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**THE ROLE OF NETWORKING IN WEEKLY PROGRAM PRODUCTION:
CASE RTG ACTIVE**

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<p>The main objective of the thesis was to compile a business operations manual for RTG Active focusing on its weekly program production and equipment rental services. Cooperation with other service providers plays a vital role in the operation of RTG Active. Thus, cooperation with a set of network partners of the company was investigated: their perceptions on cooperation, whether they match with those of RTG Active, and how cooperation could be developed. Moreover, the aim was to establish an idea of what kind of weekly program concepts exist in other destinations in Finland and whether the procedures of the production differ from those of RTG Active.</p> <p>Case study method was used in the research. The main part of the empirical research consisted of interviews with RTG Active and its network partners. Secondary data was collected on the Internet, as well as, from the databases of RTG Active. All the collected data was qualitative.</p> <p>The study results indicated that there were no obvious defects in the cooperation although the expected outcomes from it were not yet substantial. Financial benefits and gaining of extra income presented the main motives for the cooperation. Additionally, the motives of RTG Active relate to portraying itself as a multi-faceted service provider. The appreciation of the inputs of RTG Active varied among the network partners although they were considered substantial by RTG Active. The commitment and inputs of the partners to cooperation were varying and seemed to depend on personal relations and the frequency of the personal encounters of the company owners with each other. Concrete problems were almost non-existent but possible issues e.g. due to competition were noted. Suggestions for development of the cooperation concerned mostly increase in encounters between the network actors and developing cooperation in the group travel sector. Certain quality issues arose in the operations of RTG Active, in particular. The findings of the weekly program comparison were not profound, however, among the researched producers RTG Active had somewhat unique concept in combining the weekly program production with equipment rental services offering such a variety of products. Also the guaranteed departures in weekly programs were rare among the other service providers.</p> <p>The compiled manual includes only a part of RTG Active's operations and can be complemented in the future. Also, the weekly programs nationwide could be further investigated. Networking in tourism as a whole remains an important topic for further research as it can provide solutions to appealing customers to a destination.</p>	
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<p>Tämän työn tarkoitus oli koota toimintamanuaali RTG Activen toiminnoista keskittyen yrityksen viikko-ohjelma- ja vuokraamotoimintaan. Yhteistyöllä muiden palveluntarjoajien kanssa on suuri merkitys RTG Activen toiminnalle ja näinollen tutkimuksessa keskityttiin tutkimaan yhteistyötä verkostokumppaneiden kanssa selvittäen heidän näkemyksiään yhteistyöstä, miten hyvin ne vastaavat toisiaan sekä miten yhteistyötä voitaisiin kehittää. Lisäksi tavoitteena oli saada kuva siitä, millä tavoin viikko-ohjelmatuotanto muissa Suomen matkailukeskuksissa on toteutettu ja millaisia eroja niiden ja RTG Activen viikko-ohjelman toteutuksessa on.</p> <p>Tutkimus toteutettiin tapaustutkimuksena ja kerätty aineisto oli kvalitatiivista. Empiirisessä osiossa haastateltiin RTG Activea ja sen verkostokumppaneita. Myös RTG Activen omia tiedostokantoja ja Internetiä käytettiin tiedon keräämisessä.</p> <p>Tutkimustulokset osoittivat, ettei yhteistyössä ole merkittäviä epäkohtia, tosin toivotut tulokset yhteistyöstä olivat vielä pieniä. Tärkein motiivi yhteistyölle oli taloudellinen hyöty ja lisätulon saaminen. RTG Activelle lisäksi motiivi liittyi siihen, että yritys näyttäisi monipuoliselta palveluntarjoajalta asiakkaalle. Activen panostuksia yhteistyöhön arvostettiin vaihtelevasti, vaikka ne Activen näkökulmasta olivat merkittäviä. Myös yhteistyöhön sitoutuminen ja kumppaneiden panostukset yhteistyöhön vaihtelivat mahdollisesti yritysten omistajien välisten henkilökohtaisten suhteiden tiivyydestä riippuen. Konkreettisia ongelmia ei yhteistyössä ilmennyt, mutta mahdollisia ongelmia esimerkiksi kilpailutilanteen takia mainittiin. Yhteistyön kehittämismahdollisuudet liittyivät etenkin yhteisiin tapaamisiin sekä yhteistyön kehittämiseen ryhmämatkailusektorilla. Laadunhallinnan epäkohtia nousi esille, mutta ne liittyivät enimmäkseen RTG Activen omaan toimintaan enemmän kuin kumppanien. Viikko-ohjelmavertailu ei ollut perusteellinen, joten siitä ei voi tehdä merkittäviä johtopäätöksiä. Vaikuttaa kuitenkin siltä, että viikko-ohjelman ja vuokraamotoiminnan yhdistäminen ei ole kovin yleistä tai ainakaan yhtä laajaa tuotetarjontaa ei tullut esille. Myös takuulähtöisyys viikko-ohjelmissa oli harvinaista.</p> <p>Koottu toimintakäsikirja sisältää vain osan RTG Activen toiminnoista ja sitä voidaan tulevaisuudessa täydentää. Myös viikko-ohjelmia voidaan tutkia koko maan kattavalla analyysillä. Verkostoyhteistyö matkailussa on jatkossakin ajankohtainen tutkimuksen aihe, sillä yritysten verkostoyhteistyö saattaa tarjota ratkaisun siihen miten asiakkaita voidaan houkuttaa tiettyyn matkailukohteeseen.</p>	
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PREFACE

The idea of this thesis came up during my practical training period at RTG Active. The Managing Director of the company, Mr. Taneli Sutinen suggested the topic. Special thanks for this thesis belong to him for giving an interesting topic that is a bit unique from those usually being written in this field of studies.

I would also like to thank my supervisor Mrs. Mervi Väisänen who was of great help in the process. She was keeping me on track, providing excellent insights, giving hope and guidance when I seemed lost inside my own thoughts.

In addition, thanks belong to some of my friends who helped with the proofreading and were inspiring me when there was no motivation to continue.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The thesis was commissioned by RTG Active - a programme service company mainly operating in Vuokatti - one of the major holiday destinations in Finland. The thesis topic arose during an internship period in the company. The aim was to compile a business operations manual that would describe the main concept of RTG Active. The company did not have any comprehensive documentation on their operation and thus there was a real need for this work to be executed. The manual could be used internally in the company for the employees better to understand the functions of RTG Active and as a handbook if establishing new outlets in other destinations.

Other than being significant to RTG Active itself, the thesis has certain meaning in a wider context. Firstly, the topic of networking has become increasingly important in the competitive environment where small actors have difficulties surviving alone. Secondly, the programme service sector in Vuokatti is still developing and the need for emergence of new actors has even been outlined in the Master Plan. The role of networking and cooperation as the facilitator seems vital for new companies to arise. Thereby, this work has some importance related to the current situation of programme services in destinations such as Vuokatti.

Since including all the operations of RTG Active in the manual would have extended the topic too wide, the research was limited on the weekly program and equipment rental concepts taking into account the networking perspectives and cooperation in the production. Thus, the main part of the theoretical framework consists of networking. However, other aspects, relating to product development, quality, and safety in programme services needed to be discussed, as well. These topics were further examined in the empirical part. Finally, the results of the empirical research were compiled into the business operations manual. Additionally, in order to compile a somewhat whole document, certain other aspects were finally included in the manual, too, such as background information of RTG Active, its history, and company culture.

The empirical part consists mainly of interviews by which the views and perceptions of RTG Active and its network partners on cooperation were examined. In addition, a minor research on weekly operations in other Finnish destination was carried out. The rest of the data was gathered by secondary data collection using the databases of RTG Active. Also,

some complementary information was collected through discussions with the management of RTG Active.

First, in the theory section the key considerations of programme services and tourism are outlined followed by theory of networking perspectives. Second, in the empirical part RTG Active and Vuokatti are briefly introduced, and moreover, the aims and objectives of the study are outlined, reliability and validity issues are discussed and how they are taken into account when carrying out the research. Moreover, the research methods and progression of the study are described. The interviews are analysed and the main findings of it and the weekly program comparison are presented. Finally, the main findings are concluded, the reliability of the research, its outcomes and feasibility are discussed and evaluated. Also, some suggestions for development and further research are given.

2 TOURISM AND PROGRAMME SERVICES – KEY CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter outlines some basic aspects involved in programme services and tourism. The considerations related to planning and packaging of tourism products, activity products in particular, are discussed. Another considerable topic is quality in programme services; how it can be measured, observed, and maintained. Also, safety as a part of quality is emphasised. Yet, first of all, the concept of programme services is shortly defined.

Programme services in tourism could be defined as activities related to a tourism product forming the active part of the trip. In Finland, mostly, programme services are considered as nature-related guided activities such as snowmobile safaris, canoeing trips, and so forth. However, also other products can be considered as programme services such as recreational services, amusement attractions, competitions, culture, and arts events. Altogether, all those parts of tourists' trip arrangements which provide them with experiences and are not part of accommodation, food, or transport services can be classified as programme services. (Verhelä 2007, 16-17.) In this paper, however, when referring to programme services it mostly relates to those guided activities, usually taking place in a natural environment.

2.1 Product Planning and Management

A product is something offered to a market for consumption to satisfy a want or a need. It can include physical objects, services, organisations, and ideas. Whereas the definition refers to the planned components of the product, it must be noted that particularly in hospitality and tourism sector, a product may also include an unplanned component e.g. an unexpected incident when providing a service. (Kotler, Bowen & Makens 2006, 304.) Moreover, it could be added that a product is offered at a certain price, a service product being provided in a certain place, and as for programme services, they often consist of several components. As Hudson (2008, 169) suggests, it is characteristic to the tourism and hospitality products that they are bundled of a set of components to satisfy the needs and wants of the consumer. With reference to service products, it is important to understand the different levels of a product and how products can be developed.

Product Levels

As Hudson (2008, 169) states the core product, tangible product, and augmented product are the three levels of a tourism product. The physical environment – also regarded as the ‘servicescape’ – being part of the augmented product is considered one of the most important aspect for tourism products which are often dominated by the experience attributes. Kotler (2006, 304-305) defines four levels of products: *core, facilitating, supporting, and augmented products*. In brief, the core product is the product a customer is really buying, facilitating product, is what is needed for the customer to use the core product and supporting products are products not required by the core product but help to differentiate it from competition and add value to it. Augmented product, according to Kotler, is the level that includes aspects such as accessibility, customer interaction with the service provider, customer participation, and customers’ interaction with each other. The augmented product is, thereby, an important concept in tourism and hospitality as the services need customer co-production, they have to interact with both employees and other customers.

Product Development

Hudson (2008, 165) introduces four alternatives for developing new products: market penetration, market development, product development, and diversification. First, market penetration refers to modification and improvement of an existing product for the current market. Second, market development concerns identifying and developing new markets for existing products. Third, product development regards developing a genuinely new product for existing customers; and fourth, diversification relates to seeking for business opportunities outside the current business e.g. by looking for new products appealing to its existing markets.

Product Life Cycle

According to Hudson (2008, 155), product life cycle (PLC) analysis is an important means of reviewing the past and current position of a product and predicting its future. Briefly, it refers to identifying the stage on which a product is on its PLC. The PLC consists of phases from the development of a product to its abandonment. The growth phase is when a product receives increasing acceptance on the markets and generates considerable improvement in profits. The maturity phase regards a period of slow sales marked by high profits since the product is well presented in the markets. The product proceeds to the decline stage as the

sales begin to drop due to new competitors in the same marketplace. Both market share and profits decline and cost may occur in redeveloping and maintaining the product.

Given that the demand of a product is probably also affected by the destination visitor number the PLC analysis is not the only tool to use in decisions concerning products. As Seaton et al. (1996, 123-124) suggest the PLC analysis is not as straight-forward as it sounds as the PLC pattern of a particular product needs to consider the market it is in. In fact, both the life-cycle of the market and the product need to be considered together. In this sense, also the tourist area life cycle (TALC) that provides a basis for assessing a destination's past development and future prospects, is a concept to be taken into account regarding tourism products.

Positioning

Hudson (2008, 157) describes positioning as the 'bedrock' of product management. The aim of positioning is to evoke images of a destination or a product in the customer's mind that are distinctive of those of the competitors. Moreover, being effective positioning should direct all the marketing activities of a firm: advertising and promotions, pricing decisions, product and distribution channels should all be comparable with the positioning goals. There are several positioning strategies, for instance, positioning relative to target market; by price and quality; relative to product class; or relative to competitors.

As Kotler et al. (2006, 284) state, a company can differentiate itself from competitors by bundling competitive advantages. Gaining competitive advantage is possible e.g. by offering consumers lower prices than competitors for similar products or by providing more benefits justifying higher prices. Therefore, a company should compare its prices and products with the ones of its competitors and constantly seek for improvements. As long as the company manages to do better than its competitors, it has competitive advantage. However, it might be that a company can identify only minor advantages which can be easily copied and thus are highly perishable. It is important that companies continuously keep looking for new potential advantages and introducing them to the markets in order to be ahead of the competitors.

Differentiation may be established through physical attributes, service, personnel, location, or image. *Physical attributes* differentiation occurs by offering customers enhanced value in physical attributes; *service* differentiation relates to the level of service; *personnel* differentiation

refers to the ability of the staff to provide quality service that can be achieved through selecting personnel with competence, as well as, training them. Moreover, *location* can offer competitive advantage; and finally, *image* differentiation considers establishing an image in the mind of the customers that differentiates from the ones of the competitors. (Kotler et al. 2006, 284-287.)

The need for new innovations and product development derives from the need of creating competitive advantage. Networking and cooperation can be feasible when trying to create competitive advantage among the competitors, especially as it is known that networking can positively affect the emergence of innovations. Moreover, theming of tourism service packages is an important means of differentiation and positioning.

As Guia, Prats & Comas (2006, 58-59) discuss, competitive advantage can be gained either by being more efficient in the production and delivery or by differentiating the products for increasing their attractiveness. In this sense innovation becomes vital, as whatever an advantage a firm may have can be eroded by the innovativeness of the competitors. Several types of innovations can be distinguished: product, process, marketing, organisational, and institutional innovations. Moreover, they may derive from various sources: at least managers, customers, employees, competitors, suppliers and commercial fairs can be identified. It is suggested that the best way to overcome the obstacles of innovation is through networking and cooperation in the tourism local destinations.

Indeed, as systems of innovation can exist on many levels from national to regional, Guia et al. (2006, 61-62) suggest that proximity plays an important role in the innovation systems; that is, the most of the strong ties of the actors being part of the innovation system exist at the regional level. However, a problem at a regional level might be that it might not have the variety or quantity of actors needed in the innovation system such as universities. The innovation system consists of a network of local actors and the interactions between them, yet, many local industries lack the required horizontal cooperation between firms or firms and public local agencies, or lack research institutions in the proximity of the area. Thereby, as it is stated, a local system of innovation in tourism is based on a specific local area or a local tourism destination in which several tourism-related actors relate and interact with the support of ancillary industries and external actors. In such an environment the capacity for innovation increases as a result of creation and diffusion of knowledge. Consequently, local destinations will be able to sustain a competitive position in the markets and sustain the gen-

eration of collective wealth. In this sense as well, the proximity of certain institutions, i.e. location, can contribute to the competitive advantage of a firm.

2.2 Packaging Products

According to McKercher (1998, 160) the role of a tour operator is to create a tangible product in order to satisfy the intangible tourism needs. The objective can be actualised by packaging the numerous components of a product into a single product that can be purchased as a whole at a single price, and thus, creating added value to the product. The concept is simply to offer a comprehensive experience for the visitors including the variation of tourist services required.

Components of a Product

A tourist product often includes several components such as accommodation, food, transport, entrance fees, taxes and tips, equipment, guides and lessons. Whether the different items are included in the product depends on the level of service being offered, the desired price of the product, whether the participant possesses the needed equipment, and the availability of alternatives for the client. Consequently, the more is included in the package the more control the provider has over the total experience offered. Yet, the more components included the higher the price is expected to be. (McKercher 1998, 166-167.)

Theming a Package

McKercher (1998, 165) suggests that theming a product is significant in creating a strong positioning strategy for the package, since it will display the image of the type of experience being offered. Moreover, the theme created should be appealing regarding the needs of the clientele. On the other hand, how the product is positioned will determine what type of customers are attracted. All in all, as pointed out, the product must always be designed according to the needs, wants, and desires of the targeted customers bearing in mind their interests and abilities.

Benefits of Packaging

Various benefits derive from packaging of products, to both consumer and tour provider, as presented in Table 2.

Benefits on the consumer perspective	Benefits on the operator perspective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A new product ▪ A product with appeal to specific markets ▪ Better value for the consumer currency ▪ Ease of purchase; buying a single product instead of having to assemble the components by oneself ▪ A standardised and commoditised product ensuring a consistent quality of tourism experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cost savings ▪ A specialist product appealing specific markets ▪ Value-adding, permitting higher prices to be charged ▪ Ease of purchase to the consumer ▪ A standardised and commoditised product ensuring provision of a consistent quality tourism services ▪ Access to new markets and ease of access to new distribution channels, especially to travel trade ▪ Increased marketability of the product through “piggybanking” on other products in the region ▪ Opportunities for attracting new marketing partners and participating in cooperative marketing ventures

Table 1. Benefits of packaging products. (McKercher 1998, 161).

Hudson (2008, 164) further suggest consumer benefits such as ease of budgeting a trip as one pays at once and has a better idea on the total cost of the trip. Also, the cost to customer is often more economic in a package compared to purchasing each component separately. Moreover, the opportunities to experience previously unfamiliar attraction and activities and the opportunity to design components of a package for specialized interests are listed as consumer benefits. As for tourism operator benefits, Hudson suggests that packages can streamline business patterns; i.e. packaging may be used during low seasons to add attractive features to the product, hence boosting the business.

Apart from the benefits listed above, regarding nature-based tourism, one of the main reasons why packaged products are purchased is the ease with which such an experience can be taken part into. By packaging, an (adventure) tourism experience can be shifted from a high-involvement purchasing decision to one with low involvement. For instance, by a phone call

clients can have all needed components of a trip organised for them compared to a lot of time consumed if the trip was organised by the clients themselves. Moreover, by packaging the amount of strangeness or perceived risk of the experience is reduced to an acceptable level. When travelling, most people want to experience some change, yet, not to the extent that they feel threatened. Clearly, the level of tolerance of change varies with individuals. Packaging of a product, that is, providing guides, expertise, equipment, and transport allows one to participate a challenging tourism experience that one would not involve oneself alone. (McKercher 1998, 162.)

All in all, packaging enables the operators to standardize, commoditise and modify the service offer in order to facilitate ease of consumption. It allows a tourist to have a new experience with limited physical or emotional discomfort and on the other hand allows the operator to ensure consistent quality of the experience, reduce risks, and develop efficiencies in the delivery of the product. Moreover it enables building of systems that facilitate business growth. For example, it enables the operator to expand the market base of the business by attracting more mainstream clientele, say, in activities such as abseiling that need special equipment that, unless being an enthusiast, not many are willing to purchase. (McKercher 1998, 163.)

