



The challenges and opportunities of developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market

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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>The aim of this study was to investigate the challenges and opportunities of developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market. During the first decade of this millennium, the amount of educational tour groups to Finland from China has risen significantly. However, it is surprising to see materializing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market has been challenging. Therefore, by conducting semi-structured qualitative interviews with professionals who have developed, operated or marketed educational tours to Finland, opportunities, challenges and development suggestions were aimed to be explored. The purpose of the study is answered through the following research questions: What are the challenges of developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market? What are the opportunities of developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market? What are the development suggestions for educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market? In order to research on this subject, 9 professionals were interviewed. During the data analyses, a qualitative thematic analysis method was used. The interviewees found the challenges to be the awareness of Finland as an educational tour destination, resistance from Finnish schools, capacity, pricing and post COVID-19 concerns. The interviewees found the opportunities to be the high reputation of Finnish education, digital experience and Arctic theme. The findings may help regional development agencies, service providers and tour operators to reflect and evaluate how they can take actions to improve the services and formulate development strategies towards the Chinese market. The main limitation of this study is the limited sample from China which does not warrant generalization of the result. As a recommendation, further research should be conducted by gathering samples from more professionals in the target market, identifying further what is the market needs, and especially examining the impact of China's "Double Reduction" policy and recovery of educational tourism in the post COVID-19 era.</p>	
Keywords:	educational tourism, educational tours, challenges, opportunities, development suggestions, Finland, China, COVID-19, service innovation
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1 INTRODUCTION

Educational tourism is a sub-type of tourism. The definition of educational tourism refers to any "program in which participants travel to a location as a group with the primary purpose of engaging in a learning experience directly related to the location" (Rodger 1998). The concept of educational tourism includes components from both the education sector and the tourism industry. The combination of education and tourism has enhanced the performance of the tourism industry (Lam 2011, pp. 63-78).

The success of Finland's advanced educational system has attracted a new kind of international travelers to Finland. Visit Finland, the national tourism promotion agency tasked with promoting Finland as a tourist destination, has launched a development and promotion project in March 2017 with the title of *Educational Travel*, due to the growing interest in cross-border educational tourism in Finland (Business Finland 2018). In October 2021, Visit Finland published an educational travel e-learning program for educational tourism professionals in order to support the Finnish travel and education industries to together develop compelling and profitable educational tour packages for international customers (Visit Finland 2021).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, China was the world's largest outbound tourism source market when measured by visitor number and spending power (Huang et al. 2021). During the first decade of this millennium, the amount of educational tour groups from China also rose significantly (Visit Finland 2021). According to the country analysis report by the Economist Intelligence Unit (2021), Chinese tourists will remain a major driver of growth in the global tourism industry in the post COVID-19 era. The number of outbound travelers from China will continue to increase, because of China's thriving economic growth and huge population.

1.1 Research background

The author has worked in a tourism marketing company in Finland, in which the author has been involved with projects since 2018 of developing educational tour packages to Finland for 6 different Finnish destinations and promoting educational tour packages to

Chinese market. Through the work projects, the author has noticed that there are demand and interest of educational tours to Finland, but it is challenging to materialize the tour packages on the target market.

The COVID-19 pandemic has paralyzed global tourism and provided an opportunity to pause, reorientate and rethink (Lew et al. 2020). Educational travel to Finland for the Chinese market remains of interest (Visit Finland 2021). The time has come to reposition the tourism industry and change the tourism products (Abbas et al. 2021). Therefore, there is a need for diverse perspectives of identifying the challenges and opportunities of educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market and providing ideas for service development of educational tour packages for this market segment. This is to be prepared for when educational travel from the target market is once again possible.

1.2 Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to investigate the challenges and opportunities of developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market. Therefore, by conducting semi-structured qualitative interviews with professionals who have developed, operated, or marketed educational tours to Finland, opportunities, challenges, and development suggestions for educational tours were aimed to be explored.

The following three research questions guided the study:

RQ 1: What are the challenges of developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market?

RQ 2: What are the opportunities of developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market?

RQ 3: What are the development suggestions for educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market?

1.2.1 Delimitation

Educational tourism travelers include education professionals; government and municipal education officials; principals and teachers; education company representatives, and school children visiting Finland for educational camps. Providing school visits is the first and foremost part of educational travel packaged by local travel companies (Visit Finland 2021). Based on this observation, the research is designed to investigate educational tours with school visits as the main focus in relation to the study objective.

1.3 Structure of the study

The literature review in chapter 2 gives general background information on the topic from different perspectives: COVID-19 impact on tourism, the definition of educational tourism, the economic benefits of educational tourism, the growing interest of educational tours to Finland, the digital experience of educational tours, a Chinese market update, the on-going major education reform in China and service innovation in tourism.

The research methodology is explained in chapter 3. The findings of the research are presented and discussed in chapter 4 and chapter 5. The conclusion, limitation of the study and recommendation for future research are presented in chapter 5.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Tourism and impact of COVID-19

The World Tourism Organization provides this definition of tourism: “Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes” (World Tourism Organization 2008). According to Huang et al. (2021), tourism is vulnerable to many types of crisis events. Infectious diseases can cause a public health crisis and influence the tourism industry, as travelers may transmit the disease during their travel and may also get infected by others during the travel (Pine & McKercher 2004).

The health experts first identified Coronavirus in Wuhan, China, in late December 2019. On 11th March 2020, in World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General's media briefing, WHO made the assessment that COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic, due to the rapid increase in the numbers of cases outside China (World Health Organization 2020). International tourist arrivals fell sharply in March 2020. According to World Tourism Organization's report on COVID-19 Related Travel Restrictions, as of 20th April 2020, 100% of global destinations had introduced travel restrictions in response to the pandemic (World Tourism Organization 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has brought striking challenges to the global tourism industry.

The issues concerning health safety, travel restrictions, and economic uncertainty continue to limit travelling. As of 8th November 2021, the Finnish Border Guard has discontinued its internal border controls within the Schengen area. Restrictions are still in place regarding external border traffic from many countries. Persons who have received a complete and valid vaccination series may be granted entry into Finland from any country, provided that at least 7 days have passed since the last vaccine dose has been received (Finnish Border Guard 2021).

As of 30th August 2021, China's cross-border travel is still extremely limited and has not seen any meaningful recovery to date (Chen et al. 2021). Even though China's domestic travel has made strong recovery, on 23rd October 2021 the Chinese authorities asked to

tighten epidemic prevention and control measures in the culture and tourism industry (The State Council of China 2021).

According to a study carried by Ivanova et al. (2021) analyzing the travel intentions of tourists in post-pandemic era, hygiene, disinfection, and reliable health system in a destination will be the leading factors in travelers' decisions. Tourists are likely to travel by choosing destinations with reliable safety systems.

2.2 Educational tourism

2.2.1 The concept of educational tourism

Educational tourism is a sub-type of tourism. The definition of educational tourism refers to any "program in which participants travel to a location as a group with the primary purpose of engaging in a learning experience directly related to the location" (Rodger 1998). Figure 1 illustrates the two main components of educational tourism sources (Abubakar et al. 2014).

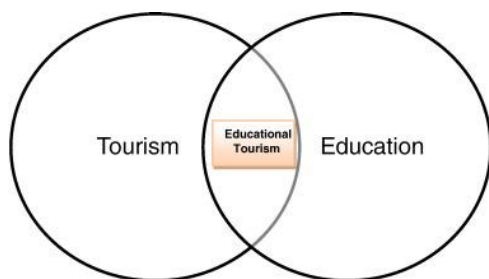


Figure 1. Two Main Components of Educational Tourism Sources (Abubakar et al. 2014)

Educational tourism is described as the event that people travel across international borders to acquire intellectual services (Abubakar et al. 2014). According to Bhuiyana et al. (2010), educational tourism is delivered through an educational program and seeks to change the learner's cognitive, participatory knowledge, skills, and behavior. Through educational tourism, the visitors travel to a location to engage in learning experiences and to develop skills.

Pitman et al. (2010) suggest a process approach for defining educational tourism, in which educational tourism can be identified by three key features: The trip is intentionally educationally focused; The style of learning is experiential; The trip is structured around an educational program.

