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**LAPPEENRANTA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY**  
**School of Business**  
**Master's program in International Marketing**  
**Management**

Master's thesis

**Destination image formation in ecotourism:  
The case of Finnish National parks**

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For the second year Master's students, who are going to read this paper and are still in the process of writing their own theses or research papers, I would like to advise – finish it early, don't go for a employment without having it done. Otherwise, you will find it extremely difficult to combine regular job with writing the thesis. Thank you for reading!

**ABSTRACT**

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The focus of current paper is on destination image in the context of ecotourism. The goal is to study destination image of Finland at different stages of image formation process and to compare the obtained images.

The research is a qualitative study, which is based on content analysis of user-generated content as well as on 20 in-depth interviews with both experienced and inexperienced Russian nature travelers.

Initial literature review allowed identifying destination image attributes which are extracted in further empirical part.

The findings reveal certain divergence in pre- and post- trip images. Based on which the author provides recommendations for destination marketers.

As the research is highly qualitative, in order to validate the results, further quantitative studies are suggested.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This research is devoted to investigating formation of ecotourism destination on the example of Finnish national parks. To provide insight into the field of the research this section focuses on brief description of research background of the topic, statement of the research question and aims, explanation of the methodology used for answering the research question and delimitation of research boundaries.

### **1.1. Research background**

Economic impact of tourism is well known and studied by plenty of researchers (Jones (2001)). There is wide range of tourism types and one of the most discussed in academic community lately is ecotourism. It is the specific way of tourism that can be regarded as a concept as well as market segment. Ecotourism appeared in the 18th-19th century but gained traction in scientific circles in the end of the 20th century. Although there is no generally accepted definition and principles of it ecotourism is proved to have positive impact on economies. Additionally to economic impact, it also affects the future attitude of travelers towards sustainability positive behavior (Yen-Ting et al (2012), Hvenegaard (1994), McNeely et al. (1991), Tobias and Mendelsohn (1991), Western and Henry (1979), Thresher (1981), Dixon and Sherman (1990)). Thereby the experience tourists receive during ecotourism activities and their satisfaction is directly affecting their attitude and lead to positive environmental behavior.

Moreover, the question of destination image formation was studied previously mainly by 2 methods – UGC (Choi et al. (2007), Pan and Fesenmaier (2006), Xiang and Fesenmaier (2006), Gretzel (2007)) and conducting interviews (UNWTO, Haahti (1996)) – and it was derived that destination should be actively involved in strategic marketing

planning to get competitive advantage over peers and develop themselves by means of attracting additional tourist flow.

So, there is confirmation that ecotourism is widely studied topic but there is no sufficient evidence on formation of ecotourism destinations in literature. Therefore, this study is devoted to filling this gap and its relevance is explained by this.

## **1.2. Research question and aims**

One of the mostly visited by ecotourists countries is Finland. The reason is that Finland is characterized by big amount of exceptional natural resources including lakes, rivers etc. There are more than 30 national parks in Finland of total square of more than 8170 square kilometers that are actively visited by ecotourists. But there is no sufficient empirical evidence on formation of image of Finland as ecotourism destination.

So, this study attempts to explore the image of Finland as an ecotourism destination from the perspective of Russian tourists who have already had travel experience in the country and who has not. It will allow to find out possible divergence in formation of image in ecotourism on the example of Finland. Based on this information discussion of the implications of images for destination marketers will be provided.

The findings will contribute to the study of image research, as well as being used in marketing strategies and planning for the ecotourism organization aimed at the promoting eco-tourism in Finland for Russian tourists. Especially, the results will allow tour operators to understand which aspects they should affect to attract experienced and inexperienced tourists to Finnish national parks. It is expected that images of Finland as ecotourism destination formed by those who have

already visited the country and those who have no experience in this are different.

Thereby the main research question is set as follows:

What is the relationship between pre- and post-visit image of Finland as ecotourism destination among Russian nature travelers?

The proposed research question consists of the following subquestions:

1. What is the pre-trip image attributes held by Russian tourists towards Finnish national parks?
2. What is the post-trip image attributes of Finland held by Russian nature travelers who has already visited Finnish national parks?
3. What is the possible divergence between two images and how it can be explained?

The set of research questions conditions the goals of the research, which are as follows:

- extract the values of destination image dimensions for both images
- analyze the experience of tourists visiting Finnish national parks
- elucidate characteristics and context of use for Russian nature travelers
- explore range and diversity of users as well as their needs and expectations
- conduct divergence analysis between images
- elaborate recommendations based on the findings aimed at popularizing ecotourism in Finland and at improving the experience and satisfaction of tourists.



### **1.3. Methodology**

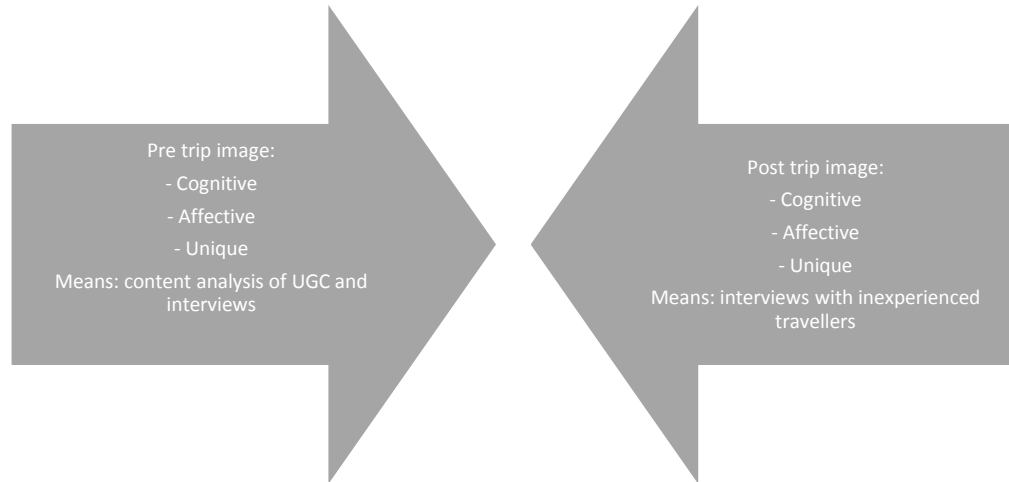
Previous researches reveal that few studies concentrate on consumers as the primary source for generating destination image attributes (Selby and Morgan 1996; Echtner and Ritchie, 2003).

Additionally, it seems that small structured techniques are more common in measuring destination image, however there is creating evidence of insufficiency of these techniques as such. Son (2010) argues that attributes not appropriately derived or elicited from visitors themselves reveal or record an incomplete and partial view of destination image. Thereby this study concentrates on unstructured technique.

Further developing the topic of image formation process, this study does not make distinction between induced (tourism specific, formed through tourism advertising, internet, television and other sources of information) and organic (formed through general life experience) images which combine to create expectations. The decision can find support in the literature. Thus Croy (2005) argues that as demonstrated through the sources of organic and induced images there is a growing overlap between them. What is organic and what is induced is increasingly difficult to determine. As a result, the study concentrated on pre-trip image, which is induced and organic combined, and post trip image, which combines all 3 images.

The scheme of empirical part of current study is represented below.

*Figure 1. Scheme of empirical research*



Adopting a qualitative approach, this study used the existent primary consumer generated data available online and semi-structured interview technique. Through consumer generated data the paper identifies the post visitation cognitive, affective and unique dimensions of destination image of Finland. Interviews with experienced travelers are intended to verify the results obtained from UGC analysis. Lastly 15 interviews with inexperienced travelers were conducted in order to assess pre-trip image dimensions of Finland.

#### **1.4. Structure of the thesis**

The thesis is structured in the following way. Chapter 2 is devoted to defining the phenomenon of destination image, defining its attributes and the process of image formatio. In Chapter 3 ways of researching destination – user generated content (UGC) and interviews – are reviewed. Chapter 4 refers to ecotourism. Here discussions concerning definition and components of the term are discussed together with key elements of ecotourism, its impact and differences from other types of tourism. Chapter 5 describes the results of empirical research of post-

trip and pre-trip image formation and the last chapter – conclusion – consists of discussions of managerial and theoretical implications of the empirical results and possible area of the further research.

## 2. DESTINATION IMAGE

World's touristic organization (UNWTO) defines destination as a central element in the process of creation and delivering touristic products. The main attribute of tourist ecosystem is a territory, which attract tourists and where to he makes his trip and spend certain amount of time – tourist destination (according to UNWTO definition). Tourist destination as a complex phenomenon includes tourist attractions, tourist infrastructure and related service (as transportation etc.)

One might ask how destination is different from a widely known and understood term 'resort'. While it might be similar terms in narrow-minded view there are certain differences especially in tourism research field. Tourist destination is a wider concept than resort. To explain the difference let us refer to examples. For Asians Western Europe is the destination, but the Côte d'Azur is a resort. Of course, there are particular qualities, which distinguish the Côte d'Azur from all other places, but there are also common features, which Asians share about the Côte d'Azur and Paris for example. If one wants to visit Costa del Sol, then this place is a resort because first he goes to Spain, which is the destination. Traditional view on destination as on unique geographical zone (country, city, island) nowadays is displaced by approach based on consumer perception, that relies on the purpose of the trip, the cultural environment, past experience, etc. Thereby destination might not relate to certain administrative units, for example Alps.

One of the results of active tourism development is increasing number of destinations available for tourists, and also diminishing individuality of them leads to increasing competition among touristic centers.

In the face of global competition, when tourist destinations are easily replaceable, destination stakeholders are included in the battle for the attention and resources of tourists. Destination stakeholders might

include governmental organizations, tourist associations, local business, local service providers and local population.

Understanding of what the destination image is and how the process of its formation is going on is crucial for this particular research because formation of Finland's image as the ecotourism destination is in center of the analysis. Therefore, further in this chapter information on destination image, its attributes and formation process is provided.

## **2.1. Destination image**

The concept of destination image is being central in this study. The increased competition in tourism industry during the last 50 years highlights the importance of the concept for destination marketers and is correspondingly gaining increased attention of academics. The concept appeared in 70<sup>th</sup> and since then became one of the most researched topics in tourist literature (Stepchenkova, 2010). The researches covered different areas related with the concept. Ones studied the definition and dimensions (Tasci et al., 2006; Stepchenkova et al., 2010; Echtner et al., 1993; McCartney et al., 2009; Lin, Mourais, Kersetter and Hou, 2007), others focused on the ways of assessing and measuring (Echtner et al., 1993; Echtner et al., 1991; Jenkins, 1999), some researched the process of image formation and different agents influencing it (Gartner, 1993; Mackay, 1997, Baloglu, 1999).

Despite elevated interest to the concept, the concrete definition is hard to capture (Echtner, Ritchie, 2003; Jenkins, 1999). Echtner et al. (1991) in their study of conceptualization of destination image concluded that most definitions are blurred. The definitions normally explain destination image as “perceptions held by potential visitors about an area”, “perceptions or impressions of a place”, “how a country is perceived relative to others” and so on. These definitions make no clear distinction between what components or aspects of the image are being explained.

