

Matkailututkimus 12 : 2 (2016)
©Suomen matkailututkimuksen seura



Tour guides' perceptions of intercultural safety communication in Finnish Lapland

Sisko Häikiö and Ulla Kangasniemi

Lapland University of Applied Sciences, Multidimensional Tourism Institute (MTI)

Abstract

There has been an increasing focus on customer safety in tourism in recent years. Tour operators have emphasised the necessity of better communication between guides and tourists, especially in intercultural encounters. This article discusses tour guides' perceptions and experiences of safety communication with their international customers in programme services in Finnish Lapland. The theoretical background relates to the concept of intercultural safety communication that encompasses giving and interpreting safety instructions in an intercultural encounter where the guide and the customers come from different cultural backgrounds. The research data was collected through an online questionnaire and was supplemented by ten semi-structured thematic interviews. The qualitative research method was selected to meet the objectives set for the project. The main research question was how tour guides experience intercultural communication in the safety context. According to the guides, cultural (or other) differences can be recognised when communicating safety instructions. Factors such as the age, gender and attitudes of the communication parties seem to have the biggest impact on how instructions are followed. The guides also seem to be aware of cultural differences in this context. The results show that more training, both culture-specific but also culture-sensitive, is needed in order to achieve broader understanding of effective intercultural safety communication.

Keywords: *tourism customer safety, intercultural safety communication, culture, safety instruction, tour guide*

Introduction

Safety is a matter of responsibility. This article is a contribution to the question of how to develop responsibility in tourist destinations. In Finnish Lapland, safety issues have gained importance in the eyes of the tourism industry, research and authorities. Although Lapland is considered as a safe destination because of a lack of terrorism and natural catastrophes, special attention has been paid to safety issues from the perspective of individual companies, single tourism products and the networks of operators (Tourism Safety and Security System in Lapland 2009–2014, 2016). The increasing numbers of international tourists arriving in Lapland has underscored the importance of safety in intercultural encounters. Tour operators in Finnish Lapland have therefore emphasised the necessity of better safety communication between their tour guides and international tourists. Recent studies in tourism have also emphasised the importance of communication for safety in relation to commercial nature activities (Buckley, 2010; Rantala & Valkonen, 2011, p. 583). Despite this, intercultural safety communication as a concept has not been the subject of research in the tourism and hospitality field. In this paper, intercultural safety communication is seen as one aspect of practising (cultural) responsibility in tourism.

The emphasis in this paper is on the concept of intercultural safety communication, which is based on the theories of intercultural, safety and tourism communication. The intercultural safety communication process encompasses giving and interpreting safety instructions in an intercultural encounter where the guide and the customers represent different cultural backgrounds. The data for the empirical part was collected through a survey directed to tour guides in Lapland in the spring 2012 and supplemented by ten semi-structured thematic interviews in summer and autumn 2012. The main research question was how the tour guides experienced intercultural communication in the safety context. The method of content analysis was applied in the empirical section. The discussion section reflects on the need for intercultural training for guides and further development ideas. This study contributes to the demand of more holistic approach to safety in tourism (Rantala & Valkonen, 2011), as well as for further research on the topic (Zhao & Lin, 2014).

Theoretical framework

Intercultural communication in tourism

Intercultural communication is described as communication between people and groups of diverse culture, subculture or subgroup identifications (Jandt, 2013, p. 35). The term intercultural communication was coined to the anthropologist E. T. Hall in his book *The Silent Language* in 1959. Nowadays intercultural communication is an interdisciplinary field that has been studied in disciplines such as psychology, sociology, communication, linguistics, business and tourism (Kielbasiewicz-Drozdowska & Radko, 2006, pp. 75–76).

In Finnish Lapland, the majority of the customers of programme services come from abroad, so the guide and the tourist often come from different cultural backgrounds. According to Jandt (2013, pp. 42–44), the extent to which they have similar understandings of the communicated symbols and cultural context is critical for the success of safety communication. Communication is an element of culture, which means that communi-

cation and culture are inseparable (Jandt, 2013, p. 39). In order to improve safety communication with international tourists, it is essential to pay attention to various cultural factors that influence giving, interpreting and following safety instructions.