2.3 Managing Service Quality

Seaton & Bennett (1996, 444-445) describe quality as the minimum level of service that a firm determines to provide in order to satisfy its target clientele. Also, it refers to the consistency in the level of service the firm is able to maintain. In fact, the level of service relates strongly to the potential customers and their varying expectations. As for consistency, the same level of service should be guaranteed at all the sectors of a company. Notably, the human element of the service sector adds greatly to the achievement of consistent quality of service.

With reference to quality in service industries, Irons (1995, 189) provides with three principal concepts of quality. An organisation should strive for fulfilling the following objectives:

- 1) The organisation should continuously meet the needs of the customers' by sustaining the quality of the service provided.

- 2) The management of the organisation should be assured of that the intended quality is being achieved and maintained.
- 3) Customers should be assured of that the quality will be delivered in the service provided.

Kotler et al. (2006, 50) suggest that delivering consistently higher quality than its competitors is one of the main means for a company to differentiate itself. The key in the delivery process is to exceed the service quality expectations of the customer. Promising only what one can deliver and then delivering more than promised is the mantra to follow. The expectations in the minds of customers are created by word-of-mouth, past experiences, or advertising, and if the expectations are exceeded the customers are likely to use the same service provider again. Therefore, it is suggested that perhaps the best way to measure the quality of services is through customer retention; the ability of a service provider to retain its customers depends on whether it is able to deliver value to the clients consistently.

As the perceived value of the service is dependent on expectations, the service provider should be aware of the expectations of its customers and the level of service intended to be delivered should be clearly communicated both to the customers and employees. Nonetheless, a company cannot prevent all service problems from occurring. Therefore, learning from mistakes and good service recovery must be emphasized as by good service recovery even disappointed customers can be turned into loyal ones. (Kotler et al. 2006, 51.)

Assessing Quality

As Cooper et al. (2005, 582) point out it is important that the quality of a product is controlled especially in the service delivery process since quality is a key component to contribute to a successful strategy of a firm. Creating systems of quality control is seemingly important in order to monitor and measure service delivery and its quality. Moreover, it is emphasized that the aim of quality management is further to form values and mindsets for the employees and indeed quality ought to be concerning all employees and the whole firm culture. In case of any changes in quality the reasons must lie in customer expectations rather than emerging from the ideas within the organisation.

In order to audit quality in service delivery, there must be a method for creating unbiased feedback. There are a range of aspects that can be assessed which are listed according to different categories in the following.

- **Tangibles** are the physical evidence of the service such as brochures of the service, appearance of personnel and conditions of the surroundings, or equipment used to provide the service.
- **Reliability** involves consistency of service delivery performance and credibility. It refers to the provider's ability to meet the expectations of the customers that it has created through given promises.
- **Responsiveness** relates to the willingness and readiness of employees to provide service and their ability to help customers promptly even if unexpected events occur.
- **Competence** refers to knowledge and courtesy of employees and offering peace of mind to the customer in the sense that the company can be trusted. Assuring that employees have the skills to create trust and confidence in the customer is vital.
- **Empathy** concerns the attention to each customer as an individual; caring and taking into account individual concerns and emotions.

Cooper et al. (2005, 583-584.)

Furthermore, there are several ways to assess the above-mentioned elements. As Cooper et al. (2005, 584) note "It is important to realise that whatever system is used to audit quality at the end of the day, that which is not measured cannot be controlled."

Indeed, for service quality to be evaluated, observed, and controlled, there must be systems and methods for measuring it. Systems for evaluating service quality bot internal inspections and auditing as presented in table 3.

Internal inspection	Auditing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Statistical process control based upon quality failure information and objective measures ▪ Visual inspections to check against standards and consistency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Internal auditors of quality ▪ External bodies ▪ Consultants, regular users, non-user surveys and feedback

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Management by walking about ▪ Quality control group feedback ▪ Inspection of competitors' offer and assessment of own company offer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cross-department audits ▪ Mystery shoppers ▪ Content analysis of complaint and praise letters and documented problems ▪ Free telephone line feedback
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Table 3. Auditing systems. (Cooper et al. 2005, 585.)

Service Value

As Irons (1995, 178) suggests, quality can only be measured or judged in the context of customers' expectations and experiences that leads to a concept of 'perceived service quality'. In fact, Kotler et al. (2006, 16) defines customer value as the difference between the benefits a client gains from using a service and the costs of purchasing it. Notably, the costs can be either monetary or non-monetary, time being perhaps the most important non-monetary cost. For the management it is a challenge to create increased value to the customers that can only be realised through understanding of what brings value to the target market.

Irons (1995, 185) makes a distinction between the service values a customer automatically expect and values that give competitive distinction. The values are categorised into *threshold values* and *incremental values*, the first one representing essential values such as safety in an airplane and the latter describe the attributes that a customer perceives as providing distinction. Andereck et al. (2006, 95) as well, suggest, that businesses should repeatedly strive for adding 'twist' to their service as a pleasant surprise to the visitor. However, as the twist is copied by other operators it becomes expected by the consumer.

Tourist Experiences and Quality

As Andereck et al. (2006, 82-83) state, two people can never have the same experience as it emerges from a series of interactions between the consumer, environment, and the provider. It is the interaction that leads to either a positive or a negative reaction, and if positive, it results in the recognition of value that remains in one's memory long afterwards. On the other hand, negative experiences are mostly related to external factors such as so-called bad luck or poor level of service within the tourism industry or the host community.

Experiences translate into meanings of which three dimensions can be recognised: the social, environmental, and activities aspect of the experience. When the interaction between all

the actors; i.e. the consumer, environment, and a provider is perceived positive, individuals assign value to the experience staying with the memories for a long time. In fact, a valuable experience is a service combined with surroundings and events that goes beyond itself bringing value to a customer's life. In the ideal case, such overall value is created that the product goes beyond ordinary into extraordinary or priceless, even. Andereck et al. (2006, 93-95.)

On the contrary, poor service taints the quality of a tourist experience, and thus emphasis should be put on the training of staff. In addition, external factors such as weather can have an influence on the visitor experience and more importantly the provided information on weather conditions affects the expectations. Therefore, truthful information should be provided in order to create realistic expectations. (Andereck et al. 2006, 95.)

Quality Criteria of Activity Products

In a report of the Finnish Tourism Board MEK (2008) about summer activity products for international markets there are certain criteria listed that a product should fulfil in order to serve international tourist. The report considers cycling, trekking, canoeing, cruises on the Finnish waterways, and equestrian holidays but there are no reasons why the criteria could not be applied to a wider variety of activity products. The criteria are listed as follows:

- The product is significant with regards to the whole area (enough of capacity , not only a few trips of 1-2 h)
- The product is connected with other services (accommodation, catering etc.)
- The product is customer-oriented and tested to be appropriate for the foreign markets; the target groups are defined and the special requirements (safety, rental equipment and their quality/shape etc.) has been recognised in providing the services
- The product is well accessible and the channels for booking and time of consumption are defined (also how the place is to be reached is defined)
- The product has a written description ("the customer path" from the arrival until departure) or at least the product description of the experience
- The activity product has to meet the criteria of the Consumer Agency (Kuluttajavirasto) of the safety of programme services
- Product criteria according to the theme need to be considered

- The pricing of a product is clear for both group and individual tourist – it has been clearly informed what the price includes, possible discounts, and numbers of participants. Both end-user price and tour operator price including commissions.
- The product description is at least in English and guiding is provided at least in English.

2.4 Safety in Programme Services

Among other aspects of quality, especially with reference to programme services, safety is a significant aspect to be considered. In fact, the Finnish Consumer Agency (Kuluttajavirasto) states that the safety in programme services is a part of the service quality. Safety can be defined in many different ways depending on which perspective it is viewed from. When considering rules and regulations the way by which safety is defined plays an important role. It can be defined e.g. as a situation in which the risks are at an acceptable level as in some standards. Safety can be understood as the opposite of risk whereby safety is a state in which there is no danger posed to people, property, or environment. Moreover, safety can be seen as a technical safety in which the equipment, machinery etc. does not cause danger. The perceived safety may not be compatible with the real safety as the feeling of being safe is connected to one's emotions and perception. (Verhelä 2007, 48-49.)

The Factors Affecting Safety in Programme Services

According to Verhelä (2007, 50-51) there are several factors affecting safety in programme services. The prerequisite is the *attitude* of all those involved in producing the service product, that is, the guide, planner, marketer, seller, and the client, as well. *All the people involved in the production of a service product influence the safety, not only by their attitudes, but also by their knowledge of safety issues, how well they have acquainted themselves with the risks, the use of safety and other equipment affect safety.* In addition, *the condition of the equipment, gear, and other instruments* needed in the production of the service plays an important part in safety, and thus they should be in a proper shape, maintained, cared, and stored accordingly.

The management of a company is in charge of managing safety in a company which includes planning and implementing safety, training the staff, and so forth. A service provider can easily influence in the above mentioned factors. However, there are other factors not dependant on the service provider such as the *physical environment* including the nature's condi-

tions or weather which are influential on safety. Yet, the service provider also needs to consider the unmanageable conditions when providing services. (Verhelä 2007, 51.)

Verhelä (2007, 52) specifies certain risks related to the customer and equipment. Problems in communication such as language barriers or misinformation on required abilities; non-safe action when the service is being produced such as client not following the given instructions; or personal qualities such as previous injuries or too high self-confidence are considerable risks. Second, bad quality of equipment, lack of maintenance, or inappropriate use of gear and equipment, for example, are considered as risks.

Measures for Improving Safety

Altogether, in order to develop safety it is essential to realise that only recognised and comprehended risks can be controlled. Safety is enhanced by regulations, directives, various means of risk management and through educating and training staff in a systematic manner. (Verhelä 2007, 49.) Although the training of personnel, in the form of different courses for example, cannot be over-emphasised, in the following only the regulations are discussed more thoroughly.

In Finland, the safety of services is regulated by 'Consumer Safety Act' (kuluttajaturvallisuuslaki). In principle, the law does not set certain requirements on the safety of a product or qualifications on the staff providing the service but the management of safety is more of self-controlled in the company itself. Any organisation providing services for consumers in profit-making purposes is considered a service provider and thus regulated by the act and liable for any defects of a product it has offered. The organisation selling the product to the end-user is liable to the consumer even though the sold service product was provided by another organisation, for instance in case of packaged products. (Verhelä 2007, 76-79.)

The service providers are bound by the law to see to that a product does not cause danger; to acquire adequate amount of rightful information on the product and the risks affiliated to it; to inform the authorities on products or services causing danger; to take action in case danger occurs in one's services, report authorities of the measures taken and to cooperate with the authorities in order to hamper danger; and to inform the customer with adequate descriptions on the product or service. Notably, the law emphasises the responsibility of the service provider of not only its own service but the ones of its network partners and sub-contractors, as well. (Verhelä 2007, 82-83.)

The Finnish Consumer Agency has given several directives on how to improve safety in programme services through marketing and prior information of the service, documentation of safety and accidents, evaluating risks, the requirements and training of staff, and so forth (Verhelä 2007, 105). Among those, a safety plan (turvallisuus-suunnitelma) is an important tool in acknowledging the risks of a programme service product, planning the measures on how to avoid them, and how to act in case of emergencies. According to Verhelä (2007, 112) a safety plan should be drafted on each service of different types or provided in different environments. A safety plan is a detailed plan of the safety of a certain service. It includes the information on the implementation of a programme service, its place, routes, risks, risk management plan, and instructions on how to act in case of mishaps.

Moreover, a service provider should draft an overall document of how safety is enforced in the company concerning all the relevant aspects not only the programme service itself. The safety document (turvallisuus-asiakirja) is to be used in the training of employees and each personnel member should sign the document to testify their understanding on the contents. It needs to be kept up to date at all times. (Verhelä 2007, 108.)

3 NETWORKING AND COOPERATION

The second part of the theoretical framework consists of representing the concept of networking in tourism business; what its characteristics are and why it is important. The chapter discusses the commitment in the network including aspects such as trust and needs for cooperation, as well as the different levels of cooperation are discussed. In addition, the barriers, risks, and problems of networking, and finally, the benefits of networking are looked into. First, however, some definitions of cooperation-related concepts are discussed that appear in the literature and may cause confusion.

3.1 Distinctions Between Cooperation-related Terms and Concepts

Parker (2008, 628) describes formal business networks as organisations bringing entrepreneurs together with the aim of sharing business information and experiences for mutual advantage. Furthermore, Knoke and Yang (2008, 8) define a social network as a structure that is composed of a set of actors some of which are linked to each other by relations. Moreover, it is suggested that the networks can be represented as a set of nodes that are the actors in the network and a set of ties which describe the interconnections.

Apart from networks, when reviewing literature over networking and cooperation, different concepts of cooperation are discussed and thus there are several terms occurring of which differences cannot be fully understood unless giving them exact definitions. In literature, for example, terms of networks and networking, clusters, partnerships, alliances, and joint ventures occur. There seems to be no self-evident way of using the terms, and thus an effort should be taken in defining the essential concepts in order to being able to use them in a structured manner.

Networks and Networking

According to Lynch & Morrison (2007, 44) there has been a failure generally in recognising the difference between *networks* and *networking*. It has been found that network has been much used in everyday speech rather than as an academic description of a phenomenon with a particular meaning. Due to the popularity of the network construct, in some cases, its ap-

plication has led to misapplication and inconsistency, which further results to confusing and contradictory findings in research.

Lynch et al. (2007, 44-47) refer to networks as so-called imaginary organisations which neither are tangible objects nor spatially limited to a certain one location but they are social constructs comprising people, activities, and thoughts. It is further suggested, that, with regard to the benefits deriving from networking, it is not the actual existence of the network that creates positive outcomes but rather the process of networking that bring benefits to its members. In brief, network can be seen as the frame that includes networking rich in social meaning. Moreover, it is observed that the term network describes the interactions of the firm with the external environment. It can offer useful insights into e.g. business relations, strategic management of small firms, as well as, regional agglomeration, whereas networking is the activity, and the process of networking can be thus defined as the activation of the actors within the network, relationships, ties, and inter-connections.

Networks, Clusters, Joint Ventures, and Alliances

With reference to Michael (2007, 23-24) there are issues in distinction of clusters and other forms of commercial alliances. He suggests that the terms *cluster* and *alliance* are occasionally used interchangeably, and thus there is a need to differentiate the two concepts. 'Alliance' is defined as a part of normal commercial arrangements that firms make with each other in order to access complementary resources and skills residing in other companies. An alliance provides a means to companies to share its information, production or distribution resources on cost-effective basis without it leading to collusion in the market behaviour of the allied firms. On the other hand, clusters are based on co-location of firms and imply cooperative exchange between both the firms and community. Cluster concept mostly refers to firms with similar production processes or common markets developing synergies in order to lower costs and improve the competitive advantage. The synergies can be established in the supply of resources and infrastructure, marketing, information and the pooling of labour skills and distribution systems.

Lynch et al. (2007, 45) represent distinctions between *clusters* and *networks* regarding their features such as specialized services, membership, cohesion, function, aims, and whether they are based on cooperation or competition. The main differences seem to be that clusters are to attract needed specialised services to a region whereas networks allow firms to access spe-

cialised services at lower costs; clusters are to generate demand for more firms with similar values and related capabilities whereas networks make it easier for companies to engage in complex production; and clusters require both competition and cooperation whereas networks are mainly based on cooperation. Also, the perception of membership between these two concepts can differ; clusters are open to any company whereas networks might have a restricted membership. Yet, it is claimed that in practice the membership is often open in networks, as well.

Doz and Hamel (1998; 6-7, 35) make a distinction between *alliances and traditional joint ventures*. They suggest the distinctive characteristics of alliances are that they might involve several parties, the uncertainty of the outcomes are great, and the benefits that each party will draw from the alliance are unclear in the initial state, whereas, traditional joint ventures usually involve two parties for whom the outcomes are more clear, they share known risks and resources and the gains of the venture are clear to both parties. Strategic alliances are formed between companies, for example, in order to compete in markets where one could not compete alone; by forming an alliance a firm can e.g. learn quickly about unfamiliar markets and become an insider in those markets.

All in all, it seems that when considering the concept of networking the closest to it is the concept of clustering. It is rather easy to draw a line between networking and the terms of alliances and joint ventures as in both of latter ones are highly based on contracts and a limited number of agreeing parties. Networks and clusters, on the other hand, do not necessarily need agreements or contracts but are rather established on trust and intangible agreements, something that exists in the member's minds. How to draw the line between networks and clusters is more complicated and it seems that certain features of the two are even clashing. When discussing about RTG Active and cooperation with its partners, the concept of networking is used as the definition of it among all the cooperation related terms seems to be the closest to the way RTG Active cooperates with the partners although the definitions of some authors about networking and clusters may be contradicting.

3.2 Characteristics of Networking

Gorman (2006, 153) lists characteristics regarding networking, cooperative marketing and relationship marketing which seem to be common to all the three disciplines. The character-

istics discussed in the following are cohesiveness and interdependence, common vision and goal, involvement (commitment), value, trust and reciprocity, bonding and socialization, sharing of resources, geographical proximity, communication, and finally, group identification and size.

Cohesiveness and interdependence are recognised as an important factor in successful networking. It is suggested that economics play a part and that structures such as networks allow high levels of interdependence and cohesiveness which provide efficiency. There are different forms of interdependence; horizontal and vertical. Horizontal interdependence is characterised by competitiveness; i.e. members compete with each other directly for resources and providing services whereas in vertical the members act at different stages of production, and thus the member complement each other with minimum competition being involved. (Gorman 2006, 153.)

Common vision and goals are essential in creating successful cooperation and as stated by Gorman (2006, 154) formation of network may occur when common vision of issues exists. It is easier to establish partnerships when the benefits can be clearly seen, and thus vision and goals should be clearly presented and transparent.

Involvement, as well as, investment is one of the key concepts of any relationship. Involvement can be set along a continuum whereby the relationship shifts from transactional in the beginning towards eventual partnership at the other end of the continuum. It is further noted that low involvement results into inefficient relationship. The level of involvement is affected by many factors basically based on the value of the relationship to the stakeholder. (Gorman 2006, 154.)

Values can be categorised into three dimensions: behavioural including social bonding trust and culture; strategic that relates to goals, time to market, strategic fit and core competencies; and economic concerning cost reduction and value engineering. It has been found out that over time in relationships the values seem to drift from business concentrated to more social values. (Gorman 2006, 154-155.)

Trust and reciprocity is needed in both relationship formation and management. Reciprocity is identified as having mutual exchange of information and interdependence which in long-term relationship result to stability, and moreover, it allows the parties to provide favours to each other. The exchange of information itself requires trust and the initial communication

followed by exchange information over time leads to building of trust, respectively. Sharing of resources is described as a factor of unification in remote tourism organisations as it, for example, enables effective marketing. (Gorman 2006, 155.)