Educational tourism provides travelers opportunities for self-improvement, career enhancement, acquiring new knowledge. Educational tourism comes in different forms, such as school trips, seminar holidays, experienced-based learning, and language courses (CBI 2020).

2.2.2 Economic benefits of educational tourism on destination

Educational tourism is also a contributor to the economy. Ibănescu et al. (2018) suggest that tourism may make a contribution to demographic stability and socio-economic sustainability, particularly in rural areas. Educational tourism offers the potential to create more employment opportunities and better incomes for the local society (International Labor Office 2019).

In a study investigating the roles of universities in improving the potential for the provision of educational tourism in their areas and thus fostering local development, Tomasi et al. (2020) suggest that educational tourists can benefit the destination by providing more opportunities for local entrepreneurs, economic benefits for small businesses and employment opportunities for local people. Similarly, Obrien & Jamnia (2013) found in their study that international educational tourism can increase the sales of products and services, and related tax revenue, as well as job creation.

Chinese leisure travelers typically spend no more than one or two nights in any one location, educational tours encourage guests to stay longer in the destination. Guests in the educational tours can travel up to two weeks in Finland and stay several days in one region. Consequently, the money spent on accommodation, various activities, and shopping, accumulates the benefit to the local community (Visit Finland 2021).

2.3 Finland as educational tour destination

2.3.1 The growing interest of educational tours to Finland

Finland has been among the top-ranking countries in all PISA tests since 2000 (Statista 2021). PISA is the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s program for International Student Assessment. PISA measures 15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges (OECD 2021). In the PISA test 2018, Finnish students performed well above the OECD average in reading, mathematics, and science knowledge (Statista 2021). The high ranking has contributed to the increasing global awareness of Finland's advanced education system.

Visit Finland is a national authority on tourism promotion in order to help Finnish travel companies to develop and market high-quality travel products. As stated by Visit Finland (2021), the success of Finland's advanced educational system has attracted a new type of international travelers to Finland. Multiple countries and regions have shown growing interests towards educational tours in Finland to learn the success of Finnish education. Visit Finland has launched a development and promotion project in March 2017 with the title of *Educational Travel*. The goal is to provide Finnish educational travel products for international tour operators and to develop the sector's output in Finland. The demand is especially high for school visits to kindergartens, elementary schools, high schools and vocational schools (Business Finland 2018). For example, Espoo, which is part of the Helsinki metropolitan area, is home to the headquarters of many major Finnish companies and start-ups. Consequently, there is strong demand for school visits from educational travelers – the local schools hosted about 600 educational delegations in 2019 (Business Finland 2020).

Visit Finland has published an educational travel e-learning program for educational travel professionals in October 2021. This educational travel e-learning program consists of a collection of materials, with text, images, and videos. It aims to support the Finnish travel and education industries in developing and implementing compelling and profitable educational tour packages for international customers (Business Finland 2021).

Educational travel is part of the tourism business, but also one part of education export (koulutusvienti in Finnish), which is commonly used in the Finnish policy context (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture 2010). The Finnish National Agency for Education (OPH) defines education export as “international trade that consists of various products and services within teaching, education and other competences” (Visit Finland 2021). A significant new growth sector for education exports of Finland is arising. Industry companies net sales increased (see Figure 2) from the starting level 260 million EUR in 2014 to 359 million EUR by the end of 2018. In 2019, net sales already amounted to 385 million EUR (Finnish National Agency for Education 2020).

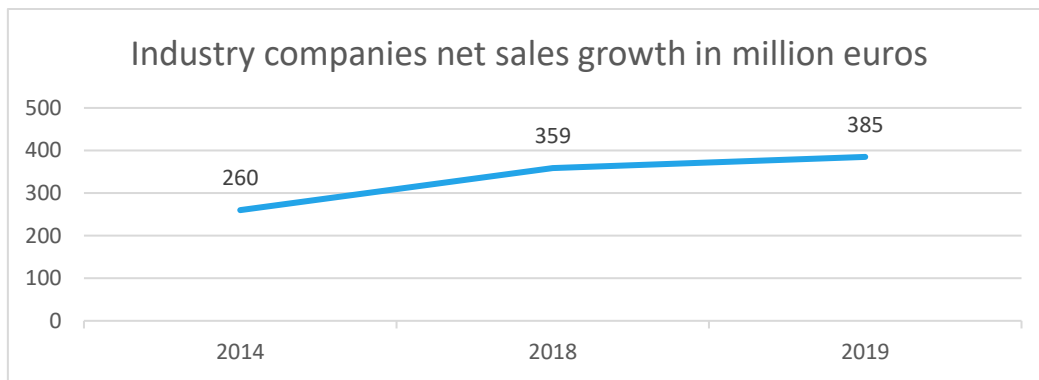


Figure 2. Industry companies net sales growth for education exports of Finland (Finnish National Agency for Education 2020).

2.3.2 Digital experience of educational tours

Tourism experience has traditionally relied on in-person visitation (El-Said & Aziz 2021). While outbound travel has come to a near halt due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and as mentioned earlier China’s cross-border travel is still extremely limited, technology allows visiting destinations as a digital experience. Technology offered for travel-related services is also emerging as a substantial need for the tourism industry in the pandemic scenario (Singh & Bashar 2021).

Virtual educational tours between schools are already a reality for both school children and for educational experts. Virtual visits can be offered in pre-recorded format, so that they can be utilized in spite of different time zones, or as interactive LIVE programs (Visit Finland 2021). There are private companies in Finland already piloting LIVE virtual visit

programs with the goal to create virtual educational tour programs without compromising the elements of the authentic experience (VisitEDUfinn 2021). However, the educational travelers are anticipated to prioritize meeting authentic people over applying digital solutions only (Visit Finland 2021). Jarratt (2021) also suggests that virtual tourism increases the likelihood to physically visit these destinations in the future.

2.4 Educational tours in the Chinese market

2.4.1 Chinese market update

In China parents invest a major share of their income into their children's education over the years and go to great lengths to fund their children's education. According to a study carried out by Lin (2019), the consumption of children's education has become the primary expense of urban families in China. Lin (2019) suggests in his study that Chinese parents consider their investment in their children as a strategy to help their children achieve educational success and ultimately obtain social upward mobility. Overseas educational tours as part of education consumption is a growing business in China. Educational tours are considered a good way to gain knowledge and reinforce values that can't be taught in normal settings.

The choice of destination country for educational tours is a leading factor when considering participating in overseas educational tours in the Chinese market. A survey was conducted in March 2019 with samples containing 1,908 responses from parents and 1,550 responses from students among New Oriental international educational travel platform users. The result of the survey (see Figure 3) shows that around 58,3 percent of respondents in China considered the destination country of the educational tour as a leading factor for their choice (Statista 2020).