The majority of the definitions of national culture refer to values, norms, rules, behaviour, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, symbols, knowledge, ideas, meanings and thoughts (Reisinger & Turner, 2003, p. 11). In an article on the cultural consequences of traveller risk perception and safety, Reisinger and Mavondo (2006, p. 17) define the concept of national culture as “a stable and dominant cultural character of a society shared by most of its individuals and remaining constant over long period of time”. Their definition does not include subcultures of ethnic or other groups living in a society, but they admit that national cultures of tourists are heterogeneous, and there are many regional and individual differences in any culture. Nevertheless, Reisinger (2009, pp. 389–390) sees national culture as an excellent tool for explaining differences in tourists' behaviour and recommends it instead of using nationalities or countries of birth or residence as a differentiating factor.

In order to develop intercultural communication education, Keisala (2011, pp. 6–7) suggests a postmodern definition of culture, following Hall's (2003, pp. 88–90) ideas: “[...] culture seems like a network of meanings that are continuously negotiated.” Instead of being coherent and consistent, “a culture includes incoherent and inconsistent set of values, norms and practices that individuals recreate as they interpret them” (Keisala, 2011, p. 1). A postmodern conception of culture enables us to see the diversity inside national cultures. It also helps to analyse how one's own cultural background affects interpretations of situations and actions (Keisala, 2011, p. 14). These abilities are therefore essential for successful intercultural communication.

In the tourism context, cultural differences cannot be completely ignored. Some of the differences are easy to observe and take into account – such as language, food or the external appearance, but more hidden factors also influence tourists' expectations, experiences and satisfaction. Culture shapes the tourists' perceptions not only of “good” service but also of safety. To reveal the cultural differences in this respect, Reisinger (2009) presents an extensive compilation of cultures, behaviour and intercultural communication in tourism. She claims that the difficulties in intercultural communication between hosts and tourists are simply caused by cultural differences. Similar observations have also been made by Zhao and Lin (2014), Reisinger and Turner (2003, p. 31) and Reisinger and Mavoldo (2006, p. 25). Reisinger (2009, pp. 119–128) divides the sources of cultural differences into differences in communication, social categories, rules of social behaviour and in value orientation. She has collected and categorised these elements by using the most cited theories of cultural frameworks by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), Hall (1976), Hofstede (1980), as well as Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988).

Cultural factors involved in an intercultural service encounter can be seen in Figure 1. Zhao and Lin (2014, p. 297) have developed the concept of the holistic mental model process in the context of tourism by evaluating intercultural tourist–tour guide service encounters and their overall travel experience. Figure 1 shows that a tour guide's work is affected by two important cultures: his/her own national culture and the organisational culture of his/her employer. With these cultures unconsciously influencing his/her behaviour, the tour guide communicates with the tourists from other cultural backgrounds. Zhao and Lin (2014, p. 298) describe the culture of this encounter as “tourism culture”. The tourism culture can also refer to “touristhood” or a state of mind that can be very

different from the norms of the national culture. If they are far from home, tourists may ignore not only their own cultural norms but also those of the destination: they may therefore take on a completely new role. This cultural mix in the encounter requires the skills and competences of intercultural communication.

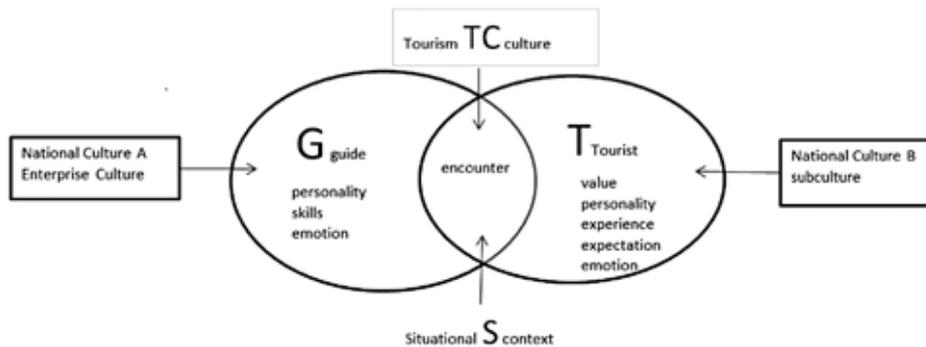


Figure 1. Intercultural service encounter between tourists and tour guides (Zhao & Lin, 2014, p. 297).

