
Sauna	[ ]	1	2	3	4	5	0
Gym	[ ]	1	2	3	4	5	0
Bicycles	[ ]	1	2	3	4	5	0
Restaurant Trattoria Aukio	[ ]	1	2	3	4	5	0
Business Center	[ ]	1	2	3	4	5	0
Meeting rooms	[ ]	1	2	3	4	5	0
Pre-purchased services	[ ]	1	2	3	4	5	0

**16. Which facilities or services would You like to add to the service selection of Solo Sokos Hotel Paviljonki?**

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**17. Other comments**

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**Thank You for participation!**

