

Comparing perceived images with projected images – A case study on Finnish ski destinations

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Abstract

The objective of this study is first to compare the image perceived by the visitors of five Finnish ski destinations with the image projected by the respective ski resort DMOs. Second, the profiles of the five ski resorts are then compared. A quantitative content analysis of the printed marketing material of the destinations was conducted. The importance of the attributes affecting ski destination choice was also investigated with 1,529 effective responses. An exploratory factor analysis using the principal component method with varimax rotation was used to determine the factors of the phenomenon. ANOVA and Post Hoc pairwise multiple comparison tests were used to explore how the identified attributes of ski destination choice differ among tourists in the five ski destinations. Four factors, namely downhill skiing services, cross-country skiing services, restaurants and social life, and spa services were found to differentiate the destinations. According to the comparison of the results of the content analysis and the factor analysis, the results show that the projected images seem to be congruent with the determinants of ski destination choice of the visitors in the respective resorts. On the other hand, the profiles of the ski resorts differ strongly.

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Introduction

Destination image is “the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impression that a person has of a destination” (Crompton 1979, 18). Tourism researchers are in consensus about the importance of the image for a destination’s viability and success (Tasci and Gartner, 2007) and there is also lots of evidence on the importance of the image in the consumer’s destination choice process (Tapachai and

Waryszack, 2000). A choice of a holiday destination, in particular, is nowadays even a lifestyle symbol for many customers (e.g. Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2005). Destinations are amalgams of tourism products, offering an integrated experience to consumers (Buhalis, 2000). As each destination can only match certain types of demand, tourism marketers have to pay attention to profile destinations for the right

target markets (Buhalis, 2000). The destination-originated activities and promotional materials aim to deliver projected (e.g. Selby and Morgan, 1996; Andreu, Bigne and Cooper, 2000), *desired image* of the destination.

There are around 100 ski resorts in Finland, the smallest of them having only one lift and two slopes, while the largest resort, Levi, having 43 slopes and 27 lifts and 230 kilometres of cross country skiing tracks (www.ski.fi). The most important ski resorts are located in Finnish Lapland, in a distance of 800-1100 kilometres from the main domestic market, i.e. the capital area. Following Pearce (2005) we assume that a decision to travel to a ski resort in wintertime is a result of the internal input of the traveller (personal characteristics and motives) and external input of the destination (destination characteristics). Based on the input the traveller desires a set of activities, which are a way to realise desired experiences. Activities available at the destination affect the destination choice.

Domestic skiers comprise the most important target market for all of the Finnish ski resorts, and especially those located in Lapland attract ski tourists from all parts of Finland. There are approximately half a million active downhill skiers in Finland, and some 1.3 million active cross-country skiers, active meaning that the person has been doing the activity during the ongoing season (The Finnish Ski Area Association, 2014). 27 per cent of the downhill skiers are loyal to one ski resort, but more than half of the skiers visit several domestic ski resorts during a season. Hence, there are lots of opportunities for the ski resorts to increase their market share among domestic skiers, and understanding the attributes affecting the ski destination choice as well as identifying their own profile among competitors may help the destination managers in their strategic activities.

The first objective of this study is to compare the image perceived by the visitors of five Finnish ski destinations with the image projected by the respective ski resort DMOs. Based on earlier studies on ski resort loyalty and satisfaction, it can be assumed that the

visitors who have chosen a certain ski resort expect the attributes of the destination to fulfil their desires, and these expectations might reflect their images of the destination (e.g. Clark and Maher, 2007; Faullant, Mazler and Füller, 2008; Mazler, Füller and Faullant, 2007; Kyle et al., 2010). The results will be compared to the marketing message of the ski resorts in order to find out if the customer expectations correspond to the projected images of the destinations. Grosspietsch (2006) wonders on the lack of research aiming to compare the image perceived by visitors with the image projected by the service providers. In addition to his work, according to the authors' knowledge, only Andreu, Bigné and Cooper (2000) have investigated the relationship between projected and perceived image of a destination. This study is an attempt to contribute to the destination image discussion by providing a trial to find a connection between the perceived and projected image of a destination. The second objective is to profile the studied five ski destinations in Finnish Lapland by examining how the factors affecting ski destination choice differ among visitors in these resorts. Understanding the profile and position of the destination in the market may help the destination management in strategic decision-making.

