THE RUSSIAN SKI TOURISTS

A CASE STUDY: IMPORTANT FACTORS OF SKI DESTINATION CHOICE FOR TOURISTS IN SAINT-PETERSBURG REGION OF RUSSIA

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UNDERSTANDING THE RUSSIAN SKI TOURISTS

A CASE STUDY: IMPORTANT FACTORS OF SKI DESTINATION CHOICE FOR TOURISTS IN SAINT-PETERSBURG REGION OF RUSSIA

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ABSTRACT

The market consists of the consumers who have their unique needs, wants and demands. Every organization can closely match the needs of customers through marketing positioning. Russian outbound tourism market is an important market for Sweden. Particularly, Russian ski tourists represent an important and growing segment for Åre, which is the main international alpine destination in Northern Sweden. During last decades the interest of snowboarding and skiing in Russia has increased. However, despite its importance and potential for growth, Russian skiing tourists represent an unexplored phenomenon. There is a lack of understanding of Russian ski segment both among researchers and practitioners. Therefore, this study aims at qualitative examination of the Russian ski tourists’ profile on the basis of demographic, geographic, behavioural and psychographic segmentation variables in order to provide recommendations on how to better target the Russian segment. In addition, the study assesses the ability of Åre ski resort to meet unique needs of Russian ski segment. The Focus Group sessions were performed in order to determine Russian ski tourist’s travel motivation and preferences for ski vacation trips. Besides, the obtained information was applied to the Swedish alpine destination (i.e., Åre ski resort) in order to develop recommendations on how to better target the Russian ski tourists. Particularly, the study suggests packaging, product development and marketing incentives.

Key Words: segmentation, motivation, Russian tourists, target marketing strategy, alpine tourism, Åre, Sweden, ski resorts
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. PROBLEM STATEMENT ........................................................................................................ 1

1.1. AIM .................................................................................................................................. 2

1.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS ..................................................................................................... 2

2. LITERATURE REVIEW .......................................................................................................... 3

2.1. WINTER SPORT TOURISM .................................................................................................. 3
  2.1.1. Brief history of skiing and snowboarding .................................................................. 5
  2.1.2. Åre’s ski resort history ............................................................................................... 6

2.2. RUSSIAN SKI TOURISTS IN SWEDEN ............................................................................ 6

2.3. FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER BEHAVIOR ......................................................... 7

2.4. MARKET SEGMENTATION IN TOURISM ......................................................................... 8
  2.4.1 Geographic and demographic segmentation ............................................................... 9
  2.4.2. Behavioral segmentation ............................................................................................ 9
  2.4.3. Psychographic segmentation ....................................................................................... 10
  2.4.4. Motivation .................................................................................................................. 11
  2.4.5. A priori and post hoc segmentation .......................................................................... 11
  2.4.6. Target marketing strategy .......................................................................................... 12

2.5. A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING SKI TOURISTS ............................................... 13

3. METHOD ............................................................................................................................... 16

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN .......................................................................................................... 16

3.2 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS ............................................................................... 17

3.3 INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW SESSION ................................................................................ 19

3.4. INCORPORATING RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY .......................................................... 20

4. FINDINGS .............................................................................................................................. 21

4.1. MOTIVATIONS TO PARTICIPATE IN WINTER TOURISM ............................................. 21
  4.1.1. Interaction with surrounding landscapes and cultural immersion ................................ 21
  4.1.2. Participation in other activities while on trips ............................................................. 21
  4.1.3. Escape from everyday life .......................................................................................... 22
1. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Winter tourism has grown rapidly over the last two decades all over the Europe. Studies have reported that a growing number of tourists visited winter sport destinations in European countries (Tsiotsou, 2005). A winter sport destination may be defined as a geographical, economic and social unit consisting of all those firms, organisations, activities, areas and installations which are intended to serve the specific needs of winter sports tourists (Bieger, 2002; WTO, 1993).

Every winter more foreign tourists travel to the Swedish mountains. Sweden offers a wide range of winter tourism experiences such as cross country skiing, alpine skiing, dogs sledding, ice fishing among others to potential travellers from different countries (such as Norway, Germany, Denmark, Netherlands, UK, Finland, USA, France, and Italy and Russia). Currently, there are about 12 ski resorts in Sweden, where Åre is one of the biggest ski destination. Ski resort offers a variety of winter sport activities such as skiing for all levels, night skiing, snowmobile safaris, dog sledding tours, ice fall climbing. Besides, the ski resort hosts ski tourists from many countries including England, Finland, Russia, and the Netherlands. According to Visit Sweden website in 2010 Russia took the 10th largest market place among foreign visitors in Sweden, and, in addition, Saint-Petersburg and Moscow regions became the Åre ski resort’s markets since 1990 (VisitSweden Website, 2011).

Once skiing is an important activity in tourism market in Sweden, and Russia is an important sending country for skiing tourism in Sweden, destination managers see the potential to increase number of ski tourists from Russia. However, there is a lack of understanding of Russian tourists’ needs during their ski vacation, and if Sweden as a winter destination intends to further expand on the Russian market, a better knowledge of this market segment is required.

Studying ski resorts’ customers will provide tourism planners with the insights about skiers’ needs, wants and behavioural patterns in an effort to retain current and attract new customers (Tsiotsou, 2005). Demographic, geographic, behaviour and psychographic characteristics are the key factors in identifying consumer groups and developing the profile of the resulting market segments (Kotler and Armstrong, 2007). The profile of Russian ski tourists can be identified by their location, demographic variables, the previous ski experience and motivation. An increased knowledge of the Russian market can help the Åre ski resort to provide better service to the Russian ski tourists (for example, awareness of the ski resort in
1.1. Aim

The idea of this study emerged during the trip to Åre ski resort in December 2010. The practical task devoted to nature based tourism in Sweden was organized for students of Mid Sweden University Tourism Department. One of the managers of SkiStar AB identified Russian tourists as an important market for Åre ski destination and expressed an interest in attracting more Russian ski tourists to this destination. However, the destination managers acknowledged the lack of understanding of needs, perception and buying behaviour of this segment and expressed an interest in the proposed topic.

Therefore, this study aims at increasing the knowledge of the Russian ski tourism segment. Furthermore, the study aims at identification of destination resources, which are particularly important for the Russian segment. Finally, the study aims at developing the recommendations for the Åre ski resort management on how to increase the attractiveness of Åre for Russian ski tourists ad how to better satisfy their needs.

1.2. Research Questions

Alpine ski market segment is a fast growing market internationally (Holden, 1998; Hudson and Cross, 2005), while international statistics indicate that there are more than 70 million winter sport tourists today (Hudson and Cross, 2005). Understanding the alpine ski tourists motivation to travel is an important step for positioning the services, developing effective communication strategies, and designing appropriate services that can satisfy tourists’ and visitors’ needs (Fodness, 1994; Ryan and Glendon, 1998; Holden, 1998).

The main research question is the following:

Which factors influence the ski destination choice for Russian tourists?