Bonding and socialization refer to three levels of bonds in a relationship which include price, social personalization and structural solutions. Price either offered to the customer or being part of costs of cooperative membership creates a bond and generates expectancy from the service provider. Personal socialization relates to personal social bonds that usually develop over time unless existing from the initial stages due to social similarities between the stakeholders. Structural solutions bond concerns contracts agreed upon with the stakeholders of the relationship. (Gorman 2006, 155.)

Geographical proximity is an important factor in affecting the level and frequency of interaction. The ones geographically far apart may consider themselves isolated, lacking group identity and being less motivated to cooperate. Although, as being stated, recent technology such as teleconferencing, email etc. help the feeling of isolation. (Gorman 2006, 155.)

The intensity of network *communication* together with participation and the degree of integration are essential to the decision-making process. Through communication organisations can learn from each other. It is as well argued that, the frequency of contact is important in establishing, sustaining relationships, and strengthening ties. Moreover, it is imperative in maintaining involvement. (Gorman 2006, 156.)

Group identification is defined as the willingness of an individual to connect with other members and thereby influences communication. *Size*, on the other hand, relates to the number of members and it is suggested that the larger the group size the weaker the group identification. (Gorman 2006, 156.)

In their study of networked core-competencies, Denicolai, Cioccarelli and Zucchella (2010, 263) analyze four dimensions of networking including knowledge sharing, formal agreements, degree of integration of local services, and trust. Formal agreements refer to written contracts between service providers and travel agencies, for example, and are referred to as a tangible expression of the network activity. Another tangible proxy is the degree of integration of tourism services which relates to the composition of tourism packages; i.e. the items included in a packaged product. On the other hand, knowledge sharing and trust refer to intangible social capital. Trust is the expectation, not directly supported by the formal

agreements, that whatever agreed on will be maintained and that the behaviour of participant involved in the network will be fair and predictable.

3.3 Commitment in a Network

Komppula (2000, 60) regards commitment as a kind of internal promise to continue certain functions in cooperation with a partner. Hence longevity can be seen as one of the main characteristics in commitment to cooperation. Additionally, Komppula (2000, 70) suggests that a firm's commitment to a network can be seen as a process followed by recognising the need for a firm to cooperate with other ones. The motives for a firm involving itself into a network can vary. When being involved in a network a firm should have an idea of the benefits of commitment that, if recognised, is followed by inputs which can be either material or intangible. As a result of the inputs and contribution the cooperating firms implement joint operations and as a consequence, gain experiences that might create concrete benefits. Depending on whether experiences being positive or negative, either trust in the network build up or decrease. Hence, if perceived positive, the commitment and cooperation in the network becomes tighter resulting into further inputs, whereas, if negative, the dissatisfaction results into decreasing level of trust and thus possible termination of cooperation. Credible and equal inputs into the collective actions are required for a high level of commitment (Komppula 2000, 293).

Needs and Motives for Cooperation

Prior to committing to cooperation an actor has to recognise the needs for it, otherwise involving into cooperation cannot be seen meaningful. Whether a firm recognises the need for cooperation, on the other hand, depends on earlier experiences on cooperation and general attitudes towards it. The need for cooperation can derive from various reasons; it can allow one to gain authority required by laws or decrees, it can improve efficiency of operations, e.g. savings on costs. In addition, the opportunity to increase credibility on the markets, and utilise the synergies of cooperation are noticeable factors regarding the needs to cooperate. (Komppula 2000, 59.)

Moreover, it is noted that the position of a firm within the markets, the other firms, as well as, the qualities of a firm such as its age, size, and economical situation all affect on a com-

pany's ability to notice the needs for cooperation. On the other hand, the attitudes of a company towards cooperation are influenced, for instance, by previous experiences on cooperation, the expectations, and the attitudes of individuals working in the company. (Komppula 2000, 70)

The goals and values of the cooperation represent a company's motives to engage in cooperation and the joint functions are the ways to cooperate. In order to being willing to contribute to the cooperation for the achievement of the goals a company must believe that it can achieve the goals by less contributions when it cooperates than it would if operating alone or that with less contributions it can achieve the same goals. (Komppula 2000, 59-60.)

Trust

As Komppula (2000, 293-294) points out the mutual trust of actors is a definite requirement for high level of commitment. According to the study of Komppula, trust is strongly related to the desire to invest in cooperation in the commitment to the net. When an actor is considering whether to join in a net the reliability of other actors is assessed, those in the inner core in particular. The reliability of the actor, credibility as a person, the actor's reliability in financial sense, as well as, the professional credibility of the actor are considered. Trust is gained from positive results which are strongly related to the expectations of an actor in a network. As well communication affects the foundation and building of trust. Trust can be enhanced e.g. through frequent communication whereby information about current matters and also neutrality of information have an influence on development of trust.

According to Niemelä (2002, 73) in time friendships, familiarity, reputation, and appreciation develop in the network relationships and due to good experiences also trust develops. Trust again is the foundation for exchange of information, joint ventures, and learning. On the other hand, lack of trust is the force to shut one out from the cooperation. It is also the force against exploitation of the network and opportunism in it. Along the building of trust also joint understanding develops, i.e. so called 'common language' which helps in avoidance of misunderstandings and fosters fluency of communication.

Lynch et al. (2007, 50) state that "the reality remains that working in a network alongside other businesses with which one is in competition requires a degree of trust, a kind of relationship glue, for it is trust that engenders the kind of cooperation that is for the general as well as the individual good." Furthermore, certain facilitators of trust can be identified; geo-

graphical isolation, organically grown networks, high social density, co-location within a locality, person familiarity, frequency of communication, dependency of relationships over time, and development of inter-organisation norms of behaviour facilitate the development of trust.

Levels of Commitment

Komppula (2000, 284-285) recognises three levels of commitment: attitudinal, behavioural and longitudinal. First, the attitudinal dimension of commitment is described as a level when an actor recognises the need for cooperation. The ability to perceive the need for cooperation can, on the other hand, be influenced by the general attitudes in the firm towards cooperation, the position of the firm in the market, the actions of other companies, and by the characteristics of the firm such as its size, age, the stage on the life cycle, and financial situation. On the passage to the second level a desire and finally ability to become committed must exist. Second, a firm reaches the behavioural level when it begins to invest in the network either material or non-material inputs. Third, the final level, longitudinal commitment involves specific trust that results of satisfaction and positive outcomes of the cooperation. Longitudinal dimension refers to aiming towards long-term and sustainable commitment (Komppula 2000, 56).

3.4 Barriers, Risks, and Problems of Networking

According to Komppula (2000, 58) barriers to cooperation might be that the initiative to cooperate may be interpreted as a sign of weakness. The potential partners may also be careful in nature. Moreover, the fear of opportunism is one of the greatest barriers for cooperation; the actors may be afraid of the associate to exploit the information and knowledge gained from the associate and starts compete in the same markets. Nonetheless, credible inputs and the faith to commitment followed by the inputs contribute to the emergence of some sort of rules or social norms which lessen the opportunistic behaviour.

Indeed, as stated by Komppula (2000, 293) credible and equal inputs into the collective actions are required for a high level of commitment. Thereby, having members that are not contributing to the cooperation equally can be seen as a problem. Parker (2008, 636) sug-

gests that business networks probably have better chances to survive when members can exclude “free-riders” from continued membership.

According to Niemelä (2002, 71-72), especially in a network consisting of small companies, the main issues relates to personal chemistries between people. If the chemistries work well the benefits of networking can be easily reached, but on the other hand, if they do not, even great opportunities can be lost. However, even cooperation can be learned but the parties not able to cooperate can be changed to other actors until a well-functioning network has been compiled.

Furthermore, the problems in networking can relate to the attitudes and motivation of the actors in the network. The actors may have different goals, means of reaching the goals, and also the different ways to operate can hamper the cooperation as reaching any concrete results may take a lot of time. It is stated, that especially in tourism the persistence of the actors, that is, how quickly they expect to gain results from the cooperation, is important as the outcomes of e.g. joint marketing efforts may be visible only after some years. (Pesonen, Mönkkönen & Hokkanen 2000, 76.)

In addition, as Pesonen et al. (2000, 76) state problems can occur due to differences of resources of the actors, competition between the companies, too large number of companies in the network, and a company in crisis belonging into the network. As well lack of trust, problems related to quality, lack of flexibility, and ambiguous goals and perceptions of the cooperation are considered problematic in business networking.

3.5 Advantages and Importance of Networking

As Gibson and Lynch (2007, 108-109) identify, there are several benefits occurring as a result of networking. The benefits can be further divided into three categories: learning and exchange, business activity, and community as table 4 indicates. Through learning and exchange between network members benefits have potential to be translated into advantages for business activity and community.

Benefit category	Identified network benefits
Learning and exchange	Knowledge transfer

	Tourism education process Communication Development of new cultural values Accelerating speed of implementation of support agency activities Facilitation of development stage of small enterprises
Business activity	Cooperative activities, e.g. marketing, purchasing, and production Enhanced cross-referral Encouraging needs-based approaches, e.g. staff development and policies Increased visitor numbers Best use of small enterprise and support agency resources Extension of visitor season Increased entrepreneurial activity Inter-trading within the network Enhanced product quality and visitor experience Opportunities for business development interventions More repeat business
Community	Fostering common purpose and focus Community support for destination development Increases or reinvents a sense of community Engagement of small enterprises in destination development More income staying locally

Table 4. Benefits of networks for building profitable tourism destinations. (Gibson et al. 2007, 109.)

Parker (2008, 628) suggests that business networks can generate valuable advantages to those utilizing them. Among the benefits learning and development of entrepreneurial processes; innovation and competitive advantage; value creation; as well as, growth and survival are named. Moreover, due to the information sharing, sharing of bad experiences or practices in specific, other firms can avoid paying wasted effort to something that another firm has already found unfeasible.

According to Pesonen et al. (2000, 75-76) the benefits of networking relate, in particular, to synergies in marketing and product development. Efficiency, productivity, cost-savings, en-

hanced ability to get marketing knowledge, reliability, publicity, and adding value to a product are as well mentioned. Cost-savings are commonly the main goal in cooperation which can be reached by combining functions and by that each actor in the network does what it knows the best. By a joint marketing channel or trademark, the products of a company can gain publicity and visibility becoming a part of a larger entity. Moreover, a firm can utilise the former experiences of the network of different areas of business operations gaining feasible marketing know-how. Obviously, the aim is to receive new satisfied customers, and thus sustainability and profitability in the business.

Cooperation is not only feasible on a company level but more on a destination level. As discussed in the following, a destination is a system and a potential incoming tourist most probably makes the travel decisions and chooses the destination based on the whole image of the destination, not because of one particular company or individual service provider. The importance of networking and cooperation between the companies lies in this assumption. In order to receive customers a destination needs to present a well-functioning exhaustive tourism system and a set of services. Hence the well-coordinated, networked service providers play the major role. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that certain level of competition exists among the members of a network especially among those on a horizontal level. All in all, it is probably better to cooperate even with a competitor if it is the means to get the tourist visit the destination.

Denicolai et al. (2010, 261-262) recognise that the customer perceives a destination as a systemic offer and is not interested in organisational fragmentation, that is, the customer rather enjoys tourism resources without inefficiencies in coordination. Consequently, the competitive advantage of a destination relies on the whole inter-firm network rather than on competencies of individual firms. In fact, the ability of firms to integrate and coordinate local resources in a distinctive way is a significant factor for tourism success as it relies on the creative combination of incomparable resources such as landscapes and local culture.

Buhalis & Cooper (1998, 329-331) discuss about the levels of competition in the field of tourism and among the small and medium-sized companies (SMTE's), in particular, listing five different levels of competition, one concerning competition from similar products and service providers at a destination. It is suggested that SMTE's often concentrate on competing on the destination level failing to understand the global competitive environment, i.e. the other levels of competition; competition from other destinations, for instance. Thereby, it

would be vital for SMTE's to remember that, ultimately, the reason for travelling is the entire spectrum of firms comprising the destination and the variety of products and services provided by all the companies should maximise the satisfaction of consumer needs and wants. Consequently, instead of competing against each other, SMTE's should focus on co-operation at a destination level, increasing their competitiveness as a destination against substitute destinations.

All in all, as Buhalis et al. (1998, 344) conclude, the establishment of powerful networks enhances the creation of wealth on the supply side and, on the other hand, enables the delivery of total tourist satisfaction on the demand side. Moreover, the authors suggest that "failure to appreciate the need for collaboration will lead to isolation with severe consequences for the prosperity of SMTE's".

4 EXAMINING THE KEY CONCEPT OF RTG ACTIVE

This chapter describes the contents and progression of the empirical research. Firstly, RTG Active and its operation area, Vuokatti, are shortly described to give the needed background information for that the research could be put to the right context in the mind of the reader. Moreover, the research question, aims, and objectives of the study are defined, the choices of research methods and progression of the study are shortly explained, and finally the reliability and validity issues are pointed out including the means of how the reliability is taken into account when carrying out the research.

4.1 Briefly about RTG Active and Vuokatti

RTG Active

RTG Active describes itself as the coordinator of programme services in Vuokatti as it produces its own services, sells and markets services of other service providers. The company further tailors products for incentive groups, in which other programme service providers may be as well sub-contracted, and arranges recreational programs for local firms, for example. Moreover, RTG Active has equipment rental and facility rental services. The operations could be categorised by the target markets in the way that the weekly program and equipment rental services mainly serve the holiday maker or families visiting Vuokatti. The other programme services, i.e. tailored programs or readily made group programs and facility rental serve the needs of larger groups. (RTG Active Oy.)

The company operates mainly in Kainuu, Vuokatti area in particular. RTG Active Safari House is located in Vuokatti next to Holiday Club Katinkulta spa hotel where the equipment rental shop is and where the weekly programs departure. Also, the company office is located within the same facilities. The main products, produced by RTG Active itself, are snowmobile safaris, different kinds of team-building and recreational programs, evening get-togethers, hunting and other nature-related programs. In addition, RTG Active sells products of other programme service providers based on commissions on sales. (RTG Active Oy.)

RTG Active is part of RTG Group which also includes operators such as RTG Ready To Go Ltd. which is a travel agency under the RTG brand, as well as RTG Sales Ltd. and RTG Invest Ltd. RTG Active has the support of the RTG Group and works in close cooperation especially with the travel agency but also with other local operators such as Sokos Hotel Vuokatti and Holiday Club Katinkulta. (RTG Active Oy.)

The core service regarding this study is the weekly program together with the equipment rental service. The weekly program of RTG Active compiles activity products of different suppliers part of them being produced by RTG Active itself, part being produced by other service providers. The idea of the weekly program is to gather the most interesting services of the area and to bring a large variety of products for the tourist visiting Vuokatti easily to accessible and purchasable. At the same time it helps RTG Active to portray itself as a multi-faceted service provider in the mind of the customer. The weekly program is implemented by a guaranteed departure principle which means that a program designated to a certain day will take place even if only one participant would take part in it.

There is no other actor within the Vuokatti area offering such a variety of products or guaranteed departures on their safaris. The main competitor within Vuokatti area is Vuokatti Safari that offers different kind of safaris mostly on motored vehicles including snowmobiles. There is also a company called Ketunpolku that arranges snowmobile safaris and rents them out and offers paintball products in the summer time that is also included in the production of RTG Active. (RTG Active Oy.)

Vuokatti

Vuokatti is situated in the central part of Finland in Kainuu region near the town of Sotkamo. According to Vuokatti Tourism master Plan, Vuokatti today is the most popular all seasons resort in Finland with the best utilization rate among all tourism resorts in Finland. In fact, for the past years joint efforts have been paid by the municipality and tourism entrepreneurs together to market Vuokatti as the “All seasons international resort”. Vuokatti has a lot to offer in terms of activities even during summer and is, in fact, the most popular amongst the summer resorts in Finland. The activities Vuokatti has to offer include:

- Spa
- Skiing (downhill and cross-country)
- Golf

- Hiking, Nordic walking, cycling and
- Bowling
- Indoor activities (tennis, gym training etc.)
- Horse-back riding
- Safaris (snowmobile, ATV, off-road vehicle, boat, husky)

According to the Master Plan 2007-2012, for instance large investments will be made to increase the bed capacity as well as to develop new and existing outdoor and indoor activities. Cooperation with the educational institutes as the means of educating skilled labour and joint marketing are acknowledged as ways to reach the goals of development. Currently, the tourism centre 'Vuokatin Matkailukeskus Ltd.' is in charge of the marketing and development of Vuokatti together with the entrepreneurs of the area, the municipality, and public authorities.

4.2 Progression of the Study

Briefly, the empirical part consists of three sections: the first section deals with finding the key elements of the cooperation of RTG Active and its network partners within the weekly program context, by interviewing with the representatives of both RTG Active and the partners. In the second part, a minor research was carried out to investigate other weekly program concepts in other skiing destinations in Finland. The third and final part relates to gathering relevant contents for the business operations manual (BOM), in which the results of the interviews and secondary data collection were used.

Research Problem, Aims, and Objectives of the Study

The problem of RTG Active was that it had no exhaustive written documentation on its operations and main concept and thus there was a need for such a document – a business operations manual that would compile the main functions of the company. The research question relates to what are the key functions of RTG Active in the production and compiling of its seasonal weekly programs, as well as, the key factors of the equipment rental and how the two are intertwined together. Moreover, cooperation forming a great deal of the functions, the aim was to find out the perceptions of cooperation of both RTG Active and some of its network partners by which cooperation could be developed. The main objective was to

compile a BOM based on the empirical study describing the main functions related to the operational concept. The manual could be used as a handbook if expanding the business to new locations as well as to the employees to gain a better understanding of how RTG Active operates.

Moreover, no research has been done on whether there are other operators in Finland operating by the same concept as RTG Active does. Thereby, the aim was to study which kind of other models and processes are used in weekly program production by other programme service companies or organisations compiling weekly programs in other skiing resorts in Finland and whether companies with similar concepts operate in the first place. The found models were compared with the one used by RTG Active to examine whether there are similar concepts of weekly program production plus equipment rental existing apart from that of RTG Active.

All in all, this study was sort of an initial study of the RTG operations, an exploratory research, the findings of which are to describe the overall concept of RTG Active weekly program production and how the partners view the cooperation. The research of weekly programs in other destinations was narrow as the idea was only to view some examples and not to carry out an exhaustive research. After this research more specific studies can be carried out.

Case Study Method

In the study, a case study method has been used. According to Lee & Lings (2008, 200-201) a case usually consists of a specific situation within a social setting which can be e.g. an organisation or other social context. However, collecting data in a single organisation does not automatically make a case study and thus case study could be defined more specifically as a method that applies multiple data collection methods, usually qualitative but often, as well, it includes secondary quantitative data. Also, it is noticeable that the aim of a case study research usually is not to be generalised to another setting but the aim is to gain a deep understanding on a certain single setting.