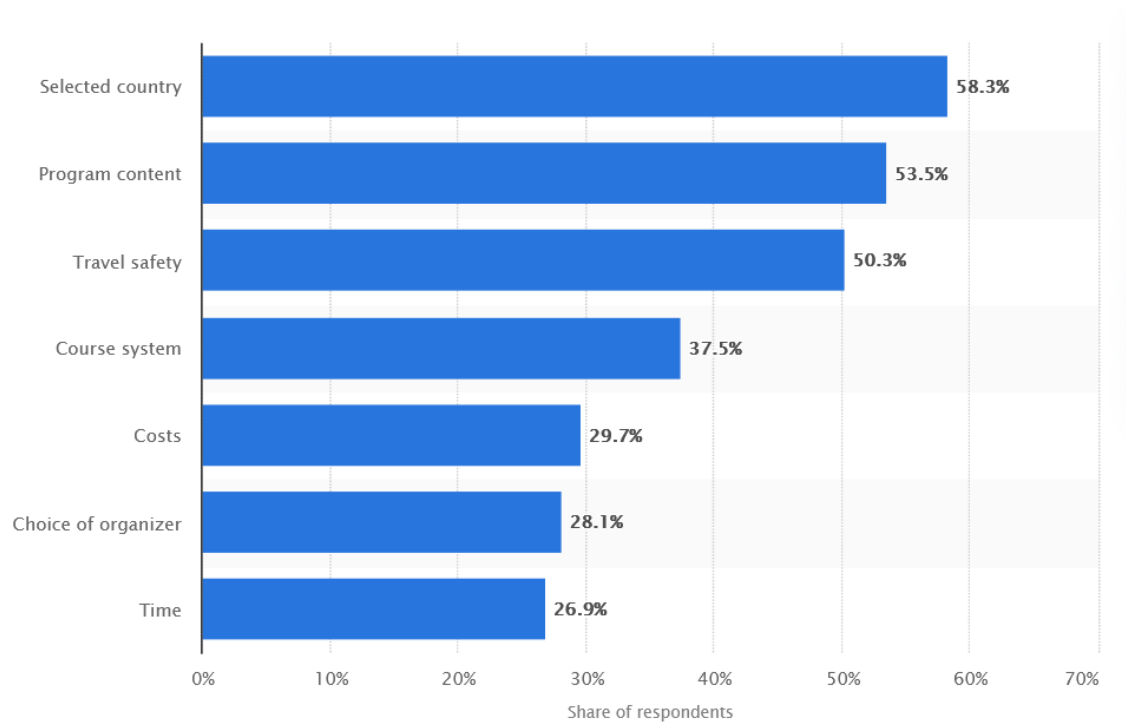


Figure 3. Leading factors of overseas educational trips in China (Statista 2020)

As mentioned earlier, the COVID-19 pandemic has heavily impacted the international tourism industry. However, educational travel to Finland for the Chinese market remains of interest (Visit Finland 2021). Traditional educational travel destinations, such as the UK, USA, and New Zealand, will continue to attract the majority of the children’s study tour and school camp market. Finland is a new educational tour destination for Chinese market (Visit Finland 2021).

2.4.2 On-going major education reform

China is going through a major education reform. In an effort to ease pressure on children and parents, China released "Double Reduction" policy in the education sector in July 2021. The policy states that after-school tutoring by private companies is restricted to subjects outside the core curricula (JD Supra Knowledge Center 2021). This reform in China's education policy brings fundamental change to the private tutoring industry and affects certain education export segments. However, educational travel remains intact and may see even new opportunities (Visit Finland 2021).

The “Double Reduction” policy has a significant impact on the private tutoring industry (JD Supra Knowledge Center 2021). According to a 2020 report by Oliver Wyman (2020), the market size for China’s after-school tutoring for kindergarten to 12th grade students reached 800 billion yuan (\$123.7 billion) in 2019. The new policy has hit private tutoring companies and left businesses struggling. When the new regulations were announced, some of China's leading tutoring service providers, like New Oriental, and TAL Education lost more than half their value on the US stock market (CGTN 2021).

This reform in the education policy caused the industry to display resilience and willingness to transform. Companies in private tutoring sectors are seeking for solutions. One of the leading private tutoring service providers, New Oriental, issued an announcement on 13th October 2021 regarding adjustment of organizational structure for business departments of each training school. The announcement requires that all schools need to set up an international educational tour & educational camp department, which covers the whole school age period and is mainly responsible for the business of educational tours and camps (Finance Sina 2021).

2.5 Service innovation in tourism

Innovations refer to the introduction and implementation of new concepts such as product, service, and process (Shamim et al. 2021). Service innovation penetrates all fields of the service industry (Tseng et al. 2015) and tourism industry is a major contributor to the service industry (Abbas et al. 2021). The concept of service innovation has been recognized as an important tool for enhancing service quality in tourism industry and service innovation has been considered as a primary source of competitive advantage of operations (Subramanian et al. 2016).

According to Xie et al. (2020), hospitality organizations now face highly competitive environments, and innovation is the only way to maintain competitive advantages over competitors. Service providers must constantly update their processes and products to remain competitive (Thakur & Hale 2013). Similarly, Spohrer & Maglio (2008) also suggest that service innovation is an important aspect for improving service providers’ competitiveness in competitive markets. In the process of creating innovation tourism product, most

companies in tourism business are transitioning to focus on external processes, which rely on knowledge created by external sources, such as customers, business partners, and competitive firms (Busser et al. 2019). According to Mention (2011), hospitality service innovation becomes a critical source of competitive differentiation.

Educational tourism differs from leisure travel. Educational tourism requires joint collaboration from both the education sector and the tourism industry. The objective of service innovation in educational tourism is to enhance the competitiveness of educational tour products by optimally arranging and managing the elements of services.

2.6 Summary of the literature review

In chapter 2 literature review, the author presented an overview of the key concepts relevant to grasp what are discussed in the study: tourism, educational tourism, Finland as an educational tourism destination, market update in China and service innovation in tourism. Additionally, the current COVID-19 impact and the education reform in China were outlined.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the research methodology of the study will be explained. It aims to present how the research is conducted. First, the research design of this study is introduced. Then follows a description of the interview participants and how the data collection is processed. Finally, the specific method for data analysis, which is qualitative thematic analysis, is described.

3.1 Research design

A qualitative research methodology was utilized to examine the research questions. Qualitative research provides insights and understanding of the research problem setting. It is a form of research in which the researcher gives weight to the views of the participants (Ahmad et al. 2019). A Semi-structured interview design was chosen to gain an understanding of the research topic from interviewees' different roles of the educational tour business. Semi-structured interview is the most common of all qualitative research methods (Alvesson & Deetz 2000, p. 194). Thematic analysis was used to uncover the themes related to the research topic. Thematic analysis is the search for and extraction of general patterns found in the data through multiple readings of the data (Yukhymenko et al. 2014).

3.2 Participants

The interviewees for this research are 9 professionals in business development, the tour operating field in Finland and educational tour consulting in China. They have experience in related work projects of developing, operating, or marketing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market. They were chosen from the author's business network. Eight interviewees were in Finland and one interviewee was in China. Each interviewee answered the interview in English.

The reasons for choosing this group of professionals are: First, they all have experience developing, operating, or marketing educational tours to Finland related to Chinese market; Second, they represent different roles as regional developing agencies in Finland, as

tour operators in Finland and as an educational tour consultant in China, which help to investigate the research questions from different perspectives in business and culture.

Therefore, investigating the opportunities, challenges and development suggestions from these professionals fits with the criteria of the research.

3.3 Data collection

The primary data presented for this study was gathered by using the qualitative method of conducting semi-structured interviews. The data used for this study was collected during 27th September 2021 and 6th October 2021 with nine interviewees through face-to-face (F2F) interviews, one email interview and three phone call interviews. As the tourism industry has changed significantly with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic since January 2020 and China has released the “Double Reduction” policy regarding education reform in July 2021, both factors may influence future educational tour packages targeting the Chinese market. Thus, it is a suitable time to investigate the research topic through the interviewees’ different roles in regional developing agencies, tour operating or educational tour consulting. Table 1 presents the list of interviewees by the chronological order of taking the interviews.

Table 1. List of interviewees by the chronological order of taking the interviews.

Nr.	Name	Position	Organization	Channel
1	Brudy Han Zhao	Co-founder	Beap Education, Finland	F2F interview 27.09.2021
2	Lacey Yi- Yang	Former man- aging director	Timetravels Incoming Ltd., Fin- land	F2F interview 27.09.2021
3	Kari Hal- onen	CEO	ToolBox Consulting Ltd., Finland	F2F interview + answered as text in email 28.09.2021
4	Evelyn Rui Jiang	Chief Operat- ing Officer	Arctic China Ltd., Finland	F2F interview 29.09.2021

Nr.	Name	Position	Organization	Channel
5	Xiang Zhang	Co-founder	Timetravels Incoming Ltd., Finland	F2F interview 30.09.2021
6	Jing Zhao	Founder	Fin-Board Education Ltd., China	Phone call 04.10.2021
7	Lesley Xiaoyi Li	Education Professional	Little Heroes International Kindergarten, Finland	F2F interview 05.10.2021
8	Peter Källberg	Project Manager	VASEK Vaasa Region Development Company, Finland	Phone call 06.10.2021
9	Rositsa Röntynen	Project Manager	JAMK University of Applied Sciences, Finland	Phone call 06.10.2021

Interview appointments were arranged face-to-face for interviewee 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7. Interview appointments were arranged through phone calls with interviewee 6, 8 and 9. All the 9 interviews were with audio recordings, while interviewee 3 answered both with written form in an email and a face-to-face interview. A semi-structured interview method with a qualitative approach was used. Ten interview questions were sent to the interviewees in advance by email or the WeChat app, before conducting the interviews. The interviews lasted approximately from 15 minutes to 30 minutes.

