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The Softening of Adventure Tourism

OUTI RANTALA, VILLE HALLIKAINEN, HELI ILOLA & SEIJA TUULENTIE

Abstract

As a consequence of diversification with regard to tourists and their perceptions on adventure tourism, there has been a supposed softening of Arctic adventure tourism. To determine if any such changes were occurring, a study of adventure tourism services from Finnish Lapland was undertaken. This study incorporated methodological triangulation and used two different data sets drawn from an on-site survey of tourists (n=308) and thematic interviews with tourism actors (n=5). With respect to Lapland, the study determined that a softening of adventure tourism and diversification in tourists' groups was occurring. Specifically, the study found that tourists possessed inadequate competencies and knowledge regarding Arctic destinations; entrepreneurs demonstrated increased preparedness to pull out mid-activity and that there was a need for multi-skilled, service-oriented actors within destinations. Subsequently, more research is needed on the soft dimensions of tourism in the Arctic, in order to address, for example, what kind of competencies are needed from different actors.

Key Words: adventure tourism, soft adventure, hard adventure, Arctic, democratisation, nature-based tourism, Finland, Lapland

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Introduction

In this paper, we examine issues related to the supposed softening of adventure tourism by focussing on commercial nature-based tourism services in Finnish Lapland. Due to cultural differences, research in Finland has focused on nature-based tourism rather than on adventure tourism (Rantala & Valkonen, 2011; Rantala, Rokenes & Valkonen, 2016). Hence, commercial nature-based tourism services in Finnish Lapland consist of highly organised and industrialised guided services, which represent “the main bulk of the adventure market” offering high-volume low-difficulty products for the unskilled market (Buckley, 2007). Typically, guided services in Lapland consist of programmed services, such as snowmobile excursions to reindeer or sledge dog farms. The high level of industrialisation means that participation in the activities and jobs in the industry are available for a majority of people – regardless of the level of experience in the offered activities. Beedie and Hudson (2003) have previously described the process of diversification of participants in adventurous activities in relation to mountaineering. They call this process “democratisation of mountaineering” and name several points that illustrate how democratisation is taking place throughout the tourism industry (see Beedie & Hudson, 2003, p. 626). These points include commodification of mountains, attitudes to risk-adventure-challenge, environmental sensitivity, the impact of technology, and changing lifestyles.

We claim that the Arctic environment can be compared to mountain environments (Beedie & Hudson, 2003). For example, the tourism industry brings urban characteristics – such as paved roads and signposts, spas and cafés – to northern wilderness areas and through this process, tourism makes it easier for inexperienced people to explore the Arctic, while making it simultaneously more complex to manage. The diverse backgrounds of both the tourists participating in the activities and the guides helping tourists with these activities highlight the importance of detailed scripting (e.g. both through guided activities, through informal guiding taking place in service encounters and guiding in form of signposts and written instructions) for such Arctic nature experiences (see Edensor, 2000; Beedie & Hudson, 2003).

Tourism has been a key development sector in Finnish Lapland since the beginning of the 1980s. Rapid growth in the tourism industry has occurred in the commercial tourism services in the winter season. In 2017, approximately 2.9 million tourists visited Lapland of which

about 1,5 million were foreign tourists (Regional Council of Lapland, 2018). The foreign tourists mainly came from Great Britain, Russia, Germany and Japan. The number of registered overnight stays has more than doubled from 1.25 million in 1990. The actual number of tourists is estimated to be three times more than the registered number, as approximately two thirds of the overnights are non-registered at least in some resorts (Lapland tourism strategy 2015-2018). In 2011, the number of tourism enterprises in Lapland was 1586 (Kyyrä, 2013; Satokangas, 2013). Most of these enterprises employed less than ten people (see also Maher et al., 2014.) Since 2003, the tourism strategies for Finnish Lapland have adopted a region-oriented development approach with ski resorts and tourist centres being seen as the key engines for development. The strategies argued that channelling public support to the resorts is the most effective way to enhance tourism. In addition, the strategies have put strong emphasis on increasing the numbers of foreign tourists. (Hakkarainen & Tuulentie, 2008).

The data for this study consisted of an on-site survey of 308 Finnish and international tourists in five tourist resorts in Finnish Lapland and five thematic interviews with local tourism actors in North-West Lapland. Two different data sets were combined in order to conduct an explorative study of changes in adventure tourism from both the demand and supply perspective. The study used methodological triangulation in order to get a more comprehensive answer to the research question. Methodological triangulation refers to using more than one research method in measuring the same object of interest (Oppermann, 2000). In this case, we used qualitative interviews as well as questionnaires. This kind of multi-method use enriches explanations of research issues and helps to provide new insights (Oppermann, 2000). Based on our explorative case study, we asked if hard adventure is becoming soft in the Arctic areas, and if so, what kind of requirements this supposed softening means for the producers of adventurous experiences.

Soft and Hard Adventures

Adventure tourism is viewed at a global level as one of the growing sectors of the visitor attraction industry (Swarbrooke et al., 2003). The greater extension of various types of adventure activities to a mass market reflects this growth, where participants do not have to be experts or highly skilled participants to sample an adventure experience (Page et al., 2006).

However, risk remains a key element in adventure tourism. Adventure also denotes action; it is not a passive experience and is generally found to be engaging and absorbing, and, in addition, adventure involves effort and commitment, and often mental and physical preparation or training is necessary (Page et al., 2006; Patterson & Pan, 2007).