Literature review

Travel decision-making

Understanding why people travel and what factors influence their behavioural intention of choosing a travel destination is beneficial to tourism planning and marketing. One popular typology for understanding travel decision is the "push and pull" model (Crompton, 1979). According to Leiper (1990) tourists are pushed by their own motivations towards the places where they expect their needs will be satisfied. Pull factors are those that attract people to a specific destination once the decision to travel has been made. They are destination specific attributes, such as natural attractions, food, people, recreation facilities, or activities, which determine whether the traveller will go to destination A or B, when both destinations fulfil the expectations derived from the push factors.

Pearce (2005) proposes that understanding motives and the visitors' preference for

activities represents a promising direction in linking visitors' needs and the attributes of destinations. In this paper the focus is on the attributes (pull factors) of the ski destination, since it is assumed that when the decision to travel to a ski destination has been made based on the travel motivation (push factor), the destination choice is dependent on the meaningful attributes of the accessible destinations.

According to Hanlan and Kelly (2005), marketers who wish to develop a strong destination brand should firstly identify the image attributes generated through destination experience within a specific market segment. They may then identify a small number of positive and meaningful image attributes on which to position the destination (Hanlan and Kelly 2005). Based on their results of a study on the impact of satisfaction and image on ski resort loyalty, Faullant, Mazler and Füller (2008) noted that "a favourable image might be the only non-imitable factor that leads to higher loyalty among customers" (p. 174).

According to Kim and Perdue (2011) there seems to be consensus among tourism researchers that consumers use a funnelling tourism destination choice process wherein the possible destinations are reduced to a smaller "consideration set" from which the final destination is selected. Hence, the more attractive a tourist perceives the destination, the more likely he or she will select that destination (Kim and Perdue, 2011). Interestingly, Perdue and Meng (2006) have found out that reasons why people select a destination, and in their study especially a ski resort, are different from those why people reject a ski resort. Hence, in order to be able to succeed in the competition, the ski resort marketers should know their market and be able to position their image in order to increase consumer satisfaction and increase their loyalty (Ferrand and Vecchiadini, 2002; Clark and Maher, 2007).

According to Alexandris, Kouthouris and Meligdis (2006), a holiday at a ski resort arouses expectations of three kinds of outcomes, in Pearce's (2005) language "experiential states". Physical outcomes are

related to an individual's beliefs that skiing will improve physical health. Social outcomes are related to beliefs that skiing will help socialization (e.g. spend time with friends or family). Psychological outcomes are related to beliefs that skiing can contribute to psychological well-being (e.g. relaxation, reduce stress, etc.). Travel motivations and the perceived ability of a destination to satisfy these expected outcomes are the key variables in destination marketing (Matzler and Siller, 2003).

Ski destination choice

Earlier studies on ski destinations concentrate on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Alexandris, Kouthouris and Meligdis, 2006; Clark and Maher, 2007; Faullant, Matzler and Füller, 2008; Ferrand and Vecchiadini, 2002; Hudson and Shephard, 1998, Kyle, Theodorakis, Karageorgiou and Lafazani, 2010; Matzler, Füller and Faullant 2007; Matzler et al., 2008, Opperman, 1999) and ski tourism motivations (Matzler and Siller, 2003, Richards, 1996). Unbehaun, Pröbstl and Haider (2008) studied climate change impacts on sport tourists' activity and destination choice, and Hallman et al. (2012) had a suppliers' perspective, as they studied the competitiveness of a winter sport destination.

