



WATERTOURISM IN PÄIJÄT-HÄME REGION (ABSTRACT)

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Introduction

The purpose of the study was to find out how many companies offer water related products at Päijänne and Päijät-Häme area. The purpose was also to find out the used marketing and distribution channels. Studying the findings one purpose is to give suggestions of the means and channels to be used and ideas to product development. The bases of the research were the principles of marketing. The research includes mapping the products and prices, accessibility (distribution) and marketing communications. Material was analysed from the individual travellers point of view. The main questions were how easily were the companies and alternatives to be found and how easy it was to buy the product? The study was concentrating in e -marketing because of its easy access and growing importance.

The focus in research was in Sysmä, Asikkala, Heinola, Padasjoki, Hollola, Lahti municipalities. They are situated near the big lakes. The first part of the research included interviews of Päijät-Häme area municipality-officials and 20 companies offering water-related tourism products. The second part of the research was analysing the interview materials from leisure activity companies and municipalities, all together 35 regional companies and municipality web pages offering information about water related products and some regional or company brochures. Few travel agencies sales managers were interviewed. We wanted to confirm what kind of marketing material they wanted from the companies. There was also few hours' drive around lake Vesijärvi to see if there are signs and information available for tourists travelling on the road.

Päijät-Häme Region

All the municipalities in research have many advantages regarding water tourism. Asikkala has Vääksey-canal, an intersection between Vesijärvi and Päijänne. There is also Päijänne –house, Asikkala´s Fishing and Cultural Centre showing the Rapala success story, and Lighthouse Pavilion serving in the harbour. Sysmä has two harbours suitable for boats, Suopelto-harbour and village harbour. Heinola is connected to Päijänne with Kalkkinen-canal and has Lake Ruotsalainen at the area. Padasjoki has Kelvennetupa Hut at Padasjoki Guest Harbour and harbour with services and summer shop. Hollola has a Pier is suitable even for bigger cruisers. Lahti has many islands for visiting and harbours with variety of services.

There are many attractions worth visiting at Päijät-Häme region. These attractions support water tourism by bringing new tourists to the area and offering extra value for water tourism product package. There are small, picturesque villages offering sight to the rural life and history near the

cities, old manor-houses and medieval churches. There are several cultural attractions like Sibelius-house, art –exhibitions and summer concerts. The unique nature is also well represented by exhibitions of the history and the nature and visitors area at Pulkkila Harju. Summer cottages and camping areas offer a good network of accommodation near attractions and water even for longer stays. Something extra is also local food and beverage. The area has strong history in beer and bread industry.

Results about water tourism products

Päijät-Häme region offers wide selection of water related tourist products like cruising for individual travellers and charters on various routes. The big lakes offer possibility for sailing and sailing schools. People take the boats here by car all the way from the coast. Paddling is famous, clubs rent canoes and there are some routes and many islands to stop to. Rowing is popular at all lake areas, many cottages have a rowing boat for guests to use, and leisure activity companies offer even church boat rowing. Fishing, in many forms (net, angling, fly), is popular and there are many companies offering equipment rental and licenses. Besides fishing catching crayfish is very popular in Southern Finland. There is even a boat taxi for people travelling to the islands. Camping sites and leisure activity companies offer various water games and equipment. Swimming and going to the sauna is possible almost everywhere. There are several companies offering leisure activities or meeting facilities. For the winter season there are ready-made routes for cross-country skiing and freedom to go everywhere. It is also possible to go ice-skating on the lakes, have snow-mobile-safaris and try ice fishing with permission. All these products were also available as a part of other themes.

Individual customers are interested in staying in summer cottages, caravan areas and boats. They often come for events and culture. There is good selection of leisure activities and services for domestic tourists but most products are available for groups only. Activities for individuals are rather expensive and suitable only for domestic travellers or ones active with water sports and it is harder to find information about them than from the group products.

People coming to the harbour by boat need berths for boats, boat related services like refuelling and waste disposal and harbour services like shops and restaurants. All the services should be walking distance from the boat. At the moment the harbours are offering good variety of services but again the information about them or about services in town is not very good.

The leisure activity companies' top customers were groups and company clients. These groups have special needs, so many leisure companies tailor services depending on their timetable, group size and wishes about activities. Tailoring the products requires a lot of time and knowledge from both sides. It seems that because of tailoring the companies offer opportunities instead of ready-made products so there are only few product descriptions (example products).

