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**CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY OF WINTER SWIMMING IN OULU**

Importance of Service Quality

# CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY OF WINTER SWIMMING IN OULU

Importance of Service Quality

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Thesis  
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Oulu University of Applied Sciences

## ABSTRACT

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The thesis topic originates from the author's experience and it was conducted as a commission for Oulun Talviuimarit ry. The objective of the thesis was to make the customer satisfaction survey. The purpose of this thesis is to provide information for commissioner about how satisfied winter swimmers are with existing premises and conditions. Other purpose was to get new developing ideas concerning additional services that could lead to better experience of service quality. The topic was chosen because of the existing problems in premises in the winter swimming place in Tuira. Moreover the topic is relevant because a need for sauna for Oulujoki river bank has been discussed for many years. The commissioning organization needed a customer satisfaction survey in order to discover the state of customer satisfaction as there is no previous study made about service quality within winter swimmers.

The theoretical framework consisted of defining service quality and customer's perception of service quality. Christian Grönroos' (2009) theory of service quality measurements was used as conceptual framework in this thesis. Furthermore Parasuraman's, Zeithaml's and Berry's (1988) ServQual tool was used in this project.

The empirical part of survey was conducted as a quantitative research. In order to design relevant questions for survey, the empirical part of the research was divided for two phases. In the first phase the questionnaire was pretested and face-to-face discussions were conducted in National Championships in March 2014 in Oulu to increase understanding. Second phase of quantitative research was conducted by sending a survey link using the Webropol software for 150 existing members of Oulu's winter swimmers, of which 44 responded. This study will help the association and city of Oulu to improve its service quality for the customer satisfaction. The main findings indicate there are lot of different opinions about service quality and how it should be developed. The results can be used when designing a functional winter swimming place in Oulu in the future.

Keywords: customer satisfaction, service quality, winter swimming, survey

# CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION .....	5
1.1	Research problem and approach .....	6
1.2	The commissioner .....	7
1.3	Winter swimming .....	8
1.4	Effects of winter swimming .....	9
2	INTERNATIONAL WINTER SWIMMING .....	11
2.1	Winter Swimming World Championships.....	11
2.2	International Ice Swimming Association (IISA) .....	14
3	INTRODUCTION TO SERVICES .....	16
3.1	Service characteristic.....	16
3.2	The services marketing mix - The 7Ps of Services Marketing .....	17
4	SERVICE QUALITY .....	19
4.1	Service quality measurement .....	19
4.2	SERVQUAL measurement model .....	20
4.3	Model of total perceived service quality .....	21
4.4	The seven criteria of good perceived service quality .....	21
5	RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....	24
5.1	Research design.....	24
5.2	Quantitative research .....	25
5.3	Survey data collection method.....	25
6	RESEARCH RESULTS .....	27
7	CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION .....	35
	REFERENCES.....	37
	APPENDICES.....	39

# 1 INTRODUCTION

There are hundreds of winter swimming places in Finland. The popularity of winter swimming is remarkably increasing in Finland and around the globe. The commissioning associate Oulun Talviuimarit ry. (later referred as commissioner) has been trying to give new ideas for city of Oulu to develop functions and maintenance in Tuira's winter swimming place for years. The purpose of this survey is to discover the level of customer satisfaction in order to point out existing problems.

Wish of Suomen Latu is that the word for ice swimming/ avantouinti attempts to get gradually rid of, and the emphasis is to use more international winter swimming as a name for this particular sport. Due to this I am using word winter swimming in my thesis. Ice swimming -word can be used, for example, when referring to the Finnish national championship level ice swimming. (Laakkonen, M. 2013, Thesis).

Oulu's Rantasaunaseura has been dreaming of having a sauna in Tuira's winter swimming place for many years. They have already planned finance of construction expenses and whole concept of functions. There is no plans to stress city of Oulu about need of financial support. According to chairman of Oulu's rantasaunaseura Markku Seppänen there is a strong need of sauna in Oulu. There is a lot of potential for this idea, because floating sauna in Oulujoki river bank has been very popular and gained a lot of positive feedback in summers 2014 and 2015. There is also an opposite opinion about the need of sauna and group of winter swimmers have collected an address against sauna in summer 2013. They are afraid of increasing fees, because many swimmers are retired people and livelihood is not so high. (Kaleva 6.5.2015).

According to Tyrväinen&Korpela (2009,57) the importance of taking care of human beings health is increasing globally, due to challenges of working life, work related diseases and urbanization. Cases of stress related diseases, mental illnesses, overweight and lack of exercise have increased dramatically during recent few years in many European countries. Increasing number of cars and modern information technology has an effect on population's manners of living and physical education also losing touch with nature are globally bothering human beings. Winter swimming as a hobby brings people closer to nature and helps balancing their mind and body health.