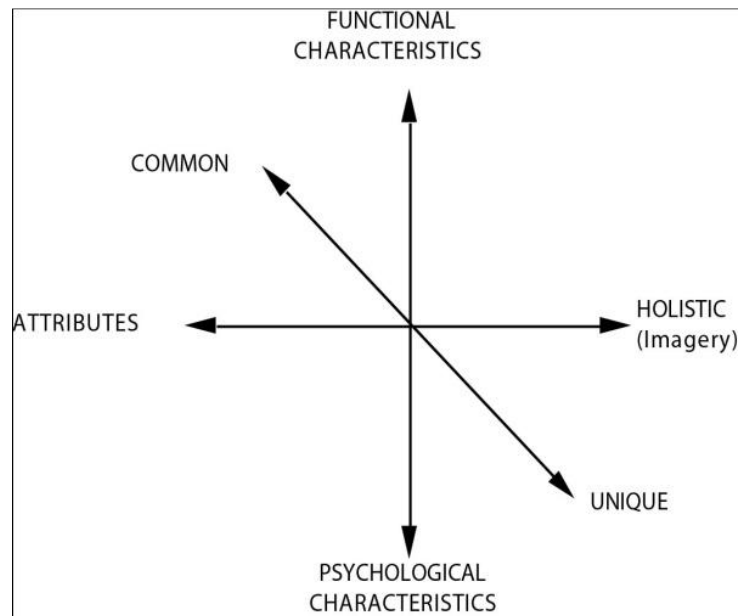
## **2.2. Image attributes**

Due to complex nature of images, studies have found that destination image consists of several dimensions or components (Stepchenkova, 2010). It is commonly accepted that the term consists of two main components – the holistic and the attribute-based dimensions (Echtner et al., 1991; Echtner et al., 1993; Lin et al., 2007; Stepchenkova et al., 2010). This division finds its routes in psychology. Psychologists claim that human process images on individual characteristics (attributes) as well as having a mental overall (holistic) impression. It is argued that humans use both components in evaluating products in the selection process (Echtner et al., 1991).

Additionally, it is widely accepted that images consist of a functional and psychological dimensions (Echtner et al., 1991). The functional component includes measureable characteristics (e.g. climate), and the psychological one is immeasurable characteristics (e.g. hospitality).

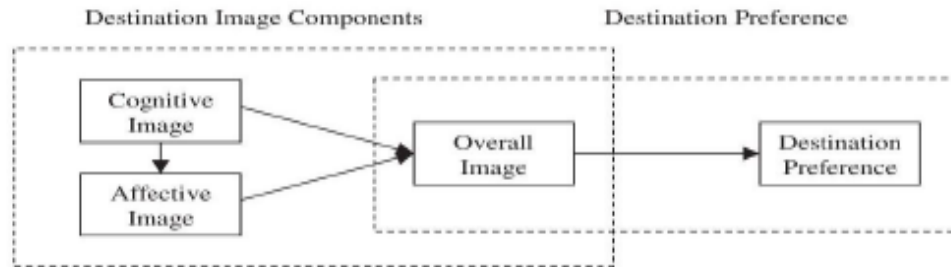
Moreover, Echtner et al. (1991) also suggest that the image consists of common or unique dimensions as well. Meaning that some components of image can be shared by some destinations, and others be unique for certain destination. Figure below represents the dimensions of destination image (Echtner et al., 1991).

Figure 2. Dimensions of destination image according Echtner et al. (1991)



Similarly, to work of Echtner it was supported that images consist of cognitive, affective and conative components (Pike et al., 2004; Lin et al., 2007; Stepchenkova et al., 2010). The cognitive dimension is close to functional characteristics and consists of tangible attributes. The affective component is close to psychological characteristics and contains the emotional part of image, which can be positive, negative or neutral. Lastly, the conative dimension is equivalent to customer behavior, or intent. (Stepchenkova, 2010). Lin et al. (2007) suggested that conation is strongly linked to the selection process or destination choice and thereby is a result of image formation (see figure below) and not a part of image.

Figure 3. Destination image components according to Lin et al. (2007)



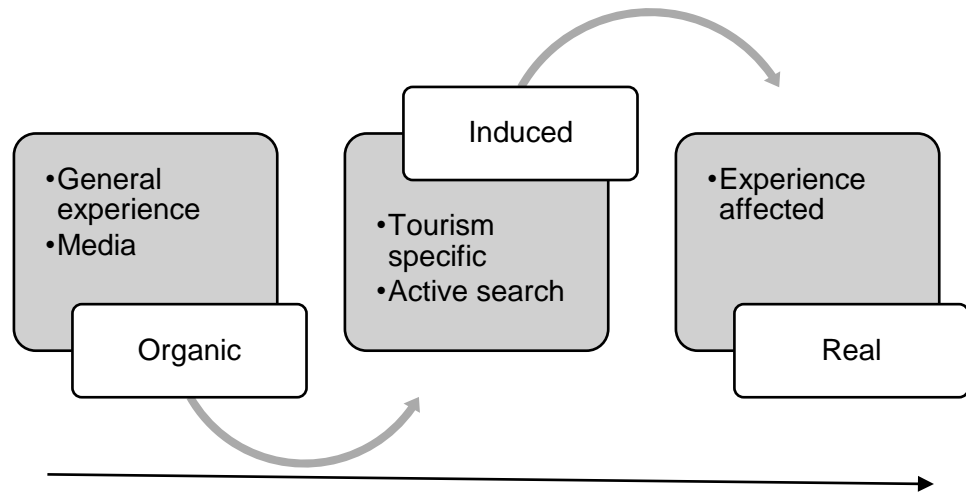
### 2.3. Image formation

As stated above the concept of destination image plays an important role in the tourist decision making and destination choice. Thereby it is crucial for destination marketers to understand how the image is being formed and what are the factors influencing this process. The process was studied in tourism academic field for a subsequent period of time (Stabler, 1985; Gunn, 1988; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Gartner, 1993; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Jenkins, 1999).

According to previous studies, it is common to divide the images into organic, induced and real (MacInnis & Price, 1987; Gunn, 1988; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Gartner, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Fodness & Murray, 1999; Croy & Kearsley, 2002). The picture below explains how those images are connected in the process of image formation.



Figure 4. Image formation process



Organic images usually relate to the images which are formed through general life experiences. There can be several sources of organic images including different Medias and personal contacts: friends, colleagues, family. Induced images are tourism specific and usually denoted by an active search for information regarding a possible destination. Sources of induced images include travel and tourism advertising, brochures, the internet, television, magazines, newspaper reports, and travel agents. Real images are those formed through experience of the destination (Croy and Wheeler, 2005).

According to Croy (2005) all image agents modify destination image to a degree, though they have differing levels of credibility in the modification process. Real images, the experience of the place, have the highest credibility. The organic images are the next most credible, followed as least credible induced images. (Cited from Croy & Wheeler, 2005)

In terms of the overall tourist experience, the organic and induced images combine to create expectations. These expectations of tourist experience and place setting are then compared to the actual experience. A difference between expectations and experience could

significantly affect the satisfaction of the overall tourist experience. (Cited from Croy & Wheeler, 2005) The place of destination image in satisfaction models is further discussed in paper of Wang et al. (2009).

Thus, in this chapter the definition of destination image and nature of its component were described. This allows to get insight into formation of destination image that is very important for answering the main question of this research, particularly, for building the methodology that will be used further in this study.

### **3. DESTINATION IMAGE RESEARCH**

Since destination image is crucial in ecotourism, especially, for tour operators and since in this study image of Finland as ecotourism destination is the object it is necessary to get insight into existing methodology of researching destination image. Therefore, in this chapter, firstly, using UGC as a means of analyzing destination image will be analyzed including information of its role and trustworthiness. Secondly, the other instrument – interviews – will be discussed in context of applying it for researching destination image. This part of the study is crucial for determining its methodology.

#### **3.1. UGC in destination image research**

Information and communication technologies (ICT) are of great importance in understanding the development of today's tourism destinations (Buhalis and Law, 2008). Development of the Internet as a mass media provides the destination marketers with a great source of valuable information. The websites containing content submitted by real travelers are raising in their popularity. Such sources as TripAdvisor, MySpace, Facebook and YouTube are changing the ways that consumers search for and evaluate travel information. Such collaboration was enabled by developing of Web 2.0. The term Web 2.0 refers to "the second generation of web-based services that have gained massive popularity by letting people collaborate and share information online in previously unavailable ways" (Reactive, 2007, p. 3). This term describes a Web which is "increasingly influenced by intelligent Web services that empower users to contribute to developing, rating, collaborating and distributing Internet content and customizing Internet applications" (Vickery and Wunsch-Vincent, 2007, p. 9).

The technology makes it possible for users to post their own content, opinions, videos, audio, or imagery to the web for other users to see and respond to. O'Reilly (2005) defines Web 2.0 as a set of principles, which include:

- the ability to integrate information;
- the desire to harness distributed knowledge;
- and the need to engage users as codevelopers.

Web 2.0 is changing the way that consumers engage with information presented via the Internet. The pivotal role that individual consumers have in submitting, reviewing, and responding to online content is reflected in terms such as user-generated content (UGC) or consumer-generated media (CGM) that are commonly used for Web 2.0 (Gretzel, 2006, 2007).

Web 2.0 tools are widely used by tourists to get information about tourism destinations and to share their tourism experiences. The digital content provided by these tourists has increasingly influenced destination awareness and image creation (Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2009).

The tools include a mixture of different instruments such as blogs, wikis, podcasts, messaging applications and others, which are meant to encourage the sharing of information.

In marketing terms, the websites containing UGC are an effective form of C-to-C e-marketing. It is a special form of electronic word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing in which anybody who has an opinion about a product or service shares his experience and attitude towards product or service with other people (Ahuja, Michels, Walker, & Weissbuch, 2007). Fernando (2007) suggests that UGC, or social media, is the polar opposite of traditional forms of media and marketing since content is generated by the consumer rather than by the marketers.

### **3.1.1. The role of UGC in tourism**

UGC refers to the information that is digitalized, uploaded by the users and made available through the Internet. There is also a specific type of user-generated content: tourist created content (TCC).

Research shows that websites are an important source of information across all stages of the traveler's trip planning process (Choi et al., 2007). The Internet is now a particularly critical source of information for prospective travelers when they are in the research phase (i.e. information search) of the travel planning process (Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006; Xiang & Fesenmaier, 2006). Pan and Fesenmaier (2006) found out that approximately 95% of Internet users rely on information from the web as part of their travel information search process.

Not surprisingly, other researches in the field show similar results. Thus, almost 60% of consumers surveyed reported that UGC had a positive effect on the likelihood of them booking travel related products and services (Compete Incorporated, 2007). More than 80% of respondents also reported that they preferred consumer reviews to (hotel) providers' description of themselves. One of the most comprehensive explorations into the impact of online travel reviews on consumers is reported in a study by Gretzel (2007) which was supported by TripAdvisor. An online survey of approximately 1,500 TripAdvisor ([www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com)) users was administered to ascertain how online travel reviews were impacting on pleasure trip planning behavior.

The results of the study also reveal that "looking at other consumers' comments/materials on online travel review sites' was the most frequently used source of information (Gretzel, 2007).

The users of travel review sites generally consider that information provided by these sites is more reliable, up-to-date and enjoyable than

the information presented on travel providers' own websites (Gretzel, 2007).

While these results provide a preliminary indication of the power of UGC sites to influence tourists' decisions, they are clearly based solely on a sample of Internet users who are already actively engaged in the use of a particular UGC site, *tripadvisor.com*. As such it is not surprising, therefore, to see the strong level of support and advocacy presented by research participants towards the effectiveness of this site. Additional research is required to further understand the impacts of UGC on a broader range of travel and hospitality consumers including those that have previously used UGC as well as those who may not have done so to date, but may well be influenced by it in the future.