Studies on ski destination choice are few. Klenosky, Gengler and Mulvey (1993) utilised the means-end approach when examining downhill skiers' perceptions of relevant factors affecting their ski destination choice. The results show that belonging, fun and excitement, achievement and safety are the key values or desired end-states determining ski destination choice. They further used cluster analysis to identify the most dominant groupings of concepts in the hierarchical value matrix derived from the means-end study. They found six different aspects skiers use when selecting among competing ski resorts: variety and challenge of the hills and trails deriving from desire for fun and excitement and perceived achievement, snow conditions that was associated with safety concerns, social atmosphere including friendly people and entertainment, deriving from a desire for sense of belonging, time savings deriving from close-to-home location and enabling more time for

skiing, money savings deriving from packaged services, lodging and resort services and sixth, local culture and familiarity reflecting the novelty associated with being at a particular resort environment. In their study, Won and Hwnag (2009) utilized findings from Klenosky et al. (1993) and identified five choice factors for Korean college skiers and snowboarders: fun, safety, ski variety, cost-consciousness and time consciousness. Additionally, Won, Bang and Shonk (2008) found that the relative importance of all other factors but snow condition were largely dependent on skiers' recreation specialisation and consumption situation. Moreover, Godfrey (1999) showed that snow quality and diversity of the skiing terrain are the two most important features of a destination for British skiers in Canada.

In their study, Hudson and Shephard (1998) found that the most important attributes for customers in the Alpine ski resorts are related to tourist information services, accommodation, ski shops, ski slopes, ski slope services and tour operator services. In Richard's (1996) study, ski destination choice was clearly affected by the price of the product. When analysing the general factors influencing destination choice, snow condition was the key factor in destination choice. The second most important attribute was listed as terrain diversity and "piste" quality as significant to their decision. Other features such as access to ski slopes, the proximity of accommodation, off-hill facilities such as shops or resort village, and the general atmosphere of the resort also made a difference when choosing a ski destination. Non-skier features, and après-ski activities such as 'shopping', 'fine dining', and 'pubs and clubs', and the opportunity to participate in other recreational activities can also be relevant to destination choice. In their extensive quantitative study on customer satisfaction with Alpine ski areas, Matzler et al. (2008) found that restaurant and bar services are actually the most important determinants of overall customer satisfaction followed by quality and safety of slopes.

Several authors have also highlighted the importance of segmenting the ski resort visitors (e.g. Konu, Laukkanen and Kompupala, 2011; Joppe, Elliot and Durand, 2013). Clark and

Maier (2007) state that ski resort visitors should be segmented based on the number of visits, as their results indicate that trust, commitment, satisfaction, past behaviour and value predict 60 per cent of the variance in attitudinal loyalty towards a ski resort. Hence, according to them, marketing strategies should manipulate factors that are most important to each segment. On the other hand, Ferrand and Vecchiattini (2002) emphasize the importance of the overall destination image by suggesting that a well-positioned ski resort image increases consumer satisfaction more than a high assessment on ski attributes. This is supported partly by Faullant, Matzler and Füller (2008) who found in their study in the Alpine context that overall satisfaction among first-time visitors was more important than image, but that the importance of image increases together with repeat visits.

Building a ski destination image

The concept of destination image can be examined either from the customer's or from the producer's perspective. From the customer's point of view it is a question of perceived destination images that, according to the literature, have an effect on destination choice, and as noted earlier in this paper, also on destination loyalty. Gartner (1989) suggests that a traveller is likely to choose the destination with the most favourable image. Hence, image is believed to be the key underlying factor influencing the traveller's choice of destination (Gartner 2000), connoting the visitor's expectations on the destination. A positive image may promise the visitor a rewarding experience. Travellers create images by processing information about destinations from various sources over time. This information is organized into a mental construct that is meaningful to the person (Leisen 2001).

Gunn (1972) proposed that tourists' destination image is distinguished by two different dimensions: organic image, which is a potential tourist's impression of a destination without having visited a place, and induced image, which is formed by promotional materials or actual visitation to the area. Fakeye and Crompton (1991) modified Gunn's theory and added a complex image to the list, which is a more realistic, objective and differentiated

image. Their model described tourists developing organic images of a set of alternative destinations from various non-tourism information sources. With the desire to travel, they may get involved in an active information search and resort to specific information sources. As a result, they develop induced images of alternative choices that may be the same as, or substantially different from, their organic images. So, the induced image is derived from a conscious effort of tourism promotion directed by tourism organisations (Leisen 2001). Nevertheless, it must be noted that the image of a destination may be formed even in the absence of any commercial information, and in most of the cases it is almost impossible to separate the impact of each possible case leading to an image (Tasci and Gartner 2007).