## 1.1 Research problem and approach

Research problem in this study is the extent to which service quality should be improved. The answers for the research problems are studied through the survey. The possibility to ask winter swimmers outside of Oulu in National Championships in March 2014 directly face-to-face about their experiences is furthermore valuable, and gave a lot of knowledge in order to design questionnaire properly with relevant questions.

Survey's answers remain anonymous within this thesis. This chance is used to research the expectations and the perceptions of Oulu's winter swimming service quality. The theme of this study was previously decided in understanding with Maarit Sihvonen. As literature of service quality is already having a ready method called SERVQUAL, therefore it will be used as a support in analyzing the results. The method combines customers' expectations and perceptions and therefore is suitable in this thesis. Not only to analyze the results, but also to give a background to the research questions asked from the swimmers. The questions were created after first getting familiar with the theory of service quality SERVQUAL method. The method itself consists of five dimensions namely, tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, which can be used in a quantitative study with a survey. The dimensions will support this thesis when analyzing the results. In a quantitative research a survey is created based on the mentioned five dimensions of SERVQUAL. Oulun Talviuimarit ry. is non-profit association, thus aspect of thesis is different than profit-orientated business organization.

Main research questions:

1. How does the customer experience the current service quality?
2. What does the customer wish from the service provider?
3. What are the developing ideas to increase the service quality?

Customer satisfaction survey was conducted according to these determinants and questions will be answered by this research work.

## 1.2 The commissioner

The establishment of the association of Oulun Talviuimarit is related to docent Pirkko Huttunen. She organized a briefing of researched information "cold resistance of winter swimming" in Kastelli's research center 30.1.1996. As a group of audience of briefing were Oulu Winter Swimmers Association's founder members: Anneli Pietilä, Ari Kähkönen, Marja Toiviainen, Juha Mustikka, Heli Pakarinen, Petteri Heino. Docent Pirkko Huttunen has written a prestigious handbook of winter swimmers together with Pasi Heikura and Taina Kinnunen (EDITA 2002). Registered Association, Oulun Talviuimarit ry. was founded 23.5.1997, and is one of Suomen Latu ry. membership associations. The current chairman of Oulun Talviuimarit ry. is Maarit Sihvonen.

Their operational concept is to promote winter swimming and to raise members' holistic health. To implement these aims association organizes various recreational and training opportunities. The aim is to raise the winter swimming appreciation and publicity and find new members this way. The association collects and disseminates information on winter swimming. The association does not want in any way to change, restrict or impede non-members good winter swimming hobby.

Business idea is to provide members with a varied activity conditions for high-quality and to improve wellness and sports activities. The aim is that Oulu's Winter Swimmers ry. is known as a versatile expert and wellness provider as well as high-quality event organizer. The association also aims to increase the enthusiasm to experiment and to practice winter swimming and to promote the positive effects of winter swimming.

Oulun Talviuimarit ry. is in co-operation with the city of Oulu, Oulun Latu ry:n, Suomen Latu ry, Oulun Rantasaunaseura ry, Oulun Pyrintö ry. and Lääkärikeskus Mehiläinen Oy. The largest effort in years 2014-2015 has been done by planning, organizing and executing the ice swimming Finnish championship competition in Oulu 5.-8.3.2015. The association provides information for its members about the various training courses, lectures and seminars.

The association encourages members to take care of themselves' wellbeing and exercise regularly by swimming and participate various winter and summer swimming events. The objective in public relations is to be featured in local media and provide writings and articles. Another aim is to participate in various events whenever it is possible. The association's web site and internal email connections will be further developed and updated. The aim is also to enlarge co-operation in many directions and activate members to participate in activities. At the moment there are 250 members in Oulun Talviuimarit ry.



*FIGURE 1: Winter swimming place in Tuira, Oulu, cited 9.11.2015*

### 1.3 Winter swimming

Winter swimming is increasingly popular recreational and health exercise in Finland. About 3% of Finns, which is about 150 000 people, regularly take part in this exercise, which involves taking a dip in ice-cold, natural waters regularly throughout the winter season. Lots of people find winter swimming through curiosity, and continue the swimming hobby for pleasure. (circumpolarhealthjournal, cited 10.9.2015.) Winter swimming provides a safe extreme-sport experience and encourage mindfulness. It is economical and natural recreation. Winter swimming started to develop towards well-being exercise between 1980-1990 decades. In Finland there are over 200 winter swimming places, which are registered by Suomen Latu (Suomen Latu 2014, cited 28.5.2015.) Winter swimming is also a popular recreation throughout Europe, especially in Russia, England, Latvia and Slovenia. Recreational and competitive swimmers from Finland and from the rest of the world gather yearly in Finland for the winter swimming Finland's Championship event arranged by Suomen Latu. World Championship games are organized every other year. The 9th World Championship Winter Swimming was held in 2014 in Rovaniemi, Finland. Next ones will be 2016 in Thymen, Russia, where they expect participants from more than 15 countries (internationaliceswimming 2014, cited 28.5.2015). Also local clubs have their own guided activities, training and events, referring to this, social aspect is also important in this hobby. Winter swimming is ideal to busy people, since it does not consume much time.

