

THESIS

Niina Mattila 2011

**CO-CREATING A TOURISM PRODUCT:
CASE ST. LAPLAND**



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Thesis

**CO-CREATING A TOURISM PRODUCT:
CASE ST. LAPLAND**

Niina Mattila

2011

Commissioned by: St. Lapland / Aurora's Trademark

Supervisor: Teija Tekoniemi-Selkälä

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The objective of this thesis was to redevelop a tourism product package, Rivers and Trails, for the export group St. Lapland. The original product was created to increase the customer flows for the summer and the autumn seasons. The purpose for the redevelopment was to improve the product to be more meaningful for the customers.

The current situation of the product was studied using qualitative research methods; observation and interviews. The observation was conducted on the Study Tour for Leisure Travel Professionals in Kuusamo after which four representatives of mid-European tour operators were interviewed. Based on the study results development ideas were suggested to improve the product. The Product Developer's Handbook created as a result of the Tourism Integrated Product Development -project was used as a theory basis for this thesis.

The research findings show that small family-owned companies are highly respected in the tourism field. Well organized products and paying attention to the customers personally contribute to their product quality. However, the customers require a degree of privacy and more choices to activities. The redevelopment of the Rivers and Trails -product began with specifying the theme, unifying the product and creating more options. The value of the different product elements were increased with small improvements and procedure changes. The thesis also suggests some product development tools for St. Lapland to better create possibilities to meaningful experiences.

Key words Co-Creation, Networks, Product Development, Tourism Integrated Product Development

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Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli kehittää St. Lapland-vientirenkaille työharjoitteluni aikana kokoamaa matkailutuotepakettia Rivers and Trails. Alkuperäinen tuote kehitettiin kasvattamaan asiakasvirtaa kesä- ja syyskaudella. Kehittämisen tavoitteena oli luoda tuotteesta asiakkaalle elämyksiä mahdollistava kokonaisuus.

Lähtökohtana opinnäytetyössä oli selvittää Rivers and Trails -tuotteen nykytila asiakkaan näkökulmasta ja löytää kehitysideoita tuotteen parantamiseksi. Opinnäytetyössä käytettiin menetelminä havainnointia ja haastattelua. Havainnointi toteutettiin eurooppalaisille matkanjärjestäjille järjestetyllä tutustumismatkalla Kuusamossa syksyllä 2010 ja matkan loppuksi tehtyihin haastatteluihin osallistui neljä keskieuropalaista matkanjärjestäjän edustajaa. Tietoperustana opinnäytetyössä käytettiin Matkailun Integroitu Tuotekehitys -projektin luomaa Matkailun tuotekehittäjän käsikirjaa.

Opinnäytetyön tulokset osoittivat, että pienet perheyrietykset ovat korkealle arvostettuja matkailussa. Perheyrietysten tuotteet ovat laadukkaita koska asiakkaat pystyvät huomioimaan yksilöllisesti. Asiakkaat toivovat kuitenkin enemmän omaa rauhaa ja valinnanvaraa aktiviteetteihin. Uudelleen kehittämisessä lähdettiin liikkeelle tarkentamalla tuotteen teemaa, eheyttämällä tuotekokonaisuutta ja luomalla asiakkaille vaihtoehtoja. Tuotteen eri elementteihin asumiseen, ruokailuun ja aktiviteetteihin pyrittiin tuomaan pienillä muutoksilla uutta ilmettä ja lisäarvoa. St. Lapland:lle suositellaan myös verkostolle hyödyllisiä tuotekehityksen työkaluja, jotka auttavat mahdollistamaan elämyksen syntymisen tuotteissa.

Avainsanat kansatuottajuus, Matkailun Integroitu Tuotekehitys, tuotekehitys, verkostot

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1 INTRODUCTION

St. Lapland is a group of companies that are networking in a form of an export group. It is marketing and selling accommodation, restaurant and program services of eight small tourism companies in the Kuusamo area. In spring 2010 I completed my advanced practical training for them during which I got to know the companies and their production. The final task of my training was to use the skills and knowledge I had gained to create a product package. The Rivers and Trails-product is a weeklong holiday package including accommodation, meals and one activity per day. This product was compiled from the existing product elements to increase the customer flow in the summer and autumn seasons.

The product development process of this thesis is a continuum of my practical training period. The thesis project was outlined to concern the new product package. The thesis aims to find out how the customers perceive St. Lapland, Kuusamo as destination and Rivers and Trails -product. The goal is to redevelop the Rivers and Trails - product to be more meaningful and appealing from the customer point of view. The main research question is how to create a theme based meaningful network product. This is answered by studying the attractiveness and competitiveness of Kuusamo as a destination, the current state of the Rivers and Trails – product, how should the Rivers and Trails - product be improved / redeveloped to be more meaningful and credible, and what type of co-creation tools can be recommended for St. Lapland.

As a baseline for the product development, the results of Tourism Integrated Product Development – project, that offers a new holistic approach to product development particularly in tourism, is used. The approach focuses on small enterprises and brings the product development closer to the everyday practices of those (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010).

This holistic approach suggests that product development happens in encounters with different actors and is affected not only by the entrepreneurial ways of acting but also by the local and the consumer ways of acting. This creates a new concept of co-creation which is introduced in the handbook. Co-creation involves all the stakeholders in the development

and production of the tourism products. Also, the traditional line process of product development is questioned and an ongoing process of developing ideas, conceptualizing and encounters with constant evaluation is proposed. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.) The theoretical part of this thesis is divided according to the three perspectives that compose the basis for the new product development process: the operational environment, the product and the customership.

The Rivers and Trails -product was tested on the Study Tour for Leisure Travel Professionals in Kuusamo, in which four representatives of different tour operators from Europe and one journalist evaluated the product. The representatives of the tour operators were interviewed after the Study Tour. I was also on the trip as a participant observer in order to examine the current state of the product and how the participants of the trip experienced the product. Observation is used as an information acquisition method when both explicit and tacit information is required (Dewalt–Dewalt 2002, 8). Evaluation of the current product was done according to the interview and observation results after which I gave my proposal on the development ideas.

The terms used in this thesis are referred in the text as follows:

- St. Lapland Network – St. Lapland
- The new product package – Rivers and Trails -product
- The Tourism Integrated Product Development Approach – the holistic approach
- Destination Management Company – DMC
- The representatives of the tour operators – the tour operators

2 HOLISTIC APPROACH TO TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND CO-CREATION

2.1 Tourism Integrated Product Development and Co-Creation

Tourism product development has not received a lot of attention and very few studies have been made concerning the subject. Traditional product development model describes a line process that starts from the idea and ends when the product is launched. (Komppula–Boxberg 2005, 97.) It is based on the manufacturing industries and the practices of large companies. Tourism is a dynamic industry and the tourism product is seen as a multidimensional process. In addition many tourism companies are not big and complex, but individual entrepreneurs and small enterprises. Hence the traditional product development models are not applicable in tourism. (García-Rosell–Haanpää–Kylänen–Markuksela 2007, 455-446, 449.)

As a result of the Tourism Integrated Product Development –project that was conducted in co-operation with Rovaniemi University of Applied Sciences, Lapland University and Lapland Centre of Expertise for the Experience Industry between 2008 and 2011, a new holistic approach to tourism product development was introduced. The holistic approach brings the product development closer to the practices of everyday life of companies. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.) It provides a model that is based on the practical work and practices of small tourism companies; “from practice to theory” (Pulju–Silvån 2010, 18).

The holistic approach is based on the notion that a tourism product and a meaningful experience, that nowadays is an important part of the product, happen in the encounters of the different actors involved in the product; the tourism service providers, the customers and the locals. The encounters always happen somewhere, a real place or a virtual place, and they are influenced by numerous factors such as social and cultural elements. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.)

“Product development is a socio-cultural practice - - -“(García-Rosell et al. 2007, 449) that requires not only the recognition of the company values but

the customers and the local people of the destination. As a tourism product is shaped by different actors, the product development happens in the center of the different ways of acting (see Figure 1). The local ways of acting include for instance the local culture and history, present way of life and special features. The entrepreneurial ways of acting are about the values and practices and network relations. The consumers' way of acting is affected by global trends, consumer and travel behavior, feelings and experiences. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.)

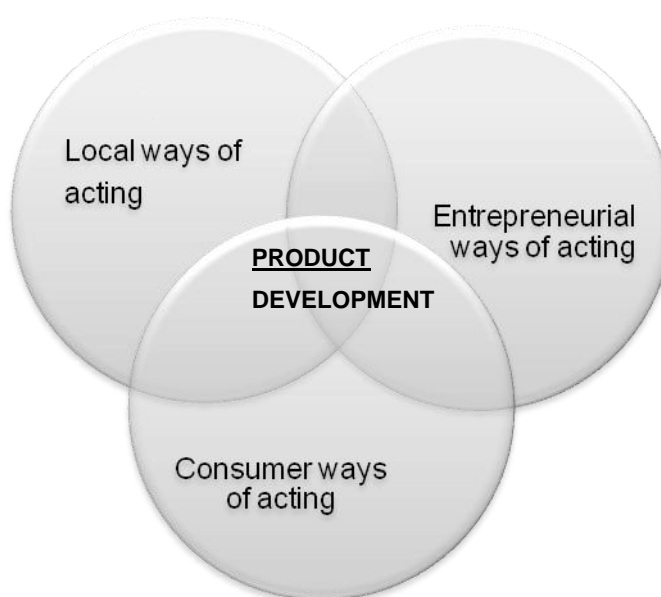


Figure 1. Operational Environment in Product Development (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010)

A successful company is continuously up-dated. Product development can refer to new product ideas and product selection broadening but also to small improvements to existing products. (Komppula – Boxberg 2005, 93.) The new Product Developer's Handbook suggests that the product development should be a comprehensive process that is part of the ongoing development activity of the whole company. The process includes developing ideas, conceptualizing and encountering, which all take place simultaneously (see Figure 2). (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.)

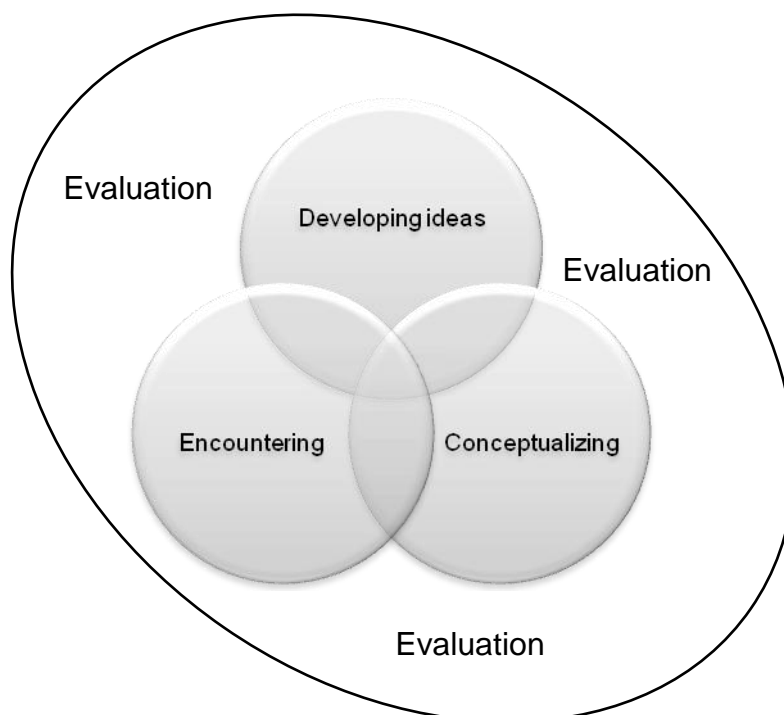


Figure 2. Product Development Process According to Holistic Approach (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010)

The process may start at any point and is an ongoing circle where evaluation is continuous. Developing ideas is a phase where the ideas for new products are generated. There are a lot of different types of developing tools that are created for helping in this process. Yet, the development does not always start from the new ideas. The holistic approach emphasizes the encounters in the process and also states that a tourism product is never ready. The nature of the tourism product as a dynamic service causes it to be different every time (Komppula–Boxberg 2005, 10–11). Therefore the involvement of different actors may disclose new ideas or a need for product development. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.)

Conceptualizing is an essential part of the product development process. The idea has to be developed into a tangible product. In tourism and service industry this means that the product needs a product concept, a product content and a product description (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010; Verhelä – Lackman 2003, 77–79). Often there are a lot of opportunities for both tourists and the service providers but the demand and the supply do not meet. The tourists do not think to ask and hereby the suppliers do not think to offer. From the experience especially small scale entrepreneurs have a lot of potential products and ideas of what could be organized but without productization it is not possible to sell them. For instance, domestic travel

suffers from the lack of clear and distinct packages. Tourists buy transfers, accommodation and services separately. (Komppula – Boxberg 2005, 92.)

The new holistic approach to the tourism product development emphasizes that the operational environment, the product and the customership are not distinct elements but intertwine together. Consequently the views of the employees, co-operators and the surrounding area are involved in the product development. This brings up a new actor: co-creator. In simple words: product development is done together with all the stakeholders. More broadly the objective of co-creation is to develop practices and products, and realize and produce them in mutual understanding. Co-creation provides the overall basis for the new holistic approach to tourism product development. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010; Pulju–Silvàn 2010, 8-9.)

The new paradigm in tourism goes more and more towards the idea in which everyone eventually comes in touch with tourism in some way. The tourist already evolves in the natural environment of the person, not in the tourism destination. The person might not leave the place but when there are others traveling in, that place becomes the destination and involves the person in tourism as a host. (Binkhorst 2006.)