Research on adventure tourism often refers to a continuum from hard to soft adventures (e.g. Pomfret, 2006; Pomfret & Bramwell, 2016; Schott, 2007; Swarbrooke et al., 2003) or from original to commodified adventures (Varley, 2006). The continuum idea originates from outdoor recreation and it is used to illustrate the degree of challenge, uncertainty, novelty, and skills involved in the activity (Swarbrooke et al., 2003, p. 33). Within this continuum, soft adventures refer to activities that include low level of actual risk, require minimal commitment and beginning skills, and are led by experienced guides (Hill, 1995, p. 63). In addition, soft adventurers' motives are described including escapism, experiencing new environments, self-discovery, novelty, excitement and socialising (Ewert, 1989; Lipscombe, 1995; Pomfret, 2006). In contrast to soft adventures, hard adventures refer to activities that include high levels of risk, require intense commitment and advanced skills (Hill, 1005, p. 63). Sometimes hard and soft are also distinguished by referring to 'real' risks in hard adventures and 'perceived' risks in soft adventures (Williams & Soutar, 2005). The motives for hard adventurers are seen as including risk and challenge (Lipscombe, 1995; Pomfret, 2006). However, it should be noted that recent studies have suggested moving beyond the hard-soft dichotomy (Cater, 2013; Peacock et al., 2017; Varley & Semple, 2015; Rantala, Rokenes & Valkonen, 2016). For example, Varley and Semple (2015) illustrate an example of slow adventure that involves a combination of low-difficulty and deep-end experience in the adventure. Rantala, Rokenes and Valkonen (2016) suggest examining what are the localized understandings of adventure tourism and the actual practical ways of doing adventure tourism. Also Peacock et al. (2017) point out that there is a paradox in that clients purchase adventure experiences involving risk and uncertainty, whereas tour operators must minimize the risk and emphasize safety. They emphasize that it is often forgotten that individuals undertake adventure for a variety of reasons, including risk and thrills, health and well-being, connection to others and nature, recreational mastery, and personal development.

The role of guide in the discussion on hard to soft continuum varies. Often it is considered that experienced guides are important for soft adventures (Patterson & Pan, 2007; Beedie, 2008). As Patterson and Pan (2007) show in their study on baby boomers motivations to

participate adventure tourism, a good guide is an important part of the experience both in regard to safety and in creating a narrative of the adventure. Still, also hard adventure tourism experiences may require guides, leaders and logistical support (Williams & Soutar, 2005). Thus, it is important for tour operators to find the appropriate level of manageable risk and uncertainty, by which tourists are challenged, rather than stressed (Williams & Soutar, 2005).

Methods

The aim of this study was to explore perceived changes in adventure tourism from both the demand and supply perspective, thus data were collected from tourists and tourism operators respectively.

Survey Data Collection

During spring, 2014, the quantitative data was collected in five tourist resorts – Levi, Muonio¹, Saariselkä, Pyhä-Luosto and Ylläs – from an on-site survey involving questionnaires on tablet computers. The selected destinations are the main tourist resorts where tourists are accommodated in Finnish Lapland. However, due to the different profile of the resorts, tourists often visit several destinations during their holiday. Some resorts are more oriented towards offering cross-country skiing, some down-hill skiing facilities and some additional services (see Figure 1). Random samples were collected from chosen destinations. Respondents were asked to fill in a questionnaire concerning their backgrounds, activities engaged in during the visit, and preferences for guide services on the tours. With respect to the latter, respondents were asked to rate the importance of 42 claims on a scale from 1 (not important at all) to 7 (extremely important). The 42 claims related to various dimensions of adventure trips, such as hard and soft experiences, group atmosphere and convenience in relation to guiding (Rokenes, Schumann & Rose, 2015). The survey was based on a larger frame that measures tourists' preferences related to guides' performance (Rokenes, Schumann & Rose, 2015), but had been modified to fit the explorative nature of our study. Altogether 308 completed questionnaires were received.

¹ Muonio differs from the other tourist resorts – instead of being constructed of one clear ski resort it consists of two small ski resorts, one main tourist resort and several villages.

Figure 1. The main tourist resorts in Finnish Lapland



Data analysis

The quantitative question sets were analysed by using multi-variate methods to compress the information of the original variables. An exploratory factor analysis was conducted to reduce the 42 items to fewer dimensions. Principal component factoring with Varimax rotation was used in the analysis (see Table 3). The consistency of the items belonging to the same factor was checked using Cronbach's alpha. Furthermore, we conducted k-means cluster analysis using the values of sum variables (mean values of the original variable values) to better illustrate the differences in perceiving guided services and to better observe diversity beyond the nationality of the tourists. The differences between Finnish tourists and tourists from abroad – concerning their previous experiences from Lapland, their travel company, the activities they participated in while in Lapland and their tendency to use guided services – were taken into account when conducting analysis on the data and when interpreting the findings.

Survey Sample

Finnish tourists travelled more often with children, whereas tourists coming outside Finland were travelling more often with a spouse and without children. There were some differences between tourists regarding different tourist destinations. Tourists who stayed at Levi were the youngest, whereas tourists who stayed in Pyhä-Luosto were the oldest. Younger tourists (age under 36) were most often travelling with friends, whereas “older” people (over 35 years) travelled more often with a spouse or family. Most of the Finnish tourists had visited Lapland several times before, whereas 52% of the tourists coming outside Finland were in Lapland for the first time.

Table 1. Respondents' background information.