Amongst the vast array of information sources consumers can turn to when planning travel, WOM is one of the most influential. Prospective travelers often rely heavily on advice from friends, family, and other peer groups, particularly when planning an intangible travel experience to a destination which they have not previously visited (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2007). There is a strong reasoning behind the trust of consumers to WOM recommendations – a provider is not looking for any commercial interest by sharing his experience and views with others. Several researches investigated such an influential power of WOM (e.g. Litvin et al., 2007). Wetzler, Zeelenberg and Pieters (2007) discovered that negative WOM featured with anger and frustration tends to have lower impact and is not perceived as constructive or useful.

Travelers' use of websites containing UGC effectively allows them to engage in a virtual community that shares tourism experiences online (Wang, Yu, & Fesenmaier, 2002). Given the very intangible nature of hospitality and travel to a prospective traveler who has never been to a destination before, it is not surprising that travelers are embracing the information supplied by other people through UGC and social

networking sites on the Internet (Saranow, 2004; Ricci & Wietsma, 2006).

Research to date on the effectiveness of UGC adoption in the travel and hospitality sector is somewhat limited given its recent introduction. Criticism regarding the power of UGC to persuade travelers about travel related decisions is based on the potential for 'fake' content to be posted by travel operators posing as independent reviewers. This effectively defeats the purpose of enabling UGC to influence travelers in their decision making process as the content added is no longer independent, objective or credible (Bray & Schetzina, 2006).

Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) note that by providing consumers with the opportunity to interact with one another through online travel communities, travel providers can enhance and maximize the strength of their relationship with consumers, however this cannot occur when the content is falsified.

### **3.1.2. Trustworthiness of UGC**

In addition to understanding how UGC influences the travel planning process, one of the most contentious issues currently surrounding its impact on consumer behavior is the extent to which people actually trust the information that is posted on these sites. Given that is not always easy to identify and assess the profile of people who post information on blogs and other social networking sites, the reader cannot easily gauge the credibility of the information provided. A study by Jupiter Research finds that only 21% of consumers surveyed actually trust information provided about products on social networking sites, whilst information provided on corporate websites is considered far more trustworthy (Wasserman, 2006). This suggests that the potential for UGC sites to have a strong and credible influence on consumers' decision-making behavior will ultimately depend on how transparent the information contained within them actually is.

Hyung-Park et al. (2007) note that online consumer reviews are often considered more trustworthy and credible than information, which is provided by suppliers of products and services, assumedly because consumers are considered to provide information that is more honest. The downside of online consumer WOM, however, is that while traditional forms of WOM tend to come from people who are known to the consumer (i.e. friends, colleagues, etc.), online reviews are passed on by total strangers, resulting in some concern over the credibility of the source of review (Hyung-Park et al., 2007, Litvin et al., 2007). Websites that are independent, third-party type-sites tend to be considered preferable to consumers compared to those, which are clearly operated by a business with a stake (Senecal & Nantel, 2004). Senecal and Nantel (2004) note that many consumers are skeptical about any form of communication that is perceived to be skewed towards the interests of the source of information. The extent to which consumers of UGC trust the information that is provided via these online sites is a significant area of interest. One of the concerns raised about the use of UGC sites when planning travel is how the consumer can be assured that the reviews they are viewing are in fact independent and hence trustworthy (Gretzel, 2006). Ultimately, the degree to which travelers trust the information provided by UGC sites when making travel plans will determine how persuasive these sites are in influencing the actual travel plans made. Research which explores the relative level of trust held in UGC information compared to other sources of online travel information is currently limited and will, therefore, be explored through the second and third hypotheses which are subsequently presented.

So, nowadays user-generated content is becoming more spread in tourism marketing. One of the reasons is that it has trustworthiness among consumers. It means that consumers tend to trust opinions of other tourists than marketing campaigns of tour operators. For this reason, analysis of user-generated content will be used further for



researching formation of formation of the post-trip image of Finland as ecotourism destination of the sample of people who have already visited Finnish national parks.

### **3.2. The role of interviews in destination image research**

The alternative way of getting information about the destination is in-depth interviews. Since conducting interviews with tourists is one of the methods used in this research this section is devoted to review of the role of this instrument in previous researches of destinations' image.

One of the main advantages of this method is that it allows to understand complex behavior of members of society (Hanlan and Kelly, 2004). It means that due to consisting of wide range of different questions focusing on revealing real attitude of respondents towards some object, event etc. In case of researching formation of destination image this method is especially of great value because for getting insight into tourists' perception of site it is necessary to understand a lot of aspects concerning destination image. Among them there are:

- the main attraction of a site which make tourists to visit it for the first time and then repeat them;
- importance of supporting infrastructure provided on a site and what infrastructure is in short supply here;
- how favorable is the atmosphere of destination and improvements of what kind are needed;
- degree of diversification of activities provided in a site;
- availability of supporting information provided by tour operators on all stages of a trip: from planning to the end;
- others.

There exist cases that confirm the significant role of interviews in destination image formation. For example, the research was conducted in 2004 in Namibia where visitors and non-visitors of a country were

interviewed (UNWTO). It was revealed that experienced and inexperienced tourists have different image of a country. Despite both groups appreciated local culture non-visitors could not realize that they should be intrusive to make acquaintance with it. And visitors were very interested in Namibian nature. It resulted in changes in marketing campaigns of local tour providers. They developed the new focus with orientation to promoting exceptional landscapes of Namibia. This reformation led to growth of touristic flow into Namibia by 11% in 3 years (increase in tourist flow from European increased by 17%). Such effect illustrate that image formation should be measured qualitatively because may have significant impact on behavior of key stakeholders. Also, interviewing visitors as well as non-visitors is necessary.

The interview instrument was also applied to analysis of Finland's image (Haahti, 1986). The author attempted to find out how Finland is perceived compared to other European countries and interviewed tourists for this. He derived that Finland has no outstanding competitive advantages over competing countries. Based on the results different marketing strategies may be realized. Firstly, in author's opinion, it is possible to increase existing strengths of the country such as exceptional natural beauty, polite residents and so on. Thus, method of interviewing tourists again proves its credibility.

So, the widely spread method of analyzing destination image formation is conducting interviews. It allows to get full understanding of tourists' perception. According to results of previous researches, this instrument proved its effectiveness, especially, because it provides policy implications for marketing specialists. Also, here it is important that comparing answers of visitors and non-visitors leads to developing marketing strategies. Taking into account these arguments method of interviews is used in this research.

## **4. ECOTOURISM**

Since ecotourism destinations of Finland are the object of this study it is necessary to define ecotourism. That is why this chapter provides information on:

- what is ecotourism and where it goes from;
- what are the key elements of ecotourism without which this kind of tourism is impossible;
- for what reasons ecotourism has significant economical and environmental impact on particular countries and world as a whole;
- what are main differences of ecotourism from other types of tourism.

### **4.1. Origin and definition**

Ecotourism is one of the kinds of tourism. Actually, it appeared many years ago but it did not have the name of ecotourism. As early as in the 19th century, there were travelers who visited Africa and America, for example, in order to meet wildlife of local nature. In contrast, nowadays this way of tourism is widely spread everywhere and is worked out on all continents and in most countries. There are 2 reasons explaining such active development of ecotourism. Since ecotourism is an economic phenomenon its development was maintained by demand-side and supply-side factors simultaneously. As for the demand-side, today tourists have more interest in environmental sights and are less interested in touristic places with big amount of visitors because they do not provide them with calm, peace and sense of relaxation compared to ecotourism objects. The supply-side factor of ecotourism development is explained by creation of number of infrastructural

objects, promotion of this kind of tourism and government support. The scheme of ecotourism formation is given in Figure 5.

*Figure 5. Ecotourism formation*



Recently ecotourism has become very popular among tourists as well as among academic community. However, researchers have no consensus on the definition of this term. In fact, it is one of the most serious problems in science of ecotourism. Therefore, the most widely used definitions will be discussed here and key components of them will be analyzed and systematized in order to get an insight into ecotourism. But, firstly, it is worth to point out that ecotourism can be regarded as a concept or as a market segment. Ecotourism as a concept is understood from the supply-side. It means that tour operators and other actors from supply-side perceive ecotourism as a type of sustainable tourism as well as natural and rural tourism. On the other hand, from the demand-side ecotourism is perceived as the segment of the tourism market included in nature tourism. The product of ecotourism is usually demanded by not too large groups of people because it is rather specific way of recreation and not each person can be interested in it.

As for definitions of ecotourism, the most famous of them, according to previous researches (Hvenegaard, 1994; Sirakaya et al. (1999), Donohoe and Needham (2006), Fennel (2001)), was formulated by Ceballos-Lascurain (1991) and sounds as "segment of tourism that involves travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural

areas with the specific objects of admiring, studying, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural features (both past and present) found in these areas". However, when this definition appeared there arose a lot of critical arguments why it is not perfect. Therefore, many individual authors, associations and non-government organizations began to develop their definitions of the term "ecotourism". Practically all of them used the approach of evolving different characteristics (principles) of ecotourism without which, from their point of view, it is impossible to understand to the full extent what ecotourism is. Table 1 aggregates the most known characteristics of ecotourism (Donohoe and Needham, 2009).

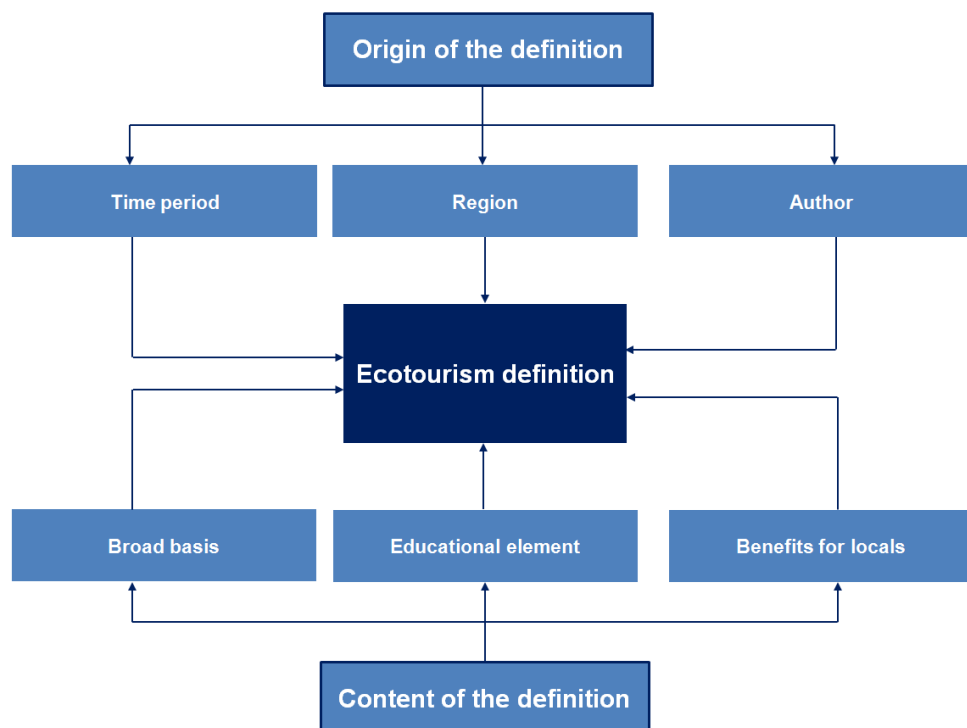
*Table 1. Characteristics of ecotourism*