## 1.4 Effects of winter swimming

Winter swimming releases pituitary gland endorphins. Amplified endorphin release increases a sense of pleasure and lowers pain threshold. Beta endorphin release causes dependency. Brain controls body temperature in hypothalamus, and the endorphins are released from there. Sympathetic nervous system activates, brown fat increases and sensitivity to cold decreases. Heart beats faster and blood runs faster and superficial veins contract-less heat loss. Heat generation increases, when adrenal gland releases adrenaline and cortisol. The sense of cold increases when the skin's temperature falls. Less blood flow in superficial veins causes oxygen deficiency in muscles, which feels like pain. Winter swimming affects systolic blood pressure. Cold water raises blood pressure, but blood pressure falls if you swim during winter time regularly. Winter swimming provides healthiness in following ways:

- Relaxes and improves your mood.
- Improves energy levels and quality of sleep.
- Retains skin elasticity.
- Improves circulation and digestion.
- Lowers blood pressure.
- Improves tolerance to cold.
- Helps your immune system fight infectious diseases.
- Ease joint and rheumatic pains.

(Suomen Latu, cited 10.9.2015)

According to Pirkko Huttunen's research "winter swimming improves general well-being".

"Many swimmers also believe that exposure to ice-cold water is beneficial to their health. However, most of the evidence supporting this contention has been anecdotal in nature, or came from studies based on small samples. Two previous studies reported that winter swimming abolishes general tiredness, improves mood, decreases fatigue and boosts self-esteem. It also relieves pain in many diseases, such as fibromyalgia and rheumatoid arthritis. Whole body cryotherapy, in which patients are exposed to very cold air (-110°C) is used in the treatment of rheumatic diseases. After the treatment, patients are painless for two, three hours. The purpose of the present paper was to study the effect of regular winter swimming on the general well-being of the swimmers. It aimed to confirm subjective reports of positive effects on the somatic and mental health of winter swimmers.

Forty-nine voluntary Finnish winter swimmers induces a stress reaction, activating the sympathetic nervous system and increasing the secretion of catecholamine, especially noradrenaline (2). This

is probably one factor behind the refreshing and pain-relieving effect of winter swimming. The change in plasma adrenaline seems to be dependent on its level prior to an exposure. Low levels may increase, whereas high levels may drop during swimming (2). Changes in the functions of both the autonomic and central nervous systems induced by the cold may have a role in the regulation of mood and pain threshold. Adaptation to cold by repeated exposures to cold water may increase the ability to withstand other kinds of stress. Improvement of general well-being via adaptation to oxidative stress is a benefit induced by regular winter swimming. (circumpolarhealthjournal, cited 10.9.2015)

300 swimmers have taken part in the winter swimming survey in England. Three quarters believed that cold water swimming is addictive and that it improves circulation and the immune system. Half believed that it improves metabolism and complexion. And one in four believed that it burns up fat and improves libido. Research undertaken by the South London Swimming Club's SLSC in 2013 finds out, that cold water swimmers believe that a chilly dip promotes well-being in the mind and body. Many describe the practice as addictive.

The research is published in Cool Swimming by Jonathan PD Buckley. This basic guide to cold water swimming includes the research results, an overview of scientific research, a potted history of cold water therapy and South London Swimming Club's tips on safe cold swimming. Most agreed that cold water swimming helps alleviate depression. The consensus was that braving the cold connects them with the natural world. It boosts self-confidence and resilience, provides great camaraderie and encourages an alternative view of life. One point is also to get out of the comfort zone. (jpd Buckley, cited 28.5.2015)

## 2 INTERNATIONAL WINTER SWIMMING

This chapter will be presenting how large sport activity is in question in an international field.

Internationally winter swimming as a hobby has increasingly grown its popularity, figure 3 shows statistics on it. This should be taken into consideration in future planning in Oulu, and how much effort is enough to achieve international standards when organizing competitions in Oulu. This kind of event is a serious tourist attraction, and might benefit the economy of Oulu.