Marketing communication is one variable influencing a consumer's destination beliefs (Vogt and Andereck, 2003). Image building refers to the activities of destination marketing organizations to enhance the positive images of the destination (e.g. Cai, 2002). Projected image is the producer's viewpoint to the image concept (Saraniemi, 2009). According to Tasci and Gartner (2007) both holistic destination image and specific destination attributes have been found to influence consumer behaviour variables related to future, during and after destination visitation (Tasci and Gartner 2007). According to Vogt and Fesenmaier (1998), tourists acquire knowledge from their own experiences, those of others, and visual, verbal, and sensory stimuli, all of which educate them about destination image, enabling them to compare similarities and differences.

Destination marketing organisations use promotional materials for establishing, reinforcing, or changing the image of a destination. Promotion creates awareness, generates interest and stimulates desire to travel to the destination. Destinations use numerous promotional tools with verbal and visual messages. The visual aspects of promotional materials receive more attention since they represent the actuality of the destination and illustrate destination dimensions. The content and amount of the

visuals are of primary importance and the inclusion or exclusion of certain dimensions determines what kind of image the destination is attempting to create in the minds of potential customers (Tasci and Gartner 2007). Positioning a destination's image in the minds of different target groups is a core activity of a DMO (Day, Skidmore and Koller 2002). According to Mackay and Fesenmaier (2000), it is important to test whether the images presented in promotional materials correspond to those held by visitors.

Brochures are conventional communication tools frequently used in both public and private tourism activities. Brochures still play a role in the formation of an induced image, although the Internet as a source of information has changed the marketing communication in the tourism sector (Molina and Esteban 2006). Although websites provide a prominent information channel for destination advertising, brochures still represent an essential part of tourism marketing, today often published on the web pages of the destinations.

Data and methods

All the main ski resorts in Finnish Lapland are located outside towns and are built for ski resort purposes only. The accessibility to all resorts is about the same from the main domestic market area. The prices in ski resorts in Finland are quite firm and equal and the services in the biggest resorts are somewhat comparable. According to a study conducted by The Finnish Ski Area Association (2014), Levi, Ylläs and Ruka were the three most popular ski resorts in Finnish Lapland. According to several experts in the industry, Levi and Ruka are seen as core competitors, and so are Ylläs and Saariselkä. Hence, these four ski resorts were included in the study. In addition, Pallas is included as the fifth case study because of its location close to Ylläs and Levi. Additionally, in Pallas, no artificial snow is produced to maintain the slopes, which is one of the specialities of this resort.

In order to discover the differentiating factors and the attributes affecting the destination choice, preliminary open interviews were conducted to complement the literature review. A convenience sample of ten representatives

Table 1. Respondent profile differences between the ski resorts

Profile characteristic	Ylläs		Levi		Ruka		Saariselkä		Pallas		Pearson Chi-Square
	N	Per cent	N	Per cent	N	Per cent	N	Per cent	N	Per cent	
Age											
< 31 years	58	11.6 %	64	22.1 %	77	34.1 %	31	6.8 %	3	6.2 %	p<0.001
31-40 years	89	17.8 %	72	24.9 %	49	21.7 %	41	9.0 %	3	6.2 %	
41-50 years	130	26.1 %	87	30.1 %	75	33.2 %	106	23.3 %	11	22.9 %	
51-60 years	147	29.5 %	54	18.7 %	20	8.8 %	162	35.7 %	21	43.8 %	
Over 60 years	75	15.0 %	12	4.2 %	5	2.2 %	114	25.1 %	10	20.8 %	
Total	499	100.0 %	289	100.0 %	226	100.0 %	454	100.0%	48	100.0 %	
Travelling (with)											
Alone	35	7.1 %	21	7.2 %	7	3.1 %	30	6.5 %	1	2.0 %	p<0.001
Husband/wife	198	40.1 %	85	29.3 %	27	11.8 %	176	38.2 %	30	61.2 %	
Family	144	29.1 %	79	27.2 %	74	32.3 %	98	21.3 %	9	18.4 %	
Friends	104	21.1 %	77	26.6 %	91	39.7 %	138	29.9 %	8	16.3 %	
Workmates	13	2.6 %	28	9.7 %	30	13.1 %	19	4.1 %	1	2.0 %	
Total	494	100.0 %	290	100.0 %	229	100.0 %	461	100.0 %	49	100.0 %	

and sales persons in destination marketing organisations of the respective ski resorts was selected. The interviewees were asked to define the ski destination pull factors affecting the ski destination choice according to their experience. The interviews confirmed the assumption that price, accessibility, shopping or snow conditions might not be factors affecting the destination choice between Finnish Lapland ski resorts. Attributes mentioned in the interviews were related to hills and trails, restaurant and after-ski services, and other non-skier facilities.