The aim of intercultural communication in tourism is to understand what each party – the host and the tourists – wants to communicate. When communicating safety instructions to international tourists, tour guides are supposed to give the instructions necessary to keep their customers safe during the tour, for example in terms of how to drive a snowmobile, how to follow the trail and how to protect oneself in cold weather conditions. The customers communicate their expectations and can ask questions about the service, which may concern safety or other aspects. They may also have a need to communicate their real or desired skill set when driving a snowmobile.

In intercultural safety encounters, the following factors have an effect on communication: verbal and non-verbal signals, relationship patterns, conversation styles, interaction styles, values, time and context orientation (Reisinger, 2009, pp. 168–189). Therefore, it is useful for a tour guide to prepare for the encounter by gaining prior knowledge about the values and communication patterns of his/her customers. The language used has to be adapted to the target group, but non-verbal communication and the tourists' hidden values regarding safety, relationships and conversation styles also need closer attention. The findings in the master's thesis written by Sipola (2011) show that employees in tourism business in Finnish Lapland need to develop their foreign language, interaction and intercultural skills. According to her, the major challenges in interaction with tourists are most likely caused by assuming similarities and by misinterpreting non-verbal messages.

Keisala (2011) brings up the fact that more knowledge about the partner may not hinder the communication, but it does not automatically improve intercultural communication either. Even with appropriate knowledge, one still tends to judge the other person's behaviour according to one's own standards: it can seem strange, irrational, impolite and even threatening. The other person also interprets, evaluates and judges our behaviour according to his/her values and norms based on assumptions from their own culture. The problem is that those assumptions about appropriate behaviour and communication are invisible and tacit. People are not aware of having those assumptions and are not able to articulate them. The intercultural encounters are therefore characterised by confusion, misunderstandings and conflict. Ethnocentrism, stereotyping and prejudices are

also barriers to effective intercultural communication (Jandt, 2013, pp. 80–89; Kielbasiewicz-Drozdowska & Radko, 2006, pp. 79–82; Reisinger, 2009, pp. 192–195). Since stereotypes are still widely used when talking about other cultures, stereotypical descriptions are also expected in the research material.

Tour guides as safety communicators

Guides' role in safety context. Commercial tourism services taking place outdoors are often dependent on guides (Rantala & Valkonen, 2011, p. 581). The role of a tour guide is shifting from being a one-way communicator into a co-creator of the tourist experience (Weiler & Black, 2015). According to Zhao and Lin (2014, p. 296), being a tour guide requires multitasking in which the tour guide is seen as an information provider, culture broker, intercultural mediator, social facilitator, people mover, safety officer, company representative, entertainer, problem solver and counsellor. Since tour guides are often the first and the most frequent encounter that tourists have, it is essential for customer satisfaction and thus for the image of tourism companies, destinations and the whole tourism industry that they provide a quality service (Zhao & Lin, 2014, p. 296).

In ensuring safety during a tour, the role of the guide is vitally important. Rantala and Valkonen (2011) have studied the complexity of safety in wilderness tours and they underline the importance of holistic and multidisciplinary approaches in order to improve the safety of commercial tourism services. The guides understand and practise safety differently and “the prerequisites [...] for creating a safe environment lie in many tacit skills and in the pre-reflexive knowledge they hold” (Rantala & Valkonen, 2011, p. 591). One aspect of practising safety is communicating the safety instructions before and during the tour.

Tour guides in Finnish Lapland are usually conducted by commercial businesses that arrange excursions or snowmobile, reindeer or husky safaris. According to Rantala and Valkonen (2011) these activities are directed at heterogeneous target groups and no previous experience in winter activities or even cold conditions is required. The tourist group expects the given programme service to be exciting and safe. Unlike in adventure tourism, risk-taking is not an intended part of the experience. Despite this, there are many elements containing risks on these tours that affect the safety and success of the service (Rantala & Valkonen, 2011, p. 582).