International Winter Swimming Association (IWSA) is the pre-eminent global organization dedicated to developing safe, cold water swimming events. IWSA offers comprehensive advice on safety, pool preparation and especially what swim distances can be sanctioned based on the prevailing air and water temperature. Association also helps with research on the health benefits of cold water swimming. (winterswimming, cited 2.10.2015)

### 2.1 Winter Swimming World Championships

The first Winter Swimming World Championship (WSWC) was held in Helsinki, Finland, in year 2000. Since that year Finland has hosted 6 times the WSWC. Outside of Finland the competition has been held in the following countries: Slovenia, Great Britain and Latvia. Next the 10<sup>th</sup> WSWC will be held in Tyumen, Russia, which is the capital of Siberia, in March 2016. It is estimated that about 1500 people are going to participate in this competition. Figure 2 demonstrates winter swimming world championships-statistics.

Competition series are from 25 meter to 450 meter swimming. Swimming styles are freestyle and breast stroke depending on the series. There is also a series without a time limit.

## Winter Swimming World Championships - statistics

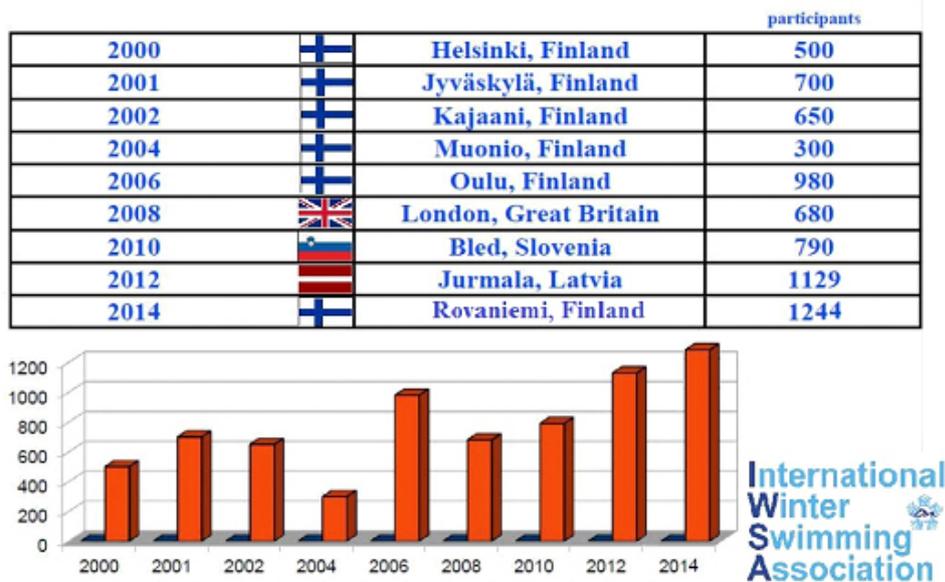


FIGURE 2: Winter swimming world championships-statistics, cited 2.10.2015

The International Winter Swimming Association has announced the inaugural Winter Swimming World Cup Series for 2015-2016. The first five events to be added to the World Cup are:

- Jelgavas Roni Cup (Latvia, 7 November 2015)
- Big Chill Swim (UK, 6-7 February 2016)
- Scandinavian Winter Swimming Championship (Sweden, 13-14 February 2016)
- Pirita Open (Estonia, 27 February 2016)
- Winter Swimming World Championships (Russia, 8-12 March 2016)

“We are delighted to announce the World Cup Series, that continues the development of a great lifestyle and sport,” said IWSA President Mariia Yrjö-Koskinen. “With more opportunities to experience the exhilaration of cold water swimming in a safe environment, we look forward to welcoming new people to our great events.”

The events will also feature the IWSA's new water temperature classification categories. Each category represents a temperature band and depending on the location of the event, swim distances will range between 25m, 50m, 100m, 200m, 450m and 1000m (1km).

(winterswimming, cited 2.10.2015)

Classification of the winter swimming championships (events)  
will be approved and provided by IWSA rules system for A, B, C categories

Category	Name (water)	Water Temperature (Celsius)	Water Temperature (Fahrenheit)	Swimming Distances (metres)						
				25	50	100	200			
A Category ≤ 200 meters long	Ice Water	-2 up to +2 (including)	28,4 up to 35,6 (including)							
B Category ≤ 450 meters long	Freezing Water	+2 (excluding) up to +5 (including)	35,6 (excluding) up to 41 (including)	25	50	100	200	450		To qualify for 450m, must have previously swam 200m in category A or B
C Category ≤ 1000 meters long	Cold Water	+5 (excluding) up to +9 (including)	41 (excluding) up to 48,2 (including)	25	50	100	200	450	1000	To qualify for 1000m, must have previously swam 450m in category B or C

FIGURE 3: Water Temperature Classification Categories A, B, C, cited 2.10.2015

The IWSA has become increasingly aware of the large differences in both air and water temperatures experienced by swimmers throughout all our event locations. Due to the undeniable need for safety, the IWSA has introduced three classification categories for championships events that takes into account these temperature differences. It has also stipulated what swim distances each category can sanction with the longer distances set for Category C. There is also a clear requirement that participants wishing to enter a 1000m swim, must have previously completed a 450m swim in the same season. (winterswimming, cited 2.10.2015).