To examine the attributes of ski destination choice, a traditional paper-and-pencil survey was conducted in five different ski resorts in Lapland Finland. Tourism management students from the regional college conducted the interviews during high seasons. The teachers of the students were given detailed instructions for the implementation of the interviews and the teachers supervised the data collection at the resorts. A quota sampling method, also known as purposive sampling (Moss, 2006), was applied: the interviews were conducted along the ski slopes, ski trails, in local restaurants, and partly at hotels and other accommodation units. Interviewers chose the informants so that a representative number of, e.g. all age groups could be reached.

Questions were designed to explore what attributes of the ski destination were most important to ski tourists. The attributes in the questionnaire were based on the foregoing literature review and 10 open interviews. Altogether 1,827 responses were collected of which 1,529 were effective (without missing values) in this study.

Table 1 describes the profile of the respondents in each of the ski resort. The data shows that while Levi and Ruka attract the youngest age groups, Saariselkä and Pallas attract older customers and Ylläs fall somewhere in between. Moreover, it seems that families are important customer groups for all the ski destinations in the study. However, it appears that Ylläs, Saariselkä and Pallas attract couples the most, while those travelling with their friends are the biggest customer group in Ruka.

The ski destination choice was measured with 14 items. In order to avoid indecisive answers, a 4-point Likert scale was used ranging from not at all important to very important. First, an exploratory factor analysis using the principal component method with varimax rotation was used to determine the factors of the phenomenon. Thereafter, ANOVA and Post Hoc pairwise multiple comparison tests were used to explore how the identified attributes of

ski destination choice differ among tourists in the five ski destinations.

At the same time as the survey, the second part of the study, namely the content analysis of the destination brochures was conducted in order to find out our interpretation of the projected images of the resorts. According to Choi, Lehto and Morrison (2007), a content analysis of written information, e.g. brochures, could provide a great deal of information about the images projected by a tourist destination. Following Edelheim (2007), it was presumed that brochure producers try to present a positive and a reasonably correct image of the destination. Printed material was chosen as the focus of this study, because it represents a more stable representation of the projected image of the destination than that of the website, which evolves during the seasons.

Only the so-called general image brochures from the four DMOs (Levi, Ruka, Saariselkä and Ylläs) for this particular season were chosen to be analysed by using quantitative content analysis of pictures and texts. It must be noted that these brochures in particular may

reflect the consensus of the destination organisation about the desired message that is sent to the market. As there is no destination marketing organisation at Pallas resort, the brochure of the ski lift company was chosen for the content analysis. The focus was on headlines, overall narrative points and the content of the pictures aiming to analyse how they are used to represent what they aim to symbolise (Edelheim, 2007). The themes were first created inductively and then categorised using the same categories as in the questionnaire, when possible. The purpose of the content analysis was to try to identify, to what kind of tourist segments the DMO aims to target its message and what is the key message projected in the brochure.

Because there is no DMO in Pallas, the marketing material of the company operating on the top of the hill was analysed, as well as general information about the region published on the web. Since this material is not directly comparable with other resorts, the results of the analysis of Pallas material are presented separately.