Co-creation brings up a wider perspective to co-operation and it can be studied from three dimensions. First dimension is the interaction between the company and the customers. The thinking has changed from the customer oriented product development where the customers are only a resource of information, to customers being key actors in the process. (Roser et al. 2009, 4; Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.) The customers can be seen as the experts of the services they are consuming and thus have a role in the development process. Co-creation is a connection between people, collaboration and co-creativity rather than interaction between a consumer and a product or involvement and co-production. "Customer is always a co-creator of value". (Roser et al. 2009, 6, 9.)

The second dimension of co-creation is dialoging inside and between companies. Well-being and harmony of the entire work community is important. In addition valuable information is stored as tacit knowledge within the different employees of the company. For instance guides and cleaners

have a different relationship with customers than an invisible sales person and thus have a different insight to the practices of customers. Co-creation happens also in interaction between different businesses or within the supply chains. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.)

The third dimension is the local population. The tourism product is experienced within the socio-cultural environment where the local culture and way of life is involved. Proceeding from the company centered perspective co-creation happens also between the customer and the local. The encounter happens when the customer steps into the locals' living environment. The present day technology enables also virtual encounters both prior and after the tourism product actually takes place. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010; García-Rosell et al. 2007, 449,453.)

Considering the different dimensions of co-creation there are no longer single companies or lone actors in tourism. Through "extended enterprises" there are enhanced networks of different stakeholders intertwined together. (Prahalad–Ramaswamy 2000.)

2.2 Operational Environment

Operational environment is where a tourism product is produced and consumed. The product happens somewhere and so the product development process does not happen in isolation either. Table 1 shows the change in the perception of operational environment between the traditional and the holistic approach. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.)

Table 1. Alternative Approaches to Operational Environment (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010)

	A Traditional Approach to Operational Environment	A Holistic Approach to Operational Environment
Perception of the Operational Environment	Profiling within traditional industries.	Profiling across the industries.
Roles of the Actors	Producer produces and consumer consumes; enterprise centricism and individualism.	The roles of producers and consumers are mixing; multi-centricism and communality.
Threats and Opportunities of the Operational Environment	Change is the only constant; reaction.	Operational environment both changes and remains the same; foresight.

The operational environment is thought as a starting point of the whole product development process (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010). It is not an external element but it is in connection with the company. The operational environment defines in what kind of space and circumstances the company operates and with whom. There is both change and continuity in the operational environment. (Pulju–Silvàn 2010, 18.) Product development happens in certain circumstances but at the same time the circumstances can be altered with the product development (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010).

The operational environment gives a company an advantage which makes it differ from the other companies. It offers a chance for uniqueness. Meaningful experiences are created by having the company's identity shown in the products. (Pulju–Silvàn 2010, 18.) Thinking has been changed from industry centered to cross the different sectors. One does not have to settle for the traditional competition setup but think outside the box. Instead of being the restaurant, program service or accommodation provider, the company could offer services for well-being, hope, romanticism or freedom. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.)

Using the global trends is a good way to specialize. The practices or products are not meant to be copied but to adopt the idea of them and adding it to the local way of doing. Modifying the global into local creates "glocalism". (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010; Koch–Savir 2004.) However, the global should not become entirely local. Cultures change all the time. As long as there are people in interaction with each other the local culture little by little changes towards the non-local. (García–Rosell et al. 2007, 453-454.)

The operational environment always involves actors which are not to be forgotten in product development. The traditional service provider - customer layout is not valid in tourism businesses of today. The roles are melding together and the limits and the meanings of different actors are dissipating. Experiences are felt and created together and the products are made situation specifically in co-creation with different actors. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.) The operational environment of a tourism product does not exclude the local environment and therefore it is a place

where different business and non-business actors meet each other (García–Rosell et al. 2007, 454).

Operational environment can be a threat with seasonality and economic and environmental changes but entrepreneurs, that are proactive rather than reactive when forced, can change these threats into opportunities. Product development can be used for adjusting but it can also be a chance to seize the opportunity. It is important to identify the stable elements and anticipate the changes in the operational environment and utilize them. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.)

2.3 Product

2.3.1 Tourism Product

A tourism product and a tourism service are hard to distinguish from each other. For a customer a tourism product is always a service or rather a compiled set of services. (See Table 2 for the three essential features of services.) The customer sees the whole trip as one product that begins with the planning of the trip and ends when the customer returns back home. Thus the customer may see the whole destination as one product. It can be a country, region or even a single cottage. (Komppula–Boxberg 2005, 12.) In turn the producer might see a product as a single service such as transfer or accommodation, which is only a part of the customer's whole product. However, it is important for a producer to recognize the whole tourist product to be able to contribute to the perception the customer creates of the destination. (Verhelä–Lackman 2003, 15.) At the end of the day the competing enterprises are reaching for the same goal: attracting customer to the destination (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010).

Table 2. Three Essential Features of Services. (Grönroos 2001, 81.)

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Services are processes that consist of activities or sets of activities and not items. 2. Services are produced and consumed at least somewhat simultaneously. 3. The customer is somehow participating to the service process. |
|--|

The traditional definition of the tourism product is fixed. The new perspective states that the start and the end of the tourism product as well as the different actors are vacillating. The tourism product should be understood as a process that is constantly evolving. (García–Rosell et al. 2007, 449.)

The holistic approach emphasizes the importance of the product to the customer as in which way the product is exactly right to this particular customer and how the product can be meaningful in the customer's life. At the same time the product has to speak to the partners and give reasons to the employees to work with the product and the company. Table 3 provides an overview of the alternative approaches to the product. The message of the product is in its story which unifies the product elements together. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.) The story is not only about the tales told around the campfire but the values and message that the company wants to tell people. Product is the core of the entrepreneurship and product development is building up the identity of the product. (Pulju–Silvàn 2010, 31.)

Table 3. Alternative Approaches to Product (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010).

	A Traditional Approach to Product	A Holistic Approach to Product
The Message of the Product	Product as means to satisfy needs: exchange value. A product is technically impeccable, of good quality and safe.	Products are means to comprehend and fulfill oneself, join a community or change; use value, instrumental value, symbolic value. A product is a significant, meaningful experience that can improve people's lives.
The Processes of the Product	Product development happens in disconnected processes; a product is ready when it has a product card or when it is introduced to customers; procedures are taken for granted.	A product is co-created in a continuous process that is not entirely ready; new procedures are adopted.
The Nature of the Product	A product is a service package by a single company or a loose network; product elements are unattached and they do not have a common story; cost-based pricing; the product is experienced in one go.	A product is a common story based on a close network co-operation or of a destination; pricing according to the story of the product; the product has a multidimensional character, many layers and can be adapted e.g. to different season.

The new product development model relies on the idea in which the product development should be done with the same actors which are involved in producing the product. And even though the product might have slightly different meanings to everyone the story should hold no matter who is talking about it. The story lives before and after the product has been consumed. The social media has enabled customers to share their experiences with each other through Facebook, Tripadvisor and other similar virtual places. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.)

Product development is not a distinct action in a company. The holistic approach sees it going hand in hand with the development of the practices in the company. Product development begins with the small improvements to the products and small changes in the practices of the company. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.) A tourism product is never ready. The

holistic approach encourages entrepreneurs for innovativeness and redevelopment of the products. (Pulju–Silvàn 2010, 32.)

The story and the quality of the product have to be considered also when pricing the products. Contemplation has to be focused on the amount people are ready to pay for certain types of products and how much value they give for the story. The most important aspect of pricing is to keep the end-price to the customer always the same. Even if there are intermediaries such as tour operators or incoming agencies in between, the customer must have the same price no matter where the product is bought. This requires that possible commissions are included to the published prices. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.)

The common core is essential in the product and basic issues such as safety are regarded as self-evidence. Without the common core the story or the theme of the product cannot serve its purpose. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.) Quality is one essential feature of the product. Tourism product again differentiates itself from the traditional consumer product as service quality is subjective. The quality is developed only when the customers experience meets with the expectations or exceeds them. The service provider should be able to full fill the promises that are given by, for example, marketing. The customer's vision about the service, however, is not only built on the image a company wants to give to the customers. The expectations are affected by the socio demographic factors of the customers, the previous experiences, the company, the price of the service and for example the mood the customer is in at the time. (Komppula–Boxberg 2005, 42, 47 – 48.)

The customers have a lot of different expectations. Not always can the customers put their expectations into words, when they are called fuzzy expectations. Explicit expectations are very clear to customers and implicit expectations are so obvious that the customers do not intentionally think of them. (Komppula–Boxberg 2005, 49.)

Total perceived quality is formed in synergy of those expectations and the experience (see Figure 3). Experienced quality has two dimension; technical and functional quality. Technical quality refers to what is received. This is the

actual product or service such as transfer from place A to place B or customer receiving a hotel room. The functional quality assesses the process and answers the question how the product or service is received. The functional quality is affected by the behavior and the appearance of the service provider. The customers often react also to the where factor, the service environment, and the other customers or actors that are present during the service process. (Grönroos 2000, 100-105.)

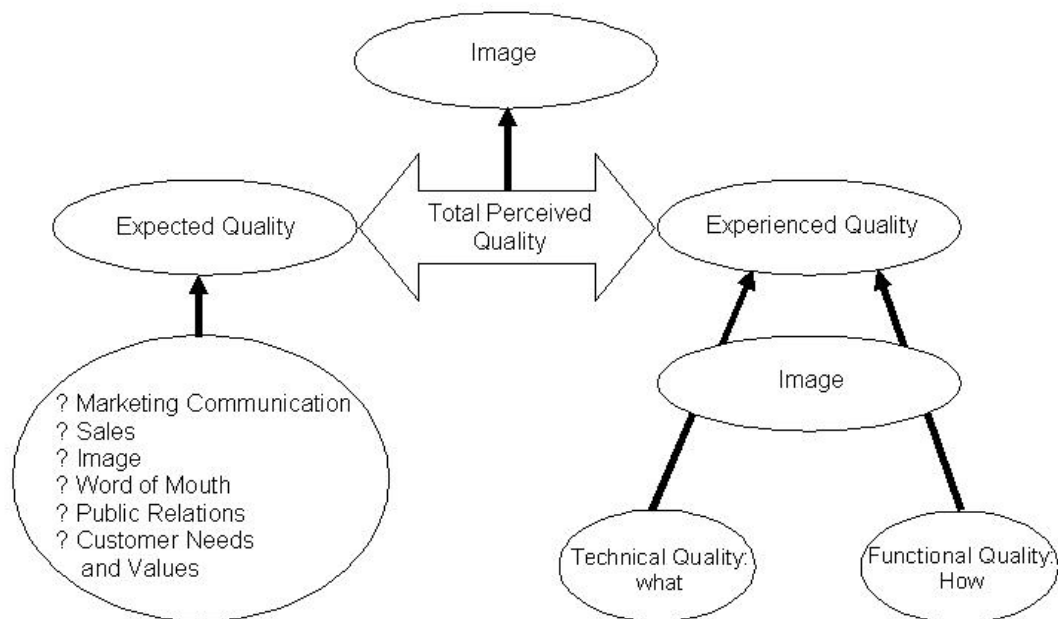


Figure 3. Total Perceived Quality Model (Grönroos 2000, 105)

2.3.2 Meaningful Experience

The word meaningful experience is used more and more in marketing tourism products. Service providers triumph is to provide meaningful experiences instead of just arranging an experience. (Tarssanen 2009, 8.) A meaningful experience is a multisensory, memorable, positive and individual experience. The difference between an experience and a meaningful experience can be a line drawn into water. A meaningful experience is based on emotions when an experience is built on knowledge. (Komppula–Boxberg 2005, 26-31.)

Pine and Gilmore (1998) present a meaningful experience in four dimensions according to how actively or passively a customer is taking part in the meaningful experience and if the customer is mentally or physically involved. The experience realms are illustrated in Figure 4. The customer can be either just observing and not having any impact on the happening, or then actively creating the meaningful experience. Another focus point is whether the customer is only absorbing the situation and surroundings or really empathizing and immersing to the event. (Komppula–Boxberg 2005, 29; Pine–Gilmore 1998, 101-102.)

Entertainment, like watching television, is commonly something that one passively follows but does not empathize on. When one is actively participating in, for example, a canoeing course but not particularly immersed, the situation is educational. Escapist experiences arise when one is actively realizing the experience, putting one's soul into it and immersing in the situation. In a more passive form this experience transforms from escapist to esthetic, multisensory observation. A comprehensive meaningful experience can be achieved in the middle when all the dimensions have been considered. (Tarssanen 2009, 10.)