The necessary sub-questions, therefore, are as follows:

- Which are the motivational factors behind the participation of the Russian segment in winter tourism?
- Which are the preferences and behavioural patterns of Russian ski tourists regarding their ski trip?
- How can the Åre ski resort increase its attractiveness for the Russian ski tourists?
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Winter sport tourism

The study at hand focuses on winter sport tourism, particularly, skiing and snowboarding. According to Hall, Muller and Saarinen (2009) sport tourism is a travel for non-commercial reasons to participate or observe sporting activities away from the home range. Ruskin (1987) defines sport tourism as an expression of patterns in human behavior during certain periods of leisure time, such as vacation time, which is done either in attractive natural settings or in artificial sports and physical recreation facilities in the outdoors. Furthermore, Gibson (1998) emphasizes the physical activity as an integral part of sport tourism:

*The sport tourism as leisure-based travel that takes individuals temporary outside of their home communities to participate in physical activities, to watch physical activities, or to visit attractions associated with physical activity.*

Gibson (1998, p. 49)

Therefore, Gibson (1998) defines sport tourism as all forms of active and passive involvement in sporting activity, organized on both non-commercial and business/commercial basis, which necessitates travel away from home and work locality. Moreover, Gibson (1998) specifies that sport tourism is a trip to nature-based destination with the purpose to participate in sporting activity.

Consequently, Nogawa (1996) defines “sport tourist” as “a temporary visitor staying at least 24 hours in the event area and whose primary purpose was to participate in a sports event with the area being the secondary attraction” (Nogawa, 1996, p. 46). According to Gammon and Robinson (1997) sport tourists represent individuals and/or groups of people, who actively or passively participate in competitive and recreational sport away from their usual environment, while sport is the primary motivation of travel.

A “winter sport destination”, according to Bieger (2002), is a geographical, economic and social unit consisting of all those firms, organizations, activities, areas and installation intended to serve the specific needs of winter sport tourists.

The operational level of ski tourism destination consists of components, which deliver the tourism product value (i.e., ski experience) to destination customers (Flagestad and
Hope, 2000). According to Flagestad and Hope (2000) ski destination consists of ski product (lift systems, sports activities, ski schools, ski guides, ski rentals, repair services, etc.), bed product (accommodation facilities, restaurants, children's garden, etc), village ambience (after ski, entertainment, events, shops, etc.), across destination service (banks, telecom, transport, medical service, police, information, etc.), and sustainability element such as ecology nature, culture/heritage, social structure, overall destination planning and design (Figure 1).

Thus, alpine tourism as a form of winter sport tourism refers to tourists who have taken temporary leisure trips to alpine destinations outside their usual environment, primary engage in winter sport activities such skiing and/or snowboarding and also experience other attractions in winter destination while on holiday.

The Canadian Tourism Commission in 2000 investigated American ski tourists, who represent the largest market for Canadian alpine destinations. The study results revealed that winter destination for American alpine ski tourists is a place with beautiful scenery, great place to relax and escape from everyday life, place that is very clean and well cared for, place with lots of things for mature adults to see and do, as well as a very safe place for skiing. Therefore in order to obtain a better understanding of potential size, characteristics and interests of American skiers at alpine destinations, the Canadian Tourism Commission undertook analyses based on travel activities and motivation survey. The results demonstrated

![Figure 1: Components of ski destination on operational level](image-url)
that ski tourists performed leisure trips to Canada and primarily engaged in alpine skiing, snowboarding, ski package and heliskiing during their trip. The less favorable attributes for ski tourists were shopping opportunities and urban attractions. In addition, daily and weekend editions of local newspapers represent the most effective channels for image building and communication of product awareness messages to potential alpine ski tourists. Thus, the study identifies the image formation challenges and selection of media sources as an important factor in attracting the US skiers. In addition, outdoor activities such as wildlife and flora viewing, hiking and backpacking, fishing, canoeing or kayaking and cycling were also popular among ski tourists from US. Moreover, the other outdoor activities such live theatre, museums and art galleries were also popular among Americans. The study results, therefore, suggested a need to combine the winter sport activities and other destination attractions to meet American alpine ski tourists’ interests (Canadian Tourism Commission, 2003).

2.1.1. Brief history of skiing and snowboarding

According to Hudson and Cross (2005) winter sport tourism such as downhill skiing and snowboarding are commonly associated with Norwegians. Modern skiing started in 1820 by Sondre Nordheim, a Norwegian from Telemark (McLennan, 2000). The 1960s faced with the start of the great ski boom. Europe witnessed the creation of the new generation of fully integrated ski stations (Hudson and Cross, 2005). Although the 1970s was a period of massive market and product expansion, the 1980s was a decade of industry consolidation and product management (McLennan, 2000). Influenced by changing demographics, skiing markets began to mature, and by the mid-1980s ski facility supply had outstripped demand in many regions, and many less-managed ski destinations were experiencing financial difficulties (Kottke, 1990). Hall, Muller and Saarinen (2009) point out that the growth and modernization of tourism, and especially the rise of nature-based winter tourism, brought new types of travellers onto the tourism scene. In the history of the winter tourism in Europe, 1980s was the period when the ski resorts structures began to develop. In case of Nordic countries, the major capacity development occurred in Finnish Lapland, as well as in Norwegian and Swedish mountain regions, since they possessed the natural advantages to winter tourism development such as topography and long, snow-covered season with relatively good accessibility (Hall, Muller and Saarinen, 2009).
2.1.2. Åre’s ski resort history

Åre valley history was on the peak of development as a ski resort in 1980s. The Åre valley became a concern for all Sweden, and the governmental involvement into the development of tourism facilities and infrastructure in Åre started on a large scale (Nilsson, 1999). During 1970s-1990s the development of tourism industry in Åre was supported by the implementation of the regional policy objectives in Sweden. According to Nilsson (1999) the period resulted in the development of Åre as an area for winter tourism and recreation.

During the ski resorts development boom in 1980s the construction of ski infrastructure began in Åre. Therefore, from this period the importance of Åre as a ski resort started growing. In addition, there was a development of basic level of infrastructure, such as skiing slopes and accommodation facilities, thus, the first cable car in Åre was launched in 1976 (Hall, Muller and Saarinen, 2009). At the same time the international demand and capital investments started to grow. As a result, the outdoor adventure activities increasingly gained popularity in tourism markets (Cater, 2006; Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie and Pomfret 2003).

According to Hall, Muller and Saarinen (2009) winter tourism in Åre has been an increasingly important and growing part of the regional economy for last few decades. As a result, nowadays Åre is one of the leading ski destinations in northern Europe. In Sweden, the mountain region is the third most important tourist destination after larger cities and coastal areas according to VisitSweden Website. In winter season the mountain region is the most popular destination (Sahlberg, 2001). Nowadays Åre ski resort development is increasingly based on international markets. In 2000s the tourist inflow increased substantially in Åre municipality (Lundmark, 2005). Moreover the geographical location has been important for the tourism business development and a concentration to more densely populated areas has taken place during the 1990s (Lundmark, 2005).