## 2.2 International Ice Swimming Association (IISA)

The International Ice Swimming Association (IISA) was formed in 2009. The IISA's vision is to increase the uptake of Ice Swimming experiences through exposure to 1km events and to formalize swimming in icy water. Association passion is to spread knowledge of swimming in icy waters and try to expand it around the globe. Their vision is to include swimming as a category in the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games sport for the 2022 Winter Games2022 and work forward to do it globally recognized sport

IISA introduced the Ice Mile as its ultimate achievement of swimming in ice waters. An Ice Mile is One Mile in water of 5C or less. The swim must be unassisted and with one pair of goggles, cap and standard swimming costume. The Ice Mile is the ultimate personal challenge that should be followed with all the safety and controls in place.

One female swimmer from Finland, 22 years old Elina Mäkinen, has won 1 kilometer swim in March 2015 IISA 1<sup>st</sup> World Championship in her series and has ranked second best time in the world. (internationaliceswimming, cited 11.9.2015).

### IISA` Safety Protocol

1. Swimming and swim racing in water temperature of 5°C is a very dangerous exercise. The swimmer must be familiar with the possible risks of cold-water swimming.
2. IISA cannot verify every swimmer's claim of record achievements. IISA can only demand certain medical and previous experience accreditation as best effort of regulating Swimmers' qualifications. Some accreditation will have to be provided by either an accredited professional or by a signed affidavit by the Swimmer him/herself. Swimmers are expected to be 100% honest about their medical condition, history and experience. Lack of adherence to this could result in placing the swimmer's life at risk.
3. The Event plan and management must provide for a checklist in terms of IISA requirements.
4. The Event management must provide for every risk eventuality to the swimmers, spectators, staff and anyone involved in the event.

5. Fatalities or emergencies are real possibilities in such events, and the management should make sure it has done everything possible to prepare for and manage such outcomes. Each Swimmer, however, must assume responsibility for his/her own decisions and actions.
6. If at any stage the Event Management perceives risk and believes it cannot attend to further eventualities, it is within the Event Safety officer and/or the Event Director's discretion and duty to pause or terminate the event with immediate effect.
7. All swimmers must have their heart rate, blood pressure and resting ECG (EKG) taken at least 30 minutes before the swim (core body temperature testing is optional).
8. The Safety Officer has the right to disallow a swimmer to swim or place him/her under medical supervision until the Safety Officer is satisfied that the swimmer is fit to participate.
9. Each swimmer must have his/her heart rate and blood pressure measured as soon as possible during the recovery process.
10. The minimum age for a Swimmer in an IISA Event will be 18 years old at the time of the Event.
11. IISA recommends that all swimmers refrain from the consumption of any alcohol at least 24hrs before any ice swim or race is undertaken.
12. There is no maximum age limit to qualify for the Events, however, the Event Committee will treat applicants over the age of 65 years old, with extra caution at its discretion. (internationaliceswimming, cited 24.11.2015).

### 3 INTRODUCTION TO SERVICES

The following chapter describes service characteristics and the service marketing mix, the model of the seven Ps, which consists of product, place, price, promotion, people, process and physical evidence. The service is at least to some extent, the process consist of a series of intangible operations, where the functions offered solutions for customer´s problems. The process includes many connections between the customer and the service provider. (Grönroos, 2009, 76-77.)

#### 3.1 Service characteristic

There are many definitions for services, but some characteristic come out more often in literature. Services are processes, performances, services and deeds. Services cannot be touched, seen, or felt and are this way intangible. (Zeithaml etc. 2000, 2.)

Characteristics between goods and services have they own inherent differences existing characteristics. Figure 4 shows four characteristics of services. Services are intangible because they cannot be touched, felt, or seen. They are performances or actions rather than objects. Services are heterogeneous, because no two customers are precisely alike. Customers have their own unique demands or experience. Ensuring consistent service quality is challenging, because heterogeneous across time, organization, and people. Simultaneous Production and consumptions meaning customers participate in and affect the transaction. Frequently customers will interact with each other during the service process and as a result affect each other´s experiences. Perishable refers to the fact that services cannot be returned, saved or stored. (Zeithaml etc. 2000, 12–14; Parasuraman, Zeithaml) Service is consumed at the point of delivery, and not be able to owned. The process through which it is delivered, the person who delivers it, and the environment in which it is delivered become an indicator of whether a customer leaves satisfied and if they will want to return. (entrepreneurial- insights, cited 9.9.2015.)