Table 2. Results of the explorative factor analysis

Measure items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Cronbach's α
Downhill skiing services					0.878
D1 Variety of ski slopes	0.909				
D2 The number of ski slopes	0.919				
D3 Ski slopes' great difference in altitude	0.895				
D4 Variety of the snowboard services	0.559				
D5 Wind-sheltered ski slopes	0.696				
Cross-country skiing services					0.932
C1 The number of ski track kilometres		0.921			
C2 Variety of ski tracks		0.944			
C3 Ski tracks' quality		0.907			
Restaurants and social life					0.775
R1 A great variety of restaurants			0.730		
R2 You can meet interesting people			0.821		
R3 Active nightlife			0.851		
R4 Plenty of other activities			0.550		
Spa services					0.820
S1 Entertaining spa services				0.875	
S2 Health resort services				0.898	
Eigenvalues	4.411	2.553	2.072	1.255	
Percentage of variance explained (Cumulative)	24.297	43.491	60.217	73.511	

Results

Factor analysis

Regarding the visitors' destination choice criteria we identified four factors namely Downhill skiing services, Cross-country skiing services, Restaurants and social life and Spa services determining ski destination choice (Table 2). The factors identified were chosen in terms of eigenvalues larger than 1.0. In order to ensure practical significance, factor loadings of less than 0.5 were removed (Hair et al. 2010). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (KMO=0.805) and the Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p < 0.001$) confirmed that the factor analysis was appropriate. The identified factors represent 73.5 per cent of the variance of the variables. The internal consistency of the factors, measured with Cronbach's alphas, showed good reliability with the scores ranging from 0.775 to 0.932.

ANOVA

The results of the ANOVA test show that the perceived importance of Cross-country skiing services differentiates the ski destinations the most ($F=87.245$), followed by the importance of Downhill skiing services ($F=51.968$) and Restaurants and social life ($F=51.007$). The importance of Spa services differentiates the ski destinations the least ($F=24.755$), though the difference is statistically highly significant ($p < 0.001$) (Table 3).

The results show that downhill skiing services are considered most important in Ruka and Levi, while the least important in Saariselkä and Pallas. In case of Cross-country skiing services, the case is the exact opposite. Restaurant and social services are considered most important in Ruka and Levi and least important in Pallas, while other ski destinations fall somewhere in between. Spa services are considered most important among tourists in Saariselkä, while the least important among the visitors in Pallas. It appears that winter tourists choose Ylläs, Saariselkä and Pallas because of the Cross-country skiing services, while Ruka and Levi seem to be ski destinations for those who value Restaurants and social life activities.

The Post Hoc pairwise multiple comparison tests show that while majority of the ski destinations differ statistically significantly in

Table 3. ANOVA results of the ski destination choice

Factors	Ylläs N=499	SD	Levi N=291	SD	Ruka N=229	SD	Saariselkä N=461	SD	Pallas N=49	SD	Total N=1529	SD	F-value	Sig.
Downhill skiing services	2.13	0.83	2.38	0.84	2.48	0.68	1.72	0.74	1.78	0.60	2.09	0.83	51.968	$p < 0.001$
Cross-country skiing services	3.11	0.90	2.53	1.02	2.16	1.04	3.34	0.70	3.17	0.69	2.93	0.98	87.245	$p < 0.001$
Restaurants and social life	2.22	0.62	2.63	0.73	2.78	0.79	2.30	0.62	1.72	0.42	2.39	0.71	51.007	$p < 0.001$
Spa services	1.85	0.69	2.17	0.78	1.77	0.80	2.08	0.73	1.33	0.63	1.95	0.76	24.755	$p < 0.001$

Note: 1 = Not at all important, 4 = Very important

Table 4. Post Hoc pairwise multiple comparisons test of the ski destination choice

Factors	Levene test (Sig.)	Ylläs vs. Levi		Ylläs vs. Ruka		Ylläs vs. Saariselkä		Ylläs vs. Pallas		Levi vs. Ruka		Levi vs. Saariselkä		Levi vs. Pallas		Ruka vs. Saariselkä		Ruka vs. Pallas		Saariselkä vs. Pallas	
		***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
Downhill skiing services ^a	$p < 0.001$	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
Cross-country skiing services ^a	$p < 0.001$	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
Restaurants and social life ^a	$p = 0.001$	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
Spa services ^a	$p < 0.001$	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***

Notes: ^aTamhane's T2 test (Equal Variances Not Assumed); * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

terms of the four measured pull factors, some destinations do not show statistical difference. It seems that in case of downhill-skiing services Levi vs. Ruka and Saariselkä vs. Pallas do not differ from each other. Again, Saariselkä vs. Pallas do not differ in terms of the importance of cross-country skiing services either, and this is also the case between Ylläs vs. Pallas. Moreover, the importance of restaurants and social life activities as a destination choice factor does not differ between Ylläs vs. Saariselkä and Levi vs. Ruka. Finally, spa services are perceived equally important among tourists in Ylläs vs. Ruka and Levi vs. Saariselkä (Table 4).