Background information	Frequency	%
<i>Gender (n=308)</i>		
Male	141	45.8
Female	167	54.2
<i>Age (n=305)</i>		
–18 years	22	7.2
18–35 years	99	32.5
36–50 years	139	45.6
50– years	45	14.8
<i>Country/continent of residence (n=307)</i>		
Finland	224	73.0
Europe	71	23.1
Asia	12	3.9
<i>Destination in Lapland (n=308)</i>		
Levi	83	26.9
Saariselkä	81	26.3
Pyhä-Luosto	59	19.2
Ylläs	55	17.9
Muonio	13	4.2
Other	17	5.5

Limitations

This study is a case study. The majority of tourists who answered the survey came from Finland (see Table 1). With respect to all of the on-site questionnaires, the results can only be generalized to the tourists who were visiting the five places at the time of the study although the sample was large enough for the statistical analysis. Thus, similar studies followed by meta-analysis would be needed for wider generalization and understanding about the phenomenon.

Interview data collection and analysis

The qualitative data set used in this study was collected in the spring 2013 in North-West of Finnish Lapland. The five nature-based tourism actors interviewed for the explorative study

include two entrepreneurs, one operational manager, one senior planner and one director of ski operations. Three of the interviewees were men and two were women. All of them had more than ten years of experience from tourism in Lapland, and they were thus asked to look back to describe the change. The themes used in the thematic interviews covered changes in products, operational environment and clientele in adventure tourism as well as education and safety. The two tourism entrepreneurs were born in North-West Lapland, the senior planner and the director of ski operations had experience from the tourism field also outside Lapland, and the operational manager had been working outside the tourism industry before moving to Lapland.

The qualitative data was analysed using thematic reading (e.g. Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In particular, the analysis took account of the ways in which issues related to soft and hard adventure were described in the data, and these ways formed a basis for the formulation and interpretation of the three themes: Tourists' inadequate knowledge regarding the destination; Entrepreneurs' increased need to be prepared to pull out in the middle of the activity; and the general need for multi-skilled, service-oriented guides in Arctic tourist destinations. These are described in more detail in the next chapter

Results

Tourists' Preferences towards Safe Guide Services

Through the analysis of the quantitative data, we sought to examine, first, how tourists use different guide services in Lapland and what their general preferences for these services are, and second, how the supposed softening is taking place within different tourist groups. Based on our data, there is a clear difference in which type of activities Finnish tourists and tourists from abroad participate. Finnish tourists mainly go downhill skiing and cross-country skiing, or (rent) snowmobiles, whereas tourists from abroad participate in guided activities, such as guided snowmobiling and sled dog or reindeer excursions (see Table 2). In total 59% of the respondents from abroad and 22% of the Finnish respondents had participated in guided activities.

Table 2. Respondents' activities during their visit.

	Finland (N = 224)	From abroad (N = 83)	Total (N = 307)
	%	%	%
Downhill skiing	86.2	34.9	72.3
Cross-country skiing	63.8	32.5	55.4
Snowmobiling	20.5	41.0	26.1
Visiting husky farm	9.4	51.8	20.8
Visit to reindeer farm	10.3	34.9	16.9
Snowshoeing	8.9	21.7	12.4
Other	35.3	39.8	36.5

Most of the tourists answering the survey perceived that guide services were an important part of guided activities. However, clarifying safety rules, creating fun experiences, giving information about equipment and providing an easy pre-trip booking system were generally seen as very important, whereas letting people experience fear and allowing experiences that include real risk were not seen as that important. According to these general views, the tourists in Lapland generally look for safe, well-organised, all-inclusive trips that offer them thrilling experiences (see also Cater, 2006).

There were several significant differences between the Finnish respondents and the respondents from abroad in their preferences (under 5 %'s risk level, see Figure 2). First, for the Finnish respondents, the two most important dimensions of guiding related to safety, whereas the two most important dimensions for tourists from abroad related to the convenience of the services offered. Second, the greatest differences between the two groups were related to experiences of solitude, reflection, democratic leadership, and renting high-end equipment. The differences in perceiving the importance of the above-mentioned variables can be partly explained by cultural differences between the two groups – in the Finnish culture, experiences of solitude in nature are valued high. On the other hand, previous experiences in the destination helped the Finnish tourists to seek deeper relationship with nature in their activities, whereas the first timers from abroad highlighted trip convenience, seeing beautiful sights and learning about local culture and nature.

