

Designing Autumn Season for Arctic Europe

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Introduction

Here, the results of three workshops dealing with the development of the autumn season in Arctic Europe are summarised. The workshops were based on collaboration between tourism foresight researcher Sanna Kyyrä, associate professor Outi Rantala and the Visit Arctic Europe (VAE) project, which is a tourism industry-led project taking place in northern Finland, Norway and Sweden. The target group for the workshops was the tourism actors involved in the VAE project. For the third workshop, the target group was also the Destination Marketing Organisations from the area (Picture 1).



Picture 1. Workshop with DMOs.

As a part of the project, VAE ordered a report dealing with the future of tourism in the area. In the report, 26 trend studies focusing on tourism, travel and the hospitality industry were examined. The results can be summarised from two perspectives that emerge from the analysis: the perspectives of disoriented travellers and disoriented destinations.

Disoriented travellers

The western way of defining a holiday and preferred holiday activities has dominated business logics. In the future, the idea of an appropriate holiday will become diverse, and the travellers could be called "disoriented".

There will be more travellers from Asia, Latin America and Africa. Furthermore, diversification will increase in terms of gender. In the Indian market, for example, females form the most significant growth segment. In addition, increasing numbers of middle class people will enter the market, especially from China and India.

The diversification is also related to the differences between the generations: new generations have grown up with the Internet, social media and smartphones. They have a strong sense of self-empowerment and they enrich their life through travel. At the same time, the amount of senior travellers is increasing thanks to better medical treatment and living conditions. What's more, in the future, seasonal holiday travelling will not dominate the travel patterns, since work and leisure become more blurred.

Destinations need to acknowledge the increasing diversification of travellers; they will not share a certain set of perceptions of how to operate in destinations. We already know that the foreign tourists currently visiting Arctic areas for the first time do not have very clear preferences, but do expect convenient services.

This means, for example, that tourism entrepreneurs need to be prepared to pull out in middle of the activities because their guests have a limited understanding of local circumstances and the capabilities needed in the different activities. At the same time, the guests feel they have right to participate in any chosen activity.

Disoriented destinations

The future travellers seek self-actualisation and different forms of wellness. Arctic destinations have good possibilities for creating tourism spaces and services related to wellness.

We can recognise two polarised consumer types among the travellers: the ethical consumer and the egoistic consumer. The ethical consumers are sensitive to unfair practices and they challenge those they do not agree with. The egoistic consumers mainly focus on personal recovery from hectic everyday life. Both seek status and recognition from friends and brands in social media by sharing stories.

Especially for the egoistic consumer, it does not matter what happens in the destination, as long as the destination brings wellness and status for the traveller. Therefore, we should be careful that we do not become disoriented ourselves when we try to make our destinations convenient for all. The destinations need to be active in deciding what kind of story they have and how they put it into practice.

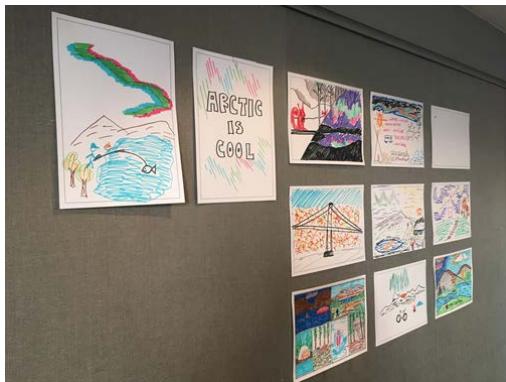
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Who are the travellers they want to welcome to their destination?

Designing the story of the destination

To design our story, we can ask – for example – how we invite the travellers to act in responsible ways; how we invite them to stay longer in our destination; and how we invite them to learn new skills. Examining what kind of (hidden) invitations are present in our products and communication materials helps in evaluating how to manage hospitality in a way that fits our values – and how to take into account the values of those with which we wish to share our story.



Picture 2. Exhibition of postcards

Greetings from future travellers

The first two workshop days were spent designing future products for the autumn season in Arctic Europe. In order to visualise the story of an autumn destination, greetings from future travellers were shared in form of post cards (Picture 2).

When reflecting on future travellers' values and wishes, the attractiveness of the autumn season was related to learning how to use natural ingredients and to finding one's own mental space in wilderness. This means that travellers are expected to explore the localities in greater detail in the autumn season, compared to the other seasons.

The participants highlighted the importance of having a master plan and developing the destinations as a whole in order to maintain a balance between mass and small-scale tourism. Furthermore, responsible use of natural resources, combined with personal service that is based on using the local knowledge, was seen as essential – especially since participation, learning and storytelling were seen as central qualities related to the new season.

ARCTIC EUROPE AS AN AUTUMN DESTINATION

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Place where you can connect with people you do not know.
Place where the air is fresh and nature pure.
Place where people from all over the world collect berries and go fishing.
Place where you are safe and secure.
Place where you easily hop on a train, electric car or bus and pay by finger prints.
Place where you see the northern lights and sleep outside.
Place where people live in the rhythm of nature and tell stories about this rhythm.
Place with the possibility to escape the hectic urban life.
Place which fits with Chinese holiday seasons and is easiest to explain to European markets.