According to Brotherton (2008, 122-123) case study is regarded by some as the most appropriate research method for initial exploratory research that is often qualitative in nature. Moreover, case studies are generally considered valuable when investigating an issue in depth within a specific context and using qualitative data to assist in the development of in-

sights or theory. Having close contact with a certain company for instance in the form of an internship could constitute a feasible context in which to undertake the research. That is if the company allows access to use their databases and information resources needed for the data collection.

The case study method was appropriate for this study given that it required various data collection methods and also as the databases were freely to be accessed for the research. Moreover, the internship in the company provided an appropriate base and knowledge for a more in-depth research to be carried out.

Preliminary Research

The preliminary research for the thesis was done during autumn when some secondary data was gathered using RTG Active information resources considering weekly programs contents, contracts with the sub-contractors and so forth. Moreover, there were some discussions with the managing director of RTG Active to form a view of the cooperation of RTG Active with the partners and to develop ideas of how to carry out the study further and what kind of data should be collected either preliminary or secondary.

Interviews

The widest part of the study related to the interviews done to examine the perceptions of cooperation between RTG Active and some of its network partners since cooperation with other service providers forms a vital part of the operations. The results of the interviews helped in writing the BOM and gaining perspectives on how to develop the cooperation. Two kinds of questionnaires were designed; one that was used with RTG Active (Appendix 1) and another type that was used with the other service providers (Appendix 2). The questionnaires were designed to consist of open-ended questions to allow interviewees freely to express their views and ideas. The questionnaire for the network partners was accepted by the commissioning party.

The idea of the interviews was to get an in-depth view over the matters lying in the cooperation and thus giving certain freedom for the interviewees to express their views while, yet, keeping the discussion on a right path was vital. As the study was carried out through face-to-face interviews and the number of interviewees was small, exhaustive data could be col-

lected through a directive, yet unstructured form of questionnaire containing open-ended questions.

Brotherton (2008, 133-134) states that an unstructured form of a questionnaire is often regarded being suitable for exploratory and relatively small-scale research, or when in-depth data is required to have an exhaustive view over the issues examined. An unstructured form of questionnaire is especially useful in face-to-face situations when the respondent says something unexpected or interesting that the interviewer would like to pursue further or when something unclear has been stated that needs further explanation. Open-ended questions are described as questions that do not dictate the response by particular response options given but rather are unstructured thus allowing considerable amount of flexibility. The flexibility enables more in-depth responses to be recorded, which is vital to the qualitative data collection.

The aim of the survey was to map the roles of the actors operating within the weekly programs of RTG Active, to find out their perceptions of the cooperation, satisfaction, commitment, and expectations for the future, and whether the perceptions of partners match with those of RTG Active. The questionnaires were themed into four categories. Apart from the background information, themes such as commitment and satisfaction on the cooperation; roles, benefits and problems in the cooperation; quality management; and points of development were covered in the interviews. The two first themes relate to business networking and questions were chosen to investigate the major issues of cooperation. Quality management is important in terms of RTG Active's own operations but as well as the company is liable for the quality of the products of its partners that it sells in the weekly program basis. Thereby, it was important to examine how quality is enforced and maintained. Safety is an important aspect of quality in programme services that was taken into account too. Moreover, in order to develop cooperation suggestions for improvements were asked in the interviews.

Apart from the Managing Director (MD) of RTG Active a set of six interviewees were chosen together with the commissioning party. The idea was to select respondents with different services and with different operational backgrounds especially with regards to how long they had been operating. The chosen interviewees were all in cooperation with RTG Active within the weekly program context; they had either guaranteed departures or minimum four participant departures. Some of the entrepreneurs chosen had been in cooperation with

RTG Active since the very beginning it started to operate and some had joined the partner network only recently. The selection was done to get a variety of opinions. Also, it seemed appropriate to choose enough interviewees in order to get enough of viewpoints and ideas, knowing that not all the actors are professionals in the field of tourism and may not come up with appropriate responses. Finally, however, five out of the six chosen network partners were interviewed as one of the chosen interviewees cancelled the participation.

The interviews were done during late November and early December 2010. First, the MD of RTG Active was interviewed in order to form an image of the cooperation and how it is considered on the side of the commissioning party. After having investigated the considerations of RTG Active, the chosen network partners were interviewed. The first interview was implemented on week 46 and the other service providers were interviewed during weeks 48 and 49. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed into text form after of which the transcripts were analysed.

A Minor Research of the Weekly Programs in Levi, Ylläs, and Ruka

The second part of the empirical study consisted of taking a quick shot to weekly programs produced in other destinations similar to Vuokatti (see appendix 3). Several websites were browsed through, however, three destinations were chosen for the comparison: Levi, Ylläs, and Ruka, which are some of the biggest skiing centres and winter destinations in Finland. The chosen three seemed to have enough variety of operators and relatively well-developed activity offerings. Two examples of weekly programs of each three destinations were further viewed and compared. All the compared details were gathered from the 2010-2011 winter weekly programs in order to limit the research. The aim was to collect details of how the programs are produced and which practices are used: which party compiles and markets the weekly program; who is providing the ultimate service and whether sub-contractors are used in the production; whether there are guaranteed departures; which types of products are being offered; and what are the practices in transfers and reservations. The companies producing weekly programs were asked by e-mail whether they use sub-contractors and in which kinds of programs as it did not occur from the information provided on the websites. Moreover, it was checked whether the compared weekly program producers have equipment rental services such as RTG Active has.

It must be noted that the research was not very comprehensive but only a few examples of weekly program producers in other destinations were chosen, those with similar products of RTG Active and a couple of examples of destination organisations compiling a weekly program. Indeed, the aim was not to do a comprehensive study on the weekly programs but rather to have a quick look on the competitors in other destinations, in order to find out how the offerings of RTG Active stand out in the competitive environment.

Compiling the Business Operations Manual

Based on the facts that were found as a result of the empirical study, a handbook was compiled of the important issues of the operations of RTG Active. The main topics included in the BOM (appendix 4) were chosen according to the wishes of the commissioning party and based on the results and findings of the interviews and secondary data collection. As the study as a whole was limited to consider the weekly program and rental business concept of RTG Active, also the manual itself focuses on the aspects related to those.

Apart from explaining the weekly program and equipment rental concepts in depth, the manual describes the quality management practices, company culture, and cooperation with the partner network. Moreover, the organisation and operations of RTG Active as a whole and RTG Group are shortly introduced. The organisation of RTG Group and RTG Active as part of it was introduced in order to describe a bigger picture of the operational environment of RTG Active. Also the description of the background of RTG Active; how it was established and which the reasons behind relate to understanding the whole context of RTG Active and its operations.

Service quality was one of the main topics investigated in the interviews and was included in the manual as it is a major consideration in the operations of a programme service company. Quality includes also the aspect of safety that is again one of the major considerations and thus discussed in the manual. To some extent, service quality also relates to the company culture; on how tasks are delegated in the firm, how the communication works in the firm and what is the attitude towards customer service and so forth. Moreover, cooperation with the partner network has a great importance in the operations of RTG Active and was also investigated in the interviews. Thereby, roles in the network, as well as, problems and benefits of networking were included in the manual.

When compiling the manual both the findings of the interviews were used, as well as, certain secondary data that existed in the RTG Active's archives. As for the interview results, mainly findings considering quality management, safety, as well as, benefits and problems deriving from the cooperation were used in compiling the manual. The details about the organisation of RTG Group and RTG Active itself, as well as, information about the company culture and practices were gathered mostly from the business plan of RTG Active.

While writing the manual it became obvious that not all the relevant information was found based on the previous research, and thus some further discussions were had with the management of RTG Active to add and clarify certain aspects mainly considering the concept of the weekly program and equipment rental, the marketing and sales channels, and the contracts between RTG Active and its partners. Also, the safety documentation of RTG Active contracts were examined and added as appendices in the business manual. Finally, as the manual was compiled it was sent to be read by the management of RTG Active to secure that the information that was gathered was correct and up-to-date as well as to get further proposals for improving the manual and finalising it.

Some examples of business operations manuals were browsed through while compiling the manual to get some guidelines. However, mostly the work was compiled freely keeping in mind that by reading the manual a reader should be able to understand the main concept of RTG Active. The manual is the first comprehensive document on the operations of RTG Active and thus, as well as, due to being limited by the frame of this thesis, the manual is not perfect or include all the functions of the business. Nor does it describe all the little details of the functions. However, it provides with a good foundation and a frame that can be complemented later on outlining some of the main functions of the company. The manual includes confidential information of the company and thus was not published.

4.3 Reliability and Validity of the Research

Qualitative research is connected to interpretivism as a general philosophy which focuses on interpreting and understanding an issue. It emphasises relativism in which reality is not objective but socially constructed, holistic, and contextual. The emphasis is not on the quantity of the information but rather the quality and richness of it and all aspects of observation are considered worthwhile as the researcher listens, feels, asks, records, and examines. (Decrop

2004, 157.) Therefore, qualitative research and results of a study have much to do with how the researcher applies the chosen study methods and analyses and interprets the given data, and thus there should be certain criteria based on which the trustworthiness of the research can be assessed and evaluated.

Decrop (2004, 159) illustrates four criteria that can be used when assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative research:

- *Credibility* refers to how truthful the findings are.
- *Transferability* concerns the extent to which the research findings are applicable to another setting or group.
- *Dependability* regards the consistency of the results and whether they are reproducible.
- *Confirmability* relates to the neutrality of the findings.

Nonetheless, as Lee et al. (2008, 201) discuss, it is arguable whether the generalizability (or transferability as referred to by Decrop) is to be considered in case of validity as mostly the aim of case studies is not to generalise the findings into other settings, but to deeply understand the researched setting. In this study, as well, the aim is to develop an understanding on the current situation of RTG Active, and thus the aspect of transferability is not considered.

To start with, according to Lee et al. (2008, 210), very simply put reliability refers to whether what one says is happening in the research is actually happening. Apart from the very basic rule of presenting the facts as they took place, in this study, the following aspects should be taken into account when evaluating the reliability of the empirical study: sampling, interviewing, recording, transcribing, and analysing data.

As Lee et al. (2008, 213) state, purposive sampling is feasible when choosing the sample group, which basically means sampling people who are relevant to the research question or, in other words, choosing people who are likely to provide information concerning the key research objectives and research questions. As stated, the feasibility or validity of the study lies on the appropriate sampling.

Moreover, certain reliability issues relate to the form of unstructured questionnaire and interviews as Brotherton (2008, 134) indicates. The questions may not be asked in a standard way of each of the respondents or perhaps are not recorded in the same way in each case

resulting into low consistency level of the design and implementation of the questionnaire. The existing inconsistencies may generate unreliable data. Another risk of the method is that people's interpretations of words can vary leading to different conclusions, and furthermore, high volume of non-standard data from words provided by the respondents may cause difficulties when analysing the data.

Other problems related to the unstructured form of questionnaire can be that although, on one hand, the respondents are not forced to pick predetermined options as in a structured form of questionnaire but, on the other hand, people are not always responding honestly. Over- or understating of issues; giving deliberately false answers in order to cover up failures or to avoid sensitive issues; and giving answers based on assumption rather than real knowledge may occur. Furthermore, the respondent may give answers that he or she thinks the interviewer expects to have. (Brotherton 2008, 133-134.)

To help the consistency in the interview situations, a set of predetermined questions were asked in a certain order. The questions may have not always been asked in a standard way, especially when noticing certain weak points in the questions e.g. in the case respondents did not understand a question, they were modified into more understandable form. Also, if it was obvious from the answer a respondent was giving that a particular question was not understood, the question was explained further until understanding was gained. Furthermore, purposive sampling was used in the first place, to get respondents that relate well to the aims of the study and the respondents were picked in consensus with the commissioning party.

As for analysing the data in a qualitative research, as Lee et al. (2008, 237) state, the main concern is how it is analysed and whether the conclusions drawn from it can be justified. The first issues of reliability may occur when transcribing the raw data into a form it can be analysed in; e.g. how much of the researchers own inference has affected the summarising or transforming raw data into a transcript. It is suggested that during the transcribing process one should use consistent methods and notation styles, and also, some of the raw data and interviewer's questions can be included in the reports in order to allow reader to form better picture on the respondents' own concepts. Hence, the reader does not have to rely entirely on the researcher's interpretations. Moreover, the way the data is recorded and transcribed has a vital influence on one's ability to represent the thoughts of the respondents in a reliable manner.

All in all, it must be noted that a conversation involves more than just speech such as gestures, and tones of voice. In this study the interviews were recorded on mp3 form. In order to get a good quality of sound and to avoid disturbances, calm places were chosen to carry out the interviews, although some disturbances were yet faced due to the nature of the profession of the respondents. Finally, however, the quality of sound was manageable and could be transcribed into text form. The same manner of transcribing was used all through the process: every sentence was transcribed, not always from word to word, but preserving the meaning of what was said, for example, utterances such as uhm, so, etc. and expletives typical in the Finnish language were left out. Also, some words were transcribed with another word with the same meaning as well as the order of words may alternate compared to the recordings. Moreover, gestures other than laughter and tones of voice are not noted in the transcripts. The recordings were first transcribed and after they were once more listened through while following the transcripts in order to spot and correct any occurring defects in the text.

The second issue of reliability in analysing the data is the analysis itself, i.e. how the data is interpreted and presented. As Lee et al. (2008, 238) discuss, validity concerns with how well one's conclusions reflect the data they were drawn from and how justifiable the conclusions are. The issue of anecdotalism is introduced which regards basing one's conclusions on a small number of quotes rather than examining the data thoroughly. Furthermore, questions such as: which quotes will be included; are there alternative interpretations of the same material; is there data that contradicts a chosen example; regard validity and must be considered throughout the analysis.

To avoid reliability issues when analysing the interviews, the transcribed data was read through thoroughly and key points of all the responses were further marked and summarised separately before written into a comprehensive analysis. Summarising the key points helped to avoid basing of conclusions on a small set of quotes. Moreover, certain well-describing quotes were chosen to support the interpretations and conclusions made or to help and encourage readers' own interpretation. Certain reliability issues could have as well arisen due to the language of the report compared with the original language of the data. The interviews were done in Finnish whereas the report is written in English and thus the comments of the respondents had to be translated to be compatible with the report. In order to avoid reliability issues occurring from the translations, the original Finnish quotes are marked as footnotes in this report.

As for the manual itself, the first draft was given to the managing director of RTG Active to read through to check for possible mistakes or wrong interpretations. Moreover, as the data collected from the RTG Active databases could be outdated, by this means it could be updated, as well. The details were later corrected, and hereby the quality and reliability of the manual itself could be secured.

5 KEY FINDINGS OF COOPERATION AND WEEKLY PROGRAM CONCEPT

This chapter concludes the main findings of the interviews done considering the cooperation of RTG Active and its network partners. First, an analysis of the interviews is presented discussing the satisfaction and commitment in the cooperation; the roles, problems, and benefits of cooperation; the quality in the service of all parties; as well as the development possibilities in cooperation. Second, summary of the results of comparing different types of weekly programs in other destinations than Vuokatti is given.

Background of the Interviewed Network Partners

The partners interviewed were programme service providers providing, fishing, dog sled, horse wandering, farm visit, and all-terrain vehicle safaris. There were both partners that had been involved in the weekly program since the start of RTG Active and partners that had only recently started cooperation within the weekly program context. One of the interviewees was not involved in the guaranteed departures anymore but was still in the weekly program as per request basis. All the partners of RTG Active interviewed were SME's employing permanently one to two employees, often only the owner self, or one of the shareholders of the company, and some seasonal workers when needed. Some also stated they used interns. Some of the interviewees were doing regular or seasonal work aside their programme service business. Some of the interviewed used sub-contractors in their products such as catering, accommodation and other programme service providers, although not necessarily in the context of weekly program production. All the partners were providing services throughout the year but the most important seasons varied according to the product offered. The most important target groups mentioned were mostly the Finnish tourists or families having a holiday in the Vuokatti area, as they present a high percentage of the visitors in Vuokatti, also Russians were considered an important group, other nationalities varying greatly. Surprisingly, only one mentioned Finnish company groups as the number one market for his business.

5.1 Satisfaction and Commitment to Cooperation

The qualities RTG Active requires of its partners were activeness for instance in developing products suitable for the customers of RTG Active. Also, mutual trust and genuine caring was considered significant, as well as the quality of partner's products. As for the weekly program based on minimum one participant departures, the service providers involved must be committed to the main principles; that is, providing the agreed service even if there was only one participant and committing to the whole weekly program season. Also longevity of the cooperation was appreciated.

"If a company gets involved in the weekly program and it is found out that its product does not sell, then there is no point keeping that product in production. However, if the partner has found cooperation good with us then we can develop the product to certain direction or introduce another type of product from the service provider and then try again. In that sense we like to have long relationships.¹"

RTG Active's motives for cooperation with a variety of service providers derive from its need to portray itself as a multifaceted service provider and for that it needs a diverse set of products and producers. It wants to make the variety of products easily accessible for the consumer so that everything can be purchased from the same place.

"We don't want to start producing everything ourselves, we won't buy our own dogs or fishing boats or so. It is natural to cooperate with the kind of entrepreneur who is concentrated on his own field and is very professional in that field. We kind of need each other.²"

On the other hand, what may attract the partners to cooperate with RTG Active are assumed to be the visible marketing within the area but also the work that is done for international inbound tourism and contacts to foreign tour operators. Altogether, a small operator may gain a lot of visibility through the marketing of RTG Active, much more than it would

¹ *"Jos viikko-ohjelmaan lähtee mukaan ja huomataan se ei toimi, se ei myy, niin ei oo mitään järkeä pitää mukana seuraavalla kaudella, mutta se yrittäjä, jos se on kokenu yhteistyön siitä huolimatta hyväks meidän kanssa, niin meidän voidaan kehittää sitä tuotetta siihen suuntaan tai laittaa vähän erityyppinen tuote siltä samalta yrittäjältä esille ja kokeilla sitten uudelleen. Että kyllä me mielellään tehään sellasia pitkäaikaisia suhteita."*

² *"...me ei, niinku mä oon aina sanonu, ni haluta ite lähtee tuottamaan kaikkee, et ei aiota ostaa omia koiria tai omia kalastusveneitä tai sillä tavalla. Se on niinku luontevaa tehdä sellasen yrittäjän kanssa joka keskittyy siihen osa-alueeseen ja on sen osa-alueen rautanen ammattilainen. Me tarvitaan tavallaan toisiamme."*

be able to gain alone. Thus increasing number of customers for the partners is assumed an important motivator for someone to cooperate with RTG Active.