The interview questions asked from the interviewees were:

- 1) What are the major challenges of developing educational tours in Finland targeting the Chinese market?
- 2) What are the reasons of these challenges?
- 3) What are the aspects you need support in developing educational tours in Finland targeting the Chinese market?
- 4) What are the opportunities of developing educational tours in Finland targeting the Chinese market?
- 5) Due to COVID outbreak, educational tour groups haven't been able to visit Finland. What could be the new opportunities of educational tours in post COVID era?

- 6) How does the China's "Double Reduction" policy may affect the educational tours?
- 7) What is the unique selling point of educational tours in Finland to Chinese market?
- 8) Why do you think these are selling points for Chinese market?
- 9) According to your experience, what are the criteria of a good educational tour package for Chinese market?
- 10) What is the age group of students and from which region of China are the main target clients for Finnish educational tours?

3.4 Data analysis

The data analysis was conducted by using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method aimed at identifying and analyzing patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke 2012). In this study, a thematic analysis was conducted by analyzing challenges, opportunities and development suggestions found in the transcripts produced by semi-structured interviews with 9 professionals who have experience in related work projects of the research topic. This approach was taken to explore the research topic from the interviewees' perspectives. Coding is the primary process for developing themes by identifying items of analytic interest in the data and tagging these with a coding label. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe codes as "pitchy labels identifying what is of interest in the data" and themes as "a common, recurring pattern across a dataset, clustered around a central organizing concept".

This research followed the 6 steps within the process of performing a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006), as illustrated in Figure 4.



Figure 4. 6 steps of a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006)

According to this theory of 6 steps of thematic analysis, the below steps were done in this study:

The first step of the thematic analysis process was familiarizing with the data. After audio recordings were conducted for all the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed to text format with an online auto-transcription service Otter.ai. As English is not the native language for all the interviewees and the interview narratives spoke with some degree of accents, there were some inaccurate transcribed words in the text transcriptions with Otter.ai. The author listened to the audio recordings, added the timestamps to the transcripts, cross-checked the transcripts, fixed the inaccurate transcribed content to ensure the accuracy of the research dataset. Next the author carefully read through the transcribed data several times and gained familiarity with the text as a whole.

Next the author read the data multiple times and aimed to identify interesting aspects and apply suitable codes to them. A set of 14 codes were initially generated, which represented the interesting excerpts in the dataset. The author did a few further rounds of checking to re-examine the codes and sorted the codes into three themes. As shown in Figure 5, 13 codes formed the main themes, whereas 1 other code ‘curriculum’ was discarded. The two codes connected with dotted lines under the theme ‘development suggestions’ are mandatory interview questions for the interviewees; thus, it’s marked differently than other codes. See Figure 5 for the developed codes and themes.

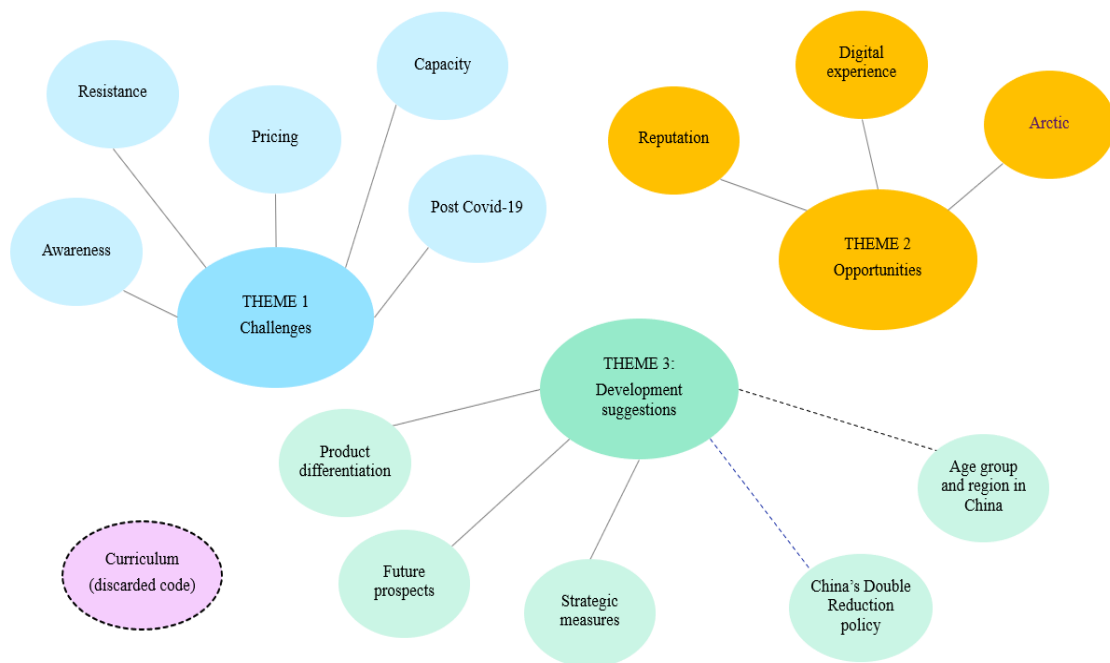


Figure 5. Codes and themes developed with thematic analysis.

Then, the author reviewed the three themes. The three themes related to the research questions were *challenges*, *opportunities*, and *development suggestions*. Below Table 2 summarizes the themes, the definition of each code, its description, and an extract example.

Table 2. Themes, codes, descriptions, and extract samples from the research dataset with thematic analysis.

Themes	Codes	Descriptions	Extract examples
1. Challenges	Awareness	The awareness of Finland as an educational tour destination in the Chinese market	<i>“Finland as educational tour destination, clients here in China are not that familiar with it.” (Interviewee 6)</i>
	Resistance	The resistance from Finnish schools	<i>“You always need to find the school that is willing to take your groups. That’s really difficult.” (Interviewee 2)</i>
	Pricing	The pricing level of educational tour packages	<i>“Because the profit margin is very small, it’s difficult to proceed with it.” (Interviewee 6)</i>
	Capacity	The capacity of Finnish schools of hosting the educational tours	<i>“Finnish school is quite small, compare to Chinese schools. That’s why when the Chinese students coming, the resources of Finnish schools are very limited.” (Interviewee 1)</i>
	Post COVID-19	The reflections of post COVID-19 era regarding educational tours	<i>“I think that we have to discuss what a lot about security and backup plans when it comes to this scenario that we just experienced.” (Interviewee 8)</i>

Themes	Codes	Descriptions	Extract examples
2. Opportunities	Reputation	The reputation of Finnish education and educational tours	<i>“It has the best educational system in the world. I would say that this is the greatest, or the best opportunity for Finland.” (Interviewee 5)</i>
	Digital experience	The opinions about virtual educational tours	<i>“I see now that there will be opening from the digital and virtual way of providing educational tours.” (Interviewee 3)</i>
	Arctic	The resources related to Lapland, Santa Claus and snow	<i>“Finland as a unique designation is very much well known by its northern position of the world. And its snow and Santa Claus.” (Interviewee 5)</i>
3. Development suggestions	Product differentiation	Developing unique selling points for educational tours	<i>“I really feel uncomfortable when different areas of Finland they are selling the same products.” (Interviewee 1)</i>
	Future prospects	Creating future prospects and further development options for students	<i>“If you select some education tours, you have to have some aim. [...] for Chinese students, travelling to some countries, they are willing to go to these countries in future.” (Interviewee 1)</i>

Themes	Codes	Descriptions	Extract examples
3. Development suggestions	Strategic measures	More support to Finnish schools on the development strategic level	<i>“There are development projects, but you have first to make a very specific plan about what are you going to develop and to apply for funding and then in the remaining months” (Interviewee 9)</i>
	China’s “Double Reduction” policy	The feedback from interviewees about China’s “Double Reduction” policy	<i>“Parents maybe will have more time and more money to spend on their kids. It also could be seen a new opportunity for the for develop the educational tours. Yeah. So in this perspective, we could take advantage of the this new policy.” (Interviewee 7)</i>
	Age group and region in China	Main target clients’ age group and region in China	<i>“Regarding the age group is about like, from middle school to, middle school student to universities students” (Interviewee 4)</i>

Finally, the author transformed the analysis into an interpretable writing by selecting appropriate extracts and relating back to the research questions. The next chapter presents the findings from the thematic analysis conducted via semi-structured interviews.