2.2. Russian ski tourists in Sweden

Skiing is a popular winter tourism activity in Russia. Snowboarding also increasingly grows in popularity, especially among youngsters (Bäckström, M., Koptioug, A., Tinnsten, M., 2006). Particularly, according to Dostaleva (2012) Russian alpine ski tourists visiting Finnish ski resorts primarily belong to the young age segment. Besides, Levin, Ainsworth and Kwok (1999) indicate that skiers in Russia tend to be younger adults spending approximately 4-5 hours per week for skiing.
More recently the outbound tourism substantially increased in Russia. In 2011 Russians undertook more than 43 million trips abroad, including 14 millions leisure trips. According to Federal Agency for Tourism in Russia the inflow of Russian tourists to Sweden increased in 2011 by 57 % in comparison with 2010 and constituted 84 000 trips, including 50 000 leisure trips. Indeed, in recent years Russian tourists started to travel to Sweden more often. According to VisitSweden Website Sweden is one of the most popular ski destinations for Russians, particularly for tourists from Saint-Petersburg. Scandinavia, including Finland, Sweden and Norway, is growing in popularity; however the Alps region remains the main destination for Russian skiing tourists (Hudson and Cross, 2005). The main tourism destination competitor in Scandinavia for Sweden is Finland. The total number of Russian trips to Finland in 2011 was 2.9 million, including 0.5 million vacation trips (Finnish Tourism Board, 2011).

The large proportion of Russian visitors arrived to Sweden by plane; nevertheless most travelers from Saint Petersburg arrive to Sweden by cars and ferries\(^1\). City breaks\(^2\) and skiing are the most attractive activities for Russian tourists in Sweden. According to VisitSweden Website Åre is one of the most popular ski destinations for Russian alpine ski tourists. According to SkiStar AB (2011) the Russian market occupies the 7\(^{th}\) place in share of foreign guests.

### 2.3. Factors influencing consumer behavior

According to Leiper (2007) tourist behavior involves a search for leisure experiences obtained from interactions with attributes or characteristics of places they choose to visit. Alpine ski tourist, therefore, is a customer who takes leisure trips outside their usual environment, who primary participates in winter activities and also experiences other attractions while on holiday (Canadian Tourism Commission, 2003).

Consumer behaviour is defined as the totality of consumer decisions with respect to the acquisition, consumption, and disposition of goods, services, time, and ideas by human decision-making units over time (Hoyer and MacInnis, 2008). “Factors influencing consumer behaviour” model (Kotler, 2000) relates to consumer’s internal and external factors influencing decision-making and distinguishes between cultural, social, personal and psychological factors. The Figure 2 applies the Kotler’s model (2000) to ski tourists.

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\(^2\) There has been a discernible upmarket trend in tourism over the last few decades, especially in Europe where international travel for short breaks is a commonplace (Singh, 2008: 134, Trends In Travel And Tourism And Law)
The *culture* factor comprises basic values, perceptions, needs and desires that a ski tourist learns continuously in a society. *Social* factors include ski tourists’ attitudes and behaviours influenced by reference groups and family, as well as an individual’s role and status within each group. *Personal* characteristics include age, life-cycle stage, occupation, economic situation, lifestyle, perception, personality and self-concept, while *psychological* factors comprise of motivation, learning, beliefs and attitudes. These factors describe tourist’s relatively consistent evaluations, feelings, and tendencies toward an object or an idea (Hoyer and MacInnis, 2008).

### 2.4. Market segmentation in tourism

Companies acknowledge that they cannot appeal to all consumers in the marketplace, since consumers are too numerous, too widely scattered, and too varied in their needs and buying practices (Kotler, 2000). Therefore, companies have to identify those segments of market that they can best serve, and, therefore, develop right relationships with right customers (Kotler and Armstrong, 2007).

Marketing strategy is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, delivering value to customers and managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders (Kotler, 2000). Marketing strategy consists of the following interrelated tasks: setting marketing goals, segmenting the market
and selecting one or more target markets, as well as positioning the product or service (Kotler and Armstrong, 2007). Market segmentation is, therefore, defined by Kotler and Armstrong (2007) as “dividing a market into distinct groups of buyers on the basis of needs, characteristics or behavior who might require separate marketing mixes” (Kotler and Armstrong, 2007, p. 244).

Thus, the customer segmentation technique is employed to better understand tourists’ characteristics and interests (Goeldner, Ritchie, and MacIntosh, 2005). Market segmentation depends greatly on consumer behaviour factors (Bovee, Thill and Dovel, 1995). Accordingly, market segmentation techniques help to design and tailor products and services that meet the needs of the specific tourists’ segments in the best possible way. Segmentation divides the customers into the groups (segments) with similar characteristics such as habits, needs, opportunities etc. According to Kotler (2000) the market consists of all potential customers with special needs and demands.

2.4.1 Geographic and demographic segmentation

The customer segmentation is based on geographic, demographic, behavioral and psychographic characteristics (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2009). Geographic characteristics for consumer markets are nations, regions, states, counties, cities, or neighbourhoods. For example, tourism markets may be segmented into international and domestic markets (Kotler, 2000). According to Lumsdon (1997) geographic segmentation does not always fulfil the requirements for identifying the segments in tourism, therefore, the other characteristics should be considered in tourism market.

Demographic segmentation divides the market into groups based on age, gender, family size, family life cycle, income, occupation, education, religion, race, generation, and nationality. For instance, destinations may specialize in family vacations and, therefore, try to attract people with specific demographic characteristics (Dolnicar and Kemp, 2009). Luxury resorts are most likely to target high-income earners, while caravan parks may target middle-income families (Kelly and Nankervis, 2001).

2.4.2. Behavioral segmentation

Behavioural segmentation focuses on how tourists organize their vacation (e.g. travel agent versus online booking), how do they interact while on trip, and how do they use the tourist product in future (Holloway and Robinson, 1995). Behavioural segmentation is also based on benefits, usage rate, knowledge and attitude to a product or service. For
instance, destination-marketing programs may use one message strategy to communicate with repeat visitors and utilize different approach for people who have never visited the place (Bowen, 1998). An example of benefit segmentation can be seen in the rise of spa resorts, which target consumers seeking rejuvenation and improved health and well-being from their holiday experience (Leisen, 2001).

Tourist is a consumer of tourism products, place and experience (Lo and Lee, 2011). Behaviour-based segmentation focuses on the previous experiences and behaviours demonstrated in the past (Tsiotsou, 2005). According to Tsiotsou (2005) the customers’ prior experience is an important step, which should be taken into consideration in the marketing planning process. Particularly, Tsiotsou (2005) applied prior experience as a measure to investigate the perceived value of customers and to predict customers’ intention to participate in the future. The study identifies the prior experience as a key element for predicting customers’ future purchase patterns. Moreover, experience has been utilized as a measure of consumer satisfaction, product awareness and familiarity. Thus, personal experiences with products may increase the perceived validity and relevance of information (Tsiotsou, 2005). Besides, prior experience with a product has been related to information processing (Bettman and Park, 1980), product evaluation (Mano and Oliver, 1993), emotions (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987), expertise and consumers’ goals (Huffman and Houston, 1993). According to Lo and Lee (2011) tourist experience is an important factor in activity participation, expenditure patterns and destination choice. Particularly, as observed by Lo and Lee (2011), awareness based on prior experience reduces perceived risk associated with tourism. Awareness gives confidence and results in greater willingness to purchase the product again (Tsiotsou, 2005). Besides, tourism research (Mano and Oliver, 1993; Lo and Lee, 2011; Tsiotsou, 2005) demonstrates that the perceived value of visited destination or participation in a specific type of travel strongly influences the future intention of travelers to return to the same destination or re-engage in a similar travel experience (Petrick, 2004).