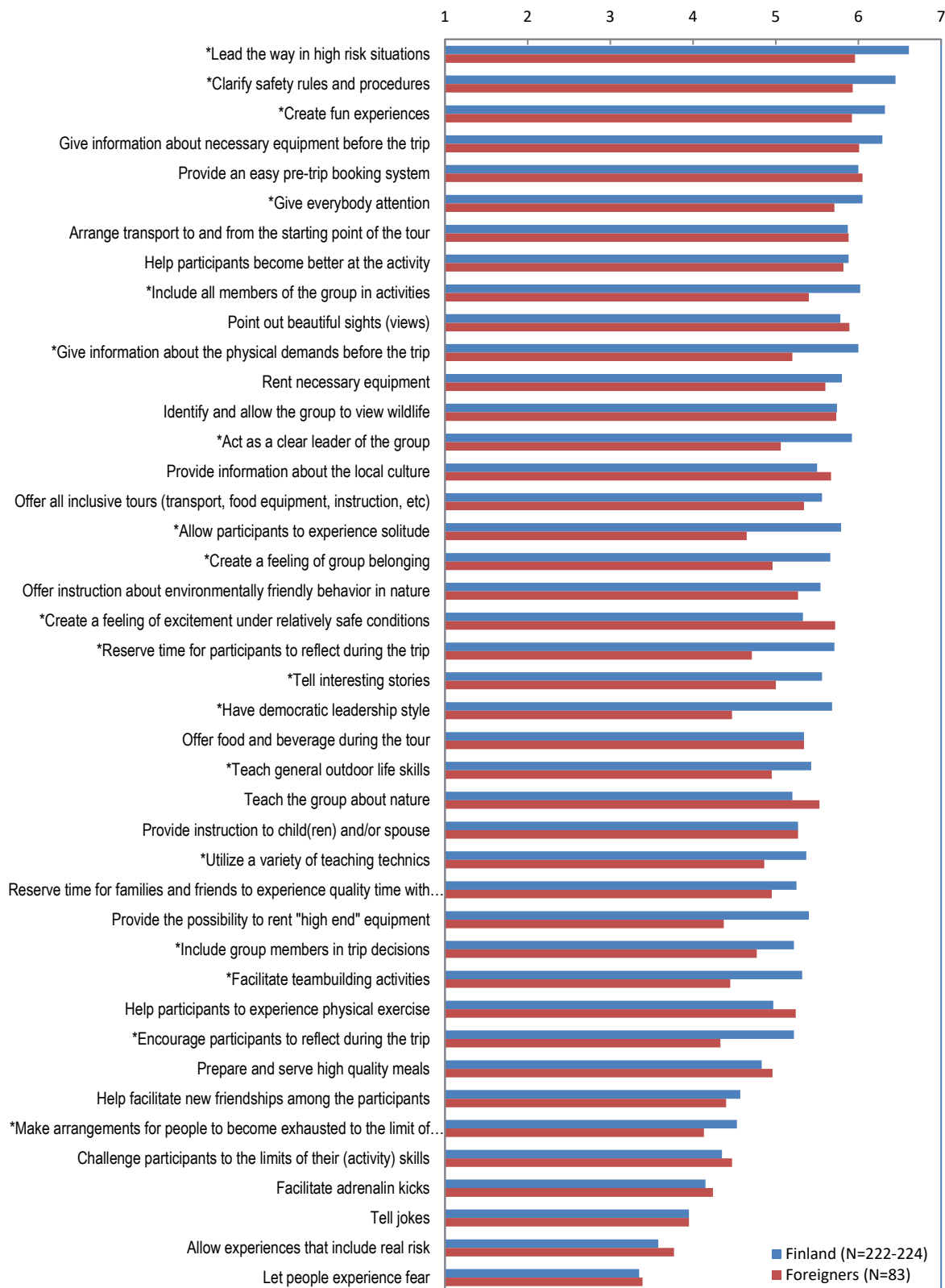


Figure 2. Importance of different guide services on tours: respondents living in Finland and foreigners. The significant differences under 5 %'s risk level of ANOVA test are expressed with asterisk (*).

The principal component analysis resulted in nine factors when the number of factors was not predetermined. However, the two last factors were not very relevant. Hence, the analysis was carried further with fixed numbers (5, 6, 7, and 8) of factors. The solution of seven factors (Table 3) proved to be most relevant. There were a few items that loaded on several factors. In these cases, the content (meaning) of the item and the factor, as well as Cronbach's alpha were used as criteria to make decision about the "right" factor.

Table 3. Factor analysis of tourists' expectations of guide services on tours. Only factor loadings greater than .400 are included.

	Considerate leader	Provides hard adventure	Affords shared experience	Expertise on local nature and culture	Make the trip convenient	Affords reflection	Affords fun and pleasant
Clarify safety rules and procedures	,739						
Lead the way in high risk situations	,721						
Give information about the physical demands before the trip	,705						
Act as a clear leader of the group	,696						
Give information about necessary equipment before the trip	,673						
Have democratic leadership style	,573					,460	
Include all members of the group in activities	,541						,468
Help participants become better at the activity	,535						
Create a feeling of group belonging	,517		,467				
Give everybody attention	,503						
Utilize a variety of teaching techniques	,452		,405				
Facilitate teambuilding activities	,451		,444				
Include group members in trip decisions	,436		,429				
Let people experience fear		,842					
Facilitate adrenalin kicks		,823					
Allow experiences that include real risk		,821					
Make arrangements for people to become exhausted to the limit of their physical capacity		,758					
Challenge participants to the limits of their (activity) skills		,737					
Tell jokes		,453					,449
Provide the possibility to rent "high end" equipment		,425			,420		
Help facilitate new friendships among the participants			,718				
Reserve time for families and friends to experience quality time with each other			,683				
Provide instruction to child(ren) and/or spouse			,637				