According to Rantala and Valkonen (2011, p. 585), tour guides consider maintaining safety as a central part of their work. It is the starting point of the whole safari and depends on the skills, attitudes and actions of the tour guides. The wilderness guides in Finnish Lapland interviewed by Valkonen in 2006 had experienced various incidents such as near-miss events, equipment breakdowns or bodily injuries on almost every safari (Rantala & Valkonen, 2011, pp. 585–586). In recent years, a few fatal accidents in programme services have been reported and they have gained a good deal of publicity (see for example Iivari, 2015). During the actual tour, it is still the guide who is responsible for the safety of his/her group, and the role of proper communication cannot be doubted. However, there are specific regulations nowadays in use in order to avoid accidents, such as the Finnish Product Safety Act and the Labour Protection Act. More emphasis has also been directed to the training of the personnel of the tourism companies (Travel Industry Safety Passport), and to the work orientation phase of the tour guides.

Process of intercultural safety communication. There is more than one accepted approach of communication in tourism (Buckley, 2010, pp. 315–320). The communication process is often described in terms of ten components (as cited in Jandt, 2013, p. 42): source, encoding, message, channel, noise, receiver, decoding, receiver response, feedback and context. Hence, the communication can be defined as a process of intentionally stimulating meaning in other humans through the use of symbols (Jandt, 2013, p. 43).

In the context of communicating safety instructions to tourists, Jandt's (2013, pp. 42–44) communication process could be demonstrated as follows: The tour guide as a *source encodes* the idea of safety instructions into a symbol, into the *message* that can be verbal or non-verbal, written or spoken. He/she sends the message through a *channel*, in a face-to-face communication situation, e.g. through sound waves. Especially outdoors, the message can be distorted by *noise* (e.g. other tourists speaking, the engine sounds of snowmobiles, dogs barking, something in the environment that catches tourists' attention). The tourist as a *receiver* attends to the message of safety instructions and *decodes* it by assigning meaning to the symbols received. After that, the tourist *responds* to the instructions by doing nothing or by taking actions that may or may not be desired by the tour guide. *Feedback* makes communication an interactive process in which the tour guide attends and assigns meaning to the tourist's response. For instance, a Finnish tour guide *decodes* the symbol of "hai" given by a Japanese tourist as a confirmation for understanding the message, which might not even be the case. Consequently, the described communication of safety instructions takes place in a *context* that can be the physical environment (outside in a beautiful snowy landscape) but also the cultural context (Chinese tourists in Finnish Lapland).

There is little literature available on health and safety communications within tourism (Buckley, 2010), and even less on intercultural safety communication. Buckley's study (2010, pp. 315–320) on adventure tour products shows that operational health and safety communications are a key component of commercial retail tour products. Similarly, from the perspective of non-adventure tour products in Finnish Lapland, the effective safety communication is essential. In most of the critical incidents observed by Buckley (2010, pp. 315–320), both guides and customers have spoken the same language and come from the same cultural background. Most of the clients in Finnish Lapland are foreigners, whereas many of the tour guides are Finnish.

Certain characteristics are related to intercultural competences, such as cultural empathy, open-mindedness, social initiative, emotional stability and flexibility (Starren, Luijters, Hornikx & Dijkman, 2011, p. 57). According to Sizoo, Iskat, Plank and Serrie (2003, p. 77), intercultural sensitivity is a skill that can be learned and measured, and organisations serving foreign customers should provide their employees with this valuable skill. This is because interculturally sensitive employees are in many ways more profitable to the company: the more satisfied customers, the more successful the organisation. Above all, they contribute also to improved safety by more effective intercultural safety communication (Starren et al., 2011, p. 57).

Methods and research data

The qualitative research method was employed in this research. The data was collected in spring 2012 by using an online questionnaire in Finnish that was sent to 44 tour guides

working in Finnish Lapland. 27 replies were received. The questionnaire contained 16 questions of which seven were structured, seven semi-structured and two open-ended. The original objective of the survey was to collect and study real cases in order to create intercultural training materials for future tour guides. However, the collected data was insufficient and therefore ten semi-structured thematic interviews were conducted to meet the objectives of the research better, as well as to clarify and supplement the received data. Of the interviewees, eight had not answered the online questionnaire, and two of the ten interviewees had already replied to the questionnaire and given their approval for a further interview. One person working for the project Tourism Safety and Security System in Lapland 2009–2014 conducted the interviews in the summer and autumn of 2012. The answers of the thematic interviews were recorded and transcribed. These and the open-ended answers of the questionnaire were analysed together according to the methods of content analysis. The data was studied several times in order to find common themes. Some specific themes arose from the data, which are discussed in more detail with citations in the results section below. The materials derived from the online questionnaire and the interviews are combined in the analysis part of this paper to create a unified view of the research topic. The presentation of the examples from the research materials states whether the example is taken from the interviews (I) or from the online questionnaire (Q).