Intangible
Heterogeneous
Simultaneous Production and consumption
Perishable

FIGURE 4: Characteristics of services (modified Zeithaml etc. 2000, 12).

Services have basically three characteristics:

1. The services are processes, which consist of functions or a series of functions. The processes take advantage of several resources for example people, knowledge, systems and infrastructure.
  2. The services are produced and consumed at least to some extent simultaneously.
  3. The customer participate at least to some extent in the production process with the service provider.
- (Grönroos, 2009, 79-80.)

### 3.2 The services marketing mix - The 7Ps of Services Marketing

Originally 4Ps marketing mix was designed in an era where most businesses sold products. It consists of price, product, place, and promotion. Good customer service, and user experience was no understood.

To compensate this problem, Booms and Bitner proposed their extension to create the services marketing mix for 7Ps model, which is still be used today to plan strategies in a more holistic manner and be able to compete better in markets. Three added concept are people, physical evidence, and process. (entrepreneurial-insights, cited 9.9.2015, Zeithaml etc. 2009, 24.)



FIGURE 5: Elements of 7Ps Marketing Mix, modified smartdraw, cited 9.9.2015

## The 7Ps elements

The product should fulfill target customers' expectations about quality and purpose. Optimal situation is to ensure repeat experiences of comparable quality and a consistently excellent user experience.

Pricing becomes very complex in services, because "unit cost" needed to calculate may be difficult to define. The place should be located somewhere the target customers are able to find it without too much effort, because the service is produced and consumed in the same place.

Promotion fulfills the same functions as it does in any other parameter. All communication tools such as, personal selling, advertising, public relations and sales promotion should be used to bring across the message of the organization in a way that fits the specific group of customers who would want to hear, see and touch, be it informative or emotionally attractive.

People are very important element of the service marketing mix. Usually all services depend on people to perform them, because the provider is service. E.g. when dining at a restaurant, and the waiter is rude if a rude, the entire experience will be categorized as bad service. This is why many businesses invest in recruiting process to find correct people. Also customers not only influence their own outcomes, but they can influence other customers as well.

A process needs to be clearly defined for the service provider and need to create balance between customization and standardization. Implementing the process by manner what the customer is essentially paying for.

Physical environment. The customers pay attention to the location of company and other physical surroundings. The facility design is also important, such as cleanness and atmosphere. These are part of service experience, and customers make their assessment of service quality based on these features. Company is able to provide sense of security paying attention environment is calm and soothing.

(Zeithaml etc. 2000, 19. entrepreneurial-insights, cited 9.9.2015.)

## 4 SERVICE QUALITY

This chapter analyzes service quality and how to measure it. As the theses topic focuses on customer satisfaction survey it is essential to understand theory behind it in order to design relevant questions for survey. Quality is often considered as one of the key factor in achieving competitive advantage. Quality and value of services is depending of the two dimensions – technical and functional. When the company chooses only technical dimension to develop business to wanted direction, it is potential risk, because the consequence can be that competitors are soon copying the idea and eventually end up in a similar solution. (Grönroos, 2009, 104.) Acceptable technical quality depends on the customers' expectations, needs, and companies' strategy. Even if the technical quality would be good, customers do not necessarily associate services as high quality. When company wishes to fulfill customer expectations it should pay attention for functional quality, those who take it into account has better chances to differentiate services against competitors and are able to achieve appreciation of the customers' compared to those companies that leave the functional dimension aside. (Grönroos, 2009, 104.)

### 4.1 Service quality measurement

Different kind of expectations can be measured, due to this measuring service quality is often problematic. Mainly the service quality research has focused on developing direct methods for measuring the service quality. In literature two measurement tools occurs:

1. Attributes based measurement tools, which are often used in companies or in academic researches. The most known is SERVOQUAL measurement model, which be presented in the next chapter.
2. Qualitative measurement tools, which studying of critical incidents and first tools are based on attributes describing the characteristics of service. This model is not so commonly used. (Grönroos 2009, 113-114.)

Naturally service quality has to be measured and probably it would be easiest by measuring the customer satisfaction. In my research case service quality is dominant element in customer's evaluations, because of its pure service provider characteristic.

## 4.2 SERVQUAL measurement model

Total perceived service quality has been studied extensively since the mid-1980 and SERVQUAL is the most known methods for measuring service quality. Berry, Parasuraman, Zeithaml execute to research perceived quality components, and how the customers evaluate quality of service. As an outcome of the research ten components of service quality were created. The ten components are tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, competence, courtesy, credibility, access, security, communication, and understanding the customer. Later on the ten components were limited to five. The five dimensions with which help the customer assesses the service quality are: tangible, assurance, reliability, responsiveness and empathy. (Grönroos 2009, 116.)