Content analysis

The pictures in the brochures were first inductively categorised into themes: downhill skiing, snowboarding, cross-country skiing, the variety of restaurants and bars, meeting interesting people, active nightlife, other

activities, entertaining spa services, health and fitness spa services, snowmobiling, dog/reindeer safaris, extraordinary experiences, snow shoeing and activities during other seasons. Also the age and family status of the people in the pictures was analysed and categorised into the following groups: young people (15-25), adults, elderly people (over 60 years), families, and children. For example, it was counted in how many pictures there is a family together, or young people having fun, and, e.g. in how many pictures there is a cross-country skier in focus.

Table 5 shows that Levi and Ruka seem to favour young people and children in their promotional material pictures. It is notable that in the Levi brochure there were no elderly people at all in the pictures. In case of Ylläs, the focus of the material is on adults and families, but in Saariselkä the emphasis is in adults.

Table 5. *Content analysis of pictures in the DMO brochures: age and family*

	Levi	Ylläs	Saariselkä	Ruka
Young people	14	7	5	14
Adults	9	9	19	8
Elderly people		1	1	3
Families	8	9	4	4
Children	7	3	2	17
Couples	5	0	2	

Table 6. *Content analysis of pictures in DMO brochures: activities*

	Levi	Ylläs	Saariselkä	Ruka
Cross-country skiing services	3	7	3	3
Downhill skiing services	15	16	4	28
Restaurants and social life	16	16	7	26
Spa services	7	3	6	4
Other services	26	31	24	35

Table 7. *Content analysis of headlines in DMO brochures*

	Levi	Ylläs	Saariselkä	Ruka
Cross-country skiing services	1	2	3	0
Downhill skiing services	8	4	3	8
Restaurants and social life	9	4	6	13
Spa services	2	2	1	3
Other services	20	14	38	28

After the inductive analysis of the data, the data was re-organized following the factors found in the survey results. Table 6 presents the results of the content analysis according to the themes in the pictures. Ruka seems to focus on downhill skiing and snowboarding, as well as restaurants and nightlife in its promotional pictures. Both Levi and Ylläs also use lots of downhill skiing material, but Saariselkä emphasizes other activities more.

The headlines in the brochures were categorised following the themes from the result of the factor analysis. The results are shown in Table 7.

In the headlines, other than skiing experiences are emphasized. Other activities comprise, e.g. husky safaris, reindeer sledge safaris, snow shoeing and different kinds of extraordinary experiences like accommodation at an ice hotel. In the brochures, the variety of activities available at the ski resorts is much more in the headlines. Again, Ruka differs here from the others, by focusing a lot on downhill skiing and snowboarding, as well as restaurant and social life.

Pallas differs from the other investigated ski resorts in many aspects: it is a wilderness resort with only nine slopes and two lifts, located in Pallas-Ylläs National Park. For Finns, Pallas is more famous for the several days' hiking and cross-country skiing trails than downhill skiing. The ski lift operator, the owner of the only hotel on the top of the fell, emphasizes the downhill skiing services of the resort on its' webpage and printed material. The picture, nevertheless, is different from pictures of other resorts, showing an adult telemark skier dressed in a traditional outfit. The National Park web information does not even mention the ski lifts but focuses on long cross-country skiing trails. People in all the pictures are adults.

As a result of the quantitative content analysis, a rough profile of the projected image of each destination based on the general marketing material can be presented. Levi seems to promote itself as a resort for young people and families. In the pictures from Levi, jazzy and extraordinary experiences and activities are

emphasized. Other activities than skiing are even more common in Levi material, but still downhill skiing is the major activity. Restaurants, bars and nightlife are represented in a wide variety in the promotional material.

According to the marketing material, Ylläs seems to be a resort especially for adults, who are interested of fell experiences all year round. Ylläs pictures emphasize more relaxed activities, enjoying the food and family togetherness. Other than winter activities are more present in the headlines but in pictures cross-country skiing is more paraded.