The main information gathered from the tour guides on safety instructions covered the questions of how to deal with customers from different cultures, if the tour guides had given safety instructions to their customers and how they had done it, if they had recognised any national differences when giving safety instructions, how different nationalities understood and followed the given safety instructions and if the tour guides had acted differently in terms of safety instructions when in contact with customers representing different cultures. One of the objectives was to find out if any cultural stereotypes were specified and if any safety related incidents had occurred due to the cultural background of the customer. The same questions were used in both the questionnaire and in the semi-structured interview. Obviously it was possible to get more detailed information in the interview.

The majority of the respondents of the questionnaire and the interviewees were young women under 35 years of age. Among the respondents of the questionnaire there were 21 women and six men. Among the interviewees there were five women, four men. The personal information from one of the interviewees was not registered. The biggest age groups were those in the 16–24 and 25–34 age groups with 21 respondents in total. In the thematic interviews the age was not asked.

The tourists who the respondents had guided represented many different nationalities but the main customer groups consisted of tourists from Great Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Russia and the Netherlands. Even though there is a growing trend of Asian tourists in Lapland nowadays, the numbers involved were still relatively small when the research was done in 2012. The respondents of the questionnaire and the interviewees had generally given safety instructions in the context of various kinds of safari, as well as cross-country and downhill skiing.

Results

One can easily understand the importance of knowledge of cultural differences in a communication situation, especially in cases that have to do with safety issues. However, it was interesting to note that almost half of the respondents of the whole research had not received any instructions or preliminary training by their employers for how to deal with customers from different cultural backgrounds. Those respondents who had instructions had received them orally or by example in actual guiding situations. They nevertheless recognised the necessity of proper safety-related materials to support them. In fact, this clearly indicates the fact that in 2012 there was lack of written materials to be studied by guides before starting their work with tourist groups. In cases where the tour guide and the tourist group did not share a common language, the instruction given by the employer was to use gestures and to give examples and show in practice what to do.

According to the results, the majority of tourists seem to follow the safety instructions given by the tour guide and more severe problems and accidents were thus avoided. It was interesting to note that the age, gender and, most importantly, the attitude of both the tourist and the tour guide were considered as possible reasons why safety instructions were ignored. Examples of the age and gender given by two respondents (translated from Finnish). One (I2) said, *There's a gender-related difference; women tend to listen more carefully and some men just don't care at all because they are so sure that they are such macho men that they will manage even in the most difficult situations.* Another (I1) said, *... so I must take the age and background of the customers into account.*

Although age and gender were not regarded as very relevant from the tour guides' perspective, there were many examples in the open answers where these factors were mentioned. The tour guides did not necessarily even pay attention to these elements, but they were subconsciously interpreted. It seems as if the tour guides were not aware of the fact that their attitudes also derive from cultural values. Attitudes towards different ages and genders are culture-related. One (I2) said, *Somehow, I should be really friendly or really tough, I guess. I don't know if the point is that the age helps. Do they obey an old woman more than they obey a young person?* While another (I1) suggested that, *Chinese people question everything more easily and especially if you, as a woman, go and talk to men; there you can notice different roles between sexes.*

When it comes to a question about a specific nationality, the respondents found Russian tourists in particular to be reluctant to follow given instructions. The respondents claimed that Russians do not understand the given instructions or they do not find them necessary or even relevant. However, almost all respondents were of the opinion that the nationality did not have particular relevance concerning safety issues. They claimed that the cultural background had more importance instead. In the following two examples, it is shown that the nationality is still emphasised when giving a definition of the behaviour pattern of Russian tourists. One (Q1) said that, *Russian tourists don't listen and they don't even care.* Another (Q2) said, *Russians are really tough: if something happens, they just keep on going. On the other hand, they also let the speed grow too high even though their skills are not that good and that is the reason why accidents happen.*