The motives or reasons of the partners to cooperate matched with the views of RTG Active, extra income being the most important one. Other motives were that RTG Active is an important actor in the Vuokatti, it is well visible and has put a lot of efforts in marketing. Also, the big organisation of RTG and its sales force behind RTG Active was mentioned. Obviously, gaining more customers and thus financial benefit was the ultimate reason mentioned by all the interviewees as the goal in cooperation. Additionally, some specified receiving customers who otherwise would not find the activities offered by them or needed transportation and so forth. Moreover, the importance of existing personal relations cannot be forgotten when discussing the reasons for choosing the partner to cooperate with as almost all of the respondents mentioned that knowing the people working in RTG Active affected the emergence of cooperation.

“RTG Active has, due to the size of the company and the operational background, good visibility among the markets...and in this sense it was natural to lean onto this kind of bigger operator, for instance, to add own visibility.”³

Even though, not all the partners had yet received a lot of extra customers through RTG Active, the company was satisfied with the diversity of products it is now able to offer, and had been able to find the kind of products are appropriate in the weekly program.

“That’s also important, if a program doesn’t sell a lot it bring diversity. If it doesn’t cause a lot of expenses to keep a program in production then it should be kept since it might be the one reason for an enthusiast of certain sport to come to Vuokatti that this kind of product is available...”⁴

Indeed, in most cases the number of customers received through RTG Active was not playing a significant part to the companies, if compared with the number of customers received directly, and the inflow was described seasonal, too. Only one stated the extra income from

³ *Activella on yritys, jo pelkästään yrityskoosta johtuen ja sitte toiminnallisesta taustastaan johtuen hyvä asiakas ja markkinointinäkyvyys. Hyvä asiakasmäärä ja markkinointinäkyvyys ja se oli siinä mielessä luontaista tällaseen isompaan toimijaan tukeutua mm. oman näkyvyyden lisäämiseksi.*

⁴ *”Siinäkin on ihan tärkeä asia, vaikka se nyt ei hirveesti myy niin mutta se tuo sitä monipuolisuutta siihen. Jos siitä ei oo hirveesti kuluja siitä että pidetään ohjelma tuotannossa niin musta se on syytä siinä pitää koska se voi olla tietyn lajin barrastajalle se yks syy tulla Vuokattiin että semmosta ohjelmaa on tarjolla...”*

the customers coming through RTG Active was significant. It was not, however, defined whether they were exactly the weekly program customers that generated the significant amount of extra income. In general, it could be stated the partners were not satisfied with the amount of customers generated through the cooperation and thus the appreciation towards cooperation seemed to vary. Some could not really tell since the cooperation had only recently started and they did not expect the sales to escalate straight away but they were wishful for the future and content, so far. One of the partners the business of which has been existing for longer period of time commented:

"...the customers coming through RTG Active versus others, it does not play a big role, in the end... We have been working here many years even before RTG Active was established. We have had to attract the customers here by ourselves and don't necessarily need a local seller for an existing customer..."⁵

Whereas another partner the business of which has been only recently established stated:

"The thing has started ok, since this requires persistence, you can't expect the business to boom right away...and you need to promote for a while before you get certain basic visibility, so I've been quite content."⁶

It seems that the need for an actor to cooperate also depends on how newly established one's business is. The ones that did not yet have a lot of contacts seemed to find cooperation with RTG Active more important than those with an existing customer base and contacts. Additionally, regarding contacts abroad, only one of the partners had direct contacts to travel agents abroad, some had no contacts at all and the others either individual customer contacts or contacts to the companies with similar businesses. For those with no agency contacts mentioned also the hope of receiving foreign customers as one reason that affected their willingness to cooperate with RTG Active.

The **communication** between the partners and RTG Active was described by all parties as quite common, happening on a daily basis, yet open. It is easy to agree on issues as the cooperation has existed long enough. However, there were no considerable other ways to

⁵ "...RTG Activen kautta tulevat asiakkaat versus muuten niin eibän se näyttele kovin suurta osaa, loppupelissä meidän... me ollaan toimittu tässä jo monta vuotta ennen ku RTG Active on perustettu. Me ollaan jouduttu ite hankkimaan ne asiakkaat tänne eikä me tavallaan niinkun välttämättä tarvita tässä paikallista myyjää jo olemassa olevalle asiakkaalle..."

⁶ "Homma on lähteny ihan ok siten, että koska tällöinen pitkäjänteisyyttä vaativa asia kyseessä, ni ei voi olettaakaan, että heti pamahtaa kauppa käyntiin.. ja se pitää aikansa rummuttaa ennen ,ku saa semmosen perusnäkyvyyden aikaseksi, että ihan oon mä ollu tyytyväinen."

communicate other than e-mail or phone, no regular meetings or such, apart from annual meetings for renewing contracts between the two parties. However, some mentioned that they were in touch even during free-time and thus communication was easy.

When asked about **learning deriving from cooperation** it was mentioned by RTG Active that most of the learning considers the products; which sell and which do not.

“It’s been some sort of discussion with the partners. To which direction should each product be developed, is it the price, contents, or duration that should be changed.”⁷

Learning as a result of cooperation did not arise much conversation. Of course, both positive and negative issues are discussed between RTG Active and the partners, and again learning about products and how well they function arises. Moreover, learning about different way of dealing with customers appeared.

5.2 Roles, Benefits, and Problems in Cooperation

Despite the relatively invisible results in terms of sales, **RTG Active** still found that the **inputs contributed into the cooperation** by the company itself are substantial. It invests in marketing on behalf of the partner. For instance, its advertisements appear on the screens in hotel lobbies, the company publishes and distributes brochures, and is in other travel-related publications, as well as pays for the language translation for the marketing material in which the partners also are presented. For all that, the partner does not pay but only when a customer books a service through RTG a commission is remitted. The inputs ease the efforts the partners have to put into marketing.

“...a company at the moment doesn’t pay anything when it decides to join our program and we pay quite a large amount that the company is shown in such extent, so it’s quite of an input already.”⁸

“So it is kind of risk-free for the entrepreneur. He gets plenty of visibility, of course expects to get sales but in case there is no sales also he doesn’t pay for it.”⁹

⁷ ”Se on ollu sellasta keskustelua näitten kumppaneitten kanssa. Mihin suuntaan mitäkin tuotetta pitäis kehittää, onko se hinta mitä pitäis muuttaa vai onko se sisältö vai kesto vai mikä se on.”

⁸ ”...yritys ei sillä hetkellä maksa mitään siitä, kun se päättää lähteä meidän ohjelmaan mukaan ja me kuitenkin maksetaan siitä aika iso summa, että se yritys näkyy noin laajasti niin se on jo aikamoinen panostus.”

Furthermore, RTG Active offers professional advice and support for example in developing products and safety related documentation, which is particularly important for the newly founded companies. In some cases of foreign groups it is ready to provide with language-skilled staff if the service provider does not have resources from its own behalf. These inputs are also seen as considerable benefits to the partners.

There were difficulties for some of the partners to recognize these inputs since they did not generate clear outcomes in sales. Also, it seemed some thought RTG Active only as an extra marketing channel, something a company could basically do without. On the other hand, some appreciated the cooperation even despite clear increase in sales and had positive expectations for the future. In fact, some of the partners recognised that RTG Active eases their marketing inputs, does a lot of work for sales and uses resources for the customer service situation itself in order to sell someone's else's product. Also, it brings the kinds of customers that otherwise would not find the service they provide. RTG Active was moreover seen as an extra marketing channel, as most of the companies still have their own marketing agenda.

“Of course, yes. It eases (our marketing efforts). In fact we don't use any money for it at all.”¹⁰”

“RTG Active also has the role that it talks with the customers, which requires a lot of resources.”¹¹”

One actually mentioned that there is even some clashing in advertisements published in the Vuokatti area, but on the other hand the company could not leave out its own sales and marketing completely as it is seen more sensible to sell the product to the end-user by the company itself. Firstly, one remains with the commission that would have to be paid in case RTG does the selling and also one is not convinced whether RTG Active sells the partners' products actively. Another partner, that does not seem to have had a lot of customers through RTG Active, felt that the cooperation does not affect their marketing in any way and another tells they do not, in fact, use any money on marketing.

⁹ *”Eli se hän on tavallaan yrittäjän kannalta hyvin riskitön. Hän saa ison määrän näkyvyyttä, toki myös odottaa että kauppa tulee mutta jos ei kauppa tule, hän ei myöskään maksa siitä.”*

¹⁰ *”Tottakai, joo. Helpottaa. Itseasiassa me ei käytetä rahaa siihen ollenkaan.”*

¹¹ *”Active tekee myös sitä roolia, eli käy sitä keskustelua asiakas-rajapinnassa, joka on paljon resursseja sitovaa.”*

“There may be some clashing but on the other hand I can’t leave the selling...Sometimes I think whether I could leave it with some RTG kind of actor, for instance the sales of the short safaris but no..I can’t. It’s too expensive.”¹²”

The inputs the network actors contribute to cooperation vary greatly according to each partner company. It seems that those partners having close personal relations with the management of RTG Active also contribute to cooperation from their side. The contributions were money, time, ideas, or taking financial risks in launching new products. With the partners not being in close relations with RTG Active, the inputs seemed to be only considering focusing on the company’s own production and acting as a supplier rather than developing new in cooperation with RTG Active.

The benefits deriving from cooperation relate to the motives to cooperate and inputs of RTG Active. As discussed, concrete financial benefits or outcomes were not yet quite well seen, although some regarded the marketing efforts of RTG Active as financial benefits, too. Still, appreciation of those benefits varied among the network partners due to lack of concrete outcomes. Apart from the benefits of marketing, also other benefits were recognised deriving from the cooperation such as reliability in invoicing, as well as that the customers that would not otherwise find a service now find it as weekly program product. Consequently, the customer who experienced the service positively may return again and on the other hand initiate positive word-of-mouth communication.

“...the satisfied customer, he markets us forward. Even people booking accommodation have come that way, they’ve visited here and seen the place and then decided that next year we come here.”¹³”

Perspective and feedback from an outsider actor was as well appreciated in order to develop the products and customer service. One of the interviewees even stated they get considerable extra income due to cooperation with RTG Active, although many did not seem to keep their hopes up on increasing visitor numbers coming through RTG Active. Additionally, the most important benefits deriving from the weekly program in the guaranteed departure context were the benefits to the buyers. It is easily purchased, and eases accessibility

¹² ”Siel voi olla vähän päällekkäisyyttäkin mut toisaalta, emmä oikeen voi jättää sitä myyntiä.. Mä oon joskus miettiny että pystysinkö mä jättää sen jonneki RTG:lle vaikka näitten lyhkästen safareitten myynti mut ei..en mä pysty. Se on liian kallista.”

¹³ ”...se tyytyväinen asiakas ja se markkinoi sitten eteenpäin. Sieltä on tullu meille mökkikkin asukkaita, jotka on täällä meillä käyneet ja kattoneet meidän paikkaa ja ovat päättäneet, että seuraavana vuonna tullaan meille.”

since transportation is offered. Finally, it is seen to increase the reliability of a company as the service is realized even if only one person took part on a trip.

“I think the reliability towards the company derives from the guaranteed departure principle. Whether there was one...as the customer thinks that this goes well since I can be here alone and still we’re going.”¹⁴

As noted previously, RTG Active regarded as an input the fact that it takes somewhat the risk on behalf of an entrepreneur regarding investments in marketing. On the other hand, the company also recognises the risk for the partners of low profits in case there are only little participants at times, which is one of the **problems in the weekly program cooperation**. Obviously, if the product does not sell, or sells with minimum participants, the production is not profitable to any party. Furthermore, from RTG Active’s point of view the main problem in cooperation seemed to be the attitude of some partners, if they only consider RTG Active as a party that just takes commission without any real efforts for selling the partner’s product. Such an attitude could be to some extent noticed but only regarding some of the respondents.

As for the partner perspective, RTG Active was seen as a competitor that is, on one hand, completely natural but, on the other hand, can be a problem in cooperation given the fact that it also produces its own products.

“...do they only sell when a customer happens to ask if you have it...or do they sell in an active manner. There’s a big difference. I sell actively to each and every tourist who enters the yard or otherwise that: ‘hey, come and try’. RTG has quite a set of products, so what do they sell actively, what makes sense. Probably it makes sense to offer their own products at first.”¹⁵

“...who wouldn’t strive for the best interests of one’s own company?”¹⁶

The competition between RTG Active and the partners was considered reality, however there are some **risks** mentioned that could be possible, yet not currently happening, such as

¹⁴ ”Minun mielestä siitä tulee se luotettavuus yritystä kohtaan, kun se takuulähtö on. Olis siinä yks tai..tai niinko se asiakas ajattelee, että no tähän toimii hyvin, koska minä oon täällä yksin ja siitä huolimatta lähetään.”

¹⁵ ”...myykö ne vaan sillon kun asiakas sattuu kysymään et onks teillä sitä.., vai myykö ne aktiivisesti. Siinä on iso ero. Mähän myyn aktiivisesti joka ikiselle turistille joka päbaan erehtyy tai muutenki että hei tuu ihmeessä kokeilee. RTG:llä on vielä aikamoinen tuotevalikoima et mitä ne siellä myy aktiivisesti, et mikä on heille järkevää. Luultavasti järkevää on myyä aktiivisesti niitä omia tuotteitaan ensin.”

¹⁶ ”...kukapa ei oman yrityksensä etuja ajaisi.”

stealing of ideas, using one's business ideas dishonestly, or misuse one's know-how. Also, the risk of the product not selling and that RTG leaves it out of production was seen as a risk. Other problems occurring from the cooperation that arose in the discussions with the partners were that the product is not sold as it is in reality, i.e., it is exaggerated or otherwise does not create the right image of the product in the mind of the customer leading to disappointment, which is recognised by both of the parties.

Cooperation is however seen flexible and e.g. the partners do not notice any problem occurring of having a pre-set date for the weekly program customers as was assumed to be problematic by RTG Active. It could be well synchronised with the daily operations of a company or it was even found that having a pre-set day in a week was beneficial as they could be well prepared for the customers coming.

"...we know in advance what day it is and then they confirm the number of people coming. In that there has been a lot done so that it's easy to continue with the day."¹⁷

Moreover, it could be problematic for the partners e.g. to arrange the weekly program if there was a large group coming already for the same day, yet, it seems that the partners perceive that an alternative arrangement can be made in such a situation.

"They can always be compromised as bigger groups always give an early notice so a call to RTG Active and things can be rescheduled..."¹⁸

However, for some partners committing to the weekly program may be a problem in the first place due to the lack of resources and capacity of the company.

"...so little customers are coming from that side that it makes absolutely no sense for us to have certain days on hold just because of waiting customers coming through RTG."¹⁹

¹⁷ "...meillä on tietona etukäteen, että mikä päivä on ja sitte he vahvistaa sitten montako henkeä tulee tänne. Siinä on jo paljon tehty sen eteen, että on helppo jatkaa siitä eteenpäin sitten sitä päivää menemään."

¹⁸ "No nehän on aina sovittavissa, et isommat ryhmät ilmoittaa ennakolta kumminki, et ne tulee pitämällä varotusajalla niin sitten soitto RTG:lle niin siirtyhän ne aikataulut sitten..."

¹⁹ "...siltä suunnalta tulee niin vähän sitä asiakasta niin ei meidän missään nimessä pidä ruveta pitämään tiettyjä päiviä auki ihan sen takia, että me ootetaan et RTG:n kautta tulis meille asiakkaita."

Furthermore, a problem of pricing was seen as an issue; how to price the products in a way that all the parties will end up satisfied; RTG Active, partners, and customers. How to fix the price in a way that customers are willing to pay it, yet leaving enough profit to the supplier as well as to RTG Active as an agent.

"...many times there's our product here and what is the price for the end-user when there is a middle-man, it's hard to make match."²⁰

As for the **roles of RTG Active and its partners in the network** and cooperation, RTG Active saw its role as the leader and coordinator of the network but also having the variety of partners is seen a prerequisite for RTG Active to operate and thus their role is described as vital and unique.

"Surely we're in the role that we lead the network and are the engine."²¹

The partners, on the other hand, saw themselves as suppliers and service providers; they concentrate on what they know the best, that is, the core service. Also the partners recognise their vital role in bringing such products to the market of RTG Active that without their company would not be available. On the partners' point of view RTG Active was mostly seen as the party that does the marketing and acquires customers for their services. It has to some extent a coordinative role given that packaging of complex product is left for RTG Active and RTG Travel Agency.

...of course without the service I offer, the certain products wouldn't be there for sales so..but then Active has marketing and advertising, gathering the customers, so the role of Active is significant."²²

"...as a service provider, my own role is vital, too, it is where the promises are redeemed..."²³

²⁰ "...monestiban se on tavallaan sit se meidän tuote täällä ja sit mikä se loppukäyttäjän hinta on kun on se välikäsi niin siinä tahtoo olla aika vaikeeta sovittaa yhteen."

²¹ "Väkisellähän me ollaan siinä roolissa, että me johdetaan sitä verkostoa ja ollaan sen verkoston veturi."

²² "...toki ilman sitä minun tarjoamaa palvelua tietyt, niitä kyseisiä tuotteita ei välttämättä olis olemassakaan siinä muodossa myynnissä eli... mutta sit Activella on tää markkinointi ja mainostaminen, asiakaskunnan haaliminen, niin se on merkittävä rooli Activella."

²³ "...palveluntuottajana, niin oma rooli on myös merkittävä, että se on se, missä sitten nämä lupaukset ja rummutukset lunastetaan..."

When asked about **product development and innovation resulting from the cooperation**, there seems to be some cooperation and discussion about products. Some partners found that the ideas come from RTG Active's side but some felt they develop products themselves due to the special know-how needed in a special field they were in. Most partners seemed to welcome new ideas from outside and some in fact noted that their time and resources on developing new were even too scarce.

"It's in principle that the products are brought into life together, except sometimes an entrepreneur has a good products that can be taken into the weekly program as it is."²⁴

"...we have discussed about the kind of products and packages that are yet not existing and thought about whether they make sense and then on a product level we have polished little thing such as phrasing and how each product should be brought up. So, there has been cooperation on both sides."²⁵

5.3 Managing Quality

Regarding the **quality requirements** RTG Active has for its partners, the major aspects consider safety and language skills. The partners need to have the needed safety documentation and the required language skills in order to deliver good quality service. However, the company has been flexible in the language requirements and e.g. offered help in certain situations. Although, in the weekly program the terms define that Finnish and English are the service languages.

"Of course, in the field of programme services one of the prerequisites is safety."²⁶

"...if we have English or Russian-speaking customers we presume that good-quality service can be delivered so that the customer could understand that service language and in that they have been met half way..."²⁷

²⁴ "Se on melkeen pääsääntöisesti sitä et tuotteet synnytetään yhdessä et jonkun verran on niitä et jollain yrittäjällä on jo valmiina hyvä tuote joka voidaan sellanena ottaa siihen viikko-ohjelmaan."