4 RESULTS

The findings of the research are presented in this chapter. The research results conclude findings from the semi-structured interviews. It is structured to be presented in the order of the research questions.

Firstly, the main challenges of developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market are the awareness of Finland as an educational tour destination, resistance from Finnish schools, pricing, capacity of Finnish side and post COVID-19 concerns. Secondly, the main opportunities of developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market are the high reputation of Finnish education, digital experience and Arctic theme. Thirdly, the development suggestions for educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market are suggested as product differentiation, future prospects for students and establishing strategic measures. In summary of the results, the interviewees' opinions about target age group of students, target client region in China and the possible impact of China's "Double Reduction" policy are presented.

4.1 Challenges of developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market

The challenges of developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market were evaluated by the interviewees, since they all have experience in related work projects. The main idea was to find out the interviewees' insights of the research topic through their roles as regional developing agencies, tour operators or an educational tour consultant. The findings suggested that the most mentioned challenges by the interviewees are shown in below Figure 6:

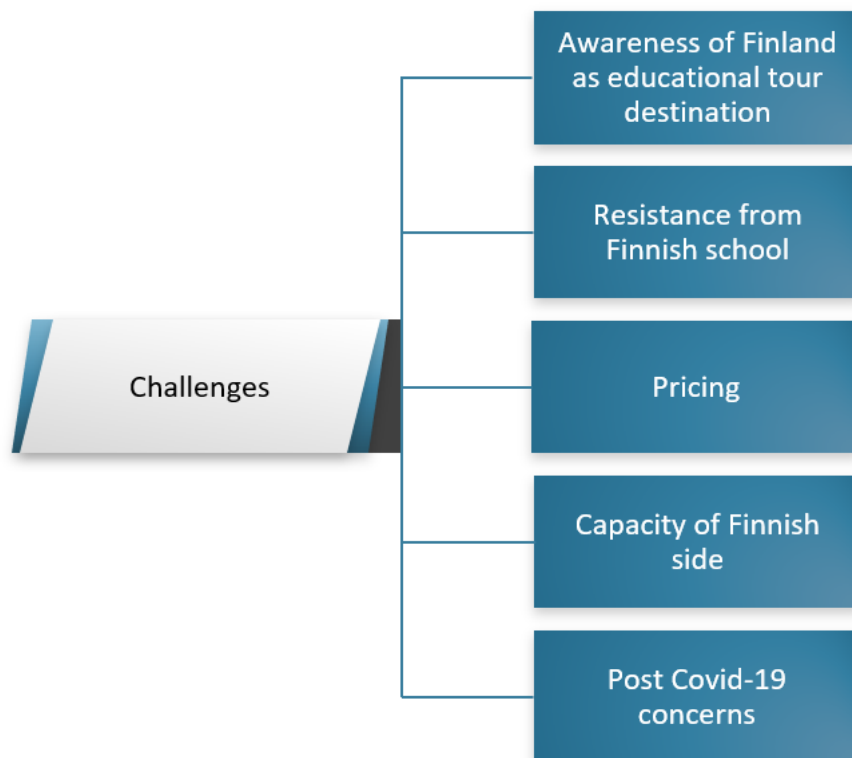


Figure 6. The main challenges of developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market.

4.1.1 Awareness of Finland as an educational tour destination

Five of the interviewees mentioned that clients in China are not familiar with Finland as an educational tour destination. Some of them pointed out that their clients in China mostly choose English-speaking countries as their first option of educational tour destinations, for example, the United States, Canada and the UK. The awareness of Finland as an educational tour destination is unfamiliar for parents who pay for the educational tours.

“Finland as a destination in educational tour countries is not popular as English native speaking countries, like United States, Canada, UK. So, the parents who are going to pay for the trip, for example, the schools who is going to organize the trips, their first destinations is always this kind of English native speaking countries.” (Interviewee 1)

The interviewees stated that Finland as a destination for educational tours cannot be understood fully by the market yet. For different parties in China who are involved in the process of educational tours would mostly use English speaking countries as their destinations. The different parties could be, for example, the schools in China which are organizing their students to participate in educational tours, the students’ parents who are

paying for the educational tours, and the business partners in China who are promoting and selling the educational tours. One interviewee pointed out that unless there is a very specific reason to come to Finland, it is very challenging for their co-operating partners in China to sell educational tours to Finland in Chinese market, comparing to the educational tour packages from English speaking countries.

“The first challenge is that as Finland as educational tour destination, clients here in China are not that familiar with it. [...] So our clients, they mostly, they use English speaking countries as their destination. So unless you have a specific very, very good reason to come to Finland, it's very challenging to convince clients to go forward with this.” (Interviewee 6)

4.1.2 Resistance from Finnish schools

According to interviewees, school visits are one of the most important features that is wanted to be included in the educational tours. The interviewees stated that it is challenging to find Finnish schools that are willing to take the educational tour groups and provide the interactions with Finnish students. The following two aspects are identified by the interviewees: non-profit driven and summer vacation season.

The interviewees stated that educational tours bring two very different fields together: tourism and education. But schools in Finland are not profit driven and educational professionals don't usually have a commercial attitude. In addition to that, educational professionals usually cite the fact that commercial activities are not part of their tasks.

“Schools in Finland are not profit driven. So, teachers and principals, they don't have any motivation, basically to, or to welcome the international students, or to be involved in this kind of commercial study tours with tour operators comparing to other countries. There are some schools are willing to take visitors, but only like once or twice a year in small cities.” (Interviewee 2)

When tour operators have received requests from multiple cities in Finland wishing for more visitors to their cities, tour operators suggested educational tours and the feedback from the cities are positive, as the interviewees described, 'motivated'. However, when tour operators have received the brochures and contact information of schools from Finnish cities, it has been challenging to communicate with the schools to make actionable arrangements for tour operators to act on educational tours. The interviewees stated that

Finnish schools are usually very cautious with these kinds of visiting requests from educational tour operators' side.

“Previously there are multiple cities, that they wish to have more visitors in their city. However, when the cities are very motivated, but the schools are not. There is obvious gap between the communication. Cities can gather all the info of school, the principals contact info, and everything like pictures, and descriptions of schools, altogether becomes a file, and then they provide this to you. When you really want to contact with these schools, it's not, it doesn't go smoothly, you obviously feel that they don't want your groups to be in the school.” (Interviewee 2)

Another important point brought up during the interviews was that it was really challenging during the summer vacation seasons in Finland to visit Finnish schools and have Finnish students to interact with Chinese students. The interviewees mentioned that the school summer vacation in China is usually in July and August which is the peak season for students to participate in educational tours. But in July and until mid-August, Finnish schools are on vacation. The interviewees concluded that the reason is that in Finnish culture people enjoy their vacation. Finnish students and teachers are not willing to go back to school and working place for this kind of purpose of educational tours.

“Especially during the summer vacation, [...] if we want to find a contact person to connect to the Finnish school, and then to manage an educational tour in that school, with the teachers and the students, it seems impossible during that time. [...] because when during the vacation in Finnish culture that everyone just enjoy their vacation. Yeah. So, no one would like to go back to the working place or to the study place just for this kind of purpose.” (Interviewee 7)

“During the summer time, it is really challenging to have Finnish students to be interested about this. They are having school holidays and it's difficult to create that kind of atmosphere that this is normal school.” (Interviewee 3)

4.1.3 Pricing

A few interviewees mentioned that the pricing of the educational tour packages in Finland has been a challenge for their co-operating partners in China, because the profit margin is small and the tour packages are more expensive compared to the educational tours of English-speaking countries. One interviewee stated that in his experience, the educational tour products of Finland is almost 15% higher than the United States.