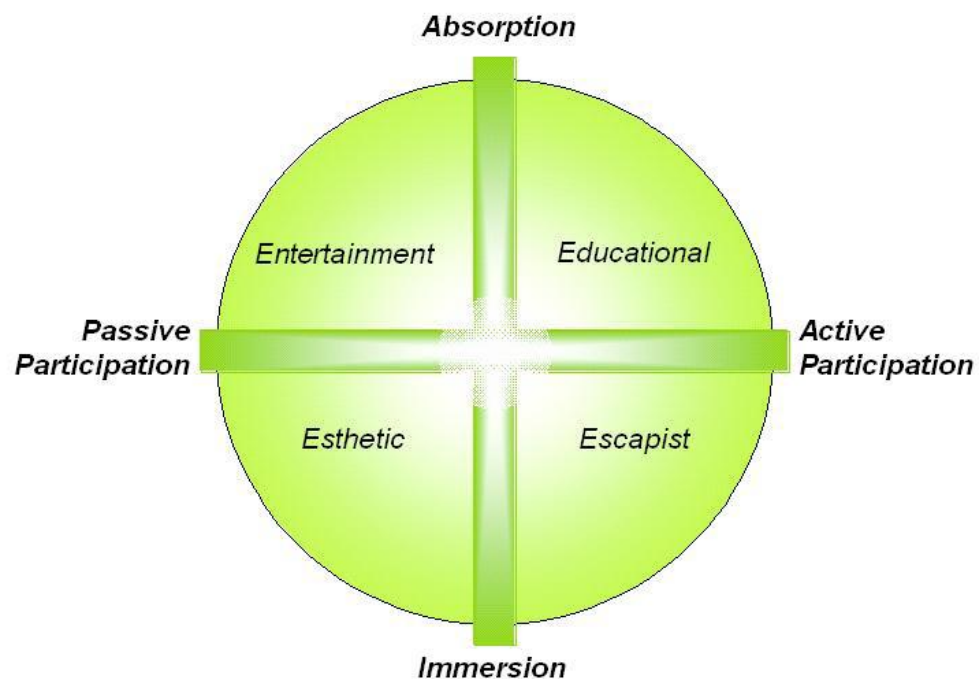


Figure 4. Experience Realms (Pine - Gilmore 1998, 102)

At best the meaningful experience can offer one a personal change but it is not something that can be guaranteed. The service and the experience can, however, contain elements that enable the meaningful experience. The experience triangle (see Figure 5) presents the ideal tourism product with the meaningful experience elements and the level of the customer's experience. (Tarssanen 2009, 11-12.)

The elements for meaningful experience are individuality, authenticity, story, multisensory perception, contrast and interaction. Individuality means something unique but in tourism products and service it can also be flexibility and possibilities to tailor the products according to customers' needs. Authenticity comes from the genuine culture and life style in the area. However, in the end the product is authentic only if the customer sees it credible and authentic. Story holds the whole product together and gives a reason for the experience. A good product stimulates all senses and thus upholds the theme. Meaningful experience can be achieved if the product is in contrast with the customers' everyday life. Thereby they can experience something new and deviant and find a new perspective of themselves in foreign environment. Interaction is good communication with the guide and other participants. Meaningful experience can be experiences also alone but the sense of community is important and contributes to the experience being acceptable and appreciated. (Tarssanen 2009, 12-15.)

A good tourism product involves all the elements listed above in all the levels of experience the customer goes through to reach the meaningful experience. The first level is motivation level where the interest and the expectations are created through for example marketing. Next is the physical level where the customer experiences the product with all senses. Customers acquire good and safe feeling when the physical needs are taken care of; they are not too cold or too hot, not hungry or thirsty, unless it is about the extreme experiences. On intellectual level the customers decide whether they like the experience. The customers should learn something new or develop new knowledge consciously or unconsciously. If all the elements have been considered in the previous level the customer is likely to have an emotional response to the product in emotional level and thus have the meaningful experience. The last level is mental level where the strong

emotional reaction can lead to a personal change in the customer's physical state, mind or lifestyle. (Tarssanen 2009, 15-16.)

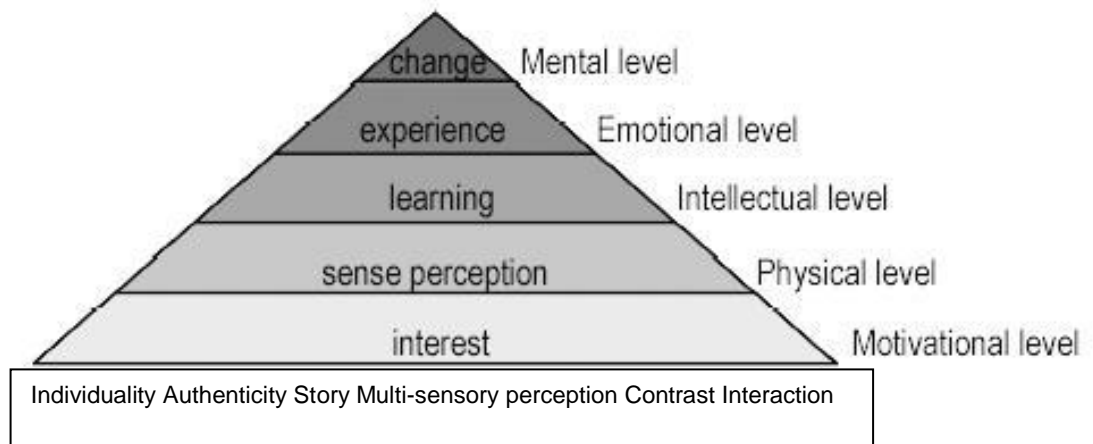


Figure 5. Experience Triangle (Tarssanen 2007, 11)

2.4 Customership

A tourism product does not happen in isolation, as stated in the chapter of the operational environment. Everything around the process in which the product happens alters the product and forms it situation specific. Same way the different actors around and involved in the product may have an effect to it. Perception of the customership and a customer in tourism is not as simple as it has been presented in the past (see Table 4). (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.)

Table 4. Alternative Approaches to Customership (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010).

	A Traditional Approach to Customership	A Holistic Approach to Customership
Perception of the Customership	Traveler, emphasis on nationalities; target groups are defined according to what people are like; mind and brains; individual.	Diverse, emphasis on lifestyles; target groups are defined according to what people feel and do, a human being as a whole; a member of a community.
The Role of a Customer	Passive follower who gives feedback; a onetime visitor; consumer.	Equally active participant; loyal customer; co-creator.
Customer and Market Information	Quantitative research information; surveys used in asking from the customer; focus on what the customers say.	Rich versatile information from different sources; focus on what the customers do.

The tourism products are produced and consumed in co-operation and co-creation with different actors within the operational environment. The tourist is not the only customer for the product but for example the employers, the locals and other service providers can be seen as customers. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.) The focus should not be on the traditional concepts such as company and customer or tourist and host but on the human being. There should be only “- - - a holistic network of stakeholders connected in experience environments - - - “ as each human being can become a tourist or become involved in tourism in one's own experience environment. (Binkhorst 2006.)

The traditional concept of customer is not uncomplicated either when studied more closely. A person who experiences the product is the end-customer but the customer can be from the distribution channel such as a tour operator. A tourism company may also have another company as a customer and then the paying customer is again different to the consuming customer. (Verhelä-Lackman 2003, 67-68.)

One product can have many different customers and thus have different meanings for different customers. For a tourist place X is a chance to experience something exotic, for a tour operator it is an activity venue and a local may consider it something to be proud of in the hometown. In product

development many faces of the customer is needed to be considered to maintain a functional co-operation within all the actors in long term. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.)

The different actors should be part of the product development process. The customers', as traditionally thought, but also all the other actors' involvement right from the beginning is beneficial for creating value and bringing up individuality and customization. The sense of community and sharing the experiences are valuable tools in product development. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.)

The customer behavior has changed. In product development it is important to acknowledge that the tourists have become more and more experienced and active. They want to participate in creating their own meaningful experiences. In product development it is essential to be able to identify the customers and their roles in the process. (Pulju-Silvàn 2010, 40.) When perceiving the customers the integrative aspects are considered. The concentration is not on what the people are like but what they do. It is not beneficial to find differences between nationalities but focus on the mutual actions such as sleeping or eating. The same applies with the ways of traveling; individuals, groups, conference or incentive travel. Simplifying the markets the product development is made easier. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.)

Customer information as well as market information is an important element in developing products. When creating meaningful experiences it is vital to hear the customers but if only surveys are used, the data might not be thoroughly reliable. Readymade surveys only give answers to the topics the service providers consider important. A product is produced in an encounter of different actors in the operational environment and thus the product development and collecting customer information should involve them all. Valuable information is found from, inter alia, guides, cleaners and waiters who share the experiences with the customers and are able to observe the behaviors and actions in the actual situations. Different means to collect information provide different type of information. It is important to determine what kind of information is essential for the product development and thus

find the suitable method for collecting the needed information. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.)

New ideas for product development will not come alone from the customer information. Market information and new global trends are to be collected and studied carefully. A wise company ignores the hierarchy levels and considers the expertise of, for example, the guides that usually are interested on what they are doing and follow the development of their interest in the world. The knowledge of markets of different sales persons and tourism contributors is also valuable. Small companies does not have to use stupendous amount of time and resources separately on the matter but with networking share the work load and information and thus gain better benefits. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.)

3 OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF RIVERS AND TRAILS – PRODUCT

3.1 Kuusamo as a Tourism Destination

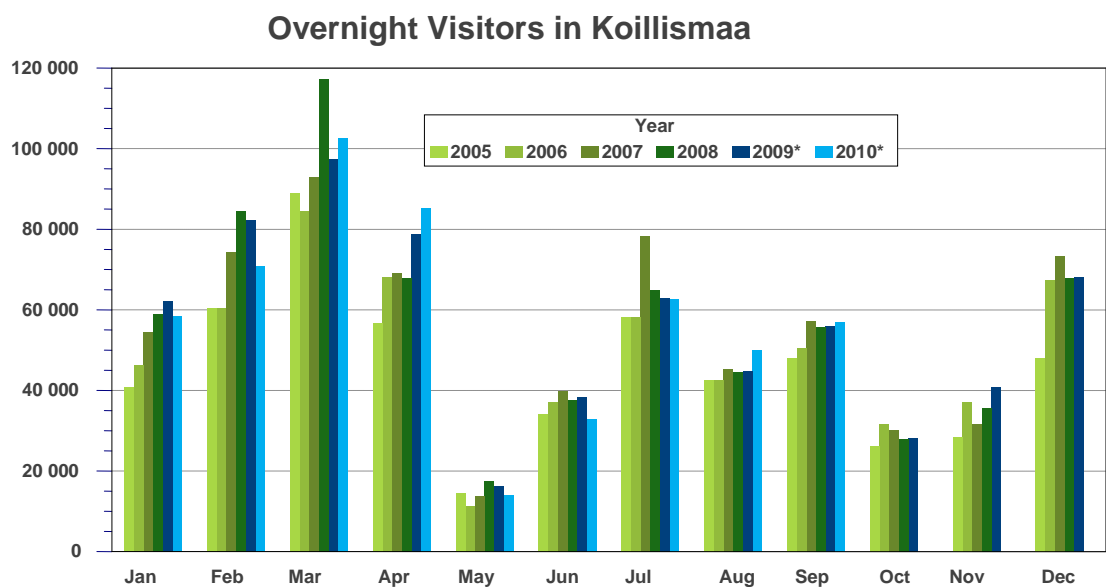
Kuusamo is located in the Koillismaa sub-region of Northern Ostrobothnia. In 2007 Kuusamo was inhabited by approximately 17 000 people and the population density was 3.4 persons per land square kilometer. The total area of Kuusamo is 5809 km² of which waters covers 830km² and forest 4330km². (Kuusamon Kaupunki 2007, 1.) From the plateau area the waters flow into five directions and the nature is very variable and rich making it one of the major attractions of the area. (Ruka-Kuusamo Matkailuyhdistys ry. 2010; Kuusamon Kaupunki 2007, 1.)

Kuusamo has lots of different types of tourist sites. Ski center Ruka, with its various services, draws a lot of visitors during winter season. There are many snow activities to do, both organized and independent. Summer season is dominated by nature attractions of Oulanka National Park, Kitka- and Oulanka rivers, different hiking routes and lakes for fishing. There are around 2000 km of different kinds of routes in the Kuusamo area. For instance there are over 500 kilometers of cross country skiing routes, 600 kilometers of snowmobile, 160 kilometers of hiking and 350 kilometers of canoeing routes. (Ruka-Kuusamo Matkailuyhdistys ry. 2010.) In addition Kuusamo offer cultural attractions, such as a museum, a Town church and a Tourism center Karhuntassu. People who are interested in local history or the war era can visit memorials and the ones who are interested in ceramics can find several small ceramic studios (Mattila 2010b) in Kuusamo. Kuusamo does not lack of festivals and events to attend. There are 25 annual events around the year. (Kuusamon Kaupunki 2007, 9-10.)

Tourism employs about 750 persons from Kuusamo year-round and a bit over half of them work in the accommodation and restaurant companies. Over million travelers visit Kuusamo every year. Mosquito- program service house by the airport and the customs and border formalities enable and have increased the amount of charter flights to Kuusamo. From 102 736 travelers that flew to Kuusamo in 2009, 24 190 were international. According to

Finnish Tourist Board MEK in 2007 Kuusamo was the fifth most visited destination in Finland. (Ruka-Kuusamo Matkailuyhdistys ry. 2010.)

There is not a lot of statistical information about the amount of visitors in Kuusamo. However, Figure 6 presents the amount of visitors in the whole Koillismaa-region between the years 2005 and 2008 and the estimations for the years 2009 and 2010. Koillismaa includes the city of Kuusamo and the municipalities of Posio, Taivalkoski, Kemijärvi, Pelkosenniemi, Salla and Savukoski (Tilastokeskus 2010.)



*Estimation

Figure 6. Overnight Visitors in Koillismaa Between 2005 and 2010 (Tilastokeskus 2010)

Roughly about 20% of the visitors in Kuusamo are international tourists. Tourism strategy sets a big stress on increasing that number. Most of the international tourists who travel to Kuusamo come from Great Britain, Russia, Netherlands and Germany. Figure 7 presents the international overnight visits by nationalities between the years 2004 and 2007 in Kuusamo. (Leo Pitkänen Oy 2008, 7-8.)