²⁵ "...on keskusteltu sellasista tuotteista ja palvelukokonaisuuksista, joita ei oo vielä olemassa ja sitten niitten hyödyllisyyttä ja järkipärisyyttä pyöritely ja sitten ihan se jo ollaan tuotetasolla, ni sitten on hierottu sitä pikkunippelipuolen asioita ihan tämmösellä sanamuotoja, millä tavalla pitää mikäkin ohjelma tuoda esille. Eli siinä on yhteistyötä ollu puolin ja toisin."

²⁶ "Meillä tietysti ohjelmalvelualalla olennaisena osana laatuun liittyy turvallisuus."

The partners stated they were able to deliver the service in English and also service in Russian can be arranged either with the help of RTG or some larger companies even use seasonal Russian-speaking guides. It was recognised that language can be an issue in some service situation especially with smaller companies. RTG Active itself has no problems serving the customers in English and Russian.

“Surely, it’s a bit shame that small companies can’t secure language-skilled staff throughout the year and then with some customers the service quality or experience is not the same as if there was high-season and they had a guide speaking the customer’s mother tongue, e.g. with Russians.”²⁸”

Requesting the partners about **quality control systems**, none of them stated of having special documentation considering quality in the service delivery or customer service. However, the safety documentation and in-house control required by law are obviously there. One partner mentioned that the owners had been to quality training, and one was considering of applying a quality control system in the near future. It was stated that some of the quality control systems (such as Laatu-tonni) are too heavy for small companies, perhaps not even needed as the system itself is not important but that the customer becomes satisfied. Also, it was stated the criteria for good quality service derives from the long experience in the field.

“...through the experience what I’ve studied and from that derive the criteria how customers are being served and things should be dealt with...”²⁹”

“...the system itself shouldn’t be the intrinsic value but it’s only the tool by which the good outcome is aimed at.”³⁰”

With reference to **RTG Active’s own quality control system** there was no general one in use at the moment. The documentation required by law exists and also there is a handbook

²⁷ “...jos meillä on englanninkielisiä tai venäjänkielisiä asiakkaita niin edellytetään se että se palvelu pystytään järjestämään laadukkaasti niin että se asiakas ymmärtäisi sen palvelukielen ja siinäkin ollaan monesti tultu vastaan...”

²⁸ “Se on tietysti ehkä semmonen harmillinen juttu, että pienet yritykset ei pysty turvaamaan sitä kielitaitoista henkilökuntaa ympäri vuoden että sitten joittenkin yksittäisten asiakkaitten kohdalla se palvelun laatu tai se kokemus ei oo ihan sama kuin silloin kun on tämmöinen käivas sesonki ja heillä on asiakkaan omaa kieltä puhuva opas töissä esim. nyt venäläiset.”

²⁹ “...kokemuksen kautta mitä on opiskeltu ja sitä kautta mitä on sitte tullu se kriteerit siihen, että mitenkä asiakkaita palvellaan ja mitenkä ne asiat pitäis hoitaa...”

³⁰ “...eihän se itse järjestelmä sais olla mikään itseisarvo, vaan sehän on vaan työkalu, millä pyritään siihen hyvään lopputulokseen.”

for the rental shop workers, yet, the need for a more comprehensive handbook was recognised.

“Maybe the handbook could be more comprehensive, so that it wasn’t concerning the rental shop only...”³¹”

As for how RTG Active controls the quality of the products offered by its partners, it was stated that, firstly, they are in contact with the partners and get the perception of whether service is on such a level as required. Second, sometimes randomly, as customers are taken to the service provider, the start of the service is being observed as well as the staffs of RTG usually test the products of the partners. Third, by discussing with the customers that have booked a service of a partner, RTG Active can evaluate the quality of service of the partner’s products.

Furthermore, RTG Active recognised its own role as a seller and giving the image of the sold products in the way that expectations of the customer when buying a product are realistic. Also, in its own service delivery RTG Active aims at ensuring the comparability of the actual service delivery and given image. For instance, the guides are asked to read through the product descriptions before taking the customers for the outing.

“It is just such sensitive work selling some travel service, activity service so that you by no means give a too pictorial image of the contents. After all, we are only selling images.”³²”

“That is actually something we have now concentrated on, we have told the service providers that ‘read through the product description in our brochure and tell us before it’s printed if it’s valid’ and encouraged our guides regarding our own products to read through the product descriptions in certain intervals before going to guide so that they know what is included...”³³”

An important factor in maintaining good quality service is that the employees or trainees, if being used, are aware of the quality requirements and service culture of the company. It was identified there is a need for development when it comes to the training of the interns of

³¹ *“Ehkä se vois olla vielä kokonaisvaltaisempi se opas, että se ei ois pelkästään vuokraamoon...”*

³² *“Et se on vaan niinku niin herkkää työtä tuo jonku matkailupalvelun, ohjelmapalvelun myyminen et sä et anna millään lailla liian maalailevaa kuvaa siitä sisällöstä. Kun me myydään kuitenkin vaan mielikuvia.”*

³³ *“Toi on oikeestaan sellanen et me on nyt tuohon sen jälkeen panostettu paljonkin, et me ollaan sanottu niille palveluntuottajille, et lukekaa tää teksti mitä täällä meidän esitteessä on ja sanokaa ennen ku se painetaa et pitääkö se paikkansa ja terotettu kaikille meidän oppaille meidän omien ohjelmien kohalla ihan samalla lailla, että muistakaa säännöllisin väliajoin lukea ne tuotetekstit ennen kun ootte menossa pitämään sitä tuotetta että te tiiätte mitä siihen kuuluu...”*

RTG Active given that they are involved in customer service situations with a level of responsibility.

"...the number of interns has grown to such extent that during high-season, for example, a lot of them are working and they are not sacrificed enough time on but they are just put to do the thing. If considering yet how responsible tasks the trainees are given then..."³⁴

As for the employees, it is assumed that they know the quality standards. Tight work community, consequently well-functioning flow of information, and the fact that the staff spends a lot of time together both at work and on free-time is seen as an important factor contributing to the quality. Maintaining of good quality of service in RTG Active's production is implemented through training of staff and collecting customer feedback, although, there is a lack of feedback system for the rental shop and weekly program users. Feedback is only collected from group clients and thus enabling feedback-giving for all the customers could be developed. Feedback is, however, analysed no matter from which channel it comes from and any identified defects are taken into account and improved.

"Anyway, we spend quite a lot of time together and go through the work-related stuff. I'd believe that if the employees were asked they'd know these things quite well."³⁵

"...enabling of feedback-giving would be the number one thing, that there were those questionnaires that could be filled and returned..."³⁶

In case of claims the attitude is that the customers are being compensated in a way found suitable as it is seen less of harm than negative word-of-mouth caused by a disappointed client. The claim deriving from the partner's service and if the product was sold by RTG the compensations are usually agreed on with the partner.

"...we have usually done so that we have agreed with the partner how the customer is compensated whether we return the money or offer a new trip. I have such a practise with claims that I rather return the money

³⁴ "...harjoittelijan määrä on nyt kasvanu niin isoksi, että sesongissa esim. toimii paljon harjoittelijoita, että niihin ei ehkä riittävästi käytetä aikaa et ne vaan tökätään tekemään sitä hommaa. Jos aatellaan miten vastuullisen roolin meillä harjoittelijatkin jo pääsee niin..."

³⁵ "Et me vietetään kuitenkin aika paljon aikaa yhdessä ja käydään työhön liittyviä asioita läpi. Uskoisin että jos vaikeita työnteekijöitä haastateltais, että heillä on nämä asiat aika hyvin selvillä."

³⁶ "...palautteen antamisen mahdollistaminen ois se ykkösjuttu, että siellä olisi sellasia kaavakeiteita, jotka voi täyttää ja palauttaa..."

because I see it less of harm paying back one trip than if the customer would go out there to tell everyone about his bad experience...³⁷”

”...you shouldn't be scared of them (claims) or panic because of them but rather love them. One can turn them into winning situation; the customer can be made even happier than if he had only had the standard experience and also you can always learn from them.³⁸”

RTG Active also uses extras mainly from one staff leasing company. Training of the leased workforce obviously contributes to the quality of products and also some joint training of RTG Active's own staff and temporary staff has been implemented. The internal training is yet seen as something that could be improved. Nevertheless, there are certain factors influencing service quality that cannot be controlled such as customer behaviour and weather.

”In the programme service field people usually do too much of that they take someone from the woods two hours before the outing and show them to do this and that. And then the person is doing it the first time in his life, which is not good.³⁹”

Training arose as the most important aspect when discussing with the partners about **how the quality standards are communicated to the employees** and possible interns. New employees or seasonal workers are trained to their duties and mostly the employees have had past experiences with the company either as an intern or they are otherwise acquainted. As for interns the training is implemented following “training lists” that include all the issues that the interns should know before starting the duties. It was further stated that interns are not really involved in situations requiring a lot of responsibility.

”...we have sort of training lists by which certain issues are gone through by 'tick the box' principle starting from fire extinguishing and ending..I don't know where but this kind of practical issues where everything is placed, uniforms and how one should present himself when customers are on the site.⁴⁰”

³⁷ “...toimittu yleensä niin et me ollaan sen meidän kumppanin kanssa sovittu miten asiakkaalle hyvitetään, palautetaanko rahat vai tarjotaanko uus retki. Minulla on sellanen subtautuminen reklamaatioihin et hyrin helposti palautan rahat koska nään sen paljon pienempänä pahana et sen yben keikan maksun kun sen mitä se läbtee revittelemään tonne kylille epäonnistunutta kokemustaan...”

³⁸ “...niistä ei pidä säikähtää eikä pidä mennä paniikkiin, vaan niitä pitää enemmän rakastaa. Nüistä voidaan kääntää voitoksi, asiakas voidaan saada jopa tyytyväisemmäksi kuin silloin kun se ois vaikka sen peruskokemuksen kokenu ja sitte niistä voidaan aina oppia.”

³⁹ “Ohjelmopalvelualalla sorrutaan yleisesti liikaa siihen et otetaan pystymetästä joku kaks tuntia ennen keikkaa ja näytetään tee tätä ja tätä ja tätä. Ja sitten se ihminen tekee sitä ensimmäistä kertaa elämässää, nii se ei oo hyvä.”

”...a couple of employees have been recruited in the way that they have been as trainees here more than once and from there bit by bit...⁴¹”

As for **maintaining good service quality** there seemed to be no system to measure quality either in the practices of RTG Active or its partners but the companies seemed to form a general perception on how things are running. None of the partners stated they have customer feedback systems but they get the feedback from the customers after the service situation either orally or by e-mail. None of them either stated that there has been negative feedback or issues in the quality arising from feedback. By maintaining well the gear and property were seen as ways to maintain quality, as well. Moreover, self-criticism, aspiration to strive for better and better service, retaining a humble attitude, and fostering one's interest and devotion in the work pertain good quality.

”...the quality is best sustained when one enjoys what he's doing...⁴²”

”...I do things myself and am quite critical on what I do and aim at going through what happened during the day, either alone or together depending on whether there were others involved in delivering the service, and think of which things perhaps affected the quality and by which small things it could be improved.⁴³”

Given that measuring customer satisfaction is important in controlling quality it was surprising to find out that none of the partners were collecting feedback currently. The reason could be the lack of resources for analysing the feedback or that the results gained from it are not feasible as the partners seemed to gain enough information based on the instant feedback. However, usually customers only give feedback when being really satisfied or disappointed and thus it would be important to know the thoughts of the clientele with average satisfaction.

⁴⁰ “...meil on perehdyttämislisat tai tällaset et tietyt asiat käydään läpi rasti ruutuun alkaen alkusammutuksesta ja päätyen jobonki..en tää mihin mut tämmöset käytännön jutut ja missä mikäkin on ja työasut ja kuin ollaan kuin esinnyttään kun asiakkaita on tontilla.”

⁴¹ “...työntekijöitä on pari rekrytoitu silleen et ne on ollu meil usemman harjottelun ja siitä pikkubiljaa sitten...”

⁴² “...siis se laatuhan säilyy parhaiten sillä et nauttii siitä mitä tekee...”

⁴³ “...mä teen itse ja aika itsekriittisesti subtaudun omiin tekemisiiini ja siinä pyrin jälkipyykkiä pesemään sitten yksin tai yhdessä riippuen, onko ollu muita tekijöitä siinä ja näin ollen käydään niitä mahdollisia asioita läpi joko itse tai yhdessä, että mitkä on kenties ollu sitä laatua heikentämässä tai millä pienillä jutuilla pystyttäis sitä laatua parantamaan.”

“...there’s just paper piling up in the locker. The customers quite well give the feedback straight away as we arrive and enter the yard.⁴⁴”

“...often you feel it there on the spot, while you’re doing your job and then I usually say if there is something and ask the customers...⁴⁵”

5.4 Points of Development

Finally, both RTG Active and its partners were asked to discuss the **needs for further co-operation and how it could be developed**. As for RTG Active the main needs for development lie in increasing the profitability of the weekly program in particular, which would benefit both the partners and the company itself. Increased profitability would probably foster the further cooperation and contribute positively to the quality of the products. Currently, RTG Active is facing a profitability-quality dilemma as the volume of weekly-program customers is not as high as could be wished for. Certainly, for the partners as well the increasing amount of customers through RTG Active is welcomed.

“Certainly the aim is that the business was more profitable for our partner and thus also for us...⁴⁶”

“...you have to consider the quality and profitability and they don’t go hand in hand unless there’s enough volume.⁴⁷”

Furthermore, the need for securing and enhancing quality in all the operations of RTG Active, as well as in the whole partner network is recognised. Quality could be enhanced through joint training sessions considering safety and customer service, for instance.

⁴⁴ *“...sitä vaan kertyy sitä paperia tonne kaappiin, et kyl ne aika hyvin ne asiakkaat antaa sen palautteen...välittömästi tossa pibaan ku tullaan.”*

⁴⁵ *“...kyllähän sen siellä aistii paikalla, kun niitä tekee ja yleensä sitten sanonki et jos on jotain, yleensä aina kysyn asiakkailta...”*

⁴⁶ *“Kyllähän tietysti tavoitteena on se että toiminta on kaupallisesti kannattavampaa niinku meidän yhteistyökumppaneille ja sitä kautta tietysti meille...”*

⁴⁷ *“... on mietittävä laatua ja kannattavuutta ja ne ei kulje käsi kädessä jos ei sitä volyyymiä oo riittävästi.”*

With reference to product development and communication the need for more frequent encounters and meetings was identified by all parties. Even encounters amongst all the network partners together were found possibly feasible, although by certain condition; the joint meetings should be held among those network members that can actually benefit each other and trust must exist between the members so that no fear of opportunistic behaviour would exist.

"...I haven't sacrificed a lot of thoughts on the cooperation or developing it. For sure there are a lot of possibilities, but there should be conversations, keeping touch, and have tighter cooperation..."⁴⁸

"...those actors which are relevant for one's own business, which actually have something to give to that, with those actors there could be concentrated exchange of information and communication and in the way that the possible outcomes support the symbiosis, and not the other way around that someone will get a free idea that he can start to market and sell..."⁴⁹

RTG Active itself has seen the potential in developing cooperation with the local educational institutions such as Kajaani University of Applied Sciences (KUAS) and Kainuu Vocational College (KAO) both of which offer education in the field of tourism as a means of acquiring and testing new ideas and innovations.

Additionally, more cooperation in tailoring products, and further cooperation in group travel such as company incentive products appeared in the interviews with the partners. A problem on a wider scale, nonetheless, seemed to be the low number of incentive groups in the whole of Kainuu area in which the role of RTG Active and its background organisation is perceived important in attracting more groups to Kainuu.

"...company groups are very little so there should...in fact, there would be room for development in the whole of Vuokatti area."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ "...en hirveesti oo ajatuksia kumminkaa ubrannu siihen yhteistyöhön tai kehitykseen, et paljon ois varmasti mahdollisuuksia, mut siinä pitäis olla sitte käyä vähän keskusteluja aina, pitää tiivimmin yhteistyötä..."

⁴⁹ "...ne toimijat, jotka ovat oman liiketoiminnan kannalta keskeisiä ja tärkeitä, joilla on oikeesti annettavaa siihen, niin heidän välillä voi olla tämmöstä keskitettyä tiedonvaihtoa ja kommunikointia ja vielä siten, että nämä mahdolliset tuotokset, mitä siitä aikaan saadaa, niin ne on tukemassa tätä symbioosia, eikä päinvastoin, että joku saa siitä sitten ilmaisen idean itselleen, jota voi rupee markkinoimaan ja myymään..."

⁵⁰ "...yritysryhmiä on tosi vähän et siin on pitäis..siin ois kehittämistä koko Vuokatin alueella itse asiassa."

"...weekly program production, 2 or 4 customers come per week. No one can live with that. It's much nicer to sell a group of 40 people."⁵¹

Currently, some of the partners were struggling with capacity vs. profitability issue; they do not have capacity to receive big groups and on the other hand cannot extend the facilities or business altogether as the customer inflow is very seasonal and rare regarding larger groups.

"I think it's an issue of Tanskanen and Pohjolan Mylly and Soininen and others, to get the customers here. Then we'll start think of services here but now we can't extend because it requires inputs...or in income it comes down if we start to enlarge..."⁵²

"...sometimes they've asked, but they've been so large groups that we can't take all the sudden if 30-40 people come, no way. And at this latitude it's not worth extending since we do this throughout the year and there are really long low seasons..."⁵³

Also, so-called brainstorming meetings and product testings, as well as receiving feedback from the customers that bought a product through RTG Active were mentioned as a means to enhance cooperation in product development. In order to develop cooperation and measuring the outcomes it was suggested that setting goals and measuring the visitor numbers would be necessary. A problem seemed to be that there are no clear objectives set, let alone, the effects being measured, which would indeed be significant in decision-making and developing new strategies and products.

"At least I haven't set any objectives on RTG about the sales, so if we wanted to develop it then there should probably be some objectives and observation and a meeting every once in a while. Now the products are there just sitting in the shelf, kind of."⁵⁴

⁵¹ *"...viikko-ohjelmatuotanto, sieltä tulee 2 tai 4 asiakasta per viikko, ni eihän kukaan elä semmosella että. Se on paljon kivempi myyä 40 hengen ryhmä."*

⁵² *"Minusta tuntuu, että se on näiden Tanskanen ja Pohjolan Myllyn ja Soinisten ja näitten asioita, että mitenkä ne sais ne asiakkaat tänne, ni sitte ruvetaan miettimään myö täällä palveluja, mutta ku ei passaa isommakskaan sitä asiaa viedä koska se meitä sitten panostusta..tai rahamäärässä ni sitte taas putovaa jos me ruvetaan isonnettaa..."*

⁵³ *"...on joskus kysyneet, mutta ne on sitten niin kauheen isoja ryhmiä, et ei me voia totentaa äkkiseltään jos 30-40 tulee ni ei pubettakaan. Eikä näillä korkeuksilla kannata paljon tosta isommaksi laajentaa, koska me tehään kuitenkin läpi vuoden ja on todella pitkiä hiljaisia aikoja..."*

⁵⁴ *"Mä en oo ainakaan asettanu mitään tavoitteita RTG:lle myynnin subteen, niin et jos sitä haluttais kehittää, niin varmaan pitäis olla tavoitteita ja seurantaa ja joku pieni palaveri sillon tällön. Nythän ne vaan on ne tuotteet siellä tavallaan hyllyssä."*

On the other hand, it was recognised by RTG Active that they have not yet found the key on how to attract the main market of Vuokatti to use their services.