“Some companies are selling cheaper products. Because it looks like a pure travelling product. So it is cheaper. But if we say official educational tour, it is almost like 15% higher than United states.” (Interviewee 1)

“The second challenge is the price. [...] so much pressure for our clients to push it forward. Because the profit margin is very small, it's difficult to proceed with it. Because compared to

other countries, for example, English speaking countries with the same price, [...] these educational tours to America, that is much easier to push to the clients.” (Interviewee 6)

4.1.4 Capacity of Finnish side

According to the interviewees, they have described the capacity of Finnish schools as one of the challenges. The research interviewees mentioned that big market players in China which operate the educational tours are aiming to maximize the profit by sending series of student groups for educational tours. The scale of the groups is thousands of students per school. Though in Finland the schools are quite small, compared to China. Finnish schools are not capable of handling the visitors’ volumes.

“Finnish school is quite small, compare to Chinese schools. That’s why when the Chinese students coming, the resources of Finnish schools are very limited.” (Interviewee 1)

“For big market players in China, they are aiming for profit. They are aiming for sending series student groups. They are talking about thousands of students per school, then even charter planes [...] That’s where they can maximize the profit and then Finland is not a country where they can handle this kind of volume. But UK and US, they can. Japan can. Singapore can. But Finland is not there yet.” (Interviewee 2)

One interviewee has pointed out that it is possible for tour operators to negotiate with youth camps and some schools in Finland that they maybe can manage a couple of groups. However, it is not possible to continuously receive hundreds of students around the year.

4.1.5 Post COVID-19 concerns

The COVID-19 pandemic has shaken the travel industry, the issue of health safety during travel is brought to the forefront. Some of the interviewees stated concerns of educational tours in post COVID-19 era as one of the challenges. The challenge is how to make the parents feel safe of their children participating in educational tours overseas. The interviewees also shared concerns of how to prepare backup plans in case such a scenario like COVID-19 happens again. The interviewees suggested that plan B – a backup plan – needs to be discussed and prepared in advance.

“I think that we have to discuss what a lot about security and backup plans when it comes to this scenario that we just experienced.” (Interviewee 8)

“I think that in the post COVID era, everyone is questioning the concept concept of putting all the eggs in one basket, everyone has to realize now that there must be Plan B in any case” (Interviewee 9)

4.2 Opportunities of developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market

Based on the research interviews, the following three aspects shown in below Figure 7 were identified as the main opportunities of developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market.

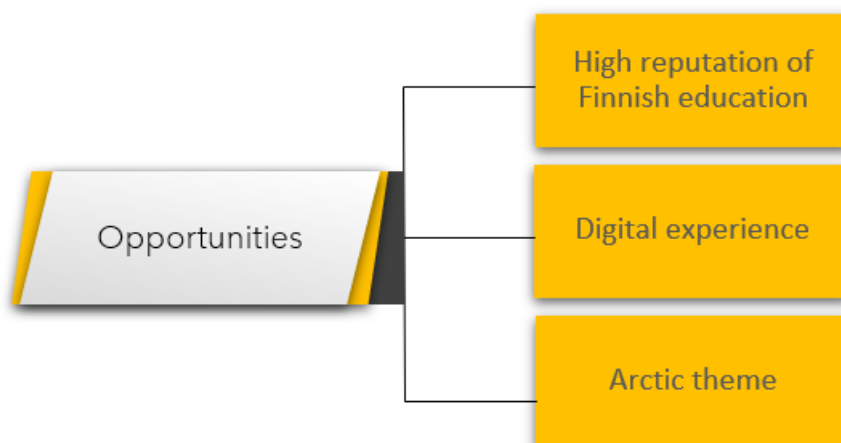


Figure 7. The main opportunities of developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market.

4.2.1 High reputation of Finnish education

The majority of the interviewees have mentioned that the high reputation of Finnish education and being a top-ranking performer of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an opportunity for developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market. The interviewees suggested that all these kinds of factors give strong motivations for Chinese to visit Finland for the educational purpose. The interviewees also noted that Chinese families care a lot about rankings, because the Chinese society is competitive. The top rankings give parents who are paying for their children's trips the sense of value of the educational tour products.

“Best education, on the higher end in the PISA test will be the selling points or the major selling points. The reason behind is that is that I was in China market, people are still believing in so called the best criteria or ranking some something is ranking on the top. So, this gives a direct feeling for the persons like especially for the parents who are really paying for their kids’ trip that they can sense the value of the products.” (Interviewee 5)

However, some interviewees also pointed out that even though the top-ranking Finnish education is an opportunity of developing educational tours to Finland, they also stated that this is only fame, without showing in the educational tour products yet. According to the interviewees, in many destinations in Finland, there aren't concrete products developed for the educational tours.

“Finnish education is already famous, so Finnish education has a fame. [...] Unfortunately, these are only the names, they are not showing as in the educational tours yet.” (Interviewee 2)

“Finland is being promoted as a country with excellent quality of education. But as many destinations or let's say at many destinations, there aren't concrete products developed for educational travel. So, we say we are good at education, but there is nothing to actually sell to people who get interested by this.” (Interviewee 9)

4.2.2 Digital experience

China has suspended outbound travel since January 2020 as part of pandemic control measures to suppress the spread of the virus which first emerged in Wuhan, China. Educational tour groups from China haven't been able to visit Finland. China's outbound travel is still extremely limited. To reduce cross-border transmission of COVID-19, all travelers who enter China, require predeparture negative antibody and PCR tests, and follow the procedure of “14+7+7” quarantine system (14-day centralized hotel quarantine; one-week at-home isolation; one-week health monitoring) since January 2021 (Chen et al. 2021). While outbound travel has come to a near halt, technology is allowing to visit the destination as digital experience.

The majority of the interviewees mentioned a positive outlook of the digital experience and considered the COVID-19 pandemic situation as an opportunity which accelerates service providers' pace to develop the online services and export them to international markets. The interviewees also highlighted that digital experience can be a warm-up for the future educational tours, before the outbound travel restrictions lift. Though the interviewees also pointed out that the virtual educational tours will not be able to replace the actual tours of visiting the tour destination.

“At the moment this border restrictions and is not yet ready for the tours to be operated. So if we think about the virtual possibility, virtual tours, well it can be as like kind of warm up for the future tours, but the virtual tours will not be able to replace the actual tours of visiting the

destination. So it can be a warm up. But it cannot replace these actual educational tours of visiting the country.” (Interviewee 6)

However, one interviewee shared a different point of view than the others regarding digital experience. This interviewee stated that during the COVID-19 pandemic, while seeing a lot of companies or persons trying to make educational tour or educational events online, the obvious benefits are not seen. Thus, educational tours can't be totally moved to online in the future.

“During COVID, I see a lot of companies or persons they try to make some kind of educational tour or educational events online. From the results, we didn't see any obvious benefits for both sides. That's why I don't think these kinds of educational tours can be totally moved to Online in the future.” (Interviewee 1)

4.2.3 Arctic Theme

According to the interviewees, the growing popularity of winter Lapland and the well-known official hometown of Santa Claus in Lapland have made Finland a unique destination. The interviewees suggested the Arctic theme is an opportunity for educational tours to Finland, because a Lapland visit is a part of the educational tour package as a unique selling point targeting the Chinese market. The interviewees also suggested that the official status of Santa Claus and the big climate contrast in terms of snow with those cities in Southern China is a great opportunity to promote to clients from that region. This is because cities in Southern China have little opportunity to get snow. One interviewee shared his experience of hosting the educational tours. The students were curious about when they could see snow, as they have little opportunity to experience snow in their cities, while adult groups were more interested of Aurora Borealis.

“Finland as a unique destination is very much well known by its northern position of the world. And its snow and Santa Claus. So East China and South China, they have little opportunity to get the snow covered everywhere in cities. So I have experienced when any group come from Shanghai or Shenzhen the first question they ask not that, when is the Northern Light, where I can see the Northern Light, is that when we will have the snow? So these are some very interesting points compared to adult groups.” (Interviewee 5)

However, the interviewees also brought up the Arctic theme from another perspective. In the winter peak season, the tourism resources are also limited in Lapland area.