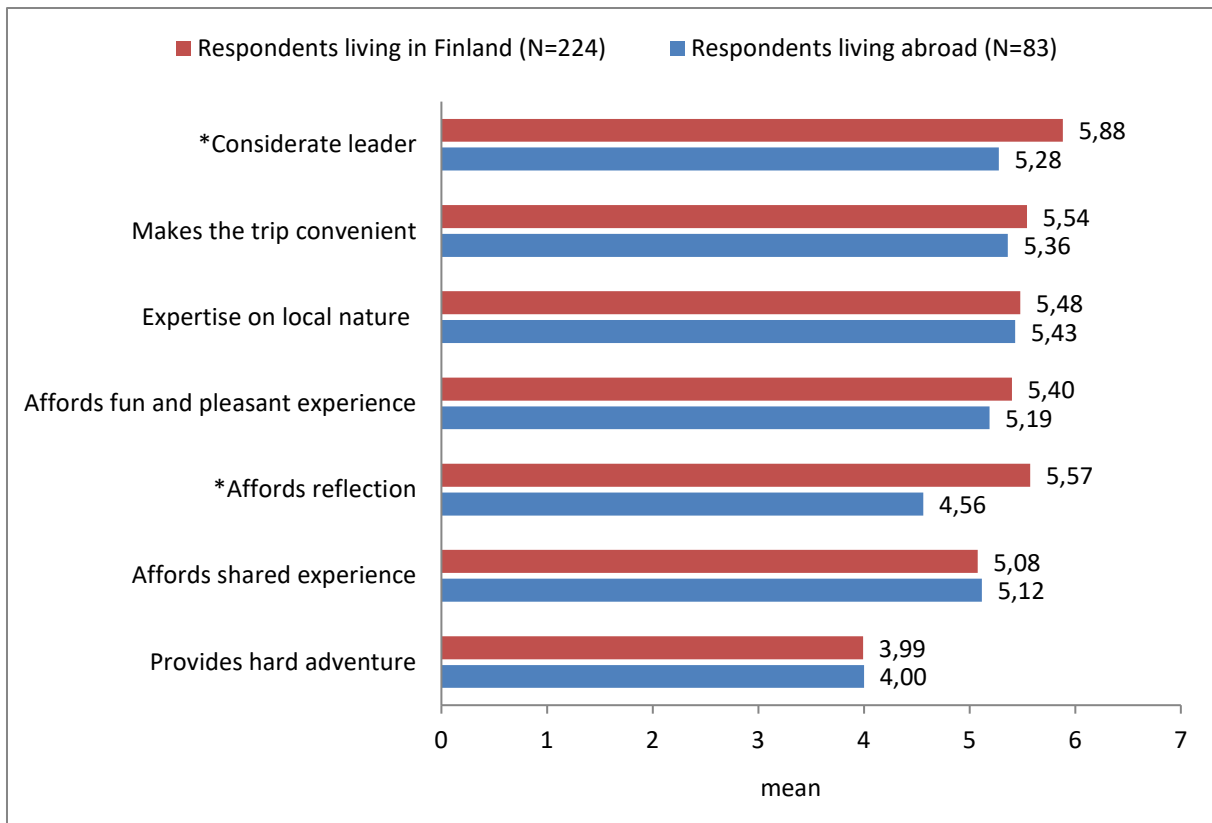


Figure 3. Importance of different guide services: factors (the means of sum variables) – respondents living in Finland and abroad. The significant differences under 5 %'s risk level of ANOVA test are expressed with asterisk (*).

The sum variables highlight the differences between Finnish tourists and tourists from abroad further. The differences are not that high in the rating of the sum variables, except in relation to affording reflection, although the order of sum variables differs between the origins of people. For Finnish tourists it was important that the leader creates a social atmosphere that allows the members of the group to feel safe and included in the group, and encourages them to reflect on their feelings with regard to wilderness. For people from abroad, expertise in local nature and culture, the ability to make the trip convenient by arranging equipment rental and transportation was more important.

In order to reflect better on the background information of the tourists, the values of the sum variables were used as source data in the k-means cluster analysis to divide the respondents into informative number of categories. The aim of the analysis was to divide the respondents into an optimal number of different groups based on the information of the sum variables. The optimal number here denotes that: 1) an additional group had to differ from the other groups,

and 2) the groups had to be interpretable. Two to five groups were tried in the analysis. The solution of four clusters was considered the optimal because every cluster has a clear interpretation. This solution, as well as the solutions of three and five clusters, produced one cluster of only a few respondents (see Figure 4).

The differences in the demographics of the respondents were analysed by the k-means groups, using cross tabulation and chi-square analysis. Cluster 3 (with only three respondents) was not included in the cross tabulations.