Author	Characteristics
Buckley (1994)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conservation</li> <li>- Sustainability</li> <li>- Environmental education</li> <li>- Nature-based activities</li> </ul>
Wallace and Pierce (1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Minimized negative impacts</li> <li>- Educational opportunities</li> <li>- Conservation</li> <li>- Democratization</li> <li>- Community benefits</li> <li>- Opportunities for local residents</li> </ul>
Newsome et al. (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nature-based</li> <li>- Ecologically sustainable</li> <li>- Environmentally educative</li> <li>- Locally beneficial</li> <li>- Satisfactory</li> </ul>
Bjork (2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Educational opportunities</li> <li>- Planning considerations</li> <li>- Ethical responsibility</li> <li>- Community benefits</li> </ul>
Sirakaya et al. (1999)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sustainability</li> <li>- Responsibility</li> <li>- Community involvement</li> <li>- Conservation</li> <li>- education</li> </ul>
Edwards et al. (1998)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Purpose</li> <li>- Setting</li> <li>- Activities</li> <li>- Guiding principles</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Management and operations</li> <li>- Nature conservation</li> <li>- Planning and design</li> <li>- Economic benefits</li> <li>- Experience and awareness</li> </ul>
Fennel (2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Location or natural setting</li> <li>- Conservation</li> <li>- Culture</li> <li>- Benefits for locals</li> <li>- Education</li> </ul>

Analyzing the question of ecotourism definition moves beyond characteristics of the phenomenon. The definition problem was also previously investigated in other contexts (Figure 6). Fennel (2001) researched 85 definitions of ecotourism. He achieved that the process of defining ecotourism was on the peak in 1991-1993 and in 1994-1996 because in these periods 25 and 23 definitions were worked out respectively. Most definitions were created by individuals (47) and government or associations (35) while non-government organizations formulated only 3 definitions.

*Figure 6. Aspects of analyzing definitions of ecotourism*



As for content of the definitions, all the analyzed issues pay attention to ecological component, 28 of them mention ecology, culture and economic together, 21 take into account ecology and culture and only 6 definitions imply ecology and economics and only 1 definition determines ecotourism as economic phenomenon without mentioning culture or ecology at all. Educational element is not mentioned in 50 definitions out of 85 and in the remaining 35 it is noticed in different variations: education, discover, interpretation, learning and study. Among benefits for local residents revenue, welfare and community development are mentioned 19, 8 and 1 time correspondingly.

One more interesting point is that content of definitions suffered changes through the time between 1990 and 1999. In other words, some components of ecotourism became more spread over this period. For example, conservation was supposed as an important component of ecotourism in 40% of definitions in 1990 and in 70% in 1997-1999. Frequency of education was equal to 30% in 1990 and rose to 45% in 1997-1999 and "popularity" of the ethical criterion increased from 10% to 25%. Except components, different dimensions concerning influence of ecotourism on economic and social areas of community life also became more often observed in definitions. Particularly, frequency of "sustainable development" rose from 10% in 1990 to 25% in 1997-1999, reference to impacts and local benefits rose from 20% to 30% and from 40% to 60% respectively.

#### **4.2. Key elements of ecotourism**

For creating ecotourism activity necessary several issues are necessary. The central part is destination which attracts attention of visitors. Besides, there are also key figures (participants) involved in formation of ecotourism product. There is wide range of actors who can take part in formation of ecotourism product. Each of them plays their specific roles (Hvenegaard, 1994). Here, firstly, roles of all actors will

be described briefly and then possible classifications and functions of 2 main actors – ecotourists and operators – will be provided. So, the following participants exist in ecotourism product formation:

- ecotourists are "consumers" of the ecotourism product, they visit touristic places inside their home country or outside it;
- tour operators help ecotourists to organize travelling and are the "sellers" of ecotourism product;
- developers are the private individuals or organizations which provide tourists with different infrastructure: lodgings, food, cultural, shopping and other kinds of services;
- educational and research centers act as consultants;
- government authorities are responsible for development of territories and conducting policy concerning tourism and environment protection;
- owners of land possess land sites and water objects;
- local communities live in the area of ecotourism objects are influenced by ecotourists visits;
- lobbyists and public associations impact political decisions on ecotourism.

So, there are many types of actors in ecotourism but further only ecotourists and tour operators will be considered in the context of possible classifications and functions as the main figures. But, firstly, eco-destination will be defined.

#### **4.2.1. Destination**

In general terms, destination for ecotourists, based on definitions of ecotourism, is a place with undisturbed nature populated by local residents interacting with tourists. Obviously, these issues are the most important for travelers. However, it is crucial to specify some other,



secondary, aspects that are also of great need because they make staying in the destination more comfortable and memorable (Wood, 2002):

- tourists should be confident that they do not harm environment by their presence, for this purpose outdoor recreational zones are to be constructed;
- all necessary infrastructure should be created in the destination including accommodation, catering, points of sales;
- entertainment activities should be organized by local communities for maintaining sociocultural education of tourists;
- interaction between tourists and local residents should be guaranteed in order to realize educational function of ecotourism and broaden range of activities.

#### **4.2.2. Ecotourists**

As it was mentioned above, ecotourists serve as consumers of ecotourism product. They visit ecotouristic sites to admire environmental sights. Despite it was proved that ecotourists, as a rule, have similar characteristics – age of 40-50 years, higher education, incomes higher than average – they still differ a lot by many other criteria. Therefore, there are different classifications of ecotourists created by different authors. They take into account such various aspects as type of organization of tourist group, motive to visiting a site, type of activity that a tourist prefers, level of interest in attractions and physical rigor. Table 2 summarizes information on classification of ecotourists.

*Table 2. Classifications of ecotourists*

Author	Classification criterion	Ecotourists groups
Kusler (1991)	Group organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do-it-yourselfers</li> <li>- Group tours</li> <li>- School tours</li> </ul>
Butler and Fenton (1987)	Motivation and activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bird watchers</li> <li>- Hard listers</li> <li>- Soft listers</li> <li>- Aesthetic watchers</li> <li>- Advanced watchers</li> <li>- Family birders</li> <li>- Courtship birders</li> <li>- Photographers</li> <li>- Social birders</li> </ul>
Lindberg (1991)	Motive and interest level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hard-core (scientific researchers)</li> <li>- Dedicated (learners of local natural history)</li> <li>- Mainstream (taking outstanding trip to natural area)</li> </ul>
Duffus and Dearden (1990)	Physical rigor and interest level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Specialists (high interest to a site, require little infrastructure)</li> <li>- Generalists (little special interest, require good infrastructure)</li> </ul>
Weaver (2005)	Motive  Type of visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Comprehensive (transformational and sociocultural interest)</li> <li>- Minimalist (only environmental interest)</li> <li>- Hard (long trips in small groups with strong environmental interest)</li> <li>- Soft (short trips in large groups with different purposes)</li> </ul>

#### 4.2.3. Tour operators

Tour operators are also heterogeneous as well as ecotourists and approaches to classifying them may also vary a lot depending on classification criteria.

Firstly, all operators can be divided into 2 large groups. The first one consists of those tour operators which make profit on organization of trips for ecotourists and it is the main purpose of their activity. The opposite for them are non-profit organizations. They usually have a goal of providing educational services using governmental funds.

Secondly, tour operators distinguish by the degree of their participation in the life of a site of ecotourism. The lowest level of participation is observed when operators are not interested in the impact of tourists' visits on site's conditions at all. The next, higher level, is characterized by the desire of an operator to know about the level of impact and to make it less unfavorable. The third stage of interest is when operators take "financial part" in maintaining conditions of a site. It means that some proportion of operator's revenue is used for protection of the object. And the last, and the best for the ecotourism site, type of operators is characterized by those which participate in protection projects not only financially but also offer ideas of such projects.

Tour operators are the intermediate link between tourists and destination and there is competition between operators. That is why it is necessary to realize what kind of ecotours tour operators should supply to satisfy tourists' needs and have competitive advantage over peers. The fact is that operators are to interact with clients on 2 stages: before the trip and during the trip. Before the trip qualified operators give some instructions to tourists. These instructions can be devoted to cultural peculiarities of the visited territory to prevent possible conflicts with local residents. Also it is important to give instructions concerning environment behavior. During the trip tourists want to have various opportunities which can be provided by an operator. In particular, here interaction with locals, guiding instructions, contribution to local organizations, comfortable and sufficient infrastructure are crucial aspects and tour operators should take them into account to get positive references from clients after the end of the trip.

### **4.3. Impact of ecotourism**

Conservation of natural resources that can be provided by ecotourism can take on 4 different forms (Hvenegaard, 1994). Previous researches proved that ecotourism is more financially beneficial for the territory

than, for example, agricultural works. The reason is that in case of organizing ecotourism local community has opportunity to get regular jobs. Moreover, this will stimulate industrial and retail development in the area because increasing tourist traffic will increase need in goods of prime necessity. As a result, diversification of the economy of the area will take place. Moreover, if foreign tourist visit the area there will be inflow of foreign capital.

However, ecotourism tends to have not only economic impact but also environmental and sociocultural effect. As for the first one, part of fees paid by visitors can devoted to maintaining conditions of a site. As for the second, there is some probability that part of tourists who visited a site will get into spirit of ecotourism and subsequently will take part in sustentation of this or other ecotourism objects.

#### **4.4. Distinctions from other kinds of tourism**

As it was already mentioned, ecotourism is a specific way of tourism. Therefore, it is extremely interesting to reveal its differences from other kinds of tourism.

Despite there is no generally accepted definition of the term "ecotourism" it is usually understood as activity closely connected with conservation of environment. Here the main difference from nature tourism is hidden. The fact is that nature tourism focuses only on observing natural objects without affecting environment. One more distinction is that in nature tourism educational opportunities are not as important as in ecotourism (Weaver, 2005) because in nature tourism environment is usually a "resource" for relaxation but not the object of learning while for ecotourists environmental site itself is of great interest.

Nature tourism is the closest to ecotourism kind of tourism but still it is not the same. And it is not surprising that ecotourism strongly differs

from mass tourism. The key distinguish is that ecotourism has much less negative influence on environment than mass tourism. The thing is that in case of ecotourism providers are more interested in decreasing bad influence on nature because it is the object of tourism and tourists want to see it in ideal conditions. In contrast, in case of mass tourism providers are not committed to maintain perfect conditions of touristic objects. That is why in areas of ecotourism the rules concerning car use, industrial pollutions, smoking and other issues are regulated tougher than in mass tourism.

Furthermore, ecotourism is made the specific form of tourism by the following aspects. The first one is specific marketing campaigns focusing on promoting destinations among potential travelers interested in visiting undisturbed territories. The second issue is effective management which should be oriented not only to providing visitors with the touristic product but primarily to organizing their activity in such style which will be safe for the area. Thirdly, range of services for tourists should be organized but in contrast to other types of tourism they are to be designed for maintaining sustainable development of the site. Fourthly, on the government level rules should be set according to which tourists' fees are devoted to conservation of natural resources.

So, this chapter provides general information on ecotourism. It is understood now that there is no generally accepted definition of the term because it is the complicated phenomenon with wide range of specific characteristics. These characteristics differ ecotourism from many other forms of tourism. The key elements of ecotouristic product are given: eco-destination, ecotourists and operators. On the one hand, variety of classifications of tourists and operators also proves complexity of the ecotourism phenomenon. On the other hand, evidence on positive economic and social impact of ecotourism confirms its necessity for society. All this information is useful for the purpose of this research because gets insight into ecotourism without

which it is impossible to investigate image of Finland as ecotourism destination for Russian travelers. Thus, this chapter provides theoretical base for the further research.