2.4.3. Psychographic segmentation

The purpose of Psychographic or lifestyle segmentation is to group the consumers according to their lifestyle and personal characteristics (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2009). Thus, psychographic bases include benefits sought, travel motivations and destination preferences (Dolnicar and Kemp, 2009). For example, adventure tourism operators may target consumers who have a strong interest in outdoor pursuits, while epicureans are the target market for food and wine trails and cooking schools (Kropp, 2005). All these segmentation
bases can be referred to as the consumer-based variables because these characteristics of each individual consumer such as having or not having a specific trait allow for classifying the consumers into different market segments (Dolnicar and Kemp, 2009).

2.4.4. Motivation

The concept of motivation links to the forces that initiate, direct, and sustain human behaviour (Iso-Ahola, 1999). Tourism motivation is “a meaningful state of mind which adequately disposes an actor or a group of actors to travel” (Iso-Ahola, 1982, p. 257). Tourist motivation refers to unique preferences of a particular market segment, and companies can develop a position strategy with a competitive advantage based on customers’ motivation analysis (Tkaczynski, Rundle-Thiele and Beaumont, 2008). For instance, the tourists who have taken trip to Fraser Coast (Australia) were motivated by factor related to see something new/different, relax lifestyle and beach.

Push and pull factors should be considered accordingly while exploring the tourist motivation (Crompton and McKay, 1997; Hanquin and Lam, 1999; Baloglou and Uysal, 1996). Push factors according to Yoon and Uysal (2005) include internal psychological forces of consumer, such as excitement, education, relaxation, enjoyment, and escape. Meanwhile, pull factors include mainly external forces related to attributes of destination, such as the design and condition of facilities, the atmosphere, the scenery, the local culture, and landscapes (Yoon and Uysal, 2005).

2.4.5. A priori and post hoc segmentation

Tourism planners divide their target audience when exploring the activity based market segment motives to travel. There are two approaches to identify market: a priori segmentation and post hoc segmentation approaches. If destination management is aware of the tourist characteristics that are of importance for such a grouping, it is sufficient to split the market up accordingly (Dolnicar and Kemp, 2009). Thus, this process refers to a priori segmentation (Mazanec, 2000). However there is post hoc segmentation if one single splitting characteristic is selected in advance and consumers are split based on their profile of the respective consumer-based variables, for instance young versus old tourists (e.g. Reece, 2004), female versus male travellers (Kim, 2007) or countries of origin (McCleary, 2006). The advantage of a priori segmentation is in selection of some variables of interest for researcher (e.g., buyer's age, gender, principal benefit sought, current brand) and then classifying buyers according to that designation (Wind, 1978). For instance, Tsiotsou (2005)
applied a priori segmentation approach in Greek alpine market studies in order to divide ski-resort customers into homogeneous groups by using visit frequency as a segmentation base. The subjects were categorized based on their visit frequency as weekly visitors, monthly visitors and yearly visitors. Besides, the satisfaction, income and ski experience were used to segment ski-resorts tourists. Thus, the number of the segments, their relative size and their description were known in advance. Similarly, a priori segmentation was applied in tourism services in order to define and target tourists with similar needs, wants and profiles (Tsiotsou, 2005).

If, however, destination management has insufficient prior notion about different groups, groupings are searched for on the basis of an empirical survey data set, a procedure called post hoc segmentation (Wedel and Kamakura, 1998). Segments are developed on the results of a variety of questions referring to demographics, attitudes, behaviours, lifestyle and psychographics variables, as well as category perceptions and preferences. In addition, post hoc segmentation approach provides insights about how to target and market the groups based on what they think, feel and act (Andereck and Caldwell, 1994).

### 2.4.6. Target marketing strategy

Ultimately segmenting the market is the first step in providing the organizations with the ability to better match the customer needs, increase profits, enhance opportunities for growth, retain customers and target communications (Kotler, 2000).

When the segments are identified then companies should determine the target markets in order to achieve higher sales rates. There are several factors which the marketers have to consider in order to make the recommendations how to more efficiently target on customer such as the size and growth potential of each segment, their structural attractiveness and the organizations’ objectives and resources’ in coming to a final decision on which segments to target (Krueger and Casey, 2009). The benefits of targeting well-defined segments of tourists rather than all tourists, particularly, include the identification of opportunities for the development of new tourism products that better fit the needs and wants of specific tourist segments, the design of more effective marketing programs to reach and satisfy the defined tourist segments, as well as the strategic allocation of marketing resources to the most attractive opportunities in the tourism market (Kotler, 2000). For example, five star hotels and resorts would appear to increase their chances of making sales if they target consumers with high disposable incomes rather than a broad market that has not been segmented (Andereck and Caldwell, 1994).
Finally, once the market has been divided and segments targeted, the company has to identify the positioning concept within each target segment and to develop the appropriate positioning concepts (Kotler, 2000). Thus, positioning is the task of designing the company’s offering and image so that they occupy a meaningful and distinct competitive position in the target customers' minds (Kotler, 2000). A visitor destination must differentiate its products or services from those of competitors; differentiation can therefore occur by physical attributes, service, personnel, location, or image (Kotler, 2000). For example, a tourist destination like Turkey, with its rich cultural heritage, can position itself to appeal to tourists across several countries that are interested in history, culture, and historical architecture; similarly, the country of Belize in Central America, with the rain forest in its backyard and the world's second largest live coral reef off its shores, may position itself to appeal to eco-tourists (Ruskin, 1987).

Market programs of any tourism destination are aimed at increasing demand (tourists flow, the stay period, the types accommodation and transportations the tourists use, how much money they spend, what type of experience they prefer) and attracting particular market segments (Goeldner, Ritchie, and MacIntosh, 2005). Understanding the demands requires knowledge of what comprises demand, what affects the level of demand, and how future demand can be identified and estimated (Kotler, 2000).

2.5. A framework for understanding ski tourists

Ski destination offers a wide range of tourism experiences to potential travellers. In order to obtain a better understanding of the potential size, characteristics and interests of activity-based market segments, the study at hand analyses of ski tourists based on their activities and motivation. Particularly, the study focuses on Russian alpine ski tourists who have recently taken leisure trips to European countries and engaged in alpine skiing.

Considering that tourism is composite of activities, services and industries that delivers a travel experience, it is important to identify and categorize its supply components. According to Goeldner, Ritchie, and MacIntosh (2005) the tourism destination consists of components such as natural resources, built environment, infrastructure, operating sectors, and spirit of hospitality and cultural resources. The quality and quantity of these determine the success of the tourism in an area (Goeldner, Ritchie, and MacIntosh, 2005). Accordingly the tourism supply components are important for categorizing and analysing a tourist area and comparing them with a competitor’s destination.
Figure 3: Relationship between ski tourist and ski destination.

The Figure 3 demonstrates a relationship between the ski tourist and ski destination. Demographics characteristics include age, gender, and occupation of potential alpine ski tourists. Travel behaviour of tourists is used to understand the previous experience of winter enthusiasts and help to predict their future intention to participate in winter sport tourism. Motivation profile of ski tourists shows why tourist chose particular ski destination, and why they engage in alpine skiing. In order to meet the interests and preferences of activity based segments the tourism planners have to understand the perceived value of tourists.
In addition, ski destination has to offer products and services to potential alpine ski tourists that may be required to attract travellers in future. Therefore, the components of ski destination on operational level, which contribute to the alpine tourism product experience, therefore, need to be appropriately delivered. Thus, for understanding ski tourists in winter sport tourism the components of ski resort can be employed including the ski product (lift systems, sports activities, ski schools, ski guides, ski rentals, repair services, etc.), the bed product (accommodation facilities, restaurants, kindergarten, etc.), the village ambience (after ski, entertainment, events, shops, etc.), and the across destination service (banks, telecom, transport, medical service, police, information, etc.) (Flagestad and Hope, 2000).