"...even though we do a lot of marketing, nonetheless maybe we haven't quite found the typical visitor of Vuokatti as well as he could be found..."⁵⁵

"...what a Finnish family or a retired Finnish couple that is having a vacation in Vuokatti, what are they ready to do with a programme service company, what are they ready to pay for...no one has come up with that yet."⁵⁶

With reference to marketing cooperation there was a request that the producers of the weekly program products would be visible in the marketing materials and on the other hand the producers could direct their customer to RTG Active in their materials, as well. Some wished for being more visible in the marketing of RTG Active. Social media and gaining of free visibility through some media events were regarded as needs for development by some of the partners. It could be considered whether this could be implemented somehow in cooperation with RTG Active and the partners.

"...it would be good, for instance, that I brought up those products that I produce for the weekly program and then directed those customers to Active when there are products with guaranteed departures. But as a return it would be good that Active in its own marketing materials brought up the suppliers where the suppliers products are presented..."⁵⁷

Ideas on concrete ways for developing the weekly program did not arise in the discussions, yet it was pondered whether there could be more special weekly programs according to special seasons, or target groups having holidays in Vuokatti during a certain time of the year. Although there are already separate programs for the Russian New Year and autumn break, it can be asked whether the two main programs for winter and snowless season are too long and would need more variety in between.

⁵⁵ "...vaikka me tehdään paljon markkinointia, niin ei siitäkään huolimatta olla ehkä löydetty sitä Vuokatissa pääasiassa lomailevaa ihmistä niin hyvin kun sen voisi löytää..."

⁵⁶ "...mitä suomalainen perhe tai suomalainen eläkeläispariskunta joka lomailee Vuokatissa, niin mitä ne on valmiita tekemään ohjelmapalveluyrityksen kanssa, mistä ne on valmiita maksamaan... sitä ei oo kukaan vielä keksinyt."

⁵⁷ "...olis ihan hyvä esim. että toisin ne tuotteet esille, jotka minä tuotan viikko-ohjelmaan ja siten ohjaisin sen asiakaskunnan tavallaan Activen asiakaskunnaksi niiltä ajanbetkeillä, jolloin on vakiolähtöisiä tuotteita, näin esimerkiksi. Mutta vastineeksi siihen sitten myös se, että kun Active omassa mainonta ja markkinointimateriaalissa tuo alihankkijoiden tuotteita julki, niin siellä olis hyvä olla nää yhteistyökumppanit julki..."

”...taking a quick look at it, the selection of products is a bit narrow since the two themes of winter and summer are used for such long periods.⁵⁸”

5.5 Comparing RTG Active Weekly Program with Those in Other Destinations

When comparing the weekly program concepts in destinations other than Vuokatti (Appendix 3), it occurred that there are similar actors to RTG Active that produce their weekly programs and offer similar products to those of RTG Active. However, the principles and terms somewhat differ. Apart from companies providing weekly programs, in some destinations the tourist office or other association dealing with the joint marketing of a destination have compiled weekly programs offering a variety of products from several service providers.

Two types of weekly programs were found of those compiled by tourism destination organisations:

- 1) Programs the products of which the tourist office itself is selling and acts as an agent.
- 2) Programs in which the clients are only given the contact details of the service provider and thus directed to do the purchase from the service provider itself; i.e. the tourism organisation acts as a mediator and marketer only.

In both of the examples chosen there were several choices of programs per day, a great variety of programs, and with comparison to the weekly programs of programme service companies they could also include services outside the activity field such as restaurant services, cooking classes and special activities for children whereas the weekly programs of the companies concentrated on ‘traditional’ outdoors activities. Moreover, the programs compiled by tourism offices did not have a set place for departures but could be depending on the practice of the program provider. Neither of the example programs had guaranteed departures and bookings were required at least a day in advance. One travel association website introduced an activity search engine by which a tourist can look for suitable activities according

⁵⁸ “...äikiseltään kun kattoo, niin se on vähän yksipuolinen se ohjelmavalikoima, koska mennään niin pitkät jaksot niillä kahella talvi- ja kesäteemalla.”

to one's preferences and the service would list possible activities matching the needs of the client.

As for the program-providing companies there was some variation between the company practices. There were even differences within one company operating in many destinations e.g. in minimum participants and booking-channels. Only one of the examples had guaranteed departures whereas between the others there were groups of two or four required for the activity to take place. RTG Active has guaranteed departures in its weekly program and additionally minimum 4 participant departures booked on request.

The practices of transportation and where the activity started varied: activities could start without exceptions from the company outlet or the point of meeting could be agreed on upon reservation whereas one of the example companies even provided transfers to and from the client's accommodation place within the destination. As for RTG Active the Safari House mostly is where the programs departure.

Moreover, in most cases the service was to be booked a day prior to the departure from the service provider. In some cases the service could be booked from hotel receptions. One of the example companies has further introduced an online booking system and research machine by which a client can search and book activities online in all the destinations the company operates. RTG Active has the same practice of bookings: they should be done a day prior and services can be booked through the company itself, at hotels through an online-booking system or independently through the online-booking.

Furthermore, it was common for the companies to use sub-contractors in some of the programs, those that need special expertise such as husky safaris and reindeer farm products. RTG has the same practice of using sub-contractors. Of the researched companies only Ylläs Adventures had equipment rental services in addition to the weekly program production as RTG Active has.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter concludes the research findings and based on those some suggestions for further development are given. Moreover, the success of the study and its outcomes as well as the reliability and validity of the research are discussed.

Cooperation with the Network Partners and Developing Cooperation

To sum up the findings of the research done through the interviews, it seems that most parties were satisfied with the cooperation itself although the results remained to be seen. All the parties seemed to have similar view that the weekly program does not yet generate a lot of extra customers and thus extra income but otherwise cooperation is seen either very significant or at least something that does no harm to a company. Appreciation for the inputs of RTG Active seemed to vary depending on the company background. Also, the commitment and inputs of the network partners seemed to vary seemingly due to how close relations the partners had with RTG Active. Thereby, frequency of communication and especially face-to-face encounters seem to play an important role. Quality issues consider mainly RTG Active's own operations. The partners seemed to be aware of the quality safety issues and to be able to maintain quality according to their own circumstances. Suggestions for development were generated, mostly considering widening cooperation outside weekly program production, as well as frequency of encounters and joint meetings.

Motives to cooperation are considered more or less the same by all parties: gaining of extra income. Moreover, RTG Active's inputs to cooperation; mostly marketing, the large background organisation, good contacts, and contacts to foreign tour operators, , as well as familiar people working at RTG Active affected the willingness of the interviewed companies to involve themselves into cooperation. Generally, the needs for cooperation may depend on the age, size, or economic situation of a company. As for the partners of RTG Active, it seemed that new companies or companies with no existing contacts value the cooperation more than those that have been operating for longer time and have an existing customer base.

Commitment to a network is followed by the recognition of the needs to cooperate and being involved into a network the parties should have a view of the benefits deriving from the cooperation that is followed by inputs into the cooperation. Contributions to the coop-

eration again result outcomes that either help to build trust or decrease it depending whether the experiences of the cooperation are perceived positive or negative.

With reference to RTG Active and its partners, the **benefits of the cooperation** relate strongly to the motives to cooperate and were seen more or less the same by most parties. The visibility of RTG Active and the whole RTG Group support, RTG Active as an extra marketing channel, and the fact that RTG Active eases marketing inputs of a company were seen as benefits. Also, gaining customers that alone would not find certain services, and possible positive word-of-mouth as a result of a satisfactory experience were recognised as the benefits of cooperation. Despite the benefits and marketing inputs of RTG Active, however, the weekly program did not generate significant amount of extra income that is after all the ultimate goal of the cooperation. Only one of the respondents stated that the company received notable financial benefits. There were differences in perceptions whether the inputs of RTG Active were appreciated as some appreciated them despite the small amount of extra income being generated and some seemed to overlook the inputs as they did not see any concrete outcomes.

Even if the outcomes of the cooperation were not overly positive, neither network partners nor RTG Active did see a reason to quit the cooperation, rather they were wishful towards the future and many of the partners even hoped to extend the cooperation outside the weekly program. Thus, it could be stated that trust in the network exists but could be enhanced with further positive results which could be searched through different paths. Communication is one tool for developing trust in a network, and thus it could be developed by RTG Active and its partners. In fact, it seemed that the tighter the communication was the tighter the cooperation. By communication not only daily communication mostly via e-mail or by phone is meant, but also meetings and face to face encounters during and outside working hours. Such encounters in particular seem to be important in close cooperation and contribute to trust, and thus, the level of commitment.

The level of commitment of the network partners of RTG Active can be argued. It could be described that most of them are on a transition from the behavioural level to the final longitudinal level. A firm is on the behavioural level when it begins to invest in the network either material or non-material input and longitudinal commitment involves specific trust that results of satisfaction and positive outcomes of the cooperation. Contributions have been made into the cooperation by all parties, more by some than others but it seems that

the clear positive outcomes are yet to be reached. It seems that those parties with tighter personal relations with the RTG Active also contribute to the cooperation more than those with loose relations and non-frequent communication. Perhaps, by more inputs into the cooperation by those parties that are not tightly involved could result to better outcomes.

Altogether, even if there were no concrete benefits deriving from the cooperation the benefits of the weekly program production to the visitor was recognised and considered something benefitting the companies in positive image creation. The whole **idea of the weekly program** is to package products, usually not longer than half-day trips, into easily purchasable and reachable entities that include a few components such as transfers, snack or meal, and the activity itself. Most of the products are implemented by a guaranteed departure principle, whereat there is no risk of cancellation due to small number of participants, which helps creating a reliable image. The strategy of guaranteed departures may as well help the company in positioning and service differentiation as by pooling the resources of its network partners it is able to provide services no other company in the destination can. Altogether, packaging enables tourism operators to standardize, commoditise and modify the service offer in order to facilitate ease of consumption and on the other hand allows the operator to ensure consistent quality of the experience and develop efficiencies in the delivery of the product. By packaging weekly program products RTG Active offers ease of consumption that further creates added value to the products.

Generally, packaging may as well help to reduce the perceived risk of an activity. The advantage of combining the rental business and weekly program production is that the customers are given options between doing an activity by oneself or lead by a professional guide. For instance, one may have a lot of experience of snowmobiling and may easily take a tour independently whereas for one with no experience and not being familiar with the tracks renting a snowmobile for independent use may be a too big step. In such a situation a guided safari offers a solution to reduce the perceived risk.

Moreover, theming of products is significant in creating a strong positioning strategy for the package, since it will display the image of the type of experience being offered. The theme created should be appealing regarding the needs of the clientele, and on the other hand, how the product is positioned will determine what types of customers are attracted. RTG Active appeals different target markets by different kinds of themed weekly programs. For instance,

there is a separate weekly program during the Russian New Year. Perhaps a variety of themed programs could be introduced to several markets.

The weekly program production is implemented through horizontal cooperation. In brief, horizontal interdependence is characterised by competitiveness; i.e. members compete with each other directly for resources and providing services whereas in vertical the members act at different stages of production. Generally, competition poses a **problem to cooperation**. Furthermore, fear of opportunism is one of the greatest barriers for cooperation and especially in a network consisting of small companies the main issues relate to personal chemistries between people. Also, having members that are not contributing to the cooperation equally can be seen as a problem whereby “free-riders” should be dropped out. Problems can occur as well e.g. due to the attitudes and motivation of the actors in the network, different goals and means of reaching the goals, differences of resources of the actors, too large number of companies in the network. As well lack of trust, problems related to quality, lack of flexibility, and ambiguous goals and perceptions of the cooperation are considered problematic in business networking.

There were only few problems due to the cooperation, yet, not all of the mentioned problems were really taking place currently but were seen more as risks or potential problems. Such problems were the risk of opportunistic behaviour and competition in a way that companies in rivalry act according to their own needs. Another problem recognised by both RTG Active and its partners derives from the fact that one party sells products of another party and in case one does not know what one is selling problems may occur due to unrealistic expectations of the customers. Consequently, RTG Active has been working on the issue in order to avoid such conflicts. The difficulties of pricing products in the way satisfactory for all parties also arose. Moreover, lack of resources for committing to the weekly program and guaranteed departure concept is a problem although in such case one can still be part of it on a minimum four participant basis. Attitude of the partners, the kind that they only see RTG Active as an unnecessary meddler and middleman can as well be a problem and even a barrier to cooperation. Such an attitude even seemed to arise slightly among the interviewed network partners.

As for the **roles in the network** it seems that RTG Active has a leading role as it coordinates the cooperation, packages products, markets and works for acquiring the customer. The network partners on the other hand are suppliers; they can concentrate on their field of

expertise, producing the core-product, and focus on the practical arrangements. Again, the way the role of RTG Active and its importance is seen depends on the operational background of a company and its existing contacts.

Quality in the service delivery is vital and provides a company a means to distinguish itself from its competitors. The main objectives in managing quality are that the quality is sustained in the way to meet the needs of the customers, to assure the management of a firm as well as the customer that a certain level quality is being maintained and provided. Consistency in quality can be evaluated only if it is measured, and thus, several ways of quality audits can be implemented. Poor service taints the quality of a tourist experience but there are also uncontrollable factors which can affect quality, such as the weather. Moreover, interaction of the customers with each other influences the experience either negatively or positively. Providing truthful information, be it of the contents of a service or the weather conditions, is vital in creating realistic expectations in the mind of the client.

Regarding programme services and activities safety portrays one of the main concerns and therefore it should be especially cared for. In all the aspects regarding quality the training of staff plays a major role. As by the law the one who sells the service is liable of its quality to the client even if the service producer was another party, it is important for RTG Active to be convinced of the quality of its suppliers as well as of its own production.

It seems that the quality requirements of RTG Active for the partners are met, which mainly consider language skills and safety requirements. It is however recognised that small companies may not be able to offer language-skilled staff all-year-round whereat RTG Active can offer its support by providing translator help. In general, no quality management systems or documentation concerning quality except those required by authorities exist in the partners' operations. Quality is rather observed on spot by observing the customers and discussing with them, no feedback systems or systems to measure and record customer satisfaction exist among the partners. On the other hand such systems are not prerequisites for good service if things work properly, however they could help in maintaining good level of quality in service and to have an idea of how the employees deliver service as not always the management is there during the service delivery. RTG Active either has no system to measure quality of its partners, although some ways to observe and "feel" the service exist. Altogether, it seems that the trust in the partners is more important than having ways to "spy" them as, nonetheless, the customers will communicate any problems in the service delivery.

The major quality concern in the own operations of RTG Active relates to the training of interns given that they are delegated with tasks with a high level of responsibility. A need for developing training regarding interns especially was thus recognised. At the time of the interviews there was also a lack of a feedback system which by the time of finalising this thesis has, however, been implemented. All in all, if viewing at the quality requirements of MEK for products aimed at foreign customers, the weekly program products seem to qualify, not only in terms of safety and language they are provided in but also in terms of the way they are packaged and offered to the market; they have proper product descriptions, themes and so forth.

As for **developing the cooperation** the main target was increasing profitability of the weekly program for all parties. Not only would it bring extra revenues but increasing profitability could also foster cooperation and add trust in the network. Moreover, it could contribute to the quality as more resources could be appointed to the weekly program production due to increasing income. All in all, maintaining and improving quality e.g. by training was recognised as a need by RTG Active but also taking educational institutions into the network would be beneficial in terms of product development, in particular.

The network partners had some aspirations considering tailoring and combining of products and enhanced cooperation in group or incentive travel sector. In fact, RTG Active with the support of RTG Group is regarded as an important actor having enough resources to put to marketing nationwide to attract more groups to come to Vuokatti. In addition, meetings in a more regular basis or initiating joint meetings among all the relevant network partners, brainstorming and product testing were aspired. Setting clear objectives for the weekly program sales, measuring the sales and strategizing based on the figures was mentioned, as well. As for the weekly program itself it was suggested that the brochure should include the company names of the service providers and that there could be more seasonal variation in the weekly programs.

Summarising the Findings of the Weekly Program Comparison

The main idea of comparing the weekly programs in other destination was to find out whether there are operators with the same concept that RTG Active has or what kind of other practices are being implemented among the weekly program providers. The sample was very small and thus more investigation would be needed for profound results. However,

some conclusions can be drawn based on this little research. Firstly, weekly programs can be offered by certain destination organisations as well as programme service companies similar to RTG Active. Tourist organisations can either be the agent of the weekly program, i.e. they both market and sell it, or they only compile the weekly program for marketing purposes and the details of each individual service provider are given to be contacted separately.

Second, when comparing the weekly programs provided by certain companies they all seem to offer similar products only the practices differ. It seems rare that companies have guaranteed departures, which is, in fact, one of the main principles in the weekly program of RTG Active and thus a considerable way for RTG Active to differentiate itself. The number of departures per day varies greatly as well, assumedly due to the size of the company and destination. Only one of the companies investigated had equipment rental by the side of the programme services, although not in such a scope that RTG Active has.

The comparison only focused on winter programs, and thus, further investigation could be carried out concerning the summer weekly programs and whether they exist at all, knowing the fact that many destinations in the Finnish Lapland face plummeting visitor numbers towards the summer season. Overall the study could be taken extensively choosing a larger sample.

Reliability and Validity of the Study

All in all, the crucial points during the study considering reliability relate to the interviews done and the analysis of them. The interviews play the most important role in collecting data and also was the one with the most space for interpretation as the rest of the study merely concerned of collecting secondary data and compiling it in the appropriate form for the business operations manual. As for the interview survey there are certain issues that may have reduced the reliability of the gained results. Firstly, my own lack of experience as an interviewer may have affected the results as doing such unstructured interviews needs some experience. The main concern is whether the respondents were kept on the right track and lead in their answers to the right direction in case one did not understand the question well, for instance. In this regards, there could have been better performance, and ways to explain the questions in a consistent way could have been practiced.

Moreover, the questionnaires themselves were not completely compatible if considering the two versions of questionnaires drafted: one for RTG Active and one for the network part-

ners. The views of the two parties could not be completely compared regarding all the questions. Also, more attention could have been paid to arrange the questions of the questionnaires into a more logical order as a means to carry the conversations more fluently. Another issue when doing the interviews was that there were some questions that were clearly not well understood by many respondents that could have been better phrased. The unclear questions resulted to leading the respondents too much and perhaps not giving them a chance to say what they really wanted to or the answer was put into their mouth. Altogether, however, the data gathered was rich and diverse bringing up such issues that could not have been imagined to arise, nonetheless interesting for the study. The respondents were given freedom to express their thoughts in a structured way that resulted to a good quality of data despite some inefficiencies in the preparations and interview situations.