## **5. IMAGE ATTRIBUTES OF FINLAND AS ECOTOURISM DESTINATION**

It is important at the beginning of this chapter to explain the reverse logic of conducted analysis. Thus, as initial step post trip image of Finland was studied. And only after, pre trip image attributes were extracted. Which may look illogical, since a person has pre-trip image at first and only after visiting he is able to form the post-trip image.

However, such reverse logic serves certain aims of analysis. Since the interviews have the nature of semi structured ones, it was important to obtain certain understanding of destination image held by travelers who have already experienced Finnish national parks. The logic was intended to get more relevant and comparable results. Thus, knowing the post-trip image allowed to direct the interviews into desired route and discuss with respondents the same aspects of image which were obtained via content analysis. Discussing the same image aspects made the further analysis easier and the data comparable.

### **5.1. Post-trip image of Finland**

This section of the chapter is devoted to description of the results derived while analyzing image of Finland which was formed by Russian travelers who have already visited Finnish national parks. Firstly, the sample will be described in detail and then the results of UGC analysis and interviews will be provided.

#### **5.1.1. Data collection and sample structure**

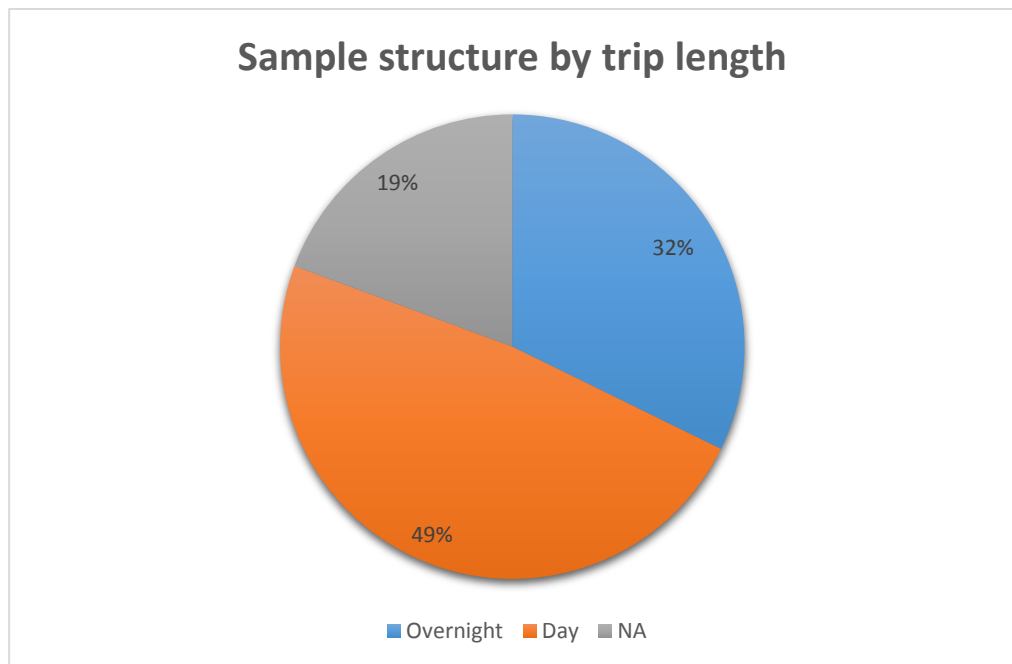
Content analysis of UGC was chosen in order to study the post-trip image of Finland. The sample was selected through an exhaustive search using Google and Yandex from 25th November, 2013 until 3rd December, 2013. Additionally relevant web-sources were identified by visiting travel message boards (e.g. tripadvisor.ru) and popular social networks (vkontakte.ru and odnoklassniki.ru). The search resulted in a

total sample size of 41 post describing the experience of Russian nature travelers in Finnish national parks and 454 comments to those posts or posts with similar topics.

The data first was reduced to the core, by eliminating “stop” words which do not carry any meanings. Then the plural forms were replaced to singular and phrases were merged into a “word” without spaces (e.g. national park = NationalPark) to avoid double counting.

The assessment of affective dimension was carried out through careful reading and analyzing the context and expressions used and connecting them with image attributes. The cognitive dimension was measured using online software, which allows assessing the frequencies of the words used.

*Figure 7. Sample structure by trip length*



As shown in the figure above almost half of analyzed reviews were related to daylong trips, about a third of sample involved overnight stay in a national park and in 19% of the sample trip length was not mentioned and could not be identified by the author indirectly.



Figure 8. Sample structure by companion

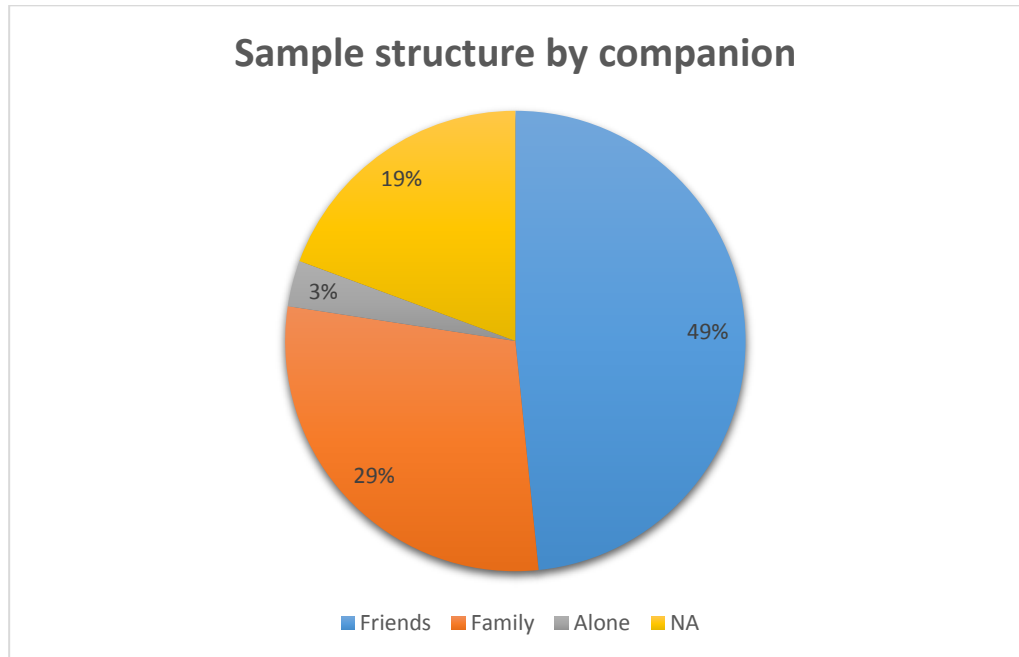


Figure 8 illustrates the structure of sample according to company with which a person was visiting a national park. And thus, about half visited a park with friends, 29% with family members, only 3% visited parks alone and 19% did not mention the company and the company could be identified by the author indirectly (e.g. form photos taken).

Figure 9. Sample structure by place visited

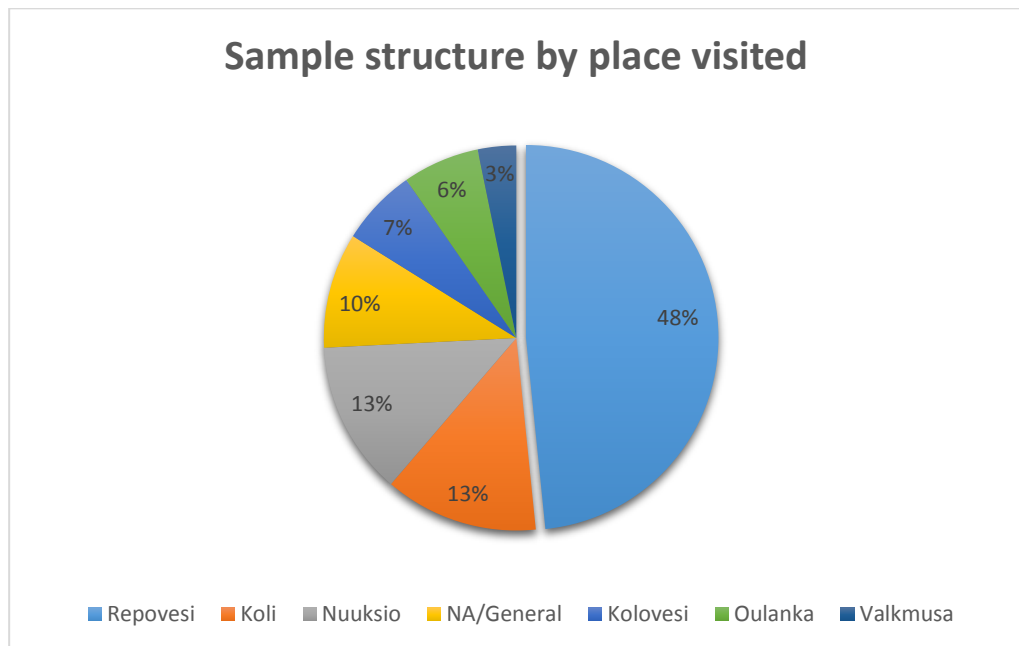
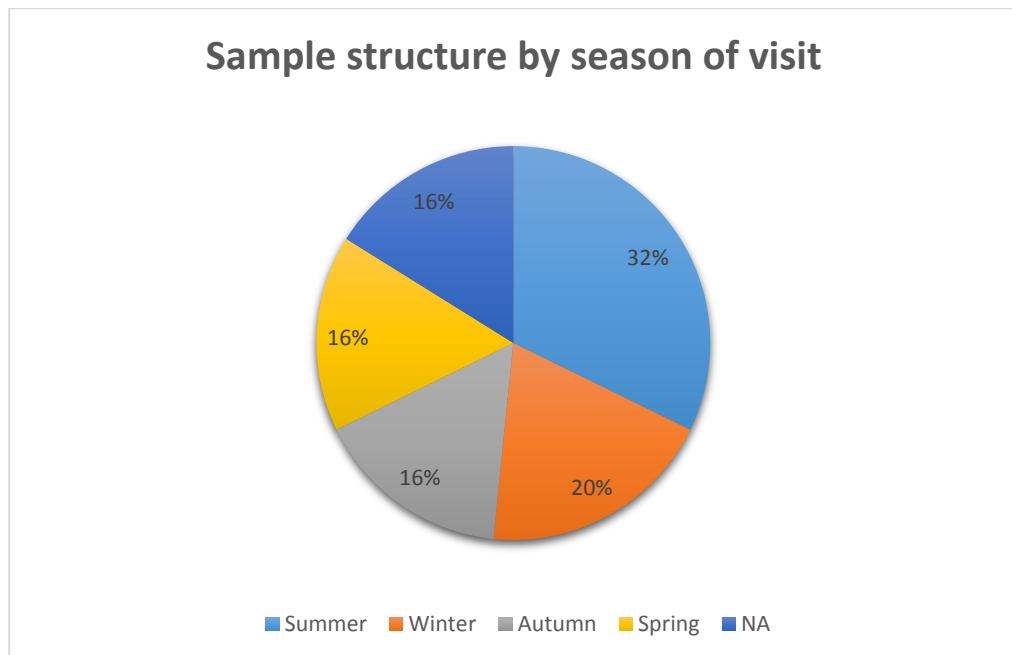


Figure 9 shows which national parks were visited by travelers from the sample. Almost half of reviews related to Repovesi National park, which is the most popular Finnish national park among Russians in a great extent due to its location. The second most often mentioned parks are Koli and Nuuksio. Kolovesi, Oulanka and Valkmusa combined have the share of 16% in the sample. And 10% of analysed posts were related to more than one national park or it was not possible to identify the park relation of a post and thereby featured with general descriptions of Finnish national parks.