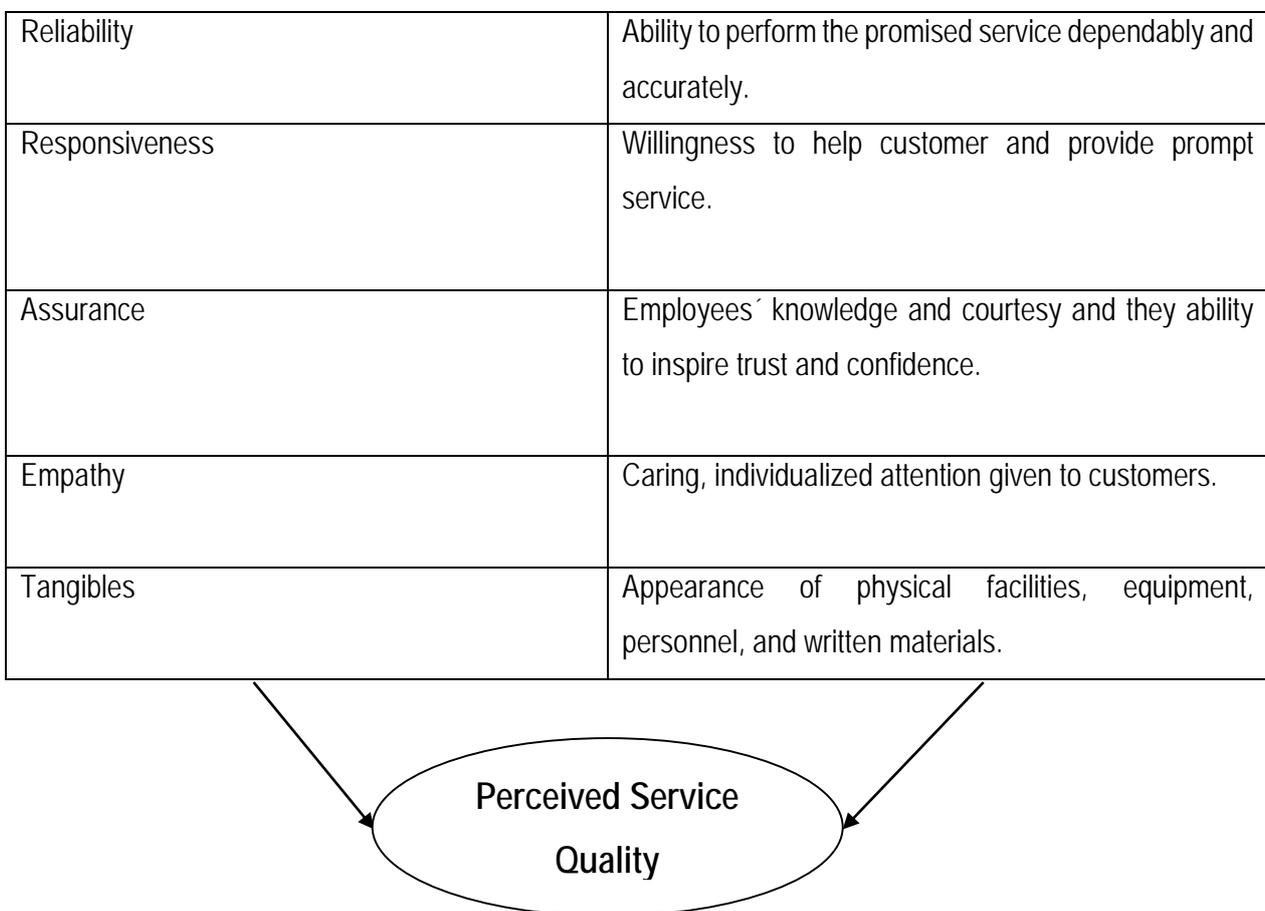


FIGURE 6: Five dimensions of service quality (modified Zeithaml, Bitner 2000, 82).

The 5 dimensions represents differences between consumers´ expectations and perceptions received from the service experience along each quality dimension. SERVQUAL is a method based on the five dimensions for measuring how customers perceive the service quality. When using this method, the chosen process of the dimensions and attributes should be carefully modified and implemented to every specific case because all dimensions concern different services. (Grönroos 2009, 116-117.)

### 4.3 Model of total perceived service quality

Model of total perceived quality, the way how a customer perceives the service quality, is not only based on the technical and functional dimensions. The model shows how the experienced quality is connected into traditional marketing actions, and eventually leads to total perceived quality. The expected quality depends on several marketing activities: marketing communication, word of mouth, the image of the company or a part of its, public relations, and the needs and values of the customers. Marketing communication consists of advertisement, direct marketing, sales promotion, internet pages; communication in internet and sales campaigns. Marketing communication is directly in charge of the company. The image, word of mouth and public relations can be controlled only indirectly by the company. These are affected mostly by the company's previous success, eventually the customer needs are influencing to expectations. (Grönroos 2009, 105-106.)