In brief, measures were taken in order to secure the reliability and validity of the study such as using a questionnaire to assure certain level of consistency in the interviews, recording the interviews and transcribing them into text form to have a reliable foundation to interpret the respondents' thoughts. In addition, when analysing the data the raw material was examined thoroughly not basing the interpretations on a few quotes only and to support the conclusions some quotes were added in the analysis. Obviously, there is always a chance qualitative data can be misinterpreted but by these measures the chance was reduced.

As for the other measures used in the study, there was no high risk of misinterpreting the information as it was mainly secondary data collection and used more or less as it is in compiling the business operations manual for RTG Active. However, to avoid any misinterpretations or misuse of the existing data the manual was given for the managing director of RTG Active to be read through and to comment on any defects in contents. Altogether, the study regarding cooperation and collecting data for the operations manual could be considered reliable and as the findings of the research are for internal use of RTG Active they are to be applied to its own operations only. No such contents were included that was not accepted by the commissioning party and the facts were checked by the party, as well.

Study Outcomes and Success of the Study

The importance of this thesis lied in the fact that RTG Active needed a written document of its operations and concept. The business operations manual was the final outcome of this study, in which the main findings along the research process were gathered into. It describes

some of the basic functions of RTG Active starting from the whole organisation of RTG and the role of RTG Active in it. It further describes the company culture, the weekly program and rental business concept, quality management, safety, and cooperation with the network partners.

Although not being an exhaustive document of all the functions of RTG Active this first version of the manual is however a good starting point for further work. Eventually, the manual even became a bit more diverse than was expected at first. Along the writing process it seemed necessary to add certain chapters such as the background information, basic details about the RTG Group and the company culture of RTG Active in order to compile a well-functioning entity even if not all the functions were included. The outcome of the writing process was finally good and satisfactory for the author as well as the commissioning party. The aim was to create a manual that can be utilised in practice by the commissioning party and the goal was reached.

Moreover, at the beginning of the research process it was, to some extent, unclear whether the interviews that were carried out would provide feasible information for the operations manual that was after all the main objective of the study. Also, the number of respondents was doubted; whether they were too many and whether each would have different kinds of views to contribute for the study. Finally, after the interviews were done, however, it was clear that the set of interviewees chosen was just right and each respondent had something new and different to offer for the study. In selecting the sample group it was vital to choose different kinds of operators; those who have started to cooperate with RTG Active only recently as well as those who have been in cooperation for a longer period. Obviously, providers of different types of services were chosen and the time the companies had been existing varied greatly as well. It could be concluded that the sampling was successful; the chosen respondents represented various operational backgrounds, and thus the responses were diverse offering rich data. Altogether, the sampling suited well for the study purposes.

Apart from gathering data for the business operations manual the perceptions over cooperation of the network partners and RTG Active could be compared and possible differences identified, although not many significant differences were found in the end. The biggest differences consider the attitudes and resources of the network partners to cooperation. In addition, suggestions to improve cooperation could be collected and also some useful practices

of the network partners were found considering the training of interns, for example, that could be useful for RTG Active as well.

All in all, this study was somewhat exploratory in nature mapping some of the vital functions of RTG Active, and thus the work as a whole was perhaps a bit too diverse and wide for a thesis. On one hand, the work could have been further limited but, on the other hand, the outcome would have not been as whole and feasible for the commissioning party if the study was not taken in its entirety. Some obstacles were still met while writing the manual as not all the functions of the company have systematic procedures and therefore difficulties arose in how to write down the processes if they are not consistent.

Apart from the manual compiled, a narrow comparison of the weekly programs in destinations other than Vuokatti was made. The comparison provides with insights to different ways of implementing a weekly program concept. Naturally, the investigation was done on a very narrow scale and thus no generalizations can be made based on the research. However, the different points or criteria examined have been set and a base for further investigation has been provided.

Suggestions for Development and Further Research

Regarding the operations of RTG Active itself the main points of development consider the consistency of quality and the role of the interns in it especially. The number of interns coming to RTG Active is big and the people change in short intervals and thus a clear and well-managed system for their training would be vital. Although each intern is appointed a supervisor it is not enough, if there are no clear practices repeated in case of each intern. There could be some kind of a handbook for interns describing the common practices, service quality and safety issues. For the time being, even the operations manual, the outcome of this thesis, could help in training the interns. Moreover, there could be so-called training lists that describe point by point the issue and practices that each intern needs to know and together with the supervisor the list could be gone through ticking the points that have been taught. This kind of a system would bring consistency in the training assuring that each intern has been provided the basic knowledge of the company operations, safety and quality in service delivery. Currently, there is a handbook for the personnel of the rental shop, however, the book could be more exhaustive considering guiding, as well.

Another point of development considers the weekly program itself. As it came up in the interviews, some of the weekly program producers wished for their company name to appear in the weekly program brochures. Moreover, the weekly program concept could perhaps be more developed to better correspond to the varying seasons, which would as well be comparable with the brand image of Vuokatti as an all-season destination. Already, the winter and summer weekly programs have been replaced with special short-season programs during the autumn holiday time and the Russian New Year. Perhaps, even more variety could exist according to the climate and target groups visiting Vuokatti at a particular time.

Currently, there is no clear system for product development and a follow-up system of the weekly program. Each year a new product is launched in the weekly programs and the sales figures of the old ones are followed up. Yet, a systematic way of observing the development of the weekly program products and their sales could be recommendable in order to examine the trends and product life cycles. In fact, product life cycle analysis is considered an important means of reviewing the position of a product and forecasting its future. Perhaps even research could be done on how the weekly programs have developed over time based on certain criteria such as price, length of the program, sales figures, and contents of the program.

As for the cooperation with the partner network, it seems that the roles of the parties are too obvious and somewhat old-fashioned if considering the network perspective. RTG Active is operating as a contractor and leads a set of sub-contracted partners whereas the network could be more interactive and even the various service providers could be in interaction with each other with the help of RTG Active. At the moment the relations are rather dyadic, i.e. RTG Active interacts with a lot of partners that are not involved with each other. Thereby, the role of RTG Active could be more of inspiring and a facilitator of meetings and encounters with all the service providers in the network, at least those involved in the weekly program production. The joint meetings could further facilitate idea generation and encourage product development. In fact, the need for a bigger number of encounters was recognised by the partners as well. Not only joint meetings but more regular meetings with only two parties involved could be as well suggested including for example brainstorming and product testing.

As for product development, taking the study institutions more effectively as a part of the network could provide with new ideas and development, too. In general, networking and

cooperation can be feasible as the generator of innovations through which the companies could create competitive advantage. In fact, it has been suggested that the best way to overcome the obstacles of innovation is through networking and cooperation in the tourism local destinations. Moreover, a local system of innovation in tourism is based on a specific local area or a local tourism destination in which several tourism-related actors relate and interact with the support of ancillary industries and external actors. In such an environment the capacity for innovation increases as a result of creation and diffusion of knowledge.

Altogether, RTG Active is well-located in a constantly developing destination surrounded by a variety of service providers and study institutions both important in educating future professionals of tourism and contributing to tourism research. Furthermore, Vuokatti is one of the few destinations in Finland where the tourism flow is somewhat consistent all-year-round. Consequently, the area provides a great starting point and potential for networking. Not only being vital for RTG Active itself networking provides benefits on a destination level as consumers are looking for well-functioning tourism systems and base their travel decisions on the exhaustive picture of a destination rather than a single company operation in a destination. The way RTG Active operates seems like the way providing the customer ease of purchasing products and a well-functioning system.

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List of Interviews

18.11.2010	The Managing Director of RTG Active
02.12.2010	A Programme service provider
03.12.2010	A Programme service provider
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07.12.2010	A Programme service provider

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Kysely RTG Activelle

Huomioi, että kysymyksissä esiintyvillä yhteistyökumppaneilla tarkoitetaan ainoastaan ohjelman-tuottajia ja yhteistyöllä yhteistyötä ohjelman-tuottajien kanssa.

Tyytyväisyys ja sitoutuneisuus yhteistyöhön

1. Millaisia ominaisuuksia RTG Activen yhteistyökumppaneilta odotetaan?
2. Millaisia erityisvaatimuksia on viikko-ohjelmaa tuottaville toimijoille?
3. Millaista sitoutuneisuutta yhteistyöhön RTG Active edellyttää kumppaneiltaan?
4. Minkä asioiden uskot vaikuttavan yhteistyöhalukkuuteen?
5. Mitä odotuksia RTG Activella on yhteistyöltä?
6. Miten kuvailisit odotuksien täyttymistä?
7. Miten arvioisit kommunikointia RTG Activen ja kumppaneiden välillä?
8. Miten arvioisit oppimista yhteistyön tuloksena (esim. toisten virheistä tai menestyksestä)?
9. Miten kuvailisit RTG Activen panostuksia yhteistyöhön?
10. Miten kuvailisit yhteistyökumppaneiden panostuksia yhteistyöhön?

Yhteistyön roolit, edut ja ongelmat

11. Miten kuvailisit RTG Activen roolia yhteistyössä?
12. Miten kuvailisit kumppaneiden roolia yhteistyössä?
13. Miten uskot kumppaneiden hyötyvän yhteistyöstä RTG Activen kanssa?
14. Mitä ongelmia uskot koituvan kumppaneille yhteistyöstä RTG Activen kanssa?
15. Mitä etuja uskot viikko-ohjelmassa (takuulähtö) mukana olosta koituvan kumppaneille?
16. Mitä ongelmia uskot viikko-ohjelmassa (takuulähtö) mukana olosta koituvan kumppaneille?
17. Miten arvioisit tuotekehitystä ja uusien ideoiden syntyä yhteistyön tuloksena?
18. Miten uskot yhteistyön vaikuttavan RTG Activen kumppaneiden markkinointiin?

Laadunhallinta

19. Millaisia laadunhallintaa koskevia kriteerejä RTG Activella on yhteistyökumppaneille?
20. Miten RTG Active seuraa yhteistyökumppaneiden tuotteiden laatua?
21. Muistatko tilanteita, joissa asiakas olisi tehnyt valituksen yhteistyökumppanin toimintaa koskien? Miten tilanteessa toimitettiin?
22. Mitä laatujärjestelmiä RTG Activella on käytössä?
23. Millä tavoin RTG Activella varmistetaan, että työntekijät/harjoittelijat tuntevat laatuvaatimukset?
24. Millä tavoin RTG Activella varmistetaan palvelun laadun säilyminen?
25. Miten RTG Active kerää palautetta asiakkailta?
26. Miten annettuun asiakas-palautteeseen reagoidaan?
27. Miten arvioisit osaavan ja kielitaitoisen työvoiman saatavuutta?

Yhteistyön kehittämismahdollisuudet

28. Mitä tavoitteita ja kehittämistarpeita RTG Activella on tulevaisuuden yhteistyötä koskien?
29. Miten yhteistyötä voitaisiin parantaa tuotekehitykseen ja oppimiseen liittyen?
30. Miten kommunikointia RTG Activen ja yhteistyökumppaneiden välillä voitaisiin kehittää?
31. Miten viikko-ohjelmaa voitaisiin kehittää?
32. Miten markkinointiyhteistyötä voitaisiin kehittää?

Kysely RTG Activen yhteistyökumppaneille

Taustatiedot

1. Mitä palveluja yritys tuottaa ja mikä niistä on tärkein (core-service):
2. Tuottaako palveluntarjoaja ohjelmat yksin, vai käyttääkö alihankkijoita (catering yms.)?
3. Yhteistyö RTG Activen kanssa alkoi vuonna _____
4. Mitkä ovat yrityksen tärkeimmät sesongit ja mitä toimintaa on muina aikoina?
5. Asiakaskohderyhmät tärkeysjärjestyksessä?
6. Toimiiko yrittäjä pääaikaisena vai osa-aikaisena yrittäjänä?
7. Vakituisten työntekijöiden määrä: _____ Sesonkeina työskentelee n. _____ hlöä
8. Kuvailkaa aikaisempia kokemuksianne yhteistyöstä matkailuyritysten kanssa?

Tyytyväisyys ja sitoutuneisuus yhteistyöhön

9. Mitkä asiat vaikuttivat RTG Activen kanssa yhteistyöhön ryhtymiseen?
10. Millaisia suhteita yrityksellänne on ulkomaille?
11. Miten yrityksenne suhteet ulkomaille tai niiden puute vaikuttivat yhteistyöhalukkuuteen?
12. Mitä tavoitteita ja toiveita yrityksellä oli yhteistyöhön ryhtyessä? Miten ne ovat täyttyneet?
13. Miten arvioisitte yrityksenne panostuksia yhteistyöhön? (Aikaa, investointeja, ideoita...)
14. Miten arvioisitte kommunikointia RTG Activen kanssa?
15. Miten arvioisitte oppimista yhteistyön tuloksena (esim. toisten virheistä tai menestyksestä)?
16. Onko yrityksenne TAKUULÄHTÖISIÄ tuotteita esillä RTG Activen viikko-ohjelmassa, tai onko niitä ollut aiemmin esillä?
17. Jos tuotteita on aiemmin ollut esillä, muttei enää, niin miksi?

Yhteistyön roolit, edut ja ongelmat

18. Miten kuvailisitte RTG Activen roolia yhteistyössä?

19. Miten kuvailisitte oman yrityksenne roolia yhteistyössä?
20. Mitä hyötyjä koette johtuvan yhteistyöstä RTG Activen kanssa
21. Mitä ongelmia koette johtuvan yhteistyöstä RTG Activen kanssa?
22. Mitä hyötyjä takuulähtöisessä viikko-ohjelmassa olosta on/oli yrityksellenne?
23. Mitä ongelmia takuulähtöisessä viikko-ohjelmassa olosta on/oli yrityksellenne?
24. Miten arvioisitte tuotekehitystä ja uusien ideoiden syntyä yhteistyön tuloksena?
25. Miten yhteistyönne RTG Activen kanssa vaikuttaa markkinointiinne?

Laadunhallinta

26. Mitä laatujärjestelmiä yrityksellänne on käytössä? (Laatukäsikirjat yms.)
27. Millä tavoin yrityksessänne varmistetaan, että työntekijät/harjoittelijat tuntevat laatuvaatimukset?
28. Millä tavoin yrityksessänne varmistetaan palvelun laadun säilyminen?
29. Miten yrityksenne kerää palautetta asiakkailta?
30. Miten annettuun asiakas-palautteeseen reagoidaan?
31. Miten arvioisitte osaavan ja kielitaitoisen työvoiman saatavuutta?

Yhteistyön kehittämismahdollisuudet

32. Mitä tavoitteita ja kehittämistarpeita yrityksellänne on tulevaisuuden yhteistyötä koskien?
33. Miten yhteistyöstä johtuvat ongelmat voitaisiin ratkaista?
34. Miten yhteistyötä voitaisiin parantaa tuotekehitykseen ja oppimiseen liittyen?
35. Miten kommunikointia RTG Activen kanssa voitaisiin kehittää?
36. Miten viikko-ohjelmaa voitaisiin kehittää? (Asiakaslähtöisyys, markkinointi...)
37. Millaisia kehittämistarpeita yrityksellänne on markkinointia koskien?
38. Miten markkinointiyhteistyötä voitaisiin kehittää?

Quickshot to the Weekly Programs in Some Other Finnish Destinations

	Vuokatti	Levi	Levi [2]	Ylläs	Ylläs [2]	Ruka-Kuusamo	Ruka-Kuusamo [2]
Weekly Program compiled by	RTG Active	Levi Tourist Info	Lapland Safaris	Lapland Safaris	Ylläs Adventures	Ruka-Kuusamo Travel Association	Rukapalvelu
Programs provided by	RTG Active's own production + sub-contracted products	Various producers	Mainly Lapland Safaris' own production. Catering related to programs + husky and reindeer programs are sub-contracted, some venues rented.	Assumedly as in Levi.	Husky and reindeer programs, one of the snowshoeing programs, skiing school and snow village programs sub-contracted, the rest is own production.	Various producers	Husky and reindeer products sub-contracted, the rest is own production.
Minimum number of participants	1 person Additionally, programs can be booked as per request for min. 4 p	2 persons	Guaranteed departures (1 exception, min. 2 adults in a husky-product)	2 adults	2 persons	Varies according to the producer. Mostly, min. 2-4 persons.	4 persons
Meeting point / Transfers	Meeting point usually at the Safari House from where transportation offered.	Meeting point at Levi Tourist Info or other place designated by the service provider.	The meeting point will be confirmed upon reservation. / Transfers from the Safari Club to the place of the service.	The meeting point will be confirmed upon reservation.	Transfers from and to the accommodation places in Ylläs are included.	Designated by the producer.	All program departures from Rukapalvelu Safari House at the Ruka Centre.
Variety and types of products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2 choices on week days, 1 departure on Sat and Sun ▪ 11 choices of programs in total ▪ Snowmobile, ice-floating, ice-fishing, ice-skating on natural ice, husky, farm-visit, jeep tour, Finnish winter activities for kids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2-3 choices per day ▪ 17 choices of programs in total ▪ Reindeer ride, ice-fishing, snowmobile, horse-back riding, dog-sled & husky, snowshoe, carting, treasure hunt (for kids) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1-5 choices per day ▪ 8 choices of programs in total ▪ Snowmobile, ice-fishing, snow-village visit, husky, snowshoe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1-4 choices per day ▪ 10 choices of programs in total ▪ Snowmobile, ice-fishing, husky, snowshoe, reindeer ride, cross-country skiing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2-4 choices per day ▪ 17 choices of programs in total ▪ Snowmobile, husky, reindeer, snowshoe, skating on natural ice, ice-fishing, cross-country skiing, winery&sheep farm visit, snow village visit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Several choices per day ▪ 26 choices of programs in total ▪ Snowmobile, reindeer ride, ice-floating in rapids, husky, horse-back riding, cooking class, farm-visits, Lappish buffet, chocolate fondue, ice-carting, Santa's cottage (for kids) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Majority of programs run on Mon – Sat ▪ 10 choices of programs in total ▪ Snowmobile, snowshoe, ice-fishing, husky, reindeer ride, reindeer farm visit, ice-floating in rapids
Reservations	The previous day by latest through RTG Active, accommodation receptions	The previous day by latest through Levi Tourist Info.	Prior to the departure through Lapland Safaris or hotel receptions.	Prior to the departure through Lapland Safaris.	The previous day by latest through Ylläs Adventures or at hotel receptions	The previous day by latest through the service provider.	The previous day by latest through Rukapalvelu.

*Lapland Safaris has an activity search engine and online booking for all the weekly program products in all Lapland Safaris' destinations.

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