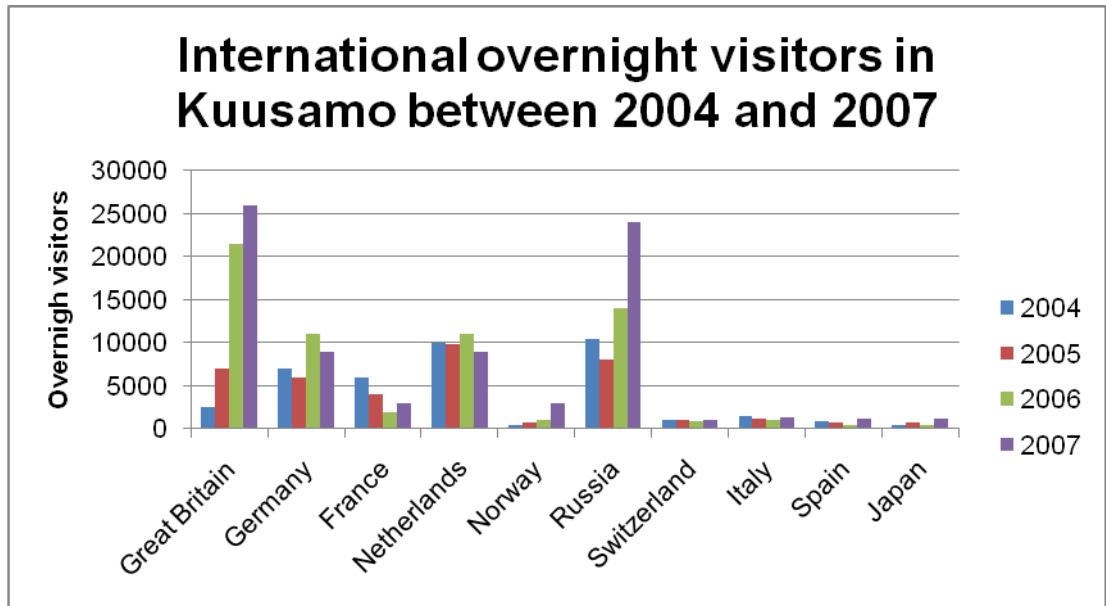


Figure 7. International Overnight Visitors in Kuusamo (Leo Pitkänen Oy 2008,8)

3.2 St. Lapland as a Commissioner

3.2.1 Networking

Co-operation is good in many areas of business but essential it is in Tourism. There is not one company that could provide all the services tourists demand on their own. Co-opetition combines competition and co-operation. Sometimes competing companies benefit more from doing co-operation with each other. Mostly similar kinds of companies that are not able to answer to certain market demands and challenges can put their forces together and reach a win-win situation. The competition can continue normally with the strong fields of business while companies co-operate to improve the weak ones. (Sirkiä 2010a; Verhelä–Lackman 2003, 87.)

Different types of co-operation and networking forms are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Co-Operation and Networking Forms (Sirkiä 2010a, 1)

Strategic alliance (co-operation in global level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common long term objectives. • Set up: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Response to global competitive situation 2. Product redevelopment costs too big for single companies 3. With co-operation better logistics can be built
Cluster (may connect different industries)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commodity and information support • Distribution and development of know-how
Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long term co-operation that brings added value to all participants. • Companies can: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. share marketing costs 2. commit to use services from each other etc.

In a network everyone brings something unique to increase the common profit and thus the best usage of resources and knowledge is achieved. This has a positive impact on all parties. The services are produced locally and the synergy can be advantageous moneywise. A network means not only that one party takes care of certain functions and the other of something else but also the investments are shared. (Sirkiä 2010c). The customers are not to be forgotten either. For a customer a trip is one whole tourism product (Komppula – Boxberg 2005, 11) that they evaluate. Even though different parts of this trip are produced by several tourism companies, the customers should not notice it.

In co-opetition network all the companies are equal (Sirkiä 2010a). A network is functional when it has realistic common goals and open communication and understanding. A good network is able to have sustainable pricing and product development is flourishing. This improves the level of services at the destination and consequently more customers are attracted to the area. (Sirkiä 2010c.)

3.2.2 St. Lapland – an Export Group

St. Lapland is a co-operative network consisting of eight small family owned tourism companies in Ruka – Kuusamo area. On 1st November 2009 (Mattila 2010b) these companies joined their forces in the form of an export group. With a common sales and marketing person, the export group seeks for increasing markets on international level. In the beginning the target markets are the big European countries and Russia. (Finpro 2010b.) St. Lapland provides the companies with common marketing name and image and also a common marketing and sales strategy (Sirkiä 2010c, 13).

The export group is organized by Finpro which is a global network of professionals that offers business consulting for Finnish Companies that are reaching for internationalization. Trade knowledge, marketing knowhow and a wide range of partners give significant support for their clients' company development. (Finpro 2010a.) The export groups are constituted by normally 4-6 companies that have mutually supportive products and services within the same trade. Export groups are a safe and cost-effective way for small and medium sized companies to head for new markets with small risks. The support from Finpro can be up to three and a half years (Sirkiä 2010c, 12) during which the companies obtain a realistic view of the markets and potential customers. (Finpro 2010b.)

For the St. Lapland companies the export group is a continuum for the co-operation in the Food and Travel- project that is administrated by Naturpolis (Kuusamo Region 2010a). Naturpolis Oy – Nordic Business Center is a development company for industries established in 2005. Its mission is to contribute to economic development co-operation and building up profitable trading and new jobs in the Kuusamo region. (Kuusamo Region 2010b.) The co-operation between the tourism companies in Kuusamo area has long roots. The Food and Travel project has been introducing the significance of dining and pure and local ingredients as tourism pull factors. The project concentrates on enterprise, inter alia, development, product development and marketing and sales development. (Kuusamo Region 2010a.)

St. Lapland acts as a DMC in Kuusamo area. A DMC is an incoming tour operator which normally operates through agents such as tour operators or

incentive houses in the tourist generating country. A DMC organizes and controls the services such as events, activities, tours, accommodation and transfers, for a holiday trip in a destination. It provides the customers with local knowledge and expertise and takes care of the end customer in the destination. (Sirkiä 2010c.)

The Sales and Marketing Manager of St. Lapland is Jaana Sirkiä and the eight companies she is working with are Isokenkäisten Klubi, Loma Lopotti, Nordic Holidays & Pohjola Countryhouse, Oivangin Lomakartano Chalets, Ollilan Lomamajat Cottage village, Ruka Adventures, Rukan Salonki Chalets and Studio Restaurant Tundra. All of these are located in the countryside around Kuusamo area (St. Lapland 2010b). The service offering of these companies include accommodation, restaurant and program service providers. St. Lapland aims to provide comprehensive service solutions for their customers. (Finpro 2010b.)

Extreme Countryside- package is one example of the joint productization that Sirkiä has compiled. It is a weeklong winter holiday round trip where the guests, in addition to modern car and snowmobile transportation, have a chance to introduce themselves with the traditional modes by reindeer and huskies. The package combines different activity programs with different types of accommodation every day. (Sirkiä 2010d). There are also for instance weekly activity programs both for summer and winter and a dinner program which have dinner options at different restaurants for every night (Mattila 2010b).

The companies are building up a common concept and the Sales and Marketing Manager is responsible for the productization and international marketing. However, the companies still continue as independent actors and keep competing in the domestic markets.

3.2.3 St. Lapland Companies

Nature, traditions, feeling of home and genuine hospitality are common in all the companies of St. Lapland. All of them are small family- owned companies that have a long history and experience in producing unforgettable moments and meaningful experiences. The entrepreneurs themselves are the ones that guests meet during their stay. They share the local stories and serve homemade meals from local ingredients. (St. Lapland 2010.)

St. Lapland consists of eight companies:

- Isokenkäisten Klubi,
- Loma Lopotti,
- Nordic Holidays & Pohjola Countryhouse,
- Oivangin Lomakartano Chalets,
- Ollilan Lomamajat Cottage village,
- Ruka Adventures,
- Rukan Salonki Chalets and
- Studio Restaurant Tundra.

Accommodation capacity in St. Lapland is all together 345 beds in 6 places. The biggest capacity is 200 beds in one place. Seven restaurants offer seating for 550 and the biggest one have 120 seats. All the restaurants and accommodation providers have conference facilities and there is a wide range of different kinds of program services available. During the snow season snowmobile, rally and ice karting safaris are accompanied with husky and reindeer programs and igloos, ice saunas and Santa Claus. Off- snow season is time for hunting, fishing and hiking and canoeing, rafting and different games. All year round there are various sauna services, theme dinners and cooking courses. (Sirkiä 2010b.)

Isokenkäisten Klubi (the Club of Big Shoe People) is situated in the middle of wilderness by the lake Heikinjärvi close to the Russian border zone (Isokenkäisten Klubi 2010a). Isokenkäisten Klubi offers three types of accommodation; cottages, hotel rooms and guesthouse accommodation (Isokenkäisten Klubi 2010b). Main building holds the Restaurant Klubi

(Isokenkäisten Klubi 2010e) and by the lake there is the only Seven Star Smoke Sauna in the world (Isokenkäisten Klubi 2010d). The surroundings of the Klubi area offer pure nature and silence but also the ones that seek for speed can find it from the Ice-Rally track (Isokenkäisten Klubi 2010c).



Picture 1. Restaurant Klubi (Mattila 2010c)

Loma Lopotti has three cozy and well equipped cottages by the Lake Vaimojärvi sheltered by the forest but still just short drive away from the attractions in Kuusamo. In the area there are also a campfire site, a Lappish hut and the Wilderness Restaurant Huilinki. (Loma Lopotti 2010b.) Huilinki is a nice stop for example during a snowmobile safari (Loma Lopotti 2010a).

Nordic Holiday Services Oy has been an incoming tour operator in Kuusamo since 2000 and the same owners run also Pohjola Country House (Finpro 2010b). The history of Pohjola Country House takes us all the way back to 17th century but serving travellers started in the early 20th century. The business as it is now started with a building renovation in 2007. The main house serves as a restaurant and upstairs there are guest house type rooms for accommodation. (Pohjolan Pirtti 2010b.) A former cowshed conceals three different types of saunas and a hot tub (Pohjolan Pirtti 2010c). Pohjola Country House is not an ordinary house. It is the Kuusamo holiday house of Santa Claus where the guests can meet Santa and his wife. (Pohjolan Pirtti 2010a.)



Picture 2. Pohjola Countryhouse (Mattila 2010c)

In the Oivangin Lomakartano Chalets guest can accommodate in three big and handsome log houses Singer, Junga and Little Junga. The chalets are situated by the lakes Singer and Junga which also gave their names to the chalets. On the tip of the cape stands the Restaurant Ukonkivi.(Oivangin Lomakartano 2010.)



Picture 3. Oivangin Lomakartano Chalets (Mattila 2010c)

Ollilan Lomamajat offers a great venue for fishermen throughout the year. On the area that used to be a popular holiday destination of the Sami are now eight holiday cottages; all of them in their own quiet locations. (Ollilan Lomamajat 2010a.) Restaurant Juomuskota serves both the cottage guests and passersby (Ollilan Lomamajat 2010b). In Juomuskota guests can have a chance to meet a Shaman who moves around the area and protects the people. It is also possible to meet the reindeer in their natural habitat and see how the reindeer herder calls them to come to him. (Ollilan Lomamajat 2010c.)

Ruka Adventures is a program service operator with wide-ranging activity programs year-round. The office is located near the Ruka-fell. The programs vary from snowmobile, ice karting and reindeer safaris and hikes and white water rafting to trips to Russia. (Ruka Adventures 2011a; Ruka Adventures 2011c). Ruka Adventures also provide packages for incentive customers (Ruka Adventures 2011b).



Picture 4. White Water Rafting and Ice Karting (Mattila 2010c)

Rukan Salonki Chalets offer high standard log house accommodation close to the Ski Resort Ruka. Rukan Salonki is situated around the Lake Salonkijärvi and in the middle of the area there are Restaurant Kultala and Hitec Smoke Sauna with HotSpring outdoor pool. In the winter the specialities of the place are Ice Sauna, Ice Chapel and Igloo accommodation. (Rukan Salonki 2010.)

Studio Restaurant Tundra "...offers you aesthetic experiences and culinary pleasure..." (Studioravintola Tundra 2010a). Tundra is a small atmospheric restaurant in an old cowshed (Mattila 2010b) which in addition to traditional dinner evening offers cooking courses and houses a ceramic studio. (Studioravintola Tundra 2010b).

4 REDEVELOPING RIVERS AND TRAILS – PRODUCT

4.1 Thesis Process

4.1.1 Purpose of This Thesis

St. Lapland is fairly new network and the purpose for establishing it was to grow the markets on international level. The Sales and Marketing Manager of St. Lapland wanted to survey the opinions of their customers about the products and packages St. Lapland offers. The thesis was outlined to concern the new Rivers and Trails -product.

The Rivers and Trails - product was created to increase the customer flows for summer and autumn seasons. Kuusamo area and nature around it have many opportunities for different kinds of activities. Rivers and Trails -product was compiled from those elements the area provides and of those that might attract visitors from the service provider's point of view. (Mattila 2010b.)

This thesis aims to find out whether the destination and the product are appealing from the customer point of view, how the package works as a one product and if the particular providers chosen for the product are suitable for this kind of holiday package. Development suggestions are presented based on the findings and the holistic approach of product development. Furthermore, co-creation tools useful to St. Lapland are introduced.

The main research question is: How to co-create a theme based meaningful network product? To be able to answer that four sub questions were created:

- Is Kuusamo attractive and competitive as a destination?
- What is the current state of the Rivers and Trails –product from the customer perspective?
- How should the Rivers and Trails - product be improved / redeveloped to be more meaningful and credible?
- What type of co-creation tools can be recommended for the St. Lapland?