There should be more services and information about them available for individual tourists. There could be readymade water and road routes with full service description. This way individual travellers could travel independently. It would be good to offer opportunities (for beginners) to try new activities. Weekly programmes during the summertime could be a good way that does not become too heavy for individual companies. That would also serve tourist who are not willing to do reservation in advance. There is also need for more additional services like accommodation and restaurants. Product and quality development should be priority in the near future. The focus in developing could be in the harbours.

Results about water tourism marketing

Most companies used 3 or 4 tools for marketing and distribution. There were many companies using more than that but some using just 1-2 tools. Most of the companies were selling mostly direct to their customers. Big part of companies was in cooperation with Lahti Travel. Companies had Lahti Travel brochures and links on Lahti Travel pages. Some of them were part in readymade packages. Brochures were available in the company, in other companies and some in travel info in the area. Companies were also well shown at the municipality tourism marketing. Most companies had own web pages and some links on other web pages. But there were also companies that had no own pages at. In that case they usually had some advertising in Yellow pages or newspapers instead. Other tools in use were different fairs, cooperation with transportation operators and information centres or clubs for special interest groups like active leisure fishers.

I tried to keep the tourist point of view and searched the information from the Internet. "Googling" lake Vesijärvi or lake Päijänne gives no tourism related results, central information pages, like Lahti Travel pages or municipality pages on the top of the list.

Many companies still do not have their own web pages, only short service description and phone number available on municipality pages. This is understandable as many of the entrepreneurs work in tourism only part time. But for tourists is it a challenge. They have to call or email to get

more information and it may take a long time to compare rates and services. Then on the other hand sometimes there were web pages available but the pages or links did not open/exist. Some had very difficult addresses to company web pages www.koti.phnet.fi/entrepreneur/companyname/.

Looking at the content of the pages the same information was aimed to individuals, groups and b-to-b customers. One has to look the content through to know if there are suitable products. More information should be available both in English and Finnish in brochures, maps, information points, harbours, signs, Internet-pages. On the pages there were good photos illustrating water products. Most texts were in Finnish or only partly in English. This again may be because of the part time nature of the business. Water is not very visible in Päijät-Häme area tourism marketing. Photos are used but they are not in the key role and water tourism products are not either. Marketing focus is on making the company known (not products). The Internet pages could be improved so that there would be stronger segmentation. Then it would be easy and quick for visitor to see the relevant information. There could be more rates and product descriptions available. More information should be available both in English and Finnish.

Both domestic and international tourists drive through southern Finland or do round trips. For them it is vital that there are signs and information available near the main roads. It may attract them to visit areas without plans and reservations. They need full service baggage including accommodation, restaurant and grocer's shops and activities. They would need more area maps and company signs by road. Area info should include also tourism companies. When the tourist comes to town, there are not enough signs to harbour/water area in the population centre. Most important thing is that at the moment the signs are only in Finnish. This all is very understandable because that is not always the entrepreneur's choice. The signs are subject to licence and rather difficult to get. The information points could be in better use. The municipalities could affect to the sign politics and aerial tourism marketing.

Travel agencies are looking for individual excursions, accommodation or restaurant services that they can add to their service package. Their need for information is more detailed. The information should include the products' description, duration, availability, capacity, suitability for groups or individual travellers, language choices and contact information. The distribution channels are mostly searching information from the Internet. When customers want services from certain area, travel agents search the area tourism marketing sites, municipality web pages and then individual companies. They would need especially regionally collected information and product handbooks

(by theme like fishing). They said that there is far too much individual brochures and information about single small companies coming in. It is hard to keep track of and file them. That is why a simple regional information package of the companies and services available is most definitely easiest way to start working. Regional information packages to distribution channels should be made.

The lake Päijänne site (www.lakepaijanne.com) could be excellent tool for this if it promoted Päijät-Häme as well. The pages, which are made in connection to water tour project, are excellent information package but at the moment the information is concentrated to the north part of Päijänne. The pages were not found by searching with words lake Vesijärvi and Päijänne. It is not very highly promoted or easy to find yet. Companies could benchmark other water tourism areas and companies at for example Saimaa area (www.saimaa.fi). There should be more cooperation in marketing and supply. Tourism destinations have a key role in this development.