Figure 10. Sample structure by season of visit



The sample structure by season of visit is depicted in figure 10. Thus, not surprisingly, the most common time for visiting is summer – about a third of the posts, second most often is winter with 20%, and autumn and spring have 16% each. In addition, in 16% of the cases it was not possible to determine the exact season from either text or pictures.

Additionally, around 71% of the sample were mainly describing forest activities in the park, and 29% were mainly related to water activities.

### 5.1.2. Cognitive dimension

The cognitive dimension of the image is extracted according to the frequencies of mentioning certain attributes in UGC and the context in which the attribute is mentioned (mainly positive or mainly negative). The values are represented in the table below.

*Table 3. Cognitive image attributes and affective dimension.*

Attribute	Share of sample mentioned, %	Mainly positively mentioned, %	Mainly negatively mentioned, %
natural resources	100%	100%	0%
history and culture	39%	33%	0%
general infrastructure	58%	56%	6%
tourist infrastructure	100%	65%	3%
tourist leisure and recreation	65%	55%	0%
economic factors	23%	71%	0%
social environment	3%	100%	0%
atmosphere	48%	93%	7%

Additional finding from content analysis is the words travelers use in order to describe their experience of visiting Finnish national parks.

Table 4. The 50 most frequent words used to describe ecotourism experience in Finland.

Rank	Word/Phrase	Times mentioned	Frequency in the core, %	Rank	Word/Phrase	Times mentioned	Frequency in the core, %	Rank	Word/Phrase	Times mentioned	Frequency in the core, %
1	Park	199	1,44	18	Parking	27	0,20	35	Lapinsalmi	13	0,09
2	Finland/ Finnish	109	0,79	19	Coast	26	0,19	36	Bird	12	0,09
3	Landscape	88	0,64	20	Nuukio	24	0,17	37	Camping	12	0,09
4	Route/trail	81	0,59	21	Recreation	24	0,17	38	Attraction	11	0,08
5	Lake	79	0,57	22	Map	23	0,17	39	Olhavanvuori	11	0,08
6	National park	72	0,52	23	Free	18	0,13	40	Fish	10	0,07
7	Repovesi	64	0,46	24	Kids	17	0,12	41	Rent	10	0,07
8	Boat	51	0,37	25	Winter	17	0,12	42	Mushroom	10	0,07
9	Forest	50	0,36	26	Road	17	0,12	43	Great	10	0,07
10	Rock	47	0,34	27	Signpost	17	0,12	44	Air	9	0,07
11	Beauty/Beautiful	39	0,28	28	Information	17	0,12	45	Wild	9	0,07
12	Nature	38	0,28	29	Fireplace	15	0,11	46	Picnic	9	0,07
13	Hill	35	0,25	30	Tour	14	0,10	47	Kayak	9	0,07
14	View	31	0,22	31	Toilet	14	0,10	48	Koli	8	0,06
15	Territory	28	0,20	32	Kouvoula	14	0,10	49	Interesting	7	0,05
16	Top	28	0,20	33	Ferry	14	0,10	50	Karelia	7	0,05
17	Bridge	27	0,20	34	Protect	13	0,09				

### 5.1.3. Affective dimension

The affective image attributes and the most indicative excerpts for each attribute are highlighted in table 5 and table 6.

*Table 5. Positive Perception of Finland*

Attribute with most positive references	Indicative excerpts
Natural resources	<p>“Even on distance the rock looked impressive”</p> <p>“The top offers beautiful panoramic view”</p>
General infrastructure	<p>“There is huge parking lot near the park”</p> <p>“... Tasty and nourishing lunches in Korpikahvila café...”</p>
Tourist infrastructure	<p>“In Finland everything is made for people. That seemed just a forest, but no: there is a special place for stay with tables and benches, chopped wood for use, axe...”</p> <p>“It is impossible to get lost in the park since the signs are placed all over the tracks”</p>
Tourist leisure and recreation	<p>“ In the park fishing with bait is allowed. There are many mushrooms and berries, they can also be collected.”</p> <p>‘Even though the park is made for self-recreation – no obtrusive services, you will have chance to ... rent a kayak ... participate in rock climbing... geocaching ’</p>

Economic factors	<p>“... entrance to any park is free and visit time is unlimited”</p> <p>“... fairy is free and goes each 15 minutes”</p>
Social environment	<p>“... you can meet tourists from all over the world...”</p> <p>“...language is not a big problem even if you don't speak English”</p>
Atmosphere	<p>“... was silent, green, calm and fresh. We wanted to walk long and far...”</p> <p>“It was sharp feeling of unity with nature and at the same time some kind of safety”</p> <p>“This place is able to charm you for a life, so you will definitely want to go back there again.”</p>

*Table 6. Negative image of Finland*

Attribute with negative references	Indicative excerpts
General infrastructure	<p>“There were 3 parking lots and all of them were totally full”</p> <p>“Medical kit is a must. Medical service in Finland is very poor”</p>
Tourist infrastructure	<p>“Without luck looking for a camping place. No information at all.”</p>
Atmosphere	<p>“There is no extravagance of Barcelona...nor philosophical deserts of Iceland and Scotland. Everything is half-hearted... Boring.”</p>

#### **5.1.4. Unique dimension**

Based on the reviews of travelers it can be concluded that Finnish national parks certainly have its own distinctive features. Thus, people admire tourist infrastructure and surroundings services. But what is truly unique for Finnish national parks, and what people can feel is the careful attitude of the whole Finnish society towards nature. The phenomena was way or another mentioned in 78% of the tourists posts.

#### **5.1.5. Findings from the interviews with experienced travelers**

Obtained content analysis findings do not show much of negative side of the image and thereby the interviews with experienced traveler were conducted in order to prove the results. The respondents were selected through exhaustive search using the network of researcher.

The respondents were asked to describe their experience of visiting Finnish national parks and additional question to them was what they didn't like, what was negative about their experience.

While describing their experience respondents repeated most frequent attributes of the image extracted from the content analysis. In relation to negativity, only two respondents were able to name any nugatory experience of their trips: "forgot some equipment at home", "worn inappropriate shoes".

Thus, the negativity does not relate to Finnish national parks as such but to certain circumstances which are not often appearing. Thereby the results of the content analysis can be considered as relevant.

To sum up the information of this section, it is worth to say that, from point of view of tourists who visited Finnish national parks, the most important attributes of them are natural resources, tourist infrastructure, tourist leisure and recreation and general infrastructure. All of them



were mentioned by more than 50% of respondents. But only natural resources are positively mentioned in 100%.

The next step is to analyze the pre-trip image of Finland formed and to find out whether it differs from the post-trip image and what are the similarities.

## **5.2. Pre-trip image of Finland**

This section contains information on the results of analyzing the pre-trip image of Finland formed by Russians. The section has the same structure as the previous one.

### **5.2.1. Data collection and respondents profile**

In order to study the pre-trip image of Finland as ecotourism destination it was set to conduct 15 in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted during December 2013 – January 2014.

The respondents were chosen using convenient sampling method. Thus, nine respondents answered positively when asked to participate in the research and were found through social networks, forums and blogs, others were obtained through existing network of the researcher. The interviews were conducted primarily using Skype and via phone, however five interviews involved face-to-face meetings. Overall, time roll of the interviews count for more than five hours.

Further information gives an idea of the profile of respondents. Thus, five respondents are female, 3 of which aged 25-35, one is 35-50 and another is above 50 years old. Others 10 respondents are male aged primarily 25-35 and 35-50. (see Appendix A)

Additionally, all of the respondents share the interest in ecotourism as were specially selected according to this factor. However, despite the interest none of respondents was able to name a Finnish national park and did not hear any concrete information about them. Few mentioned

that they heard the national parks exist in Finland and are highly attractive.

Absolute majority of respondents stated that they appreciate Finnish nature and the way Finns care about it. Only 2 respondents do not see anything special in Finnish nature.

First, the respondents were asked to say what the national park is for them. Below is the summary of their responses:

- area, which is being protected by government in order to save nature in its original form;
- some sorts of human activity are allowed;
- commercial place.

For few respondents aim of visiting is not enough in order to initiate travel to Finland. However, some stated that they would go just with a purpose of visiting national park if it would include overnight stay or they would be extremely interested in it

Respondents see Finnish national parks as a destination for family holiday or recreation with friends.

### **5.2.2. Cognitive dimension**

#### **1. Natural resources**

During the interviews, the respondents did not pay much attention to that dimension. Sometimes they were referring to wild nature in context of national parks, or to clean nature of Finland. However, nobody mentioned exceptional beauty of Finnish nature as the main attraction. Additionally, not all respondents connect Finnish national parks with lakes and water. Only few mentioned them during interviews. For the rest Finnish national park is just rugged terrain with mainly forests.

Mainly the respondents expect to see unique natural resources as a reason why a place obtained the title of national park. However, far not all of them stated natural resources as important factor for them while

choosing to which national park to go. Thereby we can conclude that they expect to meet exceptional beauty of nature in national parks by default.

## 2. History and culture

Attitude towards this dimension is controversial. On the one hand, some respondents stated that they expect the dimension to be present in different ways. Ones stated that they would be interested to know why the place received the status of national park, what was there before etc. Others also expect to see cultural attributes in Finnish national parks, since the Finns are associated with careful attitude to nature in their minds. And thereby it would be relevant to know a bit of Finnish culture, especially when travelling with children.

Few respondents do not expect to face any cultural attributes, while their visiting or state that they are not interested in it as the main purpose of visit is nature. Some stated that even though they do not expect to see these attributes but if present that would be a plus, since any additional opportunity or diversity of activities is always good.

## 3. General infrastructure

The dimension often appeared in interviews. Most often mentioned general infrastructure is parking lot nearby a park and places to eat and drink. Some respondents expect to see food places inside the park, others near the main entrance. Additionally, respondents mentioned that they expect to see some souvenir shop at either the entrance or exit of park. Medical service was also mentioned several times during the interviews.

## 4. Tourist infrastructure

The most relevant factors named by respondents from this category were good signposting, map or guidebook, places for recreation and houses in the forest. The factor, which gained the most attention, is touristic routes. The respondents named it as distinctive feature of

national parks. They expect to see several routes with different level of difficulty and full information which equipment and preparation they need in order to finish a route.

Some respondents mentioned that they expect that renting an accommodation would be possible in national park, but additionally they noted that it should not be a hotel, but in line with nature as wooden house etc.

#### 5. Tourist leisure and recreation

Mainly the respondents associate visit to national park as involving overnight stay. However, two respondents associate it as just daily recreation without overnight stay. Additionally, in the minds of tourists Finnish national parks is the place for summer recreation. Very few mentioned winter as possible season for visit, but with additional services as house rent.

Respondents expect availability of some guided tours and excursions in a park.

They also expect large variety of renting services be available which also condition the diversity of activities, among mentioned by respondents were: bicycle, boat, kayak, camping equipment, fishing equipment.

Some also expect educational activities, involving familiarizing with ecological problems and ways to protect nature, also related to biodiversity of the ecosystem.

In general respondents see Finnish national park as a place with a complex of activities, combining active and passive recreation.