4.1.2 Ethnographic Methods

The thesis utilizes ethnographic methods which are in a category of qualitative research methods. Compared to quantitative research which concentrates on measures and proportions qualitative research seeks for finding and understanding different phenomena and behavior. (Dewalt–Dewalt 2002, 2.) Ethnography search for the genuine behavior of people in the natural not created setting. (Venkatesh 2008, 7–8). It puts the researcher in the middle of the research topic to experience the answers instead of reading about them from the book and not really understanding the phenomenon. People cannot always put their thoughts into words. They also rarely are the most accurate reporters of their own behavior. Ethnography utilizes means that everyone uses for apprehension of the surrounding world in their everyday life. Ethnographic methods include participant observation, non-participant observation, interviews, informal interviews and casual conversations (Elliott–Jankel-Elliott 2003, 215–217). Ethnography benefits from not strictly structured plans. There is room for listening the interviewee and making up additive questions on the way or doing new findings outside the observation plan if not blindly followed the readymade structure. (Venkatesh 2008, 7–8.) Different kind of illustrative methods in many cases give more correct results than traditional and quantitative methods. In those people easily not lie but think or want to think they do things the way they say even though the reality is the opposite. (Elliott–Jankel-Elliott 2003, 215.)

Ethnographic methods, participant observation and interview, were chosen to perceive how the customers react to the new product. In the semi structured interviews the interviewer has control over the topics that are set to be covered. The direction of the conversation is more or less the same in all the situations but the lead is given to the interviewee as much as possible. (Dewalt–Dewalt 2002, 122.) Semi structured interviews were chosen because they enable receiving information that is not planned on receiving. The semi structured interviews collect information beyond the issues interviewer considers important and thus a holistic picture of the product can be received. Participant observation was used to see how the customers react to the product. Participant observer, as the name says take part of the action and behavior and reports the findings rather accurately in the field

notes. The method provides both explicit and tacit information and understanding and utilizes everyday conversations as an interview technique. (Dewalt – Dewalt 2002, 1-4,8.) Participant observation was chosen also because I wanted to experience the product myself and thus have a better basis on evaluating the current state of it, and to comprehensively evaluate the opinions and their justifications of the interviewees.

The observation and the customer interviews were done in the Study Tour for leisure travel professionals in Kuusamo that was organized by Kuusamo Lapland, St. Lapland and partners. The Study Tour took place between 16th and 19th of September 2010. The Study Tour acted as a familiarization trip for the Rivers and Trails – product but was also marketing St. Lapland and the whole Kuusamo Lapland area and thus included additional activities. The tour included the following activities from the Rivers and Trails –Product: canoeing, white water rafting and the visit at the Oulanka National Park Visitor Center. Hiking which is also part of the Rivers and Trails –product was organized introducing a new hiking product with huskies. The itinerary also included a quad bike safari, visits to most of the St. Lapland companies and some bigger hotel accommodation providers and also a work shop with the tourism companies and professionals in the Kuusamo Lapland area. (See the Tour schedule in Appendix 2.) During the Tour the participants stayed in one of the log houses of Oivangin Lomakartano Chalets and the meals were organized in different St. Lapland restaurants every day.

The participants were from different tour operators from Belgium, England, Germany and Poland, one from each, and a reporter from Poland writing an article of Finland. The tour operators either have Finland in their product offering and want to increase it or they are going to bring customers to Finland in the near future.

In the participant observation the list of aspects of how to contextualize the action by Spradley (Elliott - Jankel-Elliott 2003, 219) was used although the list was modified to serve this study better. I also observed the product elements for meaningful experience. The observation forms were filled separately on every company or safari.

The observation form (appendix 1) contained evaluation of the following:

- the physical place,
- the objects present,
- the people involved,
- the activity and single acts
- feelings and comments,
- the elements for meaningful experience and experience realms

The interviews with the tour operators were conducted after they had experienced the whole program. The schedule of the Study Tour on the last day was tight which left unfortunately only a little time for interviews and I could not reach as deep discussions as I would have liked. All the interviews were recorded to maximize the use of them.

The semi-structured interview questions were within these themes:

- The expectations of the trip and how they were fulfilled.
- What is the image of Kuusamo as hiking and outdoor destination?
 - What the customers like about the idea of the holiday package?
- The type and level of accommodation expected to be included in a hiking and outdoor holiday package?
 - Whether St. Lapland reaches that level?
 - What they think about Oivangin Lomakartano Chalets as there are shared bathrooms?
 - Authenticity of the places?
- How the meaningful experience is perceived?
 - How an experience differs from a service?
- The main issues in service quality?
- Does the product hold the theme?

4.1.3 Process Description

Figure 8 presents the main points of the thesis process. Writing the thesis report happened simultaneously throughout the whole thesis process. I started with the collection of background information after the first meeting with the supervisor. The handbook of the Tourism Integrated Product Development - project was released only in the beginning of December 2010 and I had to revise the angle for the theory part as I wanted to use this

holistic approach to tourism product development. All the empirical work was completed during the Study Tour in mid-September 2010 after which I began the analyzing. First I transcribed the interview data and themed it. I studied the interviews and observations separately in sections according to different themes which were destination, St. Lapland and the companies, and activities and the product package. After that I concluded the findings to the thesis report.

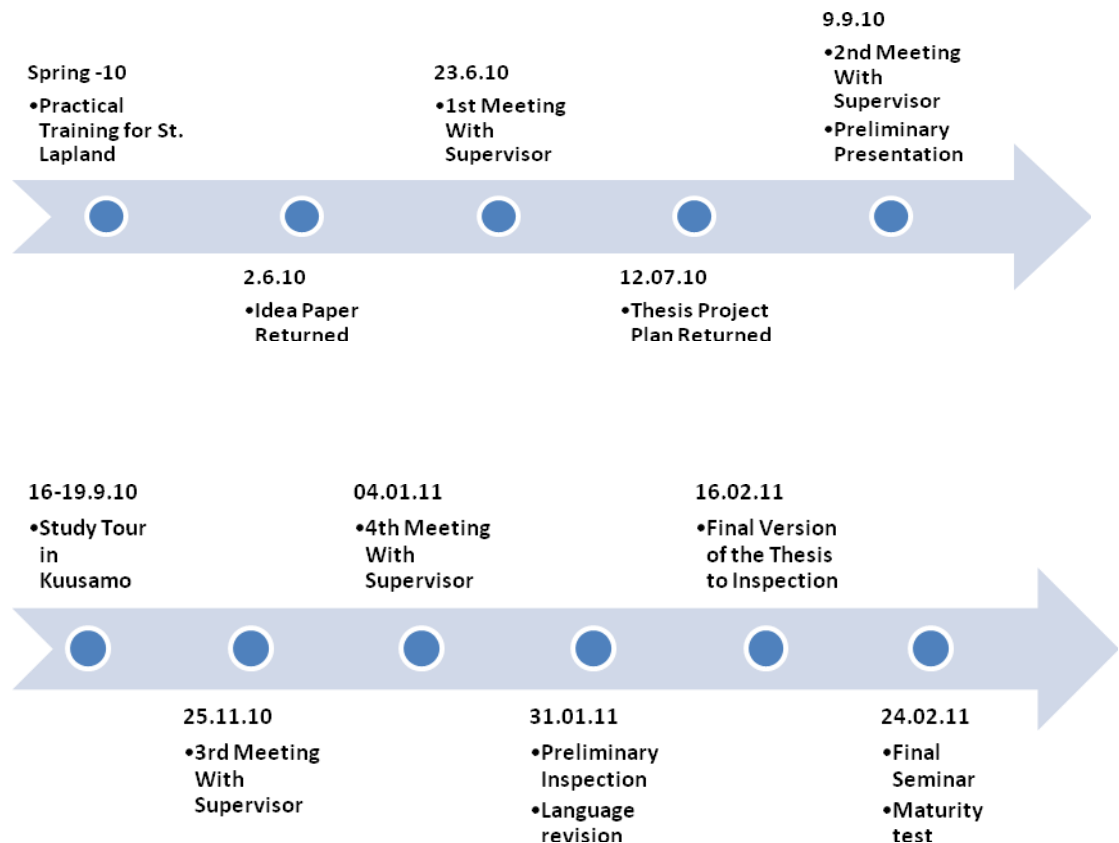


Figure 8. Thesis Process

The process description of the redevelopment process is described according to the product development model of the holistic approach. The original product development process of River and Trails -product started from the idea which was productized into an explicit product package and a product card was created. The product was then introduced to the customers and in this case to the tour operators on the Study Tour. The holistic approach emphasizes the continuum of the process phases and the constant evaluation during the product development process. This encounter with the tour operators on the Study Tour, acts as a basis for the redevelopment work

of this thesis. Testing the product is part of the conceptualizing and encounter is usually referred to the interaction with the end-customer. Thus the redevelopment process happens in the border between the conceptualizing and the encounter. This thesis is an evaluation process of those two phases. The new ideas and suggestion for improvements follow the evaluation of the existing product in the encounter with the different actors.

The process cycle in which I have been participating in every stage is presented in the figure 9.

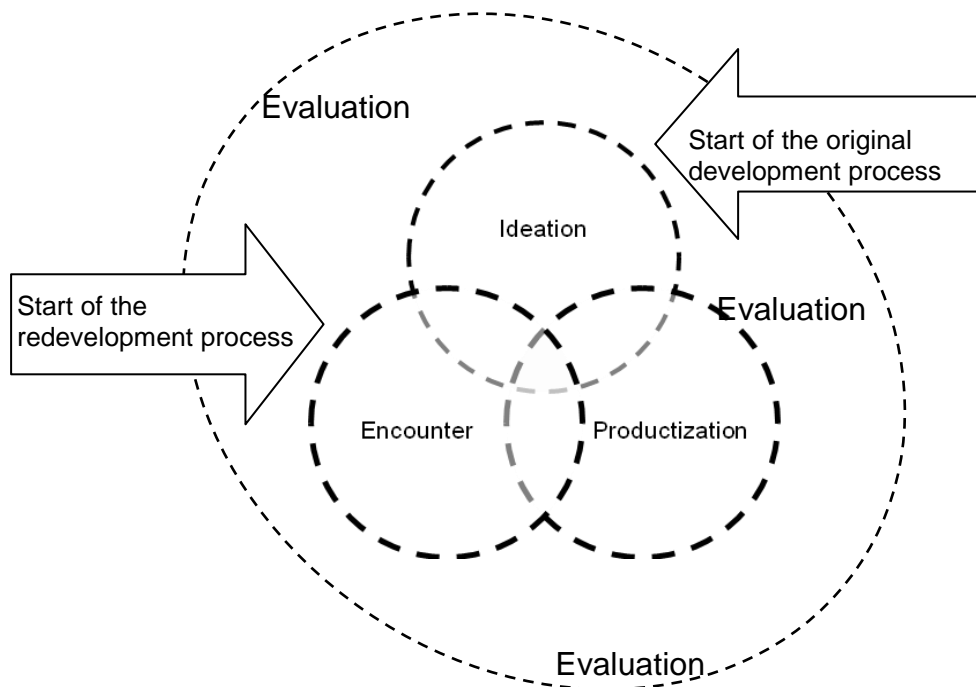


Figure 9. My involvement in Phases of Product Development Process of Rivers and Trails

4.2 Development Process of the Original Rivers and Trails –Product

In the end of my training period for St. Lapland, I was given a task to create a product, a holiday package for the summer season. The development process did not particularly rely on any theory. Even as a student who has recently been studying the subject, I found myself not using a comprehensive plan in my project. This product was created to match the existing winter products altering the format into summer product. However, looking back at

the actions and choices I made there can be noticed strong resemblance with the holistic product development approach. (Mattila 2010b.)

The product development process started from the idea generation phase (see Figure 10). St. Lapland offers different types of package holidays during the winter but they did not have any ready packages for the summer season yet. The idea for the product came from the Sales and Marketing Manager of St. Lapland but the package was compiled by me. At Sirkiä's request the product combines hiking and canoeing. (Mattila 2010b.)

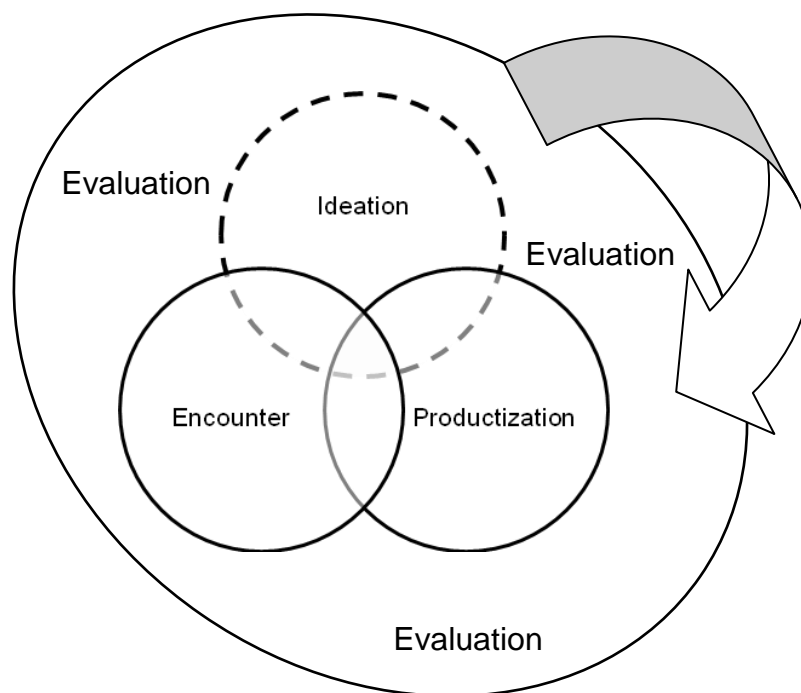


Figure 10. Starting Phase of Product Development Process of Rivers and Trails - Product

After going through the different options of St. Lapland's productions, I started the conceptualizing phase and created a baseline of activities for the product. For the final product description the owner of Ruka Adventures was consulted about the timetables and the different activity options and to what extent they could be altered to fit this package. The accommodation services were chosen according to their location from the activity venues and the type of the accommodation. The accommodation options are Oivangin Lomakartano Chalets and Loma Lopotti. Oivangin Lomakartano Chalets has a relatively centered location in Kuusamo but has big log house

accommodation with shared bathrooms. Loma Lopotti offers more traditional private cottage accommodation.