“In the winter peak season, for example, in Lapland area. Our students want to visit Lapland, in the winter peak season, the tourism resources are also limited.” (Interviewee 1)

4.3 Development suggestions for educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market

By gathering interviewees' input of a suitable educational tour package and the support they need to develop educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market, the following three aspects were identified as the main suggestions for developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market. The three aspects are shown in below Figure 8:

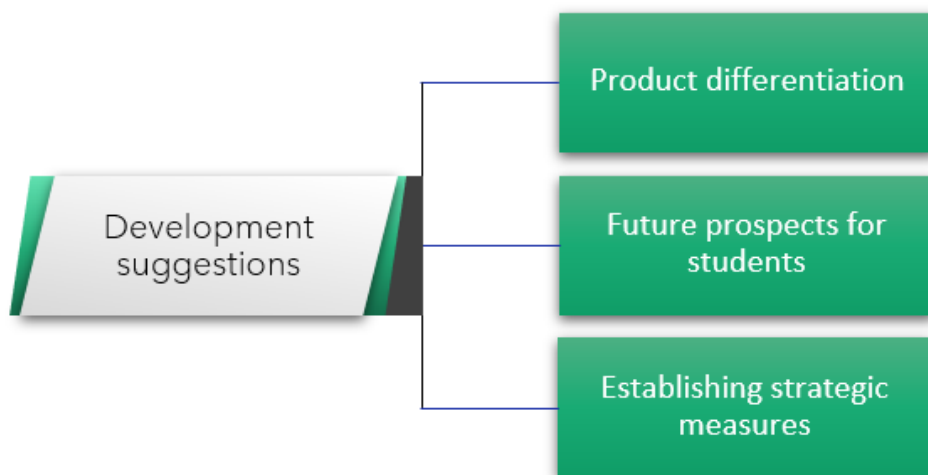


Figure 8. The main suggestions of developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market.

4.3.1 Product differentiation

8 out of 9 interviewees have stated product differentiation as an important development suggestion for educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market. Interviewees mentioned that they operate tours by collecting and combining different resources together and sell them as a whole package. However, different areas of Finland are offering the same products, for example, Nordic walking, mushroom picking, berry picking etc. which are not unique compelling educational tour package elements.

“Finnish education is unique. But I think you don’t have any unique education tours are different. [...] They see the market, they want to involve in the market, then they develop a product which is not compatible. Because I really feel uncomfortable when different areas of Finland

they are selling the same products. They always say that you can come here for Nordic walking, you can pick up strawberries, [...] but everywhere same.” (Interviewee 1)

Furthermore, the interviewees stated that they understand it is challenging for service providers in Finland to create innovative educational tour products due to the lack of understanding of the target market. Thus, it is suggested by the interviewees that educational tour packages should be developed in cooperation between tour operators and service providers who are open-minded and interested in the Chinese market, in order to bring the products to another level.

“Service providers need to have the awareness to be more innovative or more better product. But this is also very challenging for them. [...] I feel it is impossible for them to create this kind of product, because they just don’t have understanding of Chinese market. So I think this job is important and can’t be done by the service providers. [...] I would say it would be nice if some tour operators can do it for them. Or anyone who has the knowledge of Chinese market can cooperate with service providers who are open-minded and interested in the Chinese market and willing to make effort.” (Interviewee 2)

Some interviewees mentioned that they have participated in educational tour theme familiarization trips organized by Finnish tourism developing agencies. However, during the familiarization (FAM) trips, they were mostly shown accommodation options and similar activities that other Finnish destinations also have. To develop unique selling points for the Chinese market, tour operators would like to be in the real classrooms with students and get inspirations through this experience. They would like to discover what elements in Finnish education and classroom interaction would be fitting for educational tour packages targeting the Chinese market.

“I think that kind of these kinds of educational experiences can be like can be delivered only by giving the real experiences for all the FAM trip participants in the real classroom. There should be the students in the school and doing exactly the same thing, eating exactly the same food as the students do. For one or two days, then probably those FAM trip participants, they have some insights, inspirations or more ideas.” (Interviewee 5)

4.3.2 Future prospects for students

The interviewees suggested that educational tour packages for the Chinese market are associated with balancing the needs of Chinese parents and Chinese students. The students would like to have fun during the trips, while the majority of the parents who are the sponsors of the trips would like to see outcome of the educational tours. Even though in different families, the decision style is different.

“In Chinese market, we always face the challenge that do you want to satisfy the children or satisfy the parents. These are different. [...] majority is the parents who will decide which tour they are going to join.” (Interviewee 1)

“One is it has to be entertaining for the students. They need to have a lot of fun after the trip. Secondly is about the educational aspects. This is what parents want. They want to actually get something out of the trip. I would say these are the two things for the persons who is creating the product to have in mind.” (Interviewee 2)

Based on the interviews, it is identified that Chinese parents are very keen on investing in their children’s education and future prospects of their children. Therefore, their selections of educational tours need to have some aim, for example, to gain a skill, or to go back to these countries in the future and having internship or job opportunities in reputable companies. Participating in educational tours at a younger age serves future development purpose for students.

“If you select some education tours, you have to have some aim. [...] for Chinese students, travelling to some countries, of course, they are willing to go to these countries in future.” (Interviewee 1)

“Chinese are very keen on learning and educate educating themselves. And according to my experience, they they want to widen up their worldview, so to say, to gain unique experiences and to, to stand off in their own circles and communities by that knowledge. And they also want to invest in the educational and in the sophistication of their children” (interviewee 9)

One interviewee from the regional development agency has mentioned that in their region there is future prospect for students at higher university level education and job possibilities as they have need for workforce in their region for certain industry in the future.

“We also have this new industry coming here to our region with the battery technology, and we are desperately in the future where where we are going to need the workforce for this kind of industry, so that could also be something of interest when it comes to educational tours. [...] Also, the universities are opening up new majors in studying battery technology, and so forth.” (Interviewee 8)

4.3.3 Establishing strategic measures

The interviewees have expressed the importance of establishing strategic measures for developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market. The main measures described by the interviewees were: providing more resources for educational tour development and improving the marketing approach in China with Finnish officials.

As mentioned earlier in the challenges of developing educational tours to Finland, the interviewees have experienced resistance from Finnish schools. Hence, the interviewees suggested more support and resources need to be provided to Finnish schools for such educational tours' development. The interviewees mentioned that if the cities want more visitors, it's not only about gathering information and providing it to tour operators which looks helpful but is not helpful in practice. The problem needs to be solved on a deeper level, they need to give real support to the schools, so the schools can give support to the tour operators. One interviewee who used to work as a project manager for the tourism development of one destination in Finland has experienced lacking of resources and funding to proceed with an educational tour case, even though she has received an offer from a company to bring educational tourists.

"Insufficient and inadequate funding of development activities. Sometimes I have personally had this case that a company approached me offering to bring educational tourists to what destination that I was managing, but I couldn't do anything about it because it needed resources it needed some somebody to work time, it needed the other resources like to pay for some services just to get this, How to say, to launch the activity, but there was no quick funding that I can get to develop." (Interviewee 9)

Furthermore, another strategic measure interviewees pointed out was to improve the marketing approach in China with Finnish officials, for example, Finnish culture theme promotion in China with Finnish officials and Finnish school representatives. The aim is to build the culture recognition in order to further promote Finnish educational tour products to the target clients.

"I mean the promotions in China because we need. It's better we have Finnish schools plus [...] Finnish government that more official, in a way to support that this formality, of formally support. [...] this is something like like get, first, you get people, Chinese people, Chinese students or parents to get to know the culture first. When they have the cultural recognition, then it is the school level to to interact. And then it is much easier to to promote the product, the educational tour products." (Interviewee 6)

4.4 Summary of challenges, opportunities, development suggestions

A summary of the main challenges, opportunities and development suggestions which were gathered during the interviews are shown in below Table 3, 4 and 5.

Table 3. The main challenges mentioned by the interviewees.