Therefore, when tourism planners of ski destination understand ski tourists characteristics and interests, as well as ski resort abilities and opportunities, then recommendations how to attract ski tourists to destination can be developed.
3. METHOD

3.1 Research design

The purpose of this study is to explore motivational factors impelling Russians to engage in winter tourism and to develop a profile of Russian alpine ski tourists based on their previous ski tourism experience. Since little academic research in winter tourism has been conducted in the Russian ski tourist context, an exploratory study was deemed to be appropriate.

This study adopted a qualitative research approach. The use of both focus group and individual interviews techniques enable “the cross validation of the patterns, themes, and categories that were identified in the findings from the two different channels, and hence minimized the data quality problems of qualitative research interviews that are related to validity, reliability, and interviewer and response bias” (Lo and Lee, 2011, p. 329). The advantage of method is in obtaining an in-depth understanding of customers’ impressions and opinions regarding their experience. It means that details in most qualitative studies both open opportunities and create problems; therefore phenomena of interest enable description in the original language of research participants (Tsiotsou, 2005). However, qualitative research has its drawbacks. Particularly, the generalizable themes are hard to identify. Moreover, according to Tsiotsou (2005) many qualitative studies do not even take into account the generalizing, as target on generating descriptions of their phenomena. In this case the quantitative research or a combination of both could be applied afterwards in order to achieve the better outcome of research.

Focus group is a form of qualitative research used in marketing, consumer demand studies, and advertising for researching consumers (Kotler, 2000). In groups participants show emotions and thoughts during their interaction with other participants. According to Kotler (2000) people are influenced by people around them; therefore, it is a good opportunity for people to make their opinion after listening to others. Throughout the discussion participants listen to each other and share with own experience. Besides, during sessions the conversation can last longer and, as a result, the customers’ perceptions can be obtained more specifically (Kotler, 2000) rather than in an individual interview. For instance, even a simple question can evoke more emotions in focus group than if it would be asked in an individual interview. Thus, the focus group is a useful tool for collecting the insights about Russian ski tourists’ interests and motivation to travel, as well as behaviour in ski resort during vacation.
Individual interview was selected as a tool for investigating the supply organization components.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

The study employs a priori segmentation and selects the sample of ski tourists with similar characteristics such as age category, occupation, education, and country of origin. The focus group members selected from a population of Russian residents participated in winter ski tourism, while skiing was not necessarily the only reason for travel. A total of 29 Russian alpine skiers from Saint-Petersburg participated in the interviews. Groups included fourteen females and fifteen males aged from 23 to 26 years (Table 1), who had previously skied in various ski destinations both in Europe and Russia. All interviewees had completed university-level education.

One of the managers responsible for tourism product development in Åre ski destination participated in an individual interview. The examination of Åre ski resort components aims at development of Åre-specific recommendations on how to better target ski tourists from Russia.

The focus group interviews aimed at understanding the psychological characteristics of Russian tourists, their emotions, motivation, as well as behaviour during their vacation and participation in alpine skiing activities. The list of questions discussed during the focus group interviews is provided in Appendix 1.

Two focus group sessions were conducted based on prior experience of Russian tourists. The first group included tourists who skied only in Russian ski resorts (1st focus group session was conducted on 5th May, 2011), and second included tourists who experienced alpine skiing in European countries (2nd focus groups session was conducted on 6th May, 2011). Splitting focus group members into two groups based on their prior ski travel experience enable to compare them and, therefore, to offer better marketing decisions by taking into account diversity of travel experience among the certain age group (WTO, 1993). Besides, successful positioning of the destination greatly depends on knowledge of tourists’ prior experience (Lo and Lee, 2011). For example, managers should know whether to provide a greater variety of activities or to focus on a specific type of activity for improved quality.

Focus group transcripts and field notes were analyzed by a method described by Krueger and Casey (2009) that follows a systematic approach (Appendix 4): “…focusing on frequency, specificity, emotion and extensiveness of participants’ answers” (Krueger and Casey, 2009, p. 121).
Informed consent was obtained from the interviewees, and confidentiality and interviewee anonymity were assured. Permission was sought to record the focus group and individual interviews by notes. Focus groups interviews were conducted in the Russian language and the individual interview was conducted in English.

Table 1. List of Interviewees

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2nd Focus Group, skied in EU countries

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</tbody>
</table>

* Names have been removed for the sake of anonymity

3.3 Individual interview session

Individual interview is one of the most frequently used techniques to collect qualitative data (Blanchet, 1995). Formal discussion was conducted between me and a person chosen specifically according to a topic of the research in order to gather reliable insights about Åre ski resort. The interviewee was the person responsible for developing Åre ski resort and Jämtland Härjedalen tourism. The interview took place in the Head office of Skistar in Åre village (Sweden, 83014, Åre, Kurortsvägen 20), 9th May, 2011. Questions were asked in accordance with the ski destination’s components. Thus, approximately twenty questions were asked about ski product, bed product, across destination service, cultural environment and natural environment of ski destination (Appendix 2). An examination of ski destination resulted in identification and categorization of the supply components (Goeldner, Ritchie, and MacIntosh, 2005). Additional sources supplemented the study, including the newspapers, brochures about tourism in Åre and websites of Åre village, Skistar and VisitSweden.

Transcribed notes were checked immediately after the interview for better understanding of the conversation as a whole. Key words were highlighted, and notes were
classified by themes (Kotler, 2000). Obtained insights were verified after the interview (Tsiotsou, 2005).

3.4. Incorporating reliability and validity

The validity and reliability are challenging assessments for qualitative research. Validity is defined as follows: “...how far a measure really measures the concepts that it purports to measure” (Bryman and Cramer, 2005, p. 80).

The validity of research can be supported by the previous studies in related spheres and models in tourism, such as consumer behavior theory, target marketing strategy model and ski destination studies, as well as all theories linked to the tourism studies. Besides, validity of research assesses if the methods applied for collecting the customers’ insights are chosen correctly. Hence, the focus groups tool was applied in order to identify Russians’ needs while traveling to ski destination, while their previous experience was used to identify motives to travel and the perceived value. An individual interview was utilized as a tool to study the supply organization (i.e., SkiStar AB). Segmenting the travelers and selecting the appropriate respondents for the study were similarly performed to ensure the validity. Since Russian skiers represent an activity based market segment, validity was also recognized and supported by the knowledgeable person, i.e. the ski resort development manager (Tsiotsou, 2005).

Synonyms for reliability, particularly, include dependability, stability, and consistency (Kotler, 2000). Retest provides an indication of stability over time. For example, if I asked the respondents in my sample the same questions once and again in the future, I could examine whether the two waves of similar results, because ski tourists had same previous experience. Consistent results may also be estimated on the same sample by different instruments, for example, survey questionnaire and official tourism guides, which is known as the multiple forms of reliability. Therefore, official websites, focus groups and individual interviews techniques were applied to study Russian skiers.