Some similar interpretations of the behaviour of other nationalities described in a negative tone were given in the open answers. Therefore, it is evident that intercultural encounters are often characterized by confusion, misunderstanding and conflict (Keisala, 2011). The tour guides also presented stereotyped descriptions of the behaviour of

tourists from different cultural backgrounds. Some tour guides pointed out that not all members of a specific nationality are similar in their behaviour, but defined these differences as exceptions to particular stereotyped characteristics. Therefore, it can be stated that the tour guides have some knowledge of cultural stereotyping that allows them to draw conclusions on the matter.

An earlier study by Valkonen and Ruuska (2012) regarding the use of stereotypes in nature tourism work by guides in Finnish Lapland has shown that the use of stereotypes in nature tourism work by guides is connected to action and action planning. Furthermore, the guides are willing to discard the use of national stereotypes and take up finer descriptions if the situation requires it (Valkonen & Ruuska 2012, p. 106). Valkonen and Ruuska (2012, p. 108) refer to this as “nationspeak”, which, according to their research, points to a special kind of understanding that works through national categories and stereotypes by connecting these to the social world.

This research did not include a look at any background information on the cultural knowledge and expertise among the tour guides. It is evident that the cultural stereotypes they had either previously heard or experienced are considered so strong that some exceptions seem to have no relevance for the guides in this study. Tour guides have obviously noticed cultural differences, but interpret the behaviour of other people through their own culture. This seems to be the pattern, of which they might not even be aware. Cultural stereotyping can occasionally be useful in a communication situation, as it helps to modify the message and strictness of the instructions. A ski guide gave one example of this based on a bad experience in the past. However, no one mentioned that their own way of communicating might cause any misunderstandings. These results support the statements given by Keisala (2011) and Reisinger (2009) about a person's assumptions when interpreting other people's behaviour.

The tour guides also presented cases where they thought that particular cultural features had something to do with a failure to pay attention to safety instructions. According to some answers, the tour guides thought it was typical of Asian tourists not to admit that they did not understand the given information in the fear of losing face. One respondent (I1) said, *It's important to Japanese tourists not to lose face: even though they don't understand a word, they just nod as if they do.* Another suggested that,

Asian tourists follow the instructions, but they have language problems. In addition, their operating models are culture-related; European regulations may be strange for them and, in addition, they might be misunderstood. The Asian tourists cannot admit either that they are wrong or that they don't understand and that is why giving instructions and following them do not match. (Q3)

Receiving instructions from a young female guide was also considered as a stereotyped, culture-based issue. However, almost all the guides interviewed mentioned that the most common reasons for not following or understanding the safety instructions were the poor language skills of the tourist or the fact that no common language existed between the guide and the tourist. As stated in Sipola's (2011) research, improved language skills, along with interaction and intercultural skills are needed in tourism encounters in Lapland.

The tour guides also gave examples of problematic incidents that had occurred during safaris and other outdoor activities because the safety instructions were not fully follo-

wed or completely ignored. In these cases, the tour guides had given specific instructions at the beginning of the safari. The most common example was driving too fast on a snowmobile or husky safari, which obviously put the tourist in danger. Minor accidents were common. Cold weather conditions in winter in Lapland and an unwillingness to wear proper clothes during outdoor activities were mentioned many times as causes of problematic safety-related situations. From the viewpoint of the tourism business, these kinds of incidents can really harm the company and in particular its image as a safe operator in the industry where safety is strongly emphasised.

One respondent (Q4) gave an example of an occasion when, *On a snowmobile safari, the customers didn't pay attention to the speed limits and drove too fast. One of the vehicles tipped over because the customers didn't slow down or turn the right way.* Another (Q5) described a time when, *In the freezing weather of -33 centigrade, the customers on the snowmobile safari didn't understand how important it was to wear clothes that were warm enough.* A third (Q6) mentioned an incident in which, *A French customer didn't use the brake when driving the snowmobile down the hill and he fell because his speed was too high. So he injured his head.* And a fourth (Q7) described an accident in which, *An Italian customer made a stop-and-go with his snowmobile and there was a curve and a bump so he flew over it and hit a tree.*

Issues of responsibility were also regarded as challenging and the respondents brought up these kinds of remarks as well. Some tour guides also stated that one has to be convincing enough in a guiding situation and trust in one's own expertise when giving instructions and getting the customers to follow them.