Ruka promotes itself as a resort for youngsters, children and families. A major theme in the pictures is snowboarding and downhill skiing, reflecting a speedy, modern and experience-rich atmosphere. Ruka aims to be the forerunner resort in Finland in terms of ski activities.

Saariselkä seems to profile itself as a relaxation resort for adults and families. Saariselkä tries to convince the potential customer of its variety of services and activities especially for adults and elderly people. Stress or hard adventures are not present in Saariselkä promotion. Saariselkä promotes much more its cultural attractions compared to the other resorts in this study. The visitor profile of the Finnish customers seems to coincide with the projected image.

Comparison of the projected and perceived images

The survey data shows that visitors of Saariselkä and Pallas prefer cross-country skiing to downhill skiing. They also are most often adults and even elderly people, travelling with their spouses. The rough content analysis of the general marketing material supports this view and shows that the marketers seem to target their message especially to adult cross-country skiers. Nevertheless, Saariselkä seems to try and attract more families, as well in their marketing, but the profile of the visitors shows that more than half of the respondents belong to age groups that probably don't have small kids travelling with them anymore.

Levi and Ruka seem to attract downhill skiers and social life seekers especially. Following the results of the content analysis and the visitor survey, Ruka seems to be the place for youngsters to have fun. Families are also an important target group for both Levi and Ruka. Ylläs seems to attract groups of all ages, but in terms of activities and travel company, it resembles more Saariselkä than Levi or Ruka.

Discussion and Conclusion

The first objective of this study was to compare the image perceived by the visitors of five Finnish ski destination with the image projected by the respective ski resort DMOs. Comparison of the results of the survey data and the content analysis shows that the projected images of the investigated five ski resorts seem to be more or less congruent with the determinants of ski destination choice of the visitors in respective resorts. If the destination choice can be seen as a reflection of a destination perceived image, it could be argued that the projected and perceived images of these five ski resorts are parallel. Consequently, this result may suggest that the DMOs have achieved their objectives in their positioning strategies, or, that they only adopted their strategies to correspond to the demand.

The second objective of the study was to profile the studied five ski destinations in Finnish Lapland by examining how the factors affecting ski destination choice differ among visitors at these resorts. Clear differences were found, meaning that Levi and Ruka seem to be competitors, attracting downhill skiers, younger generations and social life seekers. Saariselkä and Pallas are more for adult couples and cross country skiers. These four seem to have quite distinct profiles, Ylläs being of these five most for all-rounders and more versatile age groups. Ylläs seems to follow the advice given by Andreu, Bigne and Cooper (2000), indicating that Ylläs tries to diversify their product by developing different images targeted at different segments.

In the brochures, a strong role was given to other than skiing activities. One explanation may be that skiing is considered to be the major motivation to come to the area anyway

and other services have been presented in order to differentiate the offering, or to sell more services to the visitors. Nevertheless, respondents of this study have not considered other services as a decisive determinant of their destination choice. Having said that, it must be noted that the investigated brochures are more about the destination offering in general than about one season offering. The survey data was collected in order to find the attributes affecting the ski destination choice in winter, and summer activities were not included in the questionnaire. The analysis of the marketing material shows, nevertheless, that the DMOs try to promote all year round services also for their winter season customers.

It must be noted that in this study the survey data did not examine the induced image of the destination held by the visitors, but rather the importance of the various destination attributes on their destination choice. The assumption was made that when choosing the destination in question the traveller has based the decision on his/her positive images of the resort (see e.g. Gartner 1989, 2000). So, the results of the data do not necessarily reflect the images held by the visitors but more about their expectations of a ski resort in general. It is possible that the perceived image of the chosen destination was different from the general expectations of the traveller, and the decision to choose the resort in question was affected by other reasons, like if there were no other options available.

The data did not measure the satisfaction of the customer with the destination. Nevertheless, it can be stated that comparison of the perceived images of the visitors and the projected images of the DMOs might help the destinations, on the one hand, to measure if their marketing and positioning strategies have been influential, and on the other hand, if the profile and position of the destination is correct.

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