Time and resources were limitations to examine the supply organization. Besides, only one interview was conducted with a manager of SkiStar AB. However, the interview was an important part of the study, since the interviewee was responsible for ski resort development and had worked with international quests in Jämtland region.
4. FINDINGS

4.1. Motivations to participate in winter tourism

Three major motives for individuals to participate in winter tourism were identified, including interaction with landscapes and cultural immersion, participation in other outdoor activities, and escape from everyday life.

4.1.1. Interaction with surrounding landscapes and cultural immersion

Learning about surrounding landscapes and interacting with the locals were the major motives for respondents to participate in winter tourism. Individuals are motivated to travel to ski destinations because of their need for social interaction, and by factors related to nature seeking. The majority of the individual respondents indicated that they would like to have more interaction and contact with local people through winter sport activities. These trips enabled the travellers to gain a deeper understanding of different cultures, traditions, and lifestyles, as well as first-hand experience of local life. It appeared that ski travellers desired different kinds of interaction with the local community, for instance, to “take a Swedish ski trainer,” “learn how to make local food,” and “have dinners and parties with local people.”

In addition, one of respondents from the first focus group and half of the second focus group participants expressed their desire to develop better and long-term relationships with the local community through repeat visits, because long-term relationships would enable them to have an in-depth understanding of local people and self-development through culture involvement and nature.

*I like travelling to Scandinavia, because weather conditions are similar to my location. Besides, I like to change a social environment and always get new contacts when on winter holidays. Northern countries are not far away from Saint-Petersburg, but the landscapes are quite different, it is a good possibility for me to experience all of these positive factors for a short period of time.*

(Respondent 16)

4.1.2. Participation in other activities while on trips

Half of the second focus group had taken trips with an aim to participate in other winter tourism activities, such as dogs sledding, cross country skiing and snowmobiling,
whereas none of the first focus group respondents mentioned any engagement in other (i.e., non-ski) activities. Additionally, two focus group members said that it was a great educational opportunity for them to attend local museums:

*General history museums and art galleries are sometimes point of my interest when I have a long winter holiday. These indoor attractions are a good opportunity for me to provide a welcome relief from the cold alpine slopes.*

(Respondent 19)

Focus group members expressed a belief that ski trips let them learn about lives of people in other places, and hoped that experience would have some impact on them or change their attitudes towards life or their studies. One respondent from the second focus group said that he wanted to participate in a dog sled tour for a longer period and experience nature based tourism:

*I am a person who is always seeking nature based tourism opportunities, skiing is one of the activities where I can enjoy the landscapes...*  
(Respondent 26)

**4.1.3. Escape from everyday life**

All respondents from focus groups said that they were motivated to participate in winter sport activities because it was a great opportunity for them to escape from their routine life. Focus group members mentioned that they were busy with work, and skiing provided them an opportunity to relax and engage in self-reflection. One participant from first focus group particularly commented:

*I love skiing and ski destination is a perfect place for me to spend some time with my friends. Besides, skiing helps to forget about problems, take a break from the big city life and just enjoy favourite sport.*

(Respondent 5)
4.2. Perceived value of winter tourism experience

The perceived value for participants attained through their trips to ski destinations could be divided into four major themes: product awareness messages to Russian alpine skiers, experiencing ”good life”, accessibility of ski destinations, and service offered by ski destinations.

4.2.1. Product awareness messages to Russian alpine skiers

Image building and product awareness messages to alpine skiers are likely to achieve the highest reach in the Internet, including local newspapers. These media outlets have the greatest potential for reaching skiers among those measured in the survey.

4.2.2. Experiencing a “good life”

Participants from the second focus groups considered European ski destinations to be a place with lots of things for both families and young people to see and to do, great opportunities for outdoor activities, friendly people, and great respect for natural environment. Respondents, particularly, highly appraised shopping opportunities, value for money, as well as cultural and urban attractions. Alpine ski tourists who skied only in Russia consider EU ski resorts as a place to experience a “good life” and as a destination with a popular or trendy image. In light of Russian travellers’ tourism interests, participants from both focus groups rate European countries more favourably as their future winter tourism experience compared to Russian ski destinations.

4.2.3. Accessibility of ski destinations

Since Russian skiers from Saint-Petersburg is a market close to Russian-Finnish border, it is not too surprising that many interviewees mentioned that they travelled to Finnish ski destinations. Thus, a possibility to reach the ski destination by car was a positive factor for choosing a destination. Half of the respondents from second focus group travelled to Finnish ski destinations and two of them to Swedish ones by private car. About one-fifth of all both focus members in future would prefer to visit international ski destinations by private car.

I live in Saint-Petersburg and it is a great opportunity for me to take a trip to Rukka with my family by car.
However, in regards to their future winter travel plans, respondents from both focus groups chose a plane as primary transportation to a ski destination. More than a half of the second focus group members expressed a willingness to take leisure trips to the Finland ski destinations (60%). Besides, they also mentioned Alps (22%), Sweden (10%) and, less commonly, other countries (8%) as their future international ski destinations.

4.2.4. Service offered by ski destinations

Participants agreed that winter tourism trips enriched their life experience and provided them with rare and memorable experiences. All respondents from both focus groups shared similar preferences upon services in ski destinations, since they were from the same age category and from the same region. Therefore, respondents mentioned that at the ski destination they would prefer cottages as a primary type of accommodation (60%), less hotels (38%) and sometimes they would use other types of accommodation (2%).

All focus group members expressed similar preferences regarding the food services. Russian skiers were attracted by visiting bars and restaurants along with cooking by themselves.

Russians who have taken leisure trips and engaged in alpine skiing when on recent trips might also have engaged in other winter sports activities such as cross country skiing, snowmobiling, ice fishing or ice climbing. One Russian alpine skier from the second focus group shared his experience when he was on leisure trip to Finland:

_Every time when I travel to ski destination I always try to find a new winter activity. This winter I experienced dog sledding. Before I knew about this activity from The Internet and travel brochures, and I wanted to try it. Actually it was really exciting and rather special experience for me. I hope next winter I will find out something new for me in ski destination._

(Respondent 26)
4.3. Factors influencing intention to participate in winter tourism in the future

All focus group members indicated that they would like to engage in winter sport tourism in the future. The prominent factors affecting their decisions to participate in future skiing were time, financial ability, weather conditions, the awareness of the winter ski destinations, and seasonality.

4.3.1. Time

Respondents mentioned time as the most important constraint for their travelling since they had busy work lives. Half of focus group members indicated that time would be their major concern if they would travel to a winter destination. The expressed preferences regarding the duration of the skiing trips also demonstrated the working commitments of Saint-Petersburg residents. Respondents from the first focus group preferred to engage in alpine skiing only for a short period of one up to three days, whereas respondents from the second focus group preferred to travel for a longer period of time, from seven to fourteen days.

4.3.2. Financial ability

Although all respondents expressed an opinion that the costs of their previous ski holidays were reasonable, most of respondents stated that the financial ability would be a concern when considering future winter holidays. Russian skiers would only participate in such trips if they had sufficient money. However, according to the focus group members, the skiing experience was worth the cost of the trip.

4.3.3. Weather conditions

The respondents also discussed the weather conditions, particularly, cold winters, in light of future participation in winter sport activities. It was interesting to find out that only respondents from first focus group were concerned about these issues. Perhaps, the second focus group participants were not worried and they were satisfied with the weather conditions at European ski resorts.