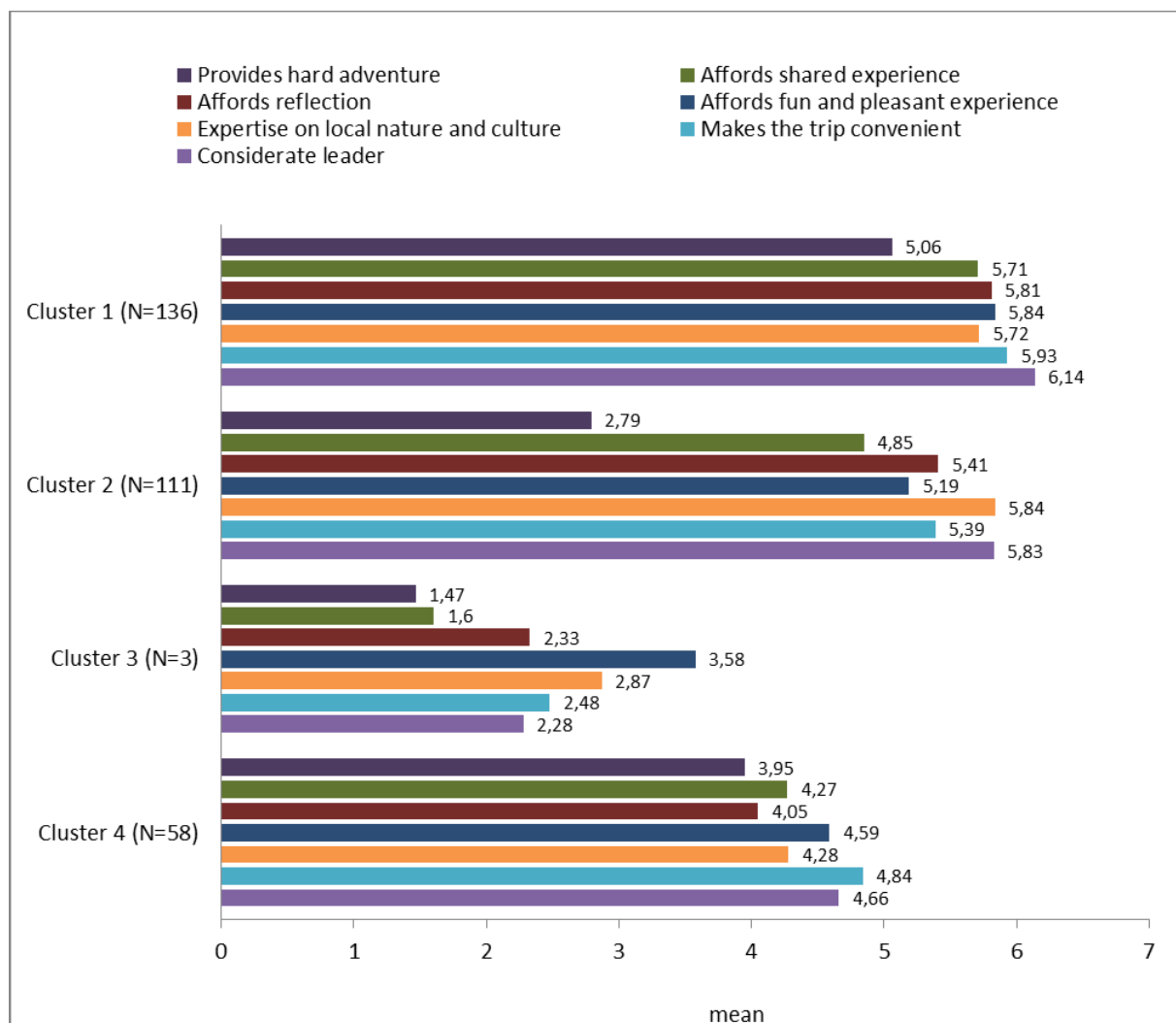


Figure 4. Importance of different guide services in four clusters: the means of sum variables.

The tourists in Cluster 1 are mainly young Finnish tourists (74%), with an average age of 35 years. One third of the group had been to Lapland from five to ten times and one fourth of the group over ten times. This cluster perceived leadership and convenience of the trip as the

most important aspects of guide services, but these tourists also saw everything in general as important. Hence, Cluster 1 represents tourists that have some experience of the destination and are keen on guided services.

Cluster 2 includes mainly middle-aged Finnish tourists (85%), with an average age of 42 years. The tourists in this group have the highest education among the respondents. This group had most previous experience with Lapland: 40% of them had been to Lapland more than ten times and almost 30% from five to ten times. Cluster 2 underlines the importance of expertise with regard to local nature and culture, leadership included in the guide services and very clearly did not seek risk or hard adventure. This cluster represented destination-committed tourists.

Cluster 3 included three middle-age women travelling with family or spouse. They see only fun and pleasant experiences as a little bit more important part of guide services, whereas other parts of guided services were not seen as important. This cluster represented people participating in activities that they had not chosen themselves.

Tourists in Cluster 4 consisted of 50% Finnish tourists and 50% tourists from abroad. There were many younger tourists in this group, with an average age of 34 years. One third of this group was visiting Lapland for the first time and 20% of the group had visited Lapland from two to four times. Cluster 4 represents tourists who were new to the destination and did not have particularly high expectations of guide services, since they perceived all the dimensions of guide services lower than average.

The findings from the cluster analysis can be reflected back to the first findings of the data: 22% of the Finnish respondents and 59% of the tourists from abroad participated in guided services during their holiday in Lapland. Finnish respondents saw leadership and reflection more important, whereas respondents from abroad perceived expertise and convenience more important. This reflection underlines the diversity of the perceptions of tourists visiting Arctic tourist destinations. The tourist from abroad – the main users of guide services – do not have very high or clear preferences and generally, they would like to have pleasant, easy experiences of Arctic thrills. The experienced Finnish tourists would like to get into a deeper connection with the northern destination when (and if) they participate in guided activities. For the committed tourists, guided service activities should not be especially risky or too

physically demanding. The people who had some experience of the destinations seemed to be the most interested in experiencing “real adventure”. In order to reflect further on these findings, data from five thematic interviews were analysed by concentrating on issues of soft and hard adventure.

The Change of Clientele in Arctic Adventure Tourism

According to the qualitative data, the local tourism actors interviewed in North-Western part of Lapland share an idea of adventure tourism products as being something extreme and special – something that is not a part of their main product supply. However, due to the extended length of some of the excursions and the possibilities to experience the cold circumstances in a specific way (e.g. by ice swimming with a floatable suit) as a part of some available products, tourism actors recognise that there are also elements of adventure included in their product supply. The viewpoint of tourism actors in North-West Lapland reflects the general division between hard and soft adventure – a division that is made by researchers to differentiate between the amount of previous experience required, comforts included, and relation between perceived and actual risk in adventurous activities (Swarbrooke et al., 2003). In addition, the perception of their services as non-adventurous seems to match with Buckley’s (2007) description of bulk adventure markets.