#### 6. Economic attribute of cognitive image.

Inexperienced tourists expect to pay for the entrance to Finnish national parks. Only one respondent mentioned that the entrance should be free but all surrounding services be of charge. On average respondents

compared the entrance to National park with value of 5-10 euro per person. One also mentioned that he would expect staff to speak at least English and maybe even Russian in case the entrance is 10 euro. Additionally respondents were even surprised when heard that the entrance to all Finnish national parks is free. Also two respondents mentioned that national park is a commercialized place and aimed to make profit for a governor.

#### 7. Social environment

Respondents stated that they don't expect to see many people while visiting national park, staff is situated in main spots, such as entrance and exit. Respondents expect at least English language skills of staff. Overall respondents stated that they do not expect much of social environment in Finnish national parks, just minimum level of support and not many other tourists around.

#### 8. Atmosphere

For most of the respondents national park is a place where you can switch off your phone and have rest out of city life. Atmosphere is very calm and they expect to feel harmony with nature. Also some of respondents mentioned that additionally to esthetic pleasure they want to feel some emotions doing active sports, as excitement etc.

### **5.2.3. Affective dimension**

Positive. The main factor leading to additional positive experience in minds of respondents is a diversity of activities, which are available for visitors. As mentioned by some of them, the diversity can lead to repeated visits, and visits with different company and in different season of the year.

Negative. Among the things which can lead to negative tourists experience many respondents mentioned the situation when they break some rules which they were not informed of before. Other negative

factors as poor services, bad weather or boring activities as declared by all respondents can't lead to negative experience of visiting a park.

#### **5.2.4. Unique dimension**

Unique dimension of image is based first on special characteristics of national parks. Thus, as already discussed, respondents expect to see unique nature, since a place got the status of national park. Additionally they expect the nature in national parks to be better maintained and adopted for hiking than wild nature. Secondly, uniqueness is based on unique characteristics of Finnish nature. Even though most of respondents feel that the appearance of Finnish nature is close to some regions of Russia, but it is cleaner and better maintained.

Thirdly, they tend to expect better-provided surrounding services. As stated by one of respondents: 'Nature is maybe similar, but the way everything is organized is very different. Neatness, care, maintenance.'

So, according to the results achieved, the most important issues for tourists who will potentially visit Finnish national parks are natural resources, general infrastructure, tourist infrastructure and tourist leisure and recreation.

### **5.3. Divergence analysis**

So, the analysis of formation of post-trip and pre-trip image of Finland was conducted. Initially, the factors of the post-trip image were revealed and then they were analyzed in context of the pre-trip image formation. The results of 2 stages of analysis differ from each other and it is not surprising because the respondents who have already visited Finnish national parks may have the opinion different from that of people who have never visited them.

So, the comparison of these two images by criteria is provided in Table 7.

Table 7. Characteristics of ecotourism

Dimension	Post-trip image	Pre-trip image
Natural resources	Natural resources are the main attraction	Beauty of nature is the reason for creating national parks but is not the main reason to visit a site
History and culture	Additional attraction but not the motive of travelling	Additional attraction but not the motive of travelling
General infrastructure	Mentioned only by 58% of respondents	Supporting services should be provided for making a trip convenient
Tourist infrastructure	Is mentioned but not always in positive way	Is not taken into account
Tourist leisure and recreation	Is not very important	Various recreation facilities are demanded
Economic dimension	Travelers know that visiting parks is free	Travelers try to assess how much they are ready to pay for visiting parks
Social environment	Unimportant	Unimportant
Atmosphere	Tourists have positive opinion on atmosphere	Enjoyable atmosphere is expected
Unique dimension	Exceptional natural resources and high quality of infrastructure	Exceptional natural resources and high quality of infrastructure
Affective dimension	Positive: diversified activities, nature, infrastructure, atmosphere Negative: poor quality of infrastructure and boring atmosphere	Positive: diversified activities Negative: breaking rules tourists are not aware of

So, the figure demonstrates that there is low divergence between pre-trip and post-trip images in history and culture, social environment, atmosphere and uniqueness; moderate divergence in natural resources, general and tourist infrastructure, tourist leisure and recreation and affective dimension; high divergence is observed only in economic dimension. To make the full picture on divergence of pre-trip

and post-trip image of Finland let us discuss each issue in more detail in context of comparison the two images.

### 1. Natural resources

Here some kind of divergence takes place. The fact is that tourists who have already visited Finnish national parks find national resources of the country to be the key aspect attracting them. In contrast, people who form the pre-trip image of Finland do not consider nature of Finland important at the same degree. They realize that beauty and uniqueness of nature is the reason for creating national parks and attracting tourists to visit them but do not think it is the main attraction. Here 2 possible explanations can take place. Firstly, uniqueness of the nature can be perceived as an integral part of a national park and, therefore, is not pointed out by potential tourists. Secondly, natural environment of a site can be assessed to the full extent only in case of visiting, as a result, tourists who have already visited Finland emphasize the importance of this aspect.

### 2. History and culture

History and culture is the attribute of low divergence between pre-trip and post-trip images. The fact is that in case of formation of the post-trip image of Finland only 1/3 of respondents find this issue important. The reason can be that the main reason for visiting national parks is admiring nature but not studying cultural and historical development of a country. In case of formation the pre-trip image this issue is also not so important but the respondents claim that if the trip provides them with the opportunity of learning some historical details about the site it will be the additional positive moment.

### 3. General infrastructure

Opinions of respondents on general infrastructure diverge at moderate extent. Namely, among visitors only 58% mentioned this issue while among those who have not yet visited Finnish national parks it is more



important – they point out importance of medical services, selling and food spots for making their trip more convenient. The reasons for divergence can be that: 1) respondent from the first sample mean that general infrastructure should be at high level by default; or 2) people who have already visited Finland formed their opinion of parks and suppose that even in case of worse general infrastructure they will not change their opinion.

#### 4. Tourist infrastructure

In context of this indicator there is also some divergence between 2 groups of respondents. On the one hand, those who form the pre-trip image do not attach great importance to this factor. On the one hand, all of those who have already visited Finnish national parks find this important and only 65% are satisfied by quality of tourist infrastructure. Supposedly, the reason is that they think they can visit Finnish parks again only if tourist infrastructure becomes more comfortable.

#### 5. Tourist leisure and recreation

Tourist leisure and recreation is the last of cognitive dimensions for which moderate divergence is observed. For the post-trip image it is not so important as for the pre-trip image (respondents claim that there should be special touristic things such as bicycles, kayaks etc.) for making their trips more interesting. The reason for difference can lie in the fact that people who have already visited Finland realize that the nature itself is more important in ecotourism than any additional opportunities.

#### 6. Economic dimension

Economic dimension is the only aspect characterized by high level of divergence between pre-trip and post-trip image of Finland. The reason is that experienced travelers are aware of the fact that entrance to national parks is free and only 23% of this type of respondents pay attention to the economic side of the question while inexperienced

respondents do not know about free entrance to national parks of Finland and, therefore, try to assess which price they are ready to pay for it.

#### 7. Social environment

Viewpoints of experienced and inexperienced travelers on the question of social environment are quite similar. Both types of respondents find this aspect unimportant in formation of the image. It can be explained by the fact that in ecotourism the aim of a trip is to visit undisturbed nature objects; that is why tourists do not expect high level of interaction with other people but desire to admire the environments of the site they visit.

#### 8. Atmosphere

As for atmosphere, among those who previously visited Finnish national parks there are more than 90% who have positive opinion about this. At the same time, inexperienced respondents also expect enjoyable atmosphere because nobody will disturb them and due to location on the nature they will feel comfortable.

#### 9. Unique dimension

There is low divergence between pre-trip and post-trip images in context of uniqueness of Finnish national parks. Here two factors can be mentioned. The first is exceptional quality of Finnish natural resources and this is not surprising because national parks cannot be in opposite conditions. The second one is infrastructure of high quality which provides tourists with all necessary services and make their trip much more convenient.

#### 10. Affective dimension

Affective dimension is an ambiguous question in terms of divergence between formation of pre-trip and post-trip images. As for positive impression, here inexperienced respondents claim that the main

criterion is diversity of activities motivating them go to the site again. Compared to this, experienced travelers mention that this is not the only factor of positive impression. They are also positively affected by natural beauty, high quality of infrastructure and favorable atmosphere.

As for negative perception, when people do not have any experience in visiting Finnish national parks they believe that poor quality is not able to have negative influence on the general impression of the trip. They think that the only reason that may have negative effect is non-acquaintance with local rules and laws and breaking them. In contrast, when people have already visited Finland they claim that poor quality of supporting services and boring atmosphere can influence negatively on the opinion of the trip.

Figure 11 provides revealed divergence between post-trip and pre-trip images of Finland.

*Figure 11. Divergence table*

Pre-trip image	Natural resources	Post-trip image
	History and culture	
	General infrastructure	
	Tourists infrastructure	
	Tourist leisure and recreation	
	Economic dimension	
	Social environment	
	Atmosphere	
	Unique	
	Affective	

	Low
	Moderate
	High

So, the divergence analysis based on the results of formation of pre-trip and post-trip image of Finland shows there is noticeable divergence between them in context of natural resources, general and tourist

infrastructure, tourist leisure and recreation, economic and affective dimensions. The differences are not surprising because those who have not yet visited Finnish parks cannot assess all the aspects to the full extent. The results achieved can be used in marketing campaigns of tour operators organizing ecotours. Due to them, operators can attract experienced and inexperienced tourists by affecting different aspects in dependence on group of tourists.

## **6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

### **6.1. Conclusions**

The question of ecotourism has become widely studied lately. There are many research papers devoted to this topic. This study contributes to the literature on it because systematizes ideas of previous research papers and focuses on empirical study of divergence between pre-trip and post-trip image of Finland formed by different respondents. Finnish national parks were chosen as the object of analysis because Finland is one of the leading ecotouristic countries.

The procedure of the study was the following. Firstly, relevant literature was analyzed. Among researches there are those devoted to destination image, methods of destination image research and ecotourism in context of its definition, the main characteristics of the phenomenon, key elements of ecotourism as market segment, its economic and social impact and differences from other types of tourism. This step provides the theoretical base for further empirical research. Secondly, the empirical research of divergence between pre-trip and post-trip image of Finland was conducted.

Below the main results of each stage of analysis will be discussed.

Firstly, in this study the question of destination image was analyzed. It was revealed that there exist induced, organic and real images which differ by the source of their formation. Also, different classifications of image attributes were analyzed and the range of dimensions for the empirical research was selected. Among them there are cognitive, affective and unique dimensions.

After that existing methods of destination image research were studied. Namely, previous research papers on UGC and interviews were reviewed and it was found out that these methods are relevant for

being used in this research because provide researchers with information about opinions of experienced and inexperienced visitors of destinations.

The next step was to analyze previous studies on ecotourism because without this it is impossible to research Finland as ecotourism destination. The researchers analyze different aspects of ecotourism. Firstly, the problem of definition of the term "ecotourism" exists. There is still no agreement on this problem. So, ecotourism is considered as quiet complicated phenomenon but it is obvious that ecotourism relates to visiting places with exceptional natural resources. This type of tourism is proved to have positive influence not only on nature due to focusing on conservation but also on sociocultural aspect. It means that tourists who visit a site may get into spirit of ecotourism and get involved in maintaining optimal conditions of ecotouristic objects. As for the main distinctions from other types of tourism, here focus on conservation of environment, importance of educational opportunities, special marketing campaigns, effective management and rules set by government should be mentioned.