4.3.4. The awareness of the winter ski destinations

Comments from nine respondents showed that they were concerned by the awareness about the ski destinations. They stressed that a ski resort should have efficient
commercial ski resorts advertisements. Respondents from the first focus group agreed that the Internet and advertising through outdoor tools were perfect type of promotions for them. Several participants from the second focus group stated that they would like to engage in winter sport activities that provided advertising to a community and have a positive feedback from previous travellers. Another two members of the same group expressed concerns related to recommendations from their relatives and friends. One participant from the first focus groups suggested:

> Internet forums about ski destinations where people share their prior experience could be a reliable source of information.  

(Respondent 5)

4.3.5. Seasonality

All respondents from both focus groups were concerned about the period of time when to go on winter holidays. There is a long vacation break in Russia in the beginning of January. Therefore, Russian tourists tend to travel a lot during this period, particularly, to ski destinations. Interestingly, most of the second focus group members preferred to ski only during this period of time. However, the respondents who skied in Russia and three respondents who experienced skiing in other countries mentioned that it did not matter for them when to engage in winter sport tourism.

4.4. Ski destination analysis

According to insights obtained in the interview with the manager of SkiStar AB, Åre as a winter sport destination, which is highly rated by alpine skiers for attributes that support a beautiful, relaxing, clean and calm image:

- A place with beautiful landscapes
- A great place to participate in different indoor and outdoor activities
- A great place to relax and get away from it all
- A very safe place for visitors
- A place with lots of things to do for young people and adults.

(EWA JERLINGER)
The manager of SkiStar AB represented Åre to be a place with lots of things for families to see and do, that respected the natural environment, had friendly people, was one of the best destinations for outdoor activities in Nordic countries.

### 4.4.1. Primary and secondary activities at Åre ski destination

According to manager of SkiStar AB, there are variety of activities in Åre winter sport destination, which provide a high value to alpine skiers. Ski destination provides slopes for all level of skiing, lifts, several ski rentals, repair services, ski schools, Tourist Information office, hospital, police department of Åre Commune, different type of accommodation facilities, such as hotels and cottages, indoor activities (e.g., Åre museum of Chocololate), and outdoor activities (e.g, dogs sledding, cross country skiing), financial services (i.e., banks), as well as such activities as after-ski, bars, restaurants and clubs.

Russians tourists during their ski destination stay actively participate in shopping activities in Åre Village and, to a lesser extent, attend the local museums and engage in other activities.

According to corporate SkiStar website, the potential for development is very positive, due to Åre’s good infrastructure, including the direct train to the village of Åre, location on the European route E14 running through the village, as well as the proximity of the resort to two nearby international airports, Åre-Östersund Airport and Vaernes Airport in Trondheim. Besides, the manager of SkiStar AB added that a new ferry connection between Saint-Petersburg and Stockholm, and the new direct flight between Åre-Östersund Airport and Helsinki was well in line with Åre’s investments in attracting more Russians tourists to ski resort. In addition, Åre ski resort continues to invest in transportation infrastructure in order to increase bed capacity and possibilities to receive a larger number of tourists.

In order to be trusted by international visitors Åre ski destination has hosted three Alpine World Cups races in one season, and due to this fact Åre has clearly shown its position and strength as an internationally competitive ski destination.

Besides, in 2010 Åre decided to extend opening hours for the lift VM8, allowing for extended skiing opportunities on the slopes, especially for advanced skiers:

*The mountains will shimmer in the distance with a wide range of magical colours and, while the rest of the surroundings will remain in darkness, selected slopes will be illuminated in such a way that light becomes the focus of experience.*
According to insights obtained during the interview, SkiStar AB provides additional conditions in order to increase the performance of primary activities in ski destination to skiers and particularly to Russian activity-based market segments.

4.4.2. Marketing Åre ski destination in St. Petersburg

In order to obtain a better understanding of the potential size, characteristics and interests of Russian activity-based market segments, SkiStar AB explore skiers using insights collected by one of partner tour operators, such as Neva Travel. Particularly, SkiStar AB focuses on alpine ski tourists from Saint-Petersburg who have taken leisure trips to Sweden and engaged in alpine skiing when on recent trips. As such, they have taken leisure trips to Sweden and, in many cases, to other destinations in the past couple of years.

Åre ski resort image building and awareness of ski destination among Russian skiers are likely to be achieved via outdoor advertising and promotion of package tours by local tour agencies, particularly, in the travel sections of local magazines and newspapers and through the Internet. According to the manager of SkiStar AB, the Internet has the greatest potential for reaching skiers among residents of Saint-Petersburg.

4.5. Ways to reach alpine ski tourists

Russian activity-based segment’s needs and interests provide a rich source of information for SkiStar AB which is interested in attracting more Russian ski tourists to Åre in future. Meantime, the examination of the Åre resort provided insights about the products and services of the ski resort.

The study demonstrated that there is an overlap between prior skiing tourism experience of Russians alpine skiers traveled and activities provided by Åre ski destination. These overlaps particularly concern packaging, product development and marketing opportunities.

Approximately half of Russian alpine skiers went to general history museums and preferred to participate in other indoor activities on recent trips. Since these attractions tend to be indoors, when packaged with skiing, they could provide welcome release from the cold alpine slopes.

In addition to packaging, sub-groups within the alpine ski segment might be attracted by combinations of products that meet winter outdoor interests of Russian tourists as
well as their interests in museums, galleries, and food preferences. For instance, other heritage attractions demanded by Russian skiers during their ski trip include historic sites or markets, as well as towns or cities. These heritage activities together with visits to general history museums might be packaged with alpine ski experiences in order to attract Russians skiers.

Over half of Russian skiers highly value beautiful landscapes at the ski destination and are motivated to participate in other activities such as dog sledding or snowmobiling. This wide array of popular outdoor activities can be attractive for a new market segment that enjoys being outdoors during winter holidays. Thus Åre could be promoted as a winter destination for people who would like to be engaged not only in alpine skiing, but in other winter sport activities as well. Similarly, the natural landscape can be emphasized in Åre marketing communications thus, attracting the potential tourists, who prefer to enjoy the nature while skiing.

Besides, shopping as an activity is highly demanded by Russian ski tourists during their trips. This activity also might be combined with alpine ski experiences, due to a well developed transport connections to Östersund city, which also provides shopping opportunities, as well as other cultural and urban attractions.
5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

By employing personal interviews and focus group discussions, this study examined the travel motivations of ski tourists from Saint-Petersburg, as well as the attributes of supply organization. All respondents who have taken leisure trips to ski destinations wanted to relax and get away from daily routine. Participants from the second focus group participated in winter sport tourism because they wanted to learn more about different culture and interact with local people. All ski tourists with international ski travel experience were motivated to participate in different winter activities, such as downhill skiing, dog sledding tours, visiting museums and attending bars and restaurants. However, the current study also found that the interviewees joined the trips because they wanted to enjoy the landscapes and nature. Saint-Petersburg is known to be a fast-paced city, and it is not uncommon that people there experience enormous stress. Winter sport tourism provides a great opportunity to escape from bustling city life by visiting ski areas in the search for inner peace.

Russian skiers’ perceived value attained through their previous trips. Moreover, brand awareness was an important factor for alpine ski tourists from Saint-Petersburg. Awareness influenced their willingness to travel to ski destination, while these tourists noted that advertising affected their preferences and ski destination choices.