“Our main products consist of easy guided excursions which last half-a-day. The aim is that anyone can participate in these excursions. Of course, some can perceive it as an adventure, but I do not regard it as an adventure”.

(Tourism entrepreneur)

Yet, even though the tourism actors consider commercial nature-based tourism as something non-adventurous or at the most as soft adventure, their descriptions of daily practices represent the elements of both soft and hard adventure. For example, the daily practices are replete with problems related to operating in cold, peripheral environments and with activities that require specific skills – and with customers who do not have these skills. Such everyday encounters with issues related to the blurring of the soft and hard elements of adventure become evident through the three main themes that we found during the thematic reading of the interviews: (1) Tourists’ inadequate knowledge regarding the destination; (2)

Entrepreneurs' increased need to be prepared to pull out in the middle of the activity; and (3) the general need for multi-skilled, service-oriented guides in Arctic tourist destinations. These findings illustrate the everyday consequences of diversification of tourist groups in Arctic tourism and can further explain the low expectations of Cluster 4 (and 3) regarding guide services.

A feeling that all of the tourism actors interviewed shared was that the tourists travelling to the Arctic have become less nature-oriented and less destination-oriented than they used to be. In particular, foreign tourists book their trips through travel agents who have not pointed out different competencies or gear needed for such trips.

“One feature is that people seem to be incapable to taking care of themselves. They are not anymore active nature hobbyists who have travelled around the world and now want to experience Lapland. Nowadays they are people who make their first trip ever and they come to Lapland. Therefore, you have to be very careful when starting excursions with them – ask them if they really know what this is about and where we are going”.

(Tourism entrepreneur)

The entrepreneur quoted above provided an example of a Swiss couple who had booked a snowshoeing excursion for six days without considering the fact that the man's hip had just been operated. Likewise, the senior planner passed on a worry, which service-personnel in the nature centre have concerning foreign tourists who arrive at the national park to do snowshoeing in the early winter season without realising that the rivers and lakes have not yet frozen and that the dusk sets very early in the afternoon. She shared an example of five young sportive men falling into a stream and firefighters needing to rescue them. She continued with another example of hikers arriving from a flight from London, taking a taxi from the airport to a nature centre, realising only when they arrive that there was no shop to buy groceries for their long hike, and that they had too few clothes. Overall, the tourist do not seem prepared for the activities they have planned to participate in.

The local tourism actors feel that tourists do not pay attention to the specific circumstances and possible competencies needed in the Arctic. Due to tourists' inadequate knowledge, there

is an increased need for a detailed scripting of commercial activities (Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Buckley, 2012). For example, more detailed and specific instructions are needed in the beginning of the excursions, and excursions need to be more “sophisticated” in design – serving lunch in a restaurant instead of serving it in nature and having a host warming up cottages before customers arrive instead of the guide doing it upon arrival. The increased need for scripting associates with the high importance of convenient services that tourists themselves emphasise (see Figure 3). Because all equipment, meals, and expertise are expected to be included in the service, tourists do not have to put their own effort into these aspects when arranging their holidays. Hence, scripting has to be provided for individual tourists touring on their own. Service personnel in nature centres and hotels, for example, need to look after tourists acting in risky ways and be prepared to call for help.

“It [problems regarding safety] is mostly with foreign tourists.

Moreover, with the equipment. Checking that tourists do not leave the centre with too light equipment. With sport-gear.”

(Senior planner)

Partly due to the inadequate expectations and competencies of tourists, the tourism companies need to be able to pull out tourists from the wilderness, even before the excursion is finished. The entrepreneurs need to make sure that they take into account the whole variety of competencies and skills of their customers. Often they have to call up, for example, another guide to look after specific clients or to bring back from the forests tourists that became too tired during the trip and cannot make it to the end – or who just are not capable to handle dog sledges or snowmobiles. Besides people not having enough skills or strength to continue with activities, there are also increased numbers of senior travellers and disabled people participating in commercial nature-based activities.

“A few years ago, we participated in a project within which we went through activities and planned for disabled people. However, with the increase in clientele we have not had time for this, and this hotel is not really a place for a disabled person since we have millions of stairs here. For example, during last Christmas, we had a couple that was very tied to a big wheel chair. It even took two hours for them to get it out of the airplane and we had to call for special transportation just for

them. We could not arrange anything for them. Up to a certain point, we can arrange things, but there is a limit.”

(Tourism entrepreneur)

The operational manager also gives examples of people arriving at the destination with wheel chairs. They have developed a special type of kick sled to transport disabled people in winter, and during the summer they can offer river rafting for disabled people. In addition, they are designing a special warm sledge to transport children with a snowmobile. These examples demonstrate the softening of the guided activities and the response to the expectations regarding everyone's right to participate in adventurous services (see also Cater, 2000). Therefore, the scripting of guided services for diverse tourist groups includes not only detailed information, but also having extra personnel on standby, and designing specific gear for children, elderly people, and disabled customers. In addition, according to the findings from the survey in relation to Cluster 2, it should be recognised that committed tourists prefer low risk activities and an emphasis on expertise with regard to local nature and culture.