Conclusions and implications

It is important to make sure that the tour guides are aware of cultural differences in order to ensure that the safety instructions are given in the most effective way possible and that the customers pay attention and understand the importance and content of the instructions. It is not only the verbal or non-verbal communication that matters. Attention should also be paid to culture-related factors such as values, as well as attitudes towards different ages and genders and towards the authority of the guide. These factors should be taken into account when training tour guides or other employees in the tourism industry. There is an increasing number of Asian tourists coming to Finnish Lapland (Embassy of Finland, Beijing, 2016; Official Statistics of Finland OSF, 2016) and it is very important that cultural differences and even stereotyped cultural features are thoroughly studied and understood when training tour guides to be prepared to give safety instructions. In this study, the share of Asian tourists was not large, but because of the change in the origins of tourists coming to Lapland, this issue will become even more relevant in the future and therefore the tourism industry has to be prepared for it. There is definitely a need for better tourism safety communication materials in tourism industry companies, and the future training of tour guides needs to be improved in terms of safety issues. This suggests that more effective cooperation between educational institutions and the actual actors in the tourism field is required to improve safety. Since 2012 cooperation between Multidimensional Tourism Institute and Lappish tourism companies has developed, for example with the Arctic Guide (2016) virtual training for future guides, which focuses primarily on improving various aspects of safety-related knowledge among guides.

Obtaining knowledge about tourist group's cultural background and learning better communication skills for guiding situations are not sufficient for intercultural communication (Kiełbasiewicz-Drozdowska & Radko, 2006, pp. 83–84; Reisinger, 2009, p. 195). One also has to become aware of one's own cultural and personal characteristics that affect communication and perception. One needs to be sensitive to cultural differences, new ideas and viewpoints, which does not mean that one has to agree with them. These factors may not be enough if people only rely on the ready-made categories of culture and expect all tourists from a certain national culture to behave in the same way. Therefore, more training in intercultural sensitivity is necessary. Intercultural training targeted at tourism professionals should not only include information on different national cultures, subcultures and situational skills, but also training in intercultural sensitivity and gaining better self-reflective skills. Surface skills and depth competences should be focused on in the training period of the tour guides. According to Byram (2011), surface skills refer, for example, to pragmatic competences such as the content of safety instructions, whereas the depth competences refer to deep capacities for understanding. In the training of intercultural encounters, the skills for certain situations should also be reflected upon and considered critically.

Intercultural safety communication is a very topical topic in the tourism industry today. Safety issues have also become more important from the viewpoint of the global competition in the field. Lapland is regarded as a safe tourism destination and in order to keep this reputation, closer attention has to be paid to the content of the training programme of future employees. The research in question was conducted in 2012, and the challenges and target markets of the tourism industry have somewhat changed since then. Consequently, companies are employing a broader range of multicultural personnel, increasing the need for intercultural skills. Therefore, new information on the competence needs of the tourism industry is needed to further develop field-related intercultural safety communication. There is definitely a need for more research, which could be based on observation.

The tour guides' perceptions in this study suggest ideas for effective but intercultural-ly sensitive training for future tourism professionals. This does not mean that all problematic situations could simply be explained by cultural differences. However, analysis of them gives a starting point for making invisible cultural features more explicit. In the future, various skills of intercultural safety communication can be improved through systematic and tailored high-quality tourism education.