Winter sport tourism also allowed Russian tourists to experience “good life” and had a great influence on participants. Particularly, this experience made them more conscious about themselves and the world around them, which is similar to Canadian Tourism Commission (2003) findings that ski destinations provide places with attributes that support a beautiful, relaxing, clean but somewhat sedate image.

The service entities, such as air companies could cooperate with travel agencies in Saint-Petersburg to provide an easy route to Åre resort by direct flight. This cooperation would create mutual benefits for both the flight Helsinki-Östersund and the ski destination, for instance, it could raise public awareness and interest in winter tourism.

This study also identified factors that affect the decision of activity based market segment to participate in future winter tourism. As Russian tourists are motivated to engage in winter tourism by the desire to relax, and also they travel to ski destinations to interact with local community, ski destination should be aware of this and organize winter tourism activities that involve awareness of other outdoors and indoors adventures, such as dog sledding, snowmobiling activity or trips to local museums.
Since Russian tourists from Saint-Petersburg have busy work lives and time for them an important constraint, therefore, SkiStar AB could promote its destination through different websites, for instance by cooperating with Russian online retailing stores who sell skiing equipments. As a result, Åre ski destination could benefit by raising awareness not only in Saint-Petersburg, but in other Russian regions as well. Thus, at the same time Russian ski tourists could save time and be aware about winter tourism in Sweden.

5.1. Data limitations and further research

As convenience sampling was used to select a small sample of participants for this qualitative research, the results are less likely to be generalizable to the whole population in Russia. The opinions obtained from the first focus group, which included members who travelled only to Russian ski resorts, might be not sufficiently diverse to provide in-depth understanding of Russian alpine ski tourists. Therefore, second focus groups session was conducted with individuals from diverse backgrounds and with different winter tourism experiences to better understand the motivations and perceived value of alpine ski tourists who travelled abroad.

All the respondents who engaged in winter sport tourism were in age category between 23-26 years old, however future studies can look at people who have participated in winter sport tourism with different demographic characteristics (e.g. older people, those who are at least 40 years of age).

None of the previous studies have examined the motivations and perceived value of young Russian ski tourists from Saint-Petersburg. This study has addressed this research gap. For a more comprehensive understanding of Russians ski tourists, research should also be done to examine the motivations and perceived value of older alpine skiers in order to identify the similarities and differences between two groups. Furthermore, studies should also be conducted to examine if the differences exist between alpine ski tourists who have different geographical background.

This study would help to identify whether it is necessary to develop different marketing strategies of SkiStar AB to promote winter tourism in Saint-Petersburg. Finally, not only SkiStar AB tourism planners should examine the expectations and perceptions of the Russian travellers, but also Åre Commune being visited by Russian tourists and other different parties, including governments and the local communities.
6. REFERENCES


### 6.1. Web links


# 7. APPENDICES

## 7.1. Appendix 1 – Focus Group Questions

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<td>How do usually get to the destination?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are you satisfied with the accessibility of transportation?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>How many days do you stay in ski resort?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What kind of accommodation do you prefer?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Behaviour (Motivation Intention Cultural and International tourism)</td>
<td>Why did you decide to ski abroad?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are you planning to ski abroad again?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What problems did you face at ski destinations?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attraction sector Events Adventure</td>
<td>Where do you prefer to ski?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What are you doing during the ski vacation except the skiing? What is your most attractive activity at the ski destination?

**Psychographic variables**

| Personality Awareness | Are you familiar with ski destination Åre? If yes, how did you get to know about the destination? If not, how do you think, what is the reason for the lack of information? | ✓ | ✓ |

When do you ski?

Are you skiing if it is pretty cold outside?

Do you like to participate in local events during the ski vacation?

| Life style | How often do you ski? | ✓ | ✓ |

What are your skills?

Where do you prefer to ski?

| Service | Where do you prefer to eat? | ✓ | ✓ |

What is the best and worst experience in service?

How can you estimate the service quality abroad? | ✓ |
### 7.2. Appendix 2 - Individual interview questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>SUPPLY</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Natural resources</strong></td>
<td>Åre’s geographical situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Built Environment</strong>&lt;br&gt;Infrastructure</td>
<td>How does the ski resort attract the tourists?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there the support of the governance?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Who is financing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you have the conferences and meetings with Russian ski resorts?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Operating sector**<br>Accommodation<br>Transportation<br>Hotel management | How do tourists get to the destination? |
|  | Where do tourists stay? |

| **Spirit of hospitality and cultural resources**<br>Activity<br>Shopping<br>Entertainment | What kind of activities do tourists prefer? Is it only skiing? |
|  | How does the ski resort attract the tourists? |
|  | What do Russian tourists like most in Åre? |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Other issue</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seasonality</strong></td>
<td>When is the most visited period?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is the visitors flow (arrivals)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impact</strong></td>
<td>What is the impact of Russian tourists on income?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.3. Appendix 3 - Outbound Russian tourists in 2010 and 2011 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Beginning of 2010r.</th>
<th>Beginning of 2011r.</th>
<th>Changing the number of Russian citizens who left for abroad in 2011 Compared to the same period of 2010 (+ - %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>108 846</td>
<td>148 007</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>68 307</td>
<td>98 098</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business trip</td>
<td>8 348</td>
<td>11 188</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>1 485 599</td>
<td>2 027 356</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>310 111</td>
<td>416 379</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business trip</td>
<td>60 594</td>
<td>107 310</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>171 737</td>
<td>196 361</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>112 632</td>
<td>124 311</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business trip</td>
<td>14 878</td>
<td>17 889</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>102 605</td>
<td>119 554</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>62 539</td>
<td>76 053</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business trip</td>
<td>10 129</td>
<td>11 221</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>22 711</td>
<td>36 110</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>11 050</td>
<td>21 232</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business trip</td>
<td>2 809</td>
<td>3 538</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 Federal Agency of Tourism in Russia
7.4. Appendix 4 - Key themes in focus groups sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Focus Group 1</th>
<th>Focus group 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency</strong></td>
<td>• overcrowded&lt;br&gt;• public transport&lt;br&gt;• lifts&lt;br&gt;• friends&lt;br&gt;• night ski&lt;br&gt;• cottage&lt;br&gt;• hotels,&lt;br&gt;• socializing</td>
<td>• infrastructure&lt;br&gt;• transportation&lt;br&gt;• friends&lt;br&gt;• family&lt;br&gt;• cheap&lt;br&gt;• not crowded&lt;br&gt;• organization&lt;br&gt;• relax&lt;br&gt;• go away from routine life&lt;br&gt;• private cars&lt;br&gt;• cottages&lt;br&gt;• sauna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specificity</strong></td>
<td>• stolen equipments&lt;br&gt;• crowded&lt;br&gt;• people skiing all day</td>
<td>• seat lifts&lt;br&gt;• high price for water&lt;br&gt;• benches and cafes on the slopes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotion</strong></td>
<td>• passion&lt;br&gt;• enthusiasm&lt;br&gt;• listen to each other delightedly</td>
<td>• restrained&lt;br&gt;• listen to with interest&lt;br&gt;• calm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extensiveness</strong></td>
<td>• over crowded</td>
<td>• infrastructure&lt;br&gt;• organization&lt;br&gt;• relax</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>