Finally, based on the theoretical background, the empirical research was conducted. Firstly, the post-trip image of Finland was studied through content analysis (on the sample of experienced travelers who have already visited Finnish national parks) and using the results of it pre-trip image formation (on the sample of inexperienced tourists) was studied through interviews because these results allowed to conduct interviews in desired direction. The results of the empirical part of the study are the following:

1. there is **low divergence** between post-trip and pre-trip image in context of:
  - history and culture because both groups of respondents find it additional attraction but not the main motive to visit Finnish national parks;

- social environment because it is not considered as important by both groups;
  - atmosphere because experienced visitors mention enjoyable atmosphere of Finnish national parks and inexperienced tourists expect the same;
  - unique dimension since both subgroups pay attention to exceptional natural resources and infrastructure of high quality;
2. **moderate level of divergence** is observed for:
- natural resources as it is the main reason for visiting Finnish parks by experienced visitors but not by inexperienced ones;
  - general infrastructure since it is very important for the pre-trip image but not so important for the post-trip one;
  - tourist infrastructure not considered in pre-trip image formation but mentioned in post-trip image formation;
  - tourist leisure and recreation that is crucial for inexperienced tourists but not for those who have already visited Finnish national parks;
  - affective dimension because negative perception of experienced travelers may be caused by poor quality of infrastructure and that of inexperienced travelers may be caused by breaking rules they were not informed about before the trip.
3. **high divergence** was revealed only for economic dimension because those tourists who have never visited Finnish national parks are not aware of the fact that they should not pay for visiting them and try to evaluate how much they are ready to pay while experienced tourists do not pay attention to this aspect because know about this peculiarity.

So, according to the results of empirical research, there are noticeable differences between post-trip and pre-trip image of Finland. These

differences can be used in practice by ecotour providers focusing on attracting different target audiences.

## **6.2. Managerial implications**

So, as it was mentioned earlier, pre-trip and post-trip images of Finland as ecotourism destination differ noticeably. From point of view of managers, these differences should be taken into account when determining marketing campaigns of touristic organizations and policy implications will depend on which category of tourists is targeted by a tour operator.

So, as for experienced tourists, tour operators focus on attracting them for repeated visits of a site. Having an idea on the dimensions most important for experienced tourists marketing strategies should be oriented towards:

- expansion of range of information supplied to customers which is devoted to natural resources of a site because exceptional natural beauty of Finnish parks is mentioned by those who have already visited them as the key attraction; tour operators may also develop new configurations of ecotours in order to increase interest of experienced tourists by providing them with the opportunity of looking at a site from new perspective;
- promotion of atmosphere of Finnish national parks: tour operators may appeal to tourists' senses connected with calm of destination and try to persuade them that they need to visit a site again for enjoying this comfortable atmosphere;
- improvement of infrastructure of a site which is needed because of its importance for tourists as the indicator of uniqueness of Finnish national parks and as a factor that may mar the impression from a trip;



- widening range of activities supplied on a site because they are regarded by tourists as a positive affective dimension and improvement of this issue may lead to increase in tourist flow.

The other group of tourists is represented by those who have never visited Finnish national parks. Marketing strategies of ecotourism may also focus on attracting them to ecotourism destination. As it was proved in previous studies, potential visitors are inclined to take into account media content generated by experienced tourists. Therefore, one way to attract new tourists is to affect experienced tourists in hopes that in future their references will attract new clients. However, there is one more way of attracting – to affect inexperienced tourists directly. In this case tour operators should function in the following way:

- support and improve quality of general infrastructure such as medical services, retail, souvenir shops etc. because they are considered by inexperienced tourists as an essential part of convenient trip;
- diversify range of activities available for tourists for making their leisure more interesting and attractive;
- provided potential tourists with information about absence of admission fees in Finnish national parks to make target audience more informed and interested in visiting the territory;
- maintain favorable atmosphere for making a trip comfortable for customers;
- inform potential tourists about political, cultural and other specifics of the territory to mitigate risk of breaking rules that tourists are not aware of.

### **6.3. Theoretical implications**

This study also has theoretical value. Firstly, it contributes to literature concerning several questions of ecotourism. Firstly, it provides systematized information on previous researches of the phenomenon,

namely, on its possible definitions and characteristics which may be used in further researches as theoretical base for getting insight into ecotourism. Secondly, it focuses on destination image and ways of analyzing it and by this brings theoretical background for possible methodology of researching divergence between pre-trip and post-trip image formation. And, finally, this study illustrates how analysis of user-generated content and conducting interviews may be employed in divergence analysis on the example of image of Finnish national parks as ecotourism destination and relevance of this approach was proved by achieving reasonable conclusions which result from applying it for divergence identification.

#### **6.4. Limitations and further research**

As for further research, it may be realized concerning limitations of this research and may focus on improving limitations of this research. There can be regarded different ways of continuing the research. For example, other ecotourism destination may be analyzed and the results may be compared with the results of this study. Moreover, economic and social impact of ecotourism may be measured for Finland and compared with that of several other territories with ecotourism object different from Finnish parks. By analyzing these results the most objects with the most significant influence on economy and society will be revealed.

Another way of measuring the image can be quantitative researches. Unlike current research, which is very qualitative, further researches can apply quantitative approach to check certain hypotheses, which be derived with the help of this paper findings. A further quantitative study would also be a good comparison in terms of the findings and image attributes thus current study findings can be verified or denied.

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## APPENDIX

### *Appendix A. Respondents profile and interviews duration*

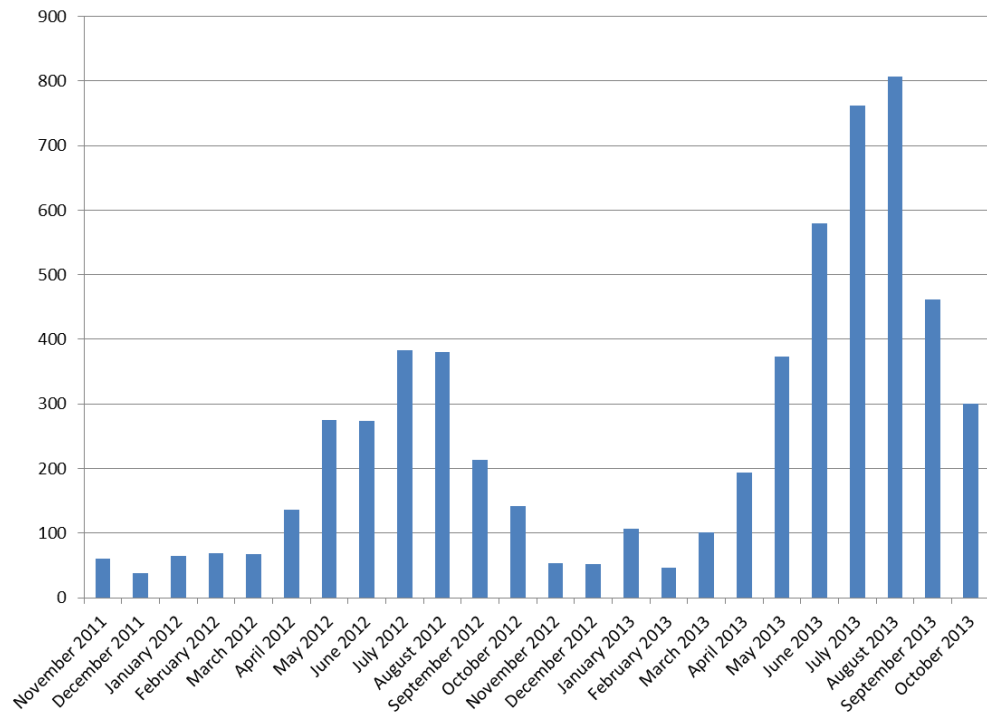
	DURATION	GENDER	AGE GROUP
RESPONDENT 1	0:30:02	M	1
RESPONDENT 2	0:14:19	M	1
RESPONDENT 3	0:20:54	M	1
RESPONDENT 4	0:19:54	M	2
RESPONDENT 5	0:21:02	F	1
RESPONDENT 6	0:16:44	M	2
RESPONDENT 7	0:13:33	F	1
RESPONDENT 8	0:13:21	M	1
RESPONDENT 9	0:21:05	M	2
RESPONDENT 10	0:19:25	M	2
RESPONDENT 11	0:11:00	F	3
RESPONDENT 12	0:28:32	F	1
RESPONDENT 13	0:17:38	M	1
RESPONDENT 14	0:16:56	M	2
RESPONDENT 15	0:15:37	F	2

### AGE GROUPS

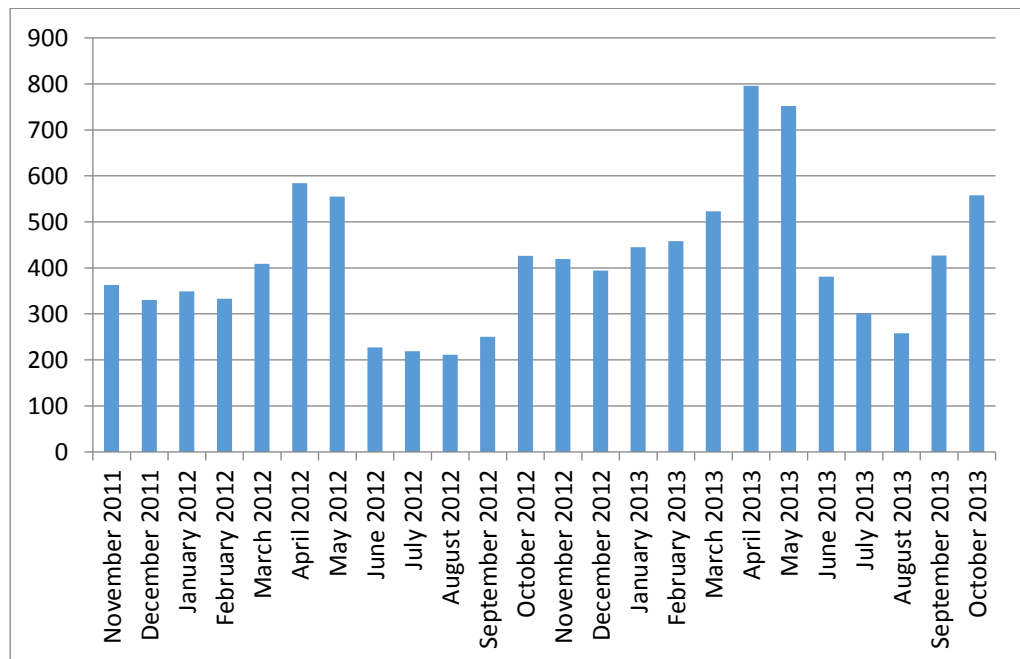
1	25-35
2	35-50
3	>50

## Appendix B. Search requests statistics

### Search requests dynamic for Repovesi (in Cyrillic letters)



### Search requests dynamic for 'Finnish nature' (in Cyrillics)



By tracking the dynamics of requests for first 10 months of 2013 comparing to the same period of 2012 the most noticeable facts are following:

- 9% increase in number of requests related to Finland
- 37% increase in number of requests related to Finnish nature
- 142% increase in number of requests related to Finnish national parks
- 85% increase in number of requests related to Repovesi (both requests in Cyrillic and Latin letters)
- Seasonality. Repovesi related requests peak in late summer, and related to Finnish nature are peaking in late spring, just before the summer