References

- Arctic Guide (2016). Arctic guide course. Lapland University of Applied Sciences. Retrieved from <https://blogi.eoppimispaivalvelut.fi/arcticguide/>
- Buckley, R. (2010). Communications in adventure tour products. Health and safety in rafting and kayaking. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 37, 315–332. doi: 10.1016/j.annals.2009.10.011
- Byram, M. (2011). Teaching intercultural competence – The complementarity of training and education. Presentation at the conference Teaching Intercultural Communication in Finnish Higher Education. University of Turku 11 November 2011. Retrieved from <http://mcnet.utu.fi/events/2011/teaching-intercultural-communication-in-finnish-higher-education-programme/>
- Embassy of Finland, Beijing (2016). Alibaba had a big launch in Rovaniemi – Rush of Chinese tourists expected to Lapland. News 11/7/2016. Retrieved from <http://www.finland.cn/public/default.aspx?contentid=353882&nodeid=35178&culture=en-US>

- Hall, S. (2003). Kulttuuri, paikka, identiteetti. In M. Lehtonen & O. Löytty (Eds.), *Erilaisuus* (pp. 85–128). Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Iivari, P. (2015). Drama in the snowfield: Audience reaction to a fatal tourist incident. *Tourism Culture & Communication, 14*, 199–213. doi: 10.3727/109830415X14213698267433
- Jandt, F. E. (2013). *An introduction to intercultural communication: Identities in a global community*. Thousand Oaks (California): Sage.
- Keisala, K. (2011). Postmodern definition of a culture in the education of intercultural communication. Presentation at the Teaching Intercultural Communication in Finnish Higher Education conference. University of Turku, 11 November 2011. Retrieved from <http://mcnet.utu.fi/events/2011/teaching-in-tercultural-communication-in-finnish-higher-education-programme/>
- Kiełbasiewicz-Drozdowska, I. & Radko, S. (2006). The role of intercultural communication in tourism and recreation. *Studies in Physical Culture and Tourism, 13*(2), 75–85. Retrieved from <http://ez.lapinamk.fi:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=hjh&AN=24222652&site=ehost-live>
- Official Statistics of Finland (OSF) (2016). Accommodation statistics [e-publication]. August 2016. Helsinki: Statistics Finland. Retrieved from http://www.stat.fi/til/matk/2016/08/matk_2016_08_2016-10-20_tie_001_en.html
- Rantala, O. & Valkonen, J. (2011). The complexity of safety in wilderness guiding in Finnish Lapland. *Current Issues in Tourism, 14*, 581–593. doi: 10.1080/13683500.2010.548548
- Reisinger, Y. (2009). *International tourism: Cultures and behavior*. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Reisinger, Y. & Mavondo, F. (2006). Cultural differences in travel risk perception. *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing, 20*(1), 13–31. doi: 10.1300/J073v20n01_02
- Reisinger, Y. & Turner, L. W. (2003). *Cross-cultural behavior in tourism: Concepts and analysis*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Sipola, A. (2011). Intercultural communication in experience tourism in the Inari area. Graduate thesis. University of Jyväskylä: Department of Communication. Retrieved from <https://jyx.jyu.fi/dspace/bitstream/handle/123456789/37142/URN%3aNBN%3afi%3ajyu-2011122611849.pdf?sequence=1>
- Sizoo, S., Iskat, W., Plank, R., & Serrie, H. (2003). Cross-cultural service encounters in the hospitality industry and the effect of intercultural sensitivity on employee performance. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration, 4*(2), 61–77.
- Starren, A., Luijters, K., Hornikx, J., & Dijkman, A. (2012). Increasing occupational safety in a multi-cultural work organization. In G. Boustras & N. Boukas (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 1st international conference in safety and crisis management in the construction, tourism and SME sectors* (pp. 50–60). Boca Raton (Florida): BrownWalker Press.
- Tourism Safety and Security System in Lapland 2009–2014 (2016). Tourism safety and security. Retrieved from <http://matkailu.luc.fi/Hankkeet/Turvallisuus/en/Tourism-Safety-and-Security>
- Valkonen, J. & Ruuska, P. (2012). Nationspeak as a tool in nature tourism work. *European Journal of Cultural Studies, 15*(1), 105–120. doi:10.1177/1367549411424946
- Weiler, B. & Black, R. (2015). The changing face of the tour guide: One-way communicator to choreographer to co-creator of the tourist experience. *Tourism Recreation Research, 40*, 364–378.
- Zhao, D. & Lin, Y. I. (2014). Understanding tourists' perception and evaluation of inter-cultural service encounters: A holistic mental model process. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research, 8*, 290–309.