Picture 3. Arctic Europe's autumn season in the future

Another theme highlighted by the participants was that those designing and developing the new season have to have faith in it. When designing the season, promotional 'hooks' should be found and used. It was discussed how we could bring up the lively localities and lifestyles instead of the empty type of wilderness related to the northern landscape (Picture 3).

When designing products based on the stories created during the first two workshop days, several point of views need to be taken into account. The participants discussed the employment issues – such as difficulties in finding employees who can use the local knowledge or difficulties in being able to offer year-round employment. What's more, the fragility of the pure nature puts pressure on the need to maintain that pureness. Also, it was pointed out that there is a need for making places accessible through creating infrastructure (e.g. tracks, huts, carrying-services), but at the same time, there is a need for increasing the awareness and regulations in some areas. To conclude, ideas such as 'harvesting without exploiting' and 'shooting, but only with a camera' were brought up and seemed to capture the spirit of designing the autumn season for future travellers (Picture 4).



Picture 4. Possibilities related to the autumn

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Towards joint communication

The third workshop day was spent reflecting on the potential of the autumn season in general and discussing the possibilities for jointly communicating this potential. The aim of this workshop was to start discussing about common values. As a result, the natural phenomena, services, activities and local culture that is supportive of learning ('learning how to be Nordic') were seen as the strongest elements in Arctic Europe (Picture 5).



Picture 5. Visualisation of the strengths

The Arctic lifestyle was discussed from two perspectives – as a special relationship with nature and as appreciative of nature's specific qualities, such as colours, silence and space. Hence, related to this Arctic lifestyle and its diverse dimensions, there exists the will to manage it and to make products with it. However, the outcome should not be a hectic and intensive season, but a season of deep and intensive encounters.

In addition to the potential content of the joint communication, it was discussed why and how we should use the shared ideas related to Arctic Europe. Participants saw that, through joint communication, shared values could become visualised. By telling the stories aloud, they are stored and start to construct a collaborative identity. Thus, the discussion offered time and space to reflect on the participants' knowledge. One of the groups captured this nicely: 'The most important things are not the common things – but the things that make us different'.

Despite the space and time, consensus was not reached in regard to which specific words or images should be used when communicating the new season in Arctic Europe – or even when sharing information about Arctic Europe generally. However, it was agreed that 'nature' and 'Arctic' were the two key words, and that a concept for Arctic Autumn should be designed around these keywords.

Slogans that were attractive to most of the participants included:

FIND YOUR ARCTIC FIRE
COLOURFUL SILENCE
COLOUR YOUR NATURE
CATCH THE ARCTIC MOMENT

Other slogans included 'you may survive' and 'we have something to give to the world'. It was seen as inappropriate to have a slogan that could be interpreted to mean that tourists arriving in the north must fear for their survival. On the other hand, the participants saw that Arctic Europe could offer an example of how to live in a responsible way and thus contribute to the survival of Earth systems.

Based on the slogans, we designed hashtags. These included:

#PUREARTIC, ARCTICLIGHTS, GOLDENAUTUMN,
COLOURFULSILENCE, ARCTICURBANISM,
ARCTICNIGHTS
#ARCTICCOLOURS
#ARCTICFIRE, ARCTICME
#LIKETHEARCTIC
#GODEEPER, NATUREDEEPER,
THELANDOFATHERINGS
#CATCHIT, CATCHTHEMOMENT,
VISITARCTICEUROPE, PURELY ARCTIC

Conclusion

The tourism actors from the area and the DMO representatives – together with selected tour operators – see the autumn season as fresh and full of potential. It holds a rhythm that is not present in the area's other tourist seasons. The rhythm arises out of the interconnectedness of the changes happening in nature and the changes taking place in culture. This Arctic lifestyle is fragile and needs to be designed into products and slogans with care, by examining the invitations we build into the products and slogans and the consequences of these invitations.

The workshops seemed to leave more questions open than were answered (Table 1). However, the aim of the workshop was to spark discussion and

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to bring people together to reflect on and share the knowledge they have. The ideas will be taken further when planning the second phase of the VAE project.

As important as advancing the designing of the new season in practice are the ideas that are taken back to the destinations when participants from different regions return home and reflect on their current ways of practicing business. We hope that new networks and collaborations will emerge from the workshops, as well as some food for thought for the existing networks.

Table 1. Reflections

DESIGNING INVITATION FOR THE AUTUMN SEASON
Who do we want here? Small-scale tourism?
Autumn travellers go deeper into the nature. They learn, harvest and are engaged with changes in nature. They go hunting without hunting.
How do we engage the travellers in ecological practices? How do we increase travellers' awareness and set regulations related to use of nature?
How do we work with local knowledge and skills? How do we enable year-round employment?
Developing the destination as a whole is important. Quality is important. Dialogue between small and big companies is important.
We need to have faith in the season – it is not a low season! We need to do marketing by experiencing – and we need to invite people to experience the autumn. To brand values, we need to be aware of our values!

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Appendices

The materials from the workshops are available as separate appendixes from VAE project representatives.

The appendices include:

Postcards made during the two first workshops.
Drafts of slogans and hashtags designed during the third workshop.