‘European and Russian Tourism and Business’ Summer School took place in Tampere University of Applied Sciences (Tamk), Finland, in August 11th-23rd. There were students from Japanese universities: Miyagi University, Kyushu University, Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology and from National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan, attending the programme. Additionally, there were Tamk Service Management students planning and organizing the programme. The studies of the first week focused on experience product analysis and product development in tourism business. Method of Experience Pyramid was studied and applied by all students involved, both in analyzing and in product development process of the Finnish culture tourism destination, Urkin Piilopirtti. As a result, there were student team reports of the destination and the product analysis. The Reports included suggestions for product development improvements to be conducted in the destination. One of the most significant learning outcomes was the understanding of different cultures and the needs of Asian tourists in Finland.

Modern societies cannot escape the experience economy. It is the phase of our economic development where selling goods and services is no longer enough (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Selling experiences is a characteristic of all type of trade nowadays. This is true also with ordinary household commodities like TV sets, mobile phones or washing machines. We desire experiences when using these in our everyday life. Naturally, in tourism business experiences are emphasized. Escaping everyday life, desire for more and more powerful experiences (see Boorstin, 1962), have led tourism business towards ever more effective specialization and proper experience product development.

Out of these ideas, principles of the experience economy were studied together with the method of Experience Pyramid (Tarssanen, 2005) in our Summer School. On the one hand, this is a model and a method for analyzing the existing product or service from the experience perspective. Experience Pyramid sets up the criteria for successful experience product. By applying the model we can identify and point out the critical parts of the product that need to be improved so that the customer could reach a meaningful experience. In developing tourism products we aim at the personal change of a tourist. On the other hand, the Experience Pyramid is a method for developing a new product idea.

A group of Tamk Service Management students started out applying the Experience Pyramid as early as February by planning activities and menus for various meals served during the first week of the Summer School. The aim of the Tamk students was to design meaningful tourist experiences and products for Asian tourists in Tampere region and especially in Urkin Piilopirtti (www.urkinpiilopirtti.fi, info@urkinpiilopirtti.fi). A Finnish nature/culture tourism destination hosted the students three days and two nights. Our Asian Summer School
students, in turn, analyzed the activities and menus and Urkin Piilopirtti by means of the Experience Pyramid.

The destination gained valuable information and product development suggestions from the Asian tourists point of view during the first week of the Summer School. The recipes and activities designed were suitable for immediate use or for further development in Urkin Piilopirtti. The Asian Summer School students had a chance to study and apply the Experience Pyramid for product analysis. In final team presentations they also had feedback from manager of Urkin Piilopirtti Mr Jyrki Sasi. While analyzing, testing and observing they also learned a lot of Finnish culture with Finnish students and teachers in authentic learning environments. Tamk students had their feedback from the Asian Summer School students in the form of experience analysis of activities and menus.

Academic learning outcomes were reached perfectly. All the stakeholders were very happy with the results of the Summer School. We must not forget the social outcomes either. Maybe these are even more important in this case. Dedication of students and everybody involved in organizing this Summer School was at optimal level. the Asian students taught us many interesting things about their lives and culture. For us Finns, it was amazing to hear positive comments on sauna and swimming in the lake or gathering herbs – somehow we take those experiences for granted. We were a big family, spending time together outside the academic programme of the Summer School. Many friendships were born. We can definitely say that it was a real, cultural exchange!
References


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