Main challenges	Number of times mentioned	Mentioned by which interviewee
Awareness as educational tour destination	5	1, 2, 5, 6, 9
Resistance from Finnish schools	5	1, 2, 3, 7, 9
Pricing	3	1, 3, 6
Capacity	2	1, 2
Post COVID-19 concerns	3	4, 8, 9

Table 4. The main opportunities mentioned by interviewees.

Main opportunities	Number of times mentioned	Mentioned by which interviewee
Reputation of Finnish education	9	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
Digital experience	6	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9
Arctic theme	3	1, 5, 6

Table 5. The main development suggestions mentioned by interviewees.

Main development suggestions	Number of times mentioned	Mentioned by which interviewee
Product differentiation	8	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
Future prospects for students	4	1, 2, 8, 9
Establishing strategic measures	3	3, 5, 9

The interviewees also suggested the target age group of students and the target region in China for educational tours. Even though the interviewees suggested different age groups in their own views, junior middle school students from age 12-15 were commonly suggested by 7 out of 9 interviewees. Some interviewees described the reason is that this group of students have more time and do not have too much study workload yet comparing to high school students.

“Because they have more time and not too much workload. And why high school, high school students are not appropriate for this kind of educational tour, because they have too much study tasks, and too much pressures for the exam of the university. (Interviewee 7)

The Chinese city tier system is a hierarchical classification of Chinese cities. Based on income, population and other criteria, China's cities are divided into various tiers (Chen et al. 2021). Tier 1 cities represent the most developed areas of the country with higher income levels than the national average (Teaching Nomad 2016). The interviewees have pointed out that tier 1 cities in China and those cities with direct flights between China and Finland are their main target regions for educational tours. According to the interviewees, more wealthy families are in tier 1 cities as the educational tours are expensive. Also, those cities with direct flights between China and Finland which offer convenient connections are considered to be main target regions of educational tours to Finland.

“Definitely tier one city. Actually, rich family in Tier one. Because it is very expensive.” (Interviewee 1)

“What I said is also about consider the flight convenience. [...] So let's see what like the flight between the cities between China and Finland. That will be the most customers from that region.” (Interviewee 4)

According to the interviewees, it is a positive sign that China has applied the “Double Reduction” policy that educational tours business will boost. It is a great opportunity to take advantage of this new policy.

“I will see is a positive sign that China has applied to this “Double Reduction” policy because this policy is kind of trying to reduce the, the occupy from these major subjects study. [...] I will say the educational travel business will boost after the COVID.” (Interviewee 5)

5 DISCUSSION

The thesis aims to investigate the challenges and opportunities of developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market. The purpose is to help destination development agencies, service providers and tour operators to gain better understanding of the expectations of the potential customers, to develop product packages for the target market and to enhance the collaboration among multi-professionals in the educational tourism field. This chapter presents the discussion of the results. In addition to the discussion of the results, conclusion, limitation, and recommendation for further research are presented.

According to the thesis research, the findings suggest that some of the challenges are results of comparing educational tour products to Finland with the tours to English-speaking countries in the Chinese market, such as awareness of Finland as an educational tour destination, capacity of Finnish schools and pricing. Additionally, post COVID-19 concerns are also addressed by the interviewees as safety issues and contingency plans. As stated by Ivanova et al. (2021) that in the post COVID-19 era, safety and hygiene in a destination would affect travelers' decisions and travelers are more likely to travel to destinations with reliable safety systems.

Secondly, the findings suggest that the majority of the interviewees have shared a positive outlook of the digital experience with applying technology to visit destinations and conduct educational tours, while cross-border travel between China and Finland is still restricted with tight quarantine rules in China. The study from Singh & Bashar (2021) proved technology is growing as a substantial need for the travel-related services in the pandemic. The interviewees also shared input that digital experience could be a warm-up for the future educational tours. Similarly, Jarratt (2021) also pointed out that virtual tours increase likelihood to physically visit these sites in the future.

Thirdly, according to the thesis research, the majority of the interviewees found the top performance of PISA and the high reputation of Finnish education as one of the main opportunities of developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market. Chinese families care a lot about rankings which give them a sense of value of paying for the educational tour products. Similarly, Visit Finland (2021) has pointed out that the

success of Finland's education has attracted international educational tour travelers to Finland. Even though the majority of the interviewees have stated the high reputation of Finnish education is an opportunity, still they shared the concerns that the fame is not materialized in the educational tour products yet and the awareness of Finland as an educational tour destination is not fully understood by the Chinese market, comparing to the popularity of educational tours from English-speaking countries. Visit Finland (2021) also pointed out that Finland is a new educational tour destination for Chinese market.

The findings from the interviewees further indicate that the educational tour products for the Chinese market is related to balance the needs of Chinese parents and Chinese students. The findings show that Chinese parents are very keen on investing in their children's education and future prospects of their children. Overseas educational tours are part of the educational investment. This point is also supported by Lin (2019) and his research suggests that children's education consumption has become the primary expense in urban families in China and Chinese parents consider their investment in their children's education as a strategy to achieve success for future. Also, the interviewees consider China's education reform with "Double Reduction" policy a positive sign that educational tour business will boom. From the market reaction to the "Double Reduction" policy, it shows that some Chinese companies in private tutoring sectors are shifting their business focus to international educational tours (Finance Sina, 2021). While the "Double Reduction" policy has impacted private tutoring industry in China, educational travel as part of the education export remains intact and may see new opportunities.

Mention (2011) pointed out that hospitality services innovation becomes an important source of competitive differentiation. The finding from the interviews have also revealed that the majority of the interviewees consider product differentiation and innovation as a key suggestion for developing educational tours targeting the Chinese market. Additionally, the results suggest that the tourism industry and public sector should strengthen the cooperation to develop educational tours, to discover elements in Finnish education which would fit for educational tour packages targeting the Chinese market. Similarly, according to Busser et al. (2019), in the process of creating innovative tourism products, relying on knowledge created by external sources, such as business partners could be focused on.

5.1 Conclusion

The thesis aimed to answer the following research questions: RQ 1. What are the challenges of developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market? RQ 2. What are the opportunities of developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market? RQ 3. What are the development suggestions for educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market? The findings of the study gathered from the research have answered the research questions and are summarized in below Table 6. This can help regional development agencies, service providers and tour operators to reflect and evaluate how they can take actions to improve the services and formulate development strategies towards the Chinese market.

Table 6. Summary of the answers to the research questions.

	Research Question	Summarized answers
1	What are the challenges of developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market?	Awareness of Finland as an educational tour destination, resistance from Finnish schools, pricing, capacity of Finnish side, post COVID-19 concerns
2	What are the opportunities of developing educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market?	High reputation of Finnish education, digital experience, Arctic theme
3	What are the development suggestions for educational tours to Finland targeting the Chinese market?	Product differentiation, future prospects for students, establishing strategic measures

Overall, it can be concluded that the successful development of educational tourism is beneficial for the local economies. Educational tourism development in Finland is still at the piloting stage. As the Chinese market remains of interest for educational tours to Finland, it is important to understand the mentality and policies of Chinese market in educational tourism. Also enhancing the collaboration between different sectors can help regional development agencies, service providers and tour operators to create innovative products and competitive advantages.

5.2 Limitations and recommendation for future research

There are three limitations to this study. First, the limited interviewee sample from China which does not warrant generalization of the result. Therefore, as a recommendation, further research should be conducted by gathering samples from more educational tour professionals from China, conducting a quantitative study to verify the results of the present study and identify further what is the market needs for different geographic areas of China, as the Chinese mindset and market needs vary across regional markets.

Secondly, even though interviewees presented confidence in China's "Double Reduction" policy regarding educational tours, the impact of this policy is still unclear regarding how those policies will be implemented regarding overseas educational tours, in terms of tour seasons and theme, or if it will give rise to a new type of educational tours. For this matter, policy implementation is suggested for further studies on how to package educational tours to integrate with the policy.

Thirdly, the thesis takes place in the COVID-19 pandemic. As of 8th November 2021, cross-border travel between China and Finland is still restricted with tight quarantine rules in China. Overseas educational tours can't be operated now. The findings in this research may differ from the post COVID-19 era. Also, the study is limited in observation of digital experience of virtual educational tours. Exploring the interests of virtual educational tours can be further researched.

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