Besides the extra arrangements that need to be made by the tourism entrepreneurs as a consequence of the softening of adventure tourism, there is an increased need for multi-skilled personnel working in the destinations. Hence, it becomes evident that the diversification of participants especially influences the type of competencies that are needed from guides (see also Valkonen, 2009). The competency highlighted by all interviewees was the ability of the guides to make circumspect decisions. By this, they refer to the ability of the guide to “read” the customers and to adjust the excursions to the competencies of the customers. In addition, at some point in the interviews, all the interviewees brought up that they expected guides to have first aid skills and that they practiced first aid skills together at the beginning of every season. The importance of first aid skills was highlighted due to the increased awareness of tourism safety in the Finnish tourism industry (through various safety related projects that have recently taken place). It is also due to the increased need for these types of skills, as well as expectations of tourism regarding “considerate leadership” (see Figure 3). The latter aspect underlines the importance of having both safety-related skills and social skills.

Discussion

Our data illustrated the issues that highlight and adds to the discussion of a further softening of adventure tourism and the need for extensive scripting of touristic nature experiences in the Arctic. First, the hard and soft aspects of the activities have become blurred, and second, expertise regarding acting in Arctic environments needs to be taken into account in new ways. Weber (2001) has suggested that more emphasis should be placed on individuals' subjective experiences and emic perceptions of adventure (see also Kane & Tucker, 2004; Patterson & Pan, 2007). According to Weber, visiting a place for a first time is already an adventure for some. Therefore, individual differences in perceiving adventure might explain why the tourists visiting Lapland for the first time do not seem to see any particular aspect of guide service as very important, whereas tourists with some experience see everything as very important. Furthermore, for the tourism actors and guides it is a challenging job to try to distinguish the diverse preferences and individual perceptions of adventure and to match the services to these preferences and perceptions. The heterogeneity of different tourist groups should be taken into account when scripting guided tourism activities and when designing tourism destinations in the Arctic. This requirement leads to a question: are we trapped to operate in the "bulk adventure market" and loose the heterogeneity of destinations by trying to serve all (see Edensor, 2000)?

The softening of adventure tourism is evident in Finnish Lapland. Since holiday decisions are made on short notice and the booking of trips is made easier, tourists are probably less aware of and less prepared for the specific features of destinations and activities they will participate in. Hence, more and more often, the tourism companies need to be prepared to pull out tourists from the wilderness in the middle of the excursion and the guides need to be prepared to change the planned route of the excursion to match it to the skills and perceptions of the tourist groups. Due to the diversification of clientele, the skills and tacit knowledge of the guides become emphasised in relation to articulating risks to the diverse tourist groups, including, among others, increased numbers of senior tourists. In addition, our study shows that on top of hard skills, tourists expect soft skills from their guides, such as expertise in local nature and culture, ability to encourage reflection, and talent for creating good social atmosphere.

According to the tourism actors interviewed in the study, the main structure of guided tourism services has not changed very much in Lapland, but the content of the services has been modified to a large extent and additional services have been included to meet the practical problems faced in everyday-operations in the industry. The findings suggest that hard experiences and hard adventure activities are still more specific; but it is the “softer end” of adventure that is becoming very blurred. Hence, interpreting preferences related to soft adventure makes everyday actions in the industry obscure. There is a need to reflect further on the boundaries of soft experience – when does a bulk adventure experience stop being an adventure? Can the tourism actors in the Arctic loose some of the very magic that draws the people to Arctic in the first place in their willingness to serve the diverse tourist groups and to modify the content of adventure services available?

In addition, our explorative case study indicates that leadership and convenience are becoming very important in destinations – illustrating that emphasis should not only be on what the guide or entrepreneur does, but increasingly the whole destination should be convenient for the tourist. This further highlights the multiplicity of skills needed from everyone living and working at the destination and an increased need for diverse infrastructure. Further research is needed to examine how to develop convenient destinations without turning them into an enclave that resemble each other.

Conclusion

We have approached the supposed softening of adventure tourism in the Arctic through a multi-method investigation of nature-based tourism in Finnish Lapland. By conducting an exploratory factor analysis and a cluster analysis on quantitative data regarding tourists’ preferences of guide services, we have first examined the differences between various tourists groups visiting Lapland. As increased foreign tourism is a strategic goal in Finnish Lapland, the differences between new target groups, consisting of a variety of foreign and Finnish tourists, and the already existing, more experienced Finnish tourist group should be taken into account when developing adventure tourism in Lapland. In order to take our analyses a step further and to investigate the requirements that the supposed softening and change in tourist groups set for the producers of adventure experiences, we conducted a thematic reading of our qualitative data from tourism actors in North-West Lapland. Three main themes in the

qualitative data confirm that there exists a softening of commercial nature-based activities in Finnish Lapland, especially, in relation to tourists' inadequate competencies and knowledge regarding the destination, entrepreneurs' increased preparedness to pull out in the middle of the activity, and a need for multi-skilled, service-oriented people in Arctic tourist destinations.

We suggest that more research is needed on the hard and soft dimensions of adventure tourism in the Arctic. In order to respond in a sustainable way to the “democratisation” of the Arctic taking place through tourism, we need to know, for example, how we can enhance the heterogeneity of Arctic tourism destinations and what kind of competencies are expected and from whom. How can we script “bulk adventure” in a sustainable way without losing the originality of the Arctic? Hence, comparative research between various Arctic destinations, highlighting different strategies for dealing with the softening of the tourism industry and democratisation of the Arctic wilderness, is needed.

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