Pricing any products but especially packages involving different service providers is important to do carefully. The product value, the story and the expectations a customer has towards the product has to correspond to the price of the product. It is also essential that a customer is able to find only one price for the same product. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.) The package price was counted from the published product prices paying attention to the commissions. The prices were counted for minimum of 6 persons. In addition to the total price, the product description presents the list of itemized product elements with their prices.

The evaluation was not a separate event but a continuous process where the Sales and Marketing Manager of St. Lapland, the owner of Ruka Adventures and I assessed the product and its functionality. At first the different ideas were criticized together and in the conceptualizing phase the owner of Ruka Adventures had central role in evaluating how the product could be organized most efficiently.

The Rivers and Trails – product is a summer and autumn holiday for people who like to spend their time outdoors. The package mixes water activities with hiking. Canoeing and hiking the Little Bears Trail are the main features but the guests will also do white water rafting on a family route and have a game of frisbee golf. As always when visiting St. Lapland companies, the guests also experience a piece of Kuusamo and its traditions. The guests have a chance to learn more about the local ingredients and how to use them to create a perfect dinner on a cooking course in the Studio Restaurant Tundra. (Mattila 2010a.) The product considers all three ways of acting, local, entrepreneurial and customer, even though I had not seen the theory of the holistic approach to product development. Consequently it can be said that the theory supports the practice.

Rivers and Trails - product is a four- or seven-night long holiday package (see Figure 11). The customers can choose whether they want to stay from Sunday to Sunday or if they prefer a shorter holiday from Sunday to Wednesday. The package includes accommodation and meals in Oivangin

Lomakartano Chalets or in Loma Lopotti and one activity per day with one day off leisure or optional activities (See the product description in Appendix 3). (Mattila 2010a.)

DAY 1 – ARRIVAL	Transfer to the accommodation.
DAY 2 – LAUNCHING THE CANOES	Canoeing on Lake Oivankijärvi
DAY 3 – LITTLE BEAR’S TRAIL	Visit to Oulanka Visitor Center Hike at the Little Bears Trail Dinner: Cooking course at Studio Restaurant Tundra
DAY 4 – DAY AT YOUR LEISURE	Optional activities (Departure if four day option)
DAY 5 – ON WATER	Canoeing at Oulanka National Park
DAY 6 – FRISBEE GOLF	Frisbee golf game
DAY 7 – WHITE WATER RAFTING	White water rafting on River Kitkajoki
DAY 8 – DEPARTURE	Transfer back to airport

Figure 11. Rivers and Trails Day by Day (Mattila 2010a)

The package has been compiled from existing activity and accommodation products and thus there are no scheduled descriptions or blueprints of this product package. In St. Lapland, they do not want to do it for this kind of weeklong package in which the timetables have to bend for different reasons. The incentive packages are different but for individuals the programs can be rescheduled to different days if necessary. The main point is that the customers receive what they are promised. (Sirkiä 2011.) However, as there are several service providers and actors involved in the operations, blueprinting the distinct activities could be useful and help combining the different product packages.

4. 3 Current State of Rivers and Trails –Product

4.3.1 Attractiveness of Destination

First, the thoughts and expectations of the tour operators towards the destination and the Study Tour were studied. Discussion on the destination concerned Finland in general but some specific opinions refer to the experiences in Kuusamo. Finland is known as a great winter destination and the place of all sorts of snow activities but it is also seen as a very potential destination for summer travelling. According to the tour operators, Finland has to strive to gain in popularity as for example Norway, Sweden and Island are competing for the same customers. These other destinations have notable travelling pull factors such as mountains, fjords, glaciers and volcanoes that automatically attract people. Finland has beautiful nature but that is not quite enough as the same can be said about many other places as well. Finland needs to find a specific pull factor for summer as we already have Santa Claus and snow as winter attractions. (Interview 2 2010; Interview 3 2010.)

The main interest for the Tour Operators to participate to the Study Tour was to experience the product offering themselves, in order to better evaluate the product's suitability for their customers. They were interested in seeing the different types of accommodation in the area and especially the small family-owned enterprises that St. Lapland consists of. Also the locality and the history and stories were something what they sought. (Interview 1–4 2010.) Enhancing the interest in Kuusamo area is the fact that St. Lapland enables individuals to travel and participate to the activities as St. Lapland do not require whole groups from the tour operators but compile those themselves on the spot (Interview 3 2010).

Tourism practices here in Finland left a good impression to European tour operators. "When I'm sending people to Lapland I'm not worried about the standard of accommodation and the infrastructure of tourism" (Interview 1 2010). The challenge in Finland is to become recognized. The general tourism marketing is scarce compared to many other countries that are more visible company wise but also as a whole country. Connection between the

supply and the demand needs to be drawn. “- - - you have the product, we have the customers” (Interview 1 2010). (Interview 2–3 2010.) Interest towards Kuusamo area and the different travelling possibilities were obvious throughout the Study Tour. The nature in Finland is not so much different than in central Europe but the Tour Operators noted the pureness and volume of it. Coming to Finland and Kuusamo Lapland is like flying to the unknown. The customers cannot picture the destination clearly before arriving there. This might result of the lack of Finland’s visibility in Europe and the clear image of the destination; nature does not exclude civilization. Being in the nature and in the woods does not automatically eliminate the conveniences and comfort that many tourists still seek from their holiday. “Amazing how we are in a forest but cell phones and w-lan works” (Polish Journalist 2010).

During the summer time tourists seem to look for independent travel opportunities. Tour operators seek for products and packages to offer to customers who travel with their own car. Also unlike during winter when all sorts of activity and attraction packages are popular summer is more about relaxing together with family. Customers rent cottages and do more simple activities on their own. The tour operators emphasize that the different activities need to be clearly offered and sold to people in summer as they do not tend to ask for them themselves. (Interview 1–4 2010.)

4.3.2 Perception St. Lapland and Companies

The Tour Operators were impressed about the authenticity and the service of St. Lapland and its companies. The value is on the small companies. It can be said that the St. Lapland companies do not have only quality or good service but they have a soul. Customers appreciate when they are taken care of. With big companies the customers are anonymous and they cannot have the feeling of being special or important. With St. Lapland the customers always meet the owners of the companies. (Interview 1–4 2010.)

As an organizer and DMC St. Lapland is trusted. For a tour operator it is safe to send tourists to Kuusamo when they know everything is taken care of right from the beginning till the end. Along the staying arrangements the activities are well organized. The different options are easily accessed and the

services are given predicting. (Interview 2-3 2010.) “- - - it’s very good that you, you are so well organized here. You can book accommodation but directly you have a full list and explanation of activities and hiking maps.” (Interview 2 2010.)

The quality of the Rivers and Trails - product comes from the quality of all the elements in the product. However, the tour operators 3 reminded about the importance of the first impression that is relevant in this occasion as the customers have to have the feeling of quality right from the beginning. The way the customer arrives to the country has to be comfortable. It is important that the person welcoming the customers at the airport is friendly and communicative. Also the first impression of the accommodation has to be positive. The final perception forms during the stay but if there is a negative feeling from the beginning it affects to the entire holiday.

Grönroos (2000) suggests that the total perceived quality is a sum of experienced quality and expected quality. The distribution has an important role in creating the expectations. A certain amount of the expectations is formed in the purchase situation. While selling the product the tour operator has to give a realistic and right picture of the travel destination so that the expectations can be met. The producer has to give everything that has been promised but this requires that the product has been sold right. During my practical training I witnessed a situation in which the customers had not known where or in what kind of place they were going. They did have a nice holiday but they had to alter their plans due to lack of information given prior the holiday. (Mattila 2010b.)

Customers are looking for traditional and authentic places that cannot be found anywhere else. This includes the whole tourism product; the place, the activities, the accommodation and also the meals. Meals need to be tasty and of good quality but is it also important that the dishes and the ingredients are local. A dinner at Pohjola Country House was brought as an example of a situation where the presentation and thorough description of what and from where the dishes were, added a great deal of the meaningfulness of that dinner. (Interview 3 2010.) Even though Pohjola Country House was adored the fact that tapas type bread with olives for snacks were instantly noticed to

being not very Finnish next to cloudberry wine, tells how important all the small details are.

Accommodation in Oivangin Lomakartano Chalets was rated to be excellent quality. The big (kelo) log houses are seen as real Finnish or rather real Lappish accommodation. One tour operator commented that the customers would be perfectly happy by just looking at the houses from the outside. And the inside of them does not lower the standard. The wooden decorations and the design of the interior are comfortable with all the modern facilities. (Interview1–4 2010.)

In Oivangin Lomakartano Chalets we stayed in a chalet that has 9 small bedrooms of which two is downstairs and the rest upstairs. All the rooms are different shapes and sizes but each has two beds. Upstairs some of the rooms are quite small and tight due to diagonal roof. The bedrooms are for sleeping and in the small rooms one would not want to spend much time. The common area is cozy with fireplace. There are a well equipped kitchen and sauna and bathroom in the cottage and two shared toilets of which one includes a shower.

There was some disagreement about the usability of the accommodation in Oivangin Lomakartano Chalets. Even though the chalets are impressive they are not very suitable for individual travelers. People like to have their privacy and they do not like to share cottages with strangers. Most of the Tour Operator's customers are families that want to spend their holiday amongst themselves. These chalets are too big for one family and the small rooms and shared bathrooms would not attract customers to share the chalet with another family. The Tour Operators would recommend Oivangin Lomakartano Chalets to individuals only if there were two or more families travelling together as a group. (Interview 2–4 2010.)

In my opinion the place could be used but the customers need to be certain type. The package Rivers and Trails is an outdoor adventure holiday and a quest house type accommodation where you meet new people and spend time in the common area could go with the theme. Although there might not be enough demand for that kind of product in Kuusamo and it would be hard to sell it for families.

The restaurant Ukonkivi of Oivangin Lomakartano follows the same comfortable style as the chalets. The owner welcomed us personally and the dishes were introduced at the beginning of the dinner. We were kept company throughout the meal. The food was well complimented by the Tour Operators and the atmosphere seemed to please them.

Loma Lopotti Cottages were felt less cozy. This might be due to the different type of the cottage and the building material which results to the cottages different appearance. In my opinion a lot could be done with small decorative improvements. The type of accommodation the cottages represent is good for individuals. There are two bedrooms in a cottage and one cottage accommodates max six persons. There are also kitchen, living room, sauna, bathroom and a toilet. The cottages are well equipped but very plain. They may fit for domestic travelers but even though the international customers do seek for authentic and traditional Finnish style the cottages could be more inviting.

The Wilderness Restaurant Huilinki is, with a high ceiling, a little hall-like. The restaurant is decorated in a simple traditional way. The spacious room serves its purpose as a lunch restaurant and stop point for snowmobilers who come there wearing ample outdoor clothing. The indoor campfire site in the middle of the dining area is a nice and unusual detail. As a dinner restaurant, Huilinki is not so idyllic. The service and the food were good. We heard a lot of interesting stories about the place and the surroundings while we ate.

4.3.3 Perception Activities and Product Package

The Rivers and Trails – product is build around the two main activities which are canoeing and hiking. During the Study Tour about three and a half hour canoe trip down the River Kitkajoki was experienced. Nature was admired and there were a lot of conversations about the product, and questions about different product opportunities were asked. It would have been better if the guides had been present during the paddling and the conversation, instead of appearing only afterwards. This was due to having three on the boat instead of two and the canoe did not proceed properly. However, especially with end-customers it would be important to ensure the guide is able to control the situation, so that the customers do not have a chance to feel uncertain. Also,

the customers are more likely to be interested in hearing about the area and asking questions.

At the beginning of the canoeing trip Susi (Wolf), co-operative activity provider, helped us with the canoes. His character and appearance, with leather outfit and a brimmed hat, impressed everyone. Susi did not bring exactly Finnish locality but just his own character to the product. He provided something different and unique to increase the probability for meaningful experience.

Hiking part was organized introducing a new activity of hiking with huskies. The route differed from the original Little Bear's Trail that is included in the Rivers and Trails –product. First there was a visit to the Oulanka Nature House where the lunch was served. Before the hike Susi told us about the huskies and instructed us with the two of them that was taken with us to the forest. There were differing opinions about the sense of using the dogs in the hiking product. It could be a nice detail especially when children are involved but definitely only an optional product choice since it was regarded as somewhat unnecessary.

Susi provided us with a lot of interesting details and stories about the nature. For instance, he knew that the little stones on the ground were studied to be from the Stone Age when people made weapons and tools by sculpting them from the stones. The more the guide knows some little interesting facts to tell the more the customer receives from the experience. The little somewhat insignificant details are important.

The taken white water rafting route was the wild route with several big rapids. This divided the group into being either excited or very scared by the time the first rapid was reached. We all were equipped with raincoats and trousers but still the water was able to soak the clothes underneath. The lunch break passed by drying the wet clothes by the fire. It had been also scheduled quite late which resulted people being hungry. The well organized routes in the forest with duckboard and the camping sites were impressive details that the tour operators complimented. They particularly liked the toilets, outhouses, in nature. The trip continued with a little hike up the hill from where we took the quad bike back to the safari house. The hike took us by surprise since there

had not been clear information about it. Everyone was able to take the time needed for the climbing, however, with the quad bike helmets we carried some got quite exhausted.

Planning the two sequential activities was not impressive. Coldness reached everyone by the time the quad bike safari was over since there was no chance to change clothing. The quad bikes were also felt scary and unsafe, especially for a woman driver. As a motor activity the quad bike safari is unsuitable for the theme of Rivers and Trails –product and should be kept as possible option.

Even though the Rivers and Trails -product includes the family route of the white water rafting which is allowed to children over the age of five, the rapids were also suggested to keep optional. The rafting was considered too scary and a potential obstacle for booking the package (Interview 2 2010). Psychological safety is as much important in a tourism product as the physical safety is. If the customer cannot have the feeling of safety the experience becomes negative. (Verhelä–Lackman 2003, 52.)

Three of the four Tour Operators also felt that their customers require more optional activities. The included activities ensure the customers have a chance for the meaningful experiences and the customers do not stay in their accommodations for not knowing what attractions are possible. On the other hand during the summer the customers expect fewer organized activities but spending time with family and doing activities independently. (Interview 2–4 2010.)

The experience often continues afterwards in conversations and memories. Sharing the experience is important; a feel of approval. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.) People also collect mementos to take with them and to show to friends and family. Photographs are a good example of those mementos. During the Study Tour I had my camera with me. Although, activities such as the river rafting, with splashing water, forced me to have the camera in the guide's waterproof bag. The camera could not be acquired before we were back on the shore. This left me and the customers without photographs of the actual activity. The guides were asked if there was a

possibility to take photographs during the activity. Even though there was, the guides did not remember to stop the boats and give time for the photographs.

These activity products can offer a customer an educational, esthetic and an escapist experience. Nature provides the esthetic experience for the ones that stop to look, hear, feel and listen. The customers most likely learn some new skills but also learn from the conversations with the guides. This requires some knowledge and storytelling skills from the guides. During our trip we were told some facts about nature and also the guides pointed out some interesting details from our surroundings. The guides, however, did not make sure that everyone was able to hear and receive the same information. For the experience to become an escapist one the customers have to be able to actively immerse into the activity. This requires a certain balance between listening to the guide and concentrating to nature. The sound of the motor definitely hinders the escapist experience. Even though, for instance, in white water rafting product the main idea is conquering the rapids and the motor speeds up the distances between the rapids, the feel of nature and the atmosphere disappears. Removing the use of motor adds only half an hour to the duration of the product and increases the exoticism of the product.

Theme of the product is outdoor holiday which is built on the main activities; canoeing and hiking. The other activities are chosen to fill up the package. The principles of offering local food at St. Lapland restaurants are connected to the theme but still quite loosely. Outdoor holiday is a wide concept which requires revision for creating a more unified and meaningful product.

4.4 Development suggestions for Rivers and Trails –Product

4.4.1 Defining Rivers and Trails –Product

With the original theme the Rivers and Trails -product is rather shattered. Alternative theme is nature and living from nature. It too is a wide concept but the package can be build around it. The customers are living from nature during that holiday week. They are staying surrounded by the wilderness and the meals are of the local ingredients from nature. The activities are based on moving in nature and using only ones own muscle power. The product theme can be divided into daily themes, for example when there is an activity on a

lake the dinner that day includes fish from the lake and land activities pair up with meat dishes. It is important to have this explained to the customers so that they see the connection.

The interviews revealed that customers are expecting options. Especially leisure travelers value the chance for decision making and even though the customers do not use options that are offered to them they require having the possibility (Komppula-Boxberg 2005, 16). For St. Lapland loose options are challenging because it is essential to know early enough which activities and safaris take place and when (Mattila 2010b). On the other hand also the idea of the product package is to have everything included. However, to increase the attractiveness of the product and to unify the theme more optional days are provided. The white water rafting, which were felt not appealing, and the frisbee golf, which does not apply for the theme, are left out of the product. Consequently there are three days of activities and three days of leisure.

The Rivers and Trails -product includes canoeing on a lake, hike at the Little bear's trail and canoeing on a river. The optional activities could be offered either having certain options for certain days to be booked beforehand or just leaving them open as there are the weekly programs of St. Lapland available. The latter option requires that the customers are informed that the registration to weekly programs have to happen minimum of one day prior the activity day. (Mattila 2010b.) Due to loosening of the program the Tundra cooking course is rescheduled to one of the leisure days. Pohjola Country House's evening program with three different types of saunas and a dinner could be an idyllic and suitable option for the Rivers and Trails -product. The suggestion for the new product itinerary is presented in Appendix 4.

The only major aspect that bothered the tour operators was the difficult use of Oivangin Lomakartano Chalets as accommodation for individuals. Revision for that choice is needed. Ollilan Lomamajat offers variety of different sizes of cottages that suite for individual travelers. Therefore Loma Lopotti is remaining the first accommodation option but the second one is changed from Oivangin Lomakartano Chalets to Ollilan Lomamajat. Hence for not needing transportation to the activity the canoeing on Lake Oivankijärvi is changed to either Lake Vaimojärvi or Lake Välijärvi.

As the co-creation with different actors in product development is important the same applies to ensuring the quality of the service product and providing elements for meaningful experiences. Therefore it is recommended for St. Lapland to pay attention to communication with the intermediaries, tour operator, and guarantee they do know what they are selling. This provides customers a comprehensive perception of the holiday and the travel destination and thus creates satisfied customers.

4.4.2 Restaurant and Accommodation Improvements

St. Lapland and the product “River and Trails” were thought to be of good quality. Some small changes and improvements would add the attractiveness and the service quality of the product and also enhance the potential for meaningful experience. All the companies should have a look at the interior and check that there is a coherent line on the decoration style. The colors should be matching and the textiles up to date, mellow and welcoming. It is easy to become blind to one’s own surroundings but the customers are very observant. They, however, appreciate and value very small details that are easily offered to them.

Huilinki, for instance, could use some decorative actions to erase the hall-like feeling. Also small changes to the cottages of Loma Lopotti would create big changes to the customers’ perception of the cottages. Pale colors of the interior materials allow the use of stronger and filling colors and textiles in decoration. Rag rugs are very Finnish and bring in the cottage atmosphere well. Yet, there are choices in color and material of the rugs.

The customers value the stories told by the company owners. As St. Lapland consists of several entrepreneurs they have a good opportunity to broaden the story base together. (See chapter 4.5 Product Development Tools.) In addition to the stories concerning the companies the Kuusamo area and the surroundings might hide some interesting stories. Attention should be paid to the distribution of the stories. In case the company owners or the employees do not possess a level of language skills the theme and the stories require alternative ways to be told. Leaflets at the rooms or pictures on the walls of the restaurants could ensure the storytelling and contribute to the atmosphere.

The interviewees emphasized the importance of the meal descriptions and knowing where the food originates. The cooks of St. Lapland companies introduce their dishes personally but it was proposed that written form of the meal descriptions would bring some extra value to the customers. There would not be need for thorough explanations to all the customers separately but the ones interested could have a look for example from a folder visible in the restaurant.

4.4.3 Activity Improvements

The new theme emphasizes the pure nature and doing by oneself. The activities that do not require the use of motors should be left without them. This enables customers fully use their all senses to explore the nature. It is also easier for the guides to talk and listen to the customers. The guides have to ensure that everyone is hearing the same stories and instructions. They also have to pay attention to how the balance the storytelling and giving space for the customers to support the meaningful experience.

The customers are always provided with appropriate equipment. Nevertheless some activities may cause wet or otherwise uncomfortable clothing. Even though it is not possible to carry extra clothes for the whole group some spare clothes such as trousers could be carried by the guides, in particular if there are children in the group. Otherwise good experience may turn into disaster if the customers are feeling uncomfortable.

The guides could also bring extra value to the customers by providing an organized break for photographs. The break is important during the activities that limit the photography during the action. Giving a chance to have the customers' photographs taken instead of only landscape pictures will improve the product and the service of the company. In addition the breaks influence on the safety issues and thus the quality of the product. In some activities, such as the river rafting, customers pulling out cameras at wrong time might cause safety risks.

4.4.4 Redevelopment Summary

In general the perception of the product and St. Lapland was very good. The small family owned companies offer competitive services. However, a

tourism product is never completely finished. The redevelopment of the Rivers and Trails - product was started with specifying the theme and unifying the product. All the elements of the product were set to support the theme, life from the nature, and the unfitting product elements were removed from the package. Adding value to the customers requires only small actions. Small decorative improvements and practice changes were suggested. All the development objects are gathered to the Table 6.

Table 6. Development Suggestions

ELEMENTS OF THE PRODUCT	THE CURRENT STATE	DEVELOPMENT SUGGESTIONS
The Package		
Theme	Outdoor holiday; the product is shattered	Nature and living from the nature
Options	Only one day with option	Three days of activities and three days of leisure.
Accommodation	At Oivangin Lomakartano Chalets and Loma Lopotti	Change the accommodation to Ollilan Lomamajat and Loma Lopotti
Canoeing on a lake	Lake Oivankijärvi	Lake Välijärvi if accommodation in Ollilan Lomamajat / Lake Vaimojärvi if accommodation in Loma Lopotti
Sauna and dinner program at Pohjola Country House	Not offered	Optional activity
Communication with Tour Operators	The end-customers have misled perceptions of the destination	Paying attention to information the Tour Operators offer to the end-customers about the product and the destination
Restaurants and Accommodation		
Decorations at restaurants / Company interiors	Mixed colors on textiles, No identical tablecloths	All the textiles to go together; warm colors for winter and lighter colors for summer. The general appearance unified.
Loma Lopotti	Plain	More colors and atmosphere, fullness with textiles

Themes and Stories	Language problems	Leaflets or pictures to ensure the storytelling and also to contribute to the atmosphere
Dish descriptions	Verbal	Written
Activity Implementation		
Motor vehicles	Motors used in ia raft boats	Paddling / Motors only when needed
Guides	Not paying attention to everyone	Making sure everyone hears and has a chance to receive the same information ; Balance between storytelling and enjoying the silence and the nature
-- --	Unknown activities; Control of the situation	Clear instructions from the beginning; Clear procedures
Extra clothes	No extra clothes	Some spare trousers (for children)
Photos	Not taken	Organized photo brake / organized photographer

4.5 Product Development Tools

The Tourism Product Developer's Handbook (2010) offers a variety of different tools to support the tourism companies with their product development processes. The tools are divided into three parts: ideation tools, conceptualizing tools and encounter tools. There is also a Tourism Product Developer's Workbook that shows the product developer how the new product development approach can be applied to one's own product development process. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.)

Product development can be examined from four different angles; refreshing existing products to existing customer, repositioning existing products to new customers, producing new products to new customers and presenting new products to existing customers (Sustainable Tourism Online 2010). With ideation tools a company can determine the opportunities for developing products and services. The basis for the ideation can be brought up from the future perspectives, seasonal changes and most importantly from the

company's and the area's own strengths and expertise. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010; Verhelä–Lackman 2003, 76-77.)

The conceptualizing tools help to build the idea into a concrete product. Conceptualizing involves defining the overall objective of the product and thus determining the theme and the story for the product but also practical issues such as practices, schedules and pricing. As tourism product is always produced and consumed at the same time the encounters are a valuable asset in product development. Feedback forms and surveys are good tools for asking customers about the success factors and the flaws of the products. Moreover the encounter tools offer practices for discovering reasons for different behaviors and acquiring a comprehensive perception of the products. Most of the elements for experience and meaningful experience are hard to visualize and observe without the actual encounter. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010; Verhelä–Lackman 2003, 77-78, 85.)

St. Lapland as a network has a good possibility to utilize the varying expertise in product development. The network creates value to customers by providing comprehensive travel experience. These experiences are easily altered to meaningful experiences by paying attention to the content of the products. The following paragraphs provide suggestions for beneficial product development tools for St. Lapland to consider.

Sticker map workshop is a tool for uncovering the tacit knowledge of the destination and its stories. The simple myths and tales can bring a variety of new product development ideas and help the destination in profiling by bringing up the special characteristics of the area. The workshop is conducted by thinking of the different feelings, experiences, tales and stories concerning the area and collecting them into a rather accurate map where even distinct houses should be marked. The task is terminated with the overview of the results and with discussion. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.)

The story arc tool helps to create thrilling, immersive and distinguishable experiences. The story arc is known from its use in performing arts but it also provides help in building up a tourism product. In a tourism product the beginning, the middle point and the end can be divided into seven steps of

building the story and experiencing the product; waiting for the experience and building up the excitement, starting the experience, increasing the excitement, peak experience, stabilization, end of the experience and memories and sharing the experience. All the steps contribute to the total perception of the product and should be considered carefully. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.)

Another important factor is the theme of the product. Especially product packages need a strong theme that is visible in all the elements of the package. Theme tool can give a basis for creating the storyline but products such as accommodation and restaurant services do not necessarily tell a story, when they benefit more from the authentic and credible theme.

Focused conversations help the network to discuss about the issues in product development. Normal conversation can be errant where as the planned topics will help the network to dig underneath the surface of the themes. Focused feedback conversation can bring new perspectives to the subject and development ideas for new products or redevelopment suggestion for existing products, even though all the participants have not taken part to the actual product. Tacit knowledge does not necessarily come from the experience but through the word of mouth. Accommodation providers discover easily information about the activities as well as activity providers learn about the accommodation their customers experience, when having conversations with them. This information is seldom used instructively because it requires tight co-operation within the accommodation and activity providers. A network such as St. Lapland has an excellent opportunity to co-create in this way. (Tourism Product Developer's Handbook 2010.)

5 Conclusion

Product development is a vital part of a company's operations and thus it was an interesting area to study. I believe I gained useful knowledge for my future. Comparing the traditional and the holistic approaches of tourism development widened my perspective towards the subject. Moreover, given the opportunity to redevelop the product I had already created during my practical training, gave me even greater understanding for the process. The difference between the two processes is evident.

The objective for the thesis was to determine how a theme based meaningful network product can be created. The outlines were set to relate to the redevelopment of the product package Rivers and Trails. The current situation analysis based on the interviews and observation on the Study Tour revealed that the basic elements of the product were in place and St. Lapland as an organizer was respected. Kuusamo as a destination has a lot of potential with attracting culture and nature. The fact that the companies in St. Lapland are small and family owned brings more value to the customers as the service is of good quality, authentic and personal. The main concerns were the usability of the big log houses of Oivangin Lomakartano Chalets and unified product entity with enough choices for the customers. Attention should also be given to the first impression of the physical appearance of the companies.

The development suggestions were given in three parts; the product package, the accommodations and restaurants, and the activities. The redevelopment process began by specifying the theme for the product to be Life from Nature referring to nature surrounded accommodation with local nature based dining and activities. The product was unified by removing the unfitting product elements and at the same time creating more options for the customers to be able to affect to the course of their holiday. Small improvements for the interiors of the companies were suggested for refreshment. The value of the product to the customers was increased by paying attention to how the guides can better consider the customers and

changing some practices such as removing the use of motors in the activities.

The analyses regarding the observation and the interviews affect the reliability of this thesis. I learned a lot during the thesis process and I note that I was not quite ready for the empirical part when it was conducted. Both planning as well as the implementation of the interviews and the observation was not as thorough as they should have been. It is inevitable that during the analysis new aspects arise but in this case I believe a better planning would have resulted in more comprehensive research material. The interviews were short due to lack of time because I waited till the end of the trip to conduct them. One or two longer interviews could have been conducted during the trip to be able to fully utilize the unstructured interview method. Considering the scarce schedule, it would have been beneficial to plan the interviews better and perhaps structured interviews would have been more appropriate method. I also realized that the observation would have needed more effort. As I was conducting observation for the first time I did not necessarily pay attention to all the right issues.

The observation and the interviews were conducted only with tour operators and not with end-customers, which has both good and bad sides. The empirical results were somewhat one-sided because the Study Tour did not proceed exactly the same way it would have with end-customers. The end-customers could have reacted differently to the product and they could have given varying interview answers to compare with. However, the tour operators as interviewees were productive due to knowledge and understanding of the industry and the practices of both the producing companies and the customers. Due to long experience they can quite accurately tell what their customers require.

St. Lapland can discuss the redevelopment suggestions presented in this thesis and decide to what extent to implement them. The development process of the Rivers and Trails -product is recommended to be continued with end-customers. Further, blueprinting the product package might bring some advantages on resource planning and profitability. Even though blueprinting the whole package is not viable due the possible changes,

blueprinting the separate activities could be useful. Marking the times each phase of the product element takes, removes the need for specific timetabling (See an example in Appendix 5). St. Lapland is also encouraged to utilize the diverse expertise of a network in applying different product development tools. The tools were selected in order to improve the possibility for meaningful experience in the products.

The thesis process took surprisingly long time. As the Study Tour during which the observation and the interviews were conducted, took place in early autumn, my empirical part was conducted according to the schedule. However, I had trouble putting my thoughts into words and the writing process was relatively slow and tangled. I was also able to revise the theory part only when the Product developer's handbook was published in full extent in December 2010.

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APPENDIX

Observation Form	Appendix 1
Schedule of the Study Tour for Leisure Travel Professionals	Appendix 2
Original Product Description of Rivers and Trails –Product	Appendix 3
Suggestion for River and Trails –Product’s Itinerary	Appendix 4
Example of Blueprinting	Appendix 5

Observation form:

<p>SPACE: the physical place</p> <p>OBJECT: the physical things that are present</p>	
<p>ACTOR: the people involved / interaction</p>	
<p>ACTIVITY: a set of related acts people do</p>	
<p>ACT: single actions that people do</p>	
<p>FEELING: the emotions felt and expressed</p>	

Comments:	
Authenticity / Harmony / Contrast	
Multisensory Experience	
Experience Realms: entertainment, education, esthetic, escapist	
Theme was the theme shown, did it hold up	

Schedule of the Study Tour for Leisure Travel Professionals





The program in brief:

Thursday 16th September 2010 - Welcome to Kuusamo of Flights to Kuusamo
 Welcome dinner in Restaurant Kutlala. We will also have a look at the chalets of Rukan Salonki, which are on the premises of the restaurant.
 Accommodation at stylish Oivanki Lodge

Friday 17th September 2010 - Rivers and Trails
 Discover Outank National Park! Canoeing on the river and hiking on the well known Bear's Trail. We will visit Oulanka Nature House.
 After lunch we continue with Erisbee Golf and a hike with the friendly huskies.
 Dinner Forest Restaurant Huilinki. In Huilinki you will have the possibility to meet with various suppliers from the area.
 Accommodation in Oivanki Lodge.

Saturday 18th September 2010 - Ready for an adventure
 Inspection of Hotel Rukahovi, offering a variety of room types and apartments for holiday makers in the area.
 We start our adventurous day with river rafting on the most popular river routes of Kuusamo. After a picnic lunch we continue by modern and comfortable quadbikes to Pohjolan Partti where a pampering sauna bath and delicious dinner awaits us.
 Accommodation in Oivanki Lodge.


Sunday 19th September 2010 - Kuusamo Town
 A sightseeing tour in Kuusamo is something extraordinary. We will not be looking at monuments and sights, we will be discovering the everyday local life. The places we visit offer you a story of their own. Within the sightseeing we will also have inspection of Sokos Hotel Kuusamo (with lunch) and Holiday Club Tropiikki.
 Transfer to the airport.
Flights back home!

You will be provided with contacts and information material of the area and the services provided for future business possibilities.






Original Product Description of Rivers and Trails -Product

ST. LAPLAND 

Rivers and Trails
Summer programme in Kuusamo-Lapland

Jaana Sirkiä - St. Lapland
GSM: +358 400 794 748
E-mail: jaana@stlapland.fi

Group:
Time of travel:
Accommodation:
Program:
Bookings:
Validity of the offer:

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RIVERS AND TRAILS

Welcome to experience the Lappish summer in Kuusamo Lapland. Explore the landscape scattered by rivers and lakes by canoe and hike amongst the Lappish flora and fauna in the forest. Beautiful nature, midnight sun and exciting new experiences are waiting for you.

MAIN FEATURES & HIGH LIGHTS

Pure nature

Active fun: Canoeing, white water rafting, hiking, games and more.

Personal service

Private accommodation: in cozy lodges.

Local cuisine: homemade meals of local ingredients.

ITINERARY

DAY 1 - ARRIVAL

DAY 2 - LAUNCHING THE CANOES

DAY 3 - LITTLE BEAR'S TRAIL

DAY 4 - DAY AT YOUR LEISURE

DAY 5 - ON WATER

DAY 6 - FRISBEE GOLF

DAY 7 - WHITE WATER RAFTING

DAY 8 - DEPARTURE

DESTINATION & AIRPORT

Destination: Kuusamo, Lapland

Airport: Kuusamo (KAO)

Oivangin Lomakartano:

The beautiful big log houses of Oivangin Lomakartano are situated on a beautiful small lake in the middle of the forest about 16 km from Kuusamo Airport. Big traditionally build log houses are with double rooms and sauna, WC and showers to share. A nice big living room as well as the roomy terrace invites you to spend a cozy and nice evening together... a perfect spot to enjoy the Lappish summer!

KINDLY NOTE

Dates:

Group size:

RIVERS AND TRAILS



DAY 1 - ARRIVAL

Arriving to Kuusamo, Lapland.

Transportation from airport to Oivangin Lomakartano. A collection of handsome grey log buildings are beautifully located in a pine forest. Here our hosts Heikki and Tuula greet us. We are taken to homely lodges where we accommodate.

Dinner at the restaurant.

DAY 2 – LAUNCHING THE CANOES

After the breakfast we head down to Lake Oivanginjärvi. Our experienced guide will tell you about canoeing and you will learn the basic techniques before hopping in the canoes. After equipping ourselves we launch the canoes and start the fun. On the way we can admire the beautiful lake scenery and we get to hear about the nature and the people of the area.

Lunch is served at the restaurant.

In the evening you have a chance to enjoy the pampering heat of the sauna and the dinner will be served in the restaurant.

DAY 3 – LITTLE BEAR'S TRAIL

Breakfast at the Restaurant.

Today we use our feet and enjoy the Lappish nature from land. We start from the Oulanka Visitor Center and enter the Little Bears Trail, a hiking track of 12 kilometer which takes us to the forest of the Oulanaka National Park. The rumbling of the rapids of river Kitka and the sounds of the forest will accompany us on our way. We visit a little mill at Myllykoski and enjoy a picnic lunch by the steep and beautiful rapid Jyrävä.

In the afternoon you have time to relax a bit and get ready for the dinner.

Today we have been invited to Studio restaurant Tundra where Chef de Cuisine Jarmo Pitkänen shows us how to

RIVERS AND TRAILS



get the best flavors out of the gorgeous, northern ingredients. The restaurant kitchen is buzzing with conversation and laughter. Soon the table will be set for a self-made feast. The Chef helps us to prepare a tasty three course meal and after the cooking we will just eat, talk and enjoy the evening. From here you will take many tips with you to try at home.

DAY 4 – DAY AT YOUR LEISURE

Breakfast at the Restaurant.

Today it is up to you if you want to take part to any activities or just relax and explore the surroundings or for example go swimming.



Optional activities:

- Paintball game
- Quadbike safaris
- Fishing
- Canoeing / White Water rafting



Dinner at the restaurant.

DAY 5 – ON WATER

Breakfast at the Restaurant.

It's time to hop in the canoes again. We will be transferred to Oulanka National Park from where we paddle down to Jäkälämutka. We spend a peaceful day surrounded by the beautiful landscapes.

On the way we stop for a lunch and of course there is no going home without breathtaking photographs.



Dinner at Restaurant.

RIVERS AND TRAILS



DAY 6 – FRISBEE GOLF

Breakfast at the Restaurant.

Today we see who has the best sight and the sharpest hand. For this game you will not need a Green Card but the basics are the same as in classic golf, and you have a chance to get a “Frisbee Green Car”. On the field there are metallic rings (“holes”) in which the Frisbee should end up without using too many throws.

We will be transferred to Ruka and the game field. Our guide will instruct you to the game and you have a chance to practice a little. After that you are able to go through all the nine holes at your own speed.

The afternoon is for you to relax and compare the golf results.

Dinner at the Restaurant.



DAY 7 – WHITE WATER RAFTING

Breakfast at the Restaurant.

This day is full of thrill and adrenaline bursts.

We start again from the Oulanka Visitor Center and head down the river Kitkajoki. Our guide will make sure everyone knows what should be done and how the boats are steered. Seven rapids from easy to average are waiting for us to conquer them. We will enjoy the speed of flying down the river and beautiful lake view and we have a chance to see the carnival of different animals and birds.

Dinner at the Restaurant.



DAY 8 - DEPARTURE

Breakfast at the Restaurant.

It is time to have a last glance at the Lappish nature and say goodbye.

Transfer to the Airport.

PRICES

SUPPLEMENTS

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

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Suggestion for River and Trails –Product's Itinerary

DAY 1 – ARRIVAL

DAY 2 – LAUNCHING THE CANOES

DAY 3 – LITTLE BEAR'S TRAIL

DAY 4 – DAY AT YOUR LEISURE

DAY 5 – DAY AT YOUR LEISURE

- COOKING COURSE AND DINNER AT STUDIO
RESTAURANT TUNDRA

DAY 6 – ON WATER

DAY 7 – DAY AT YOUR LEISURE

DAY 8 – DEPARTURE

Blueprinting White Water Rafting

Theme: Nature, conquering the rapids, overcoming oneself.
Stories:

Customer process	Departure for the activities	Preparing for the activity	White Water Rafting	Picnic lunch	The end of the activity	Transfers back to accommodation
Visible service-process	Pick up from the accommodation.	Signing the participation and responsibility contract. Receiving the equipment and getting dressed. Transfers to the activity venue.	Safety and paddling instructions. Dealing groups. Rafting.	Organizing the campfire. Serving the lunch.	Transfers back to Rutka Adventure's office. Returning the equipment.	Transfers back to accommodation.
Person responsible	?					
Invisible service process	Refueling the car, planning the route etc.	Preparing the equipment and the car. Cleaning and maintaining the premises.	Maintaining the boats. Updating the instructions and checking the routes. First aid kit.	Preparing the lunch and the fire equipment.	Maintaining the equipment.	
Person responsible	?					
Timetable	starting time	? minutes from the start	-/-	-/-	-/-	total time

Example of Blueprinting