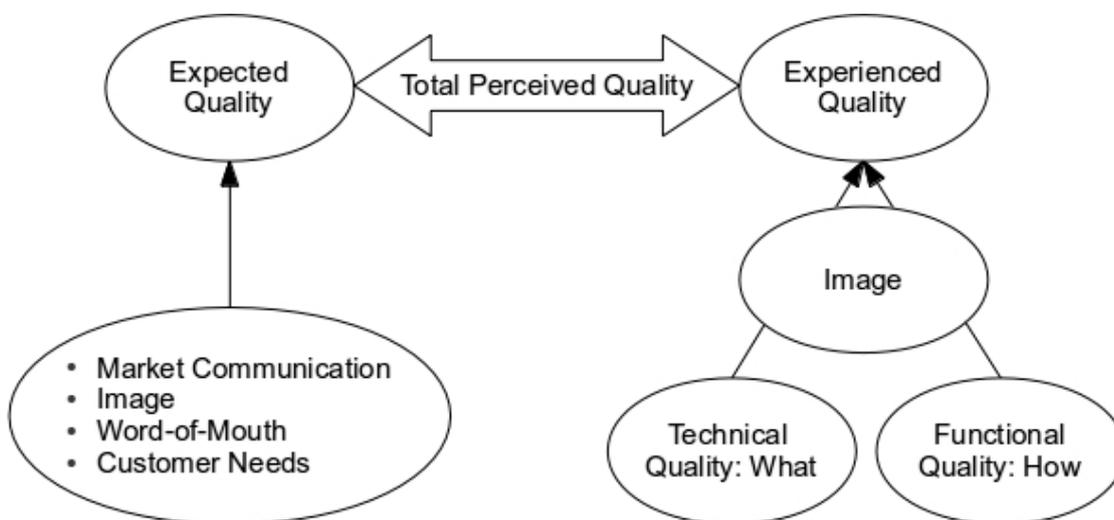


FIGURE 7. Total perceived quality (Grönroos 2009, 105.)

Quality is good enough, when experienced quality meets customer expectations. If the expectations are unrealistic experienced, perceived quality is low. Service provider should promise less and try to provide more quality, which can lead to repeat purchases. Image is essential factor how people perceived the quality. Image problems are usually not so well understood. (Grönroos 2009, 106.)

### 4.4 The seven criteria of good perceived service quality

Figure 2 based on studies, theory and practical experiences, which matter to customers when they estimate the perceived service quality, which is combination of several researches and theoretical analyzing. Most of the

criteria, attitudes and behavior, accessibility and flexibility, reliability and trustworthiness, and service recovery, and servicescape, are linked to the functional dimension. Servicescape means the physical environment and other factors describe to the environment of the service meeting. In addition, professionalism and skills belong to the technical dimension and reputation and credibility to the image.

### **1. Professionalism and skills**

- Customers understand service provider has enough resources to solve the problems.

### **2. Attitudes and behaviour**

- Customers expect the service provider pays attention and is motivated to solve customers' problems kindly and in spontaneous manner.

### **3. Approachability and flexibility**

- Customers feel that service provider's location, opening hours and operative functions are easy to access and ready to adjust to customers' demands.

### **4. Reliability**

- Customers are able to rely on service provider's promises and service functions.

### **5. Servicerecovery**

- Customers understand if something goes wrong, service provider performs immediately needed actions to keep the situation in order or finds a new acceptable result.

### **6. Servicescape**

- Customers understand that service provides support to positive experiences related to physical environment.

### **7. Reputation and credibility**

- Customers are able to trust service provider functions and to get value for money. Service provider's values are order to meet customer expectations.

*FIGURE 8.*The seven criteria of good perceived service quality (modified Grönroos 2009, 122.)

This result in an interpretation when a company seeks for a higher service level. The focus should be on the functional dimension. Nevertheless, all the seven criteria are important to recognize. The importance of criteria is changing depending on which organization is in question and the type of the customers. In special circumstances might occur factors of good service quality where mentioned criteria does not be suitable for utilize. (Grönroos 2010, 121-122.)

## 5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 5.1 Research design

It is very essential to understand the importance of theory and methodology when writing good theses. Research is a process of planning, executing and investigating in order to find answers to our specific questions. The goal is to get reliable answers to our questions. Investigation need to be done in a systematic manner to way it is easier for others to understand the logic and believe in our report. (Ghuri, P. &Grønhaug, K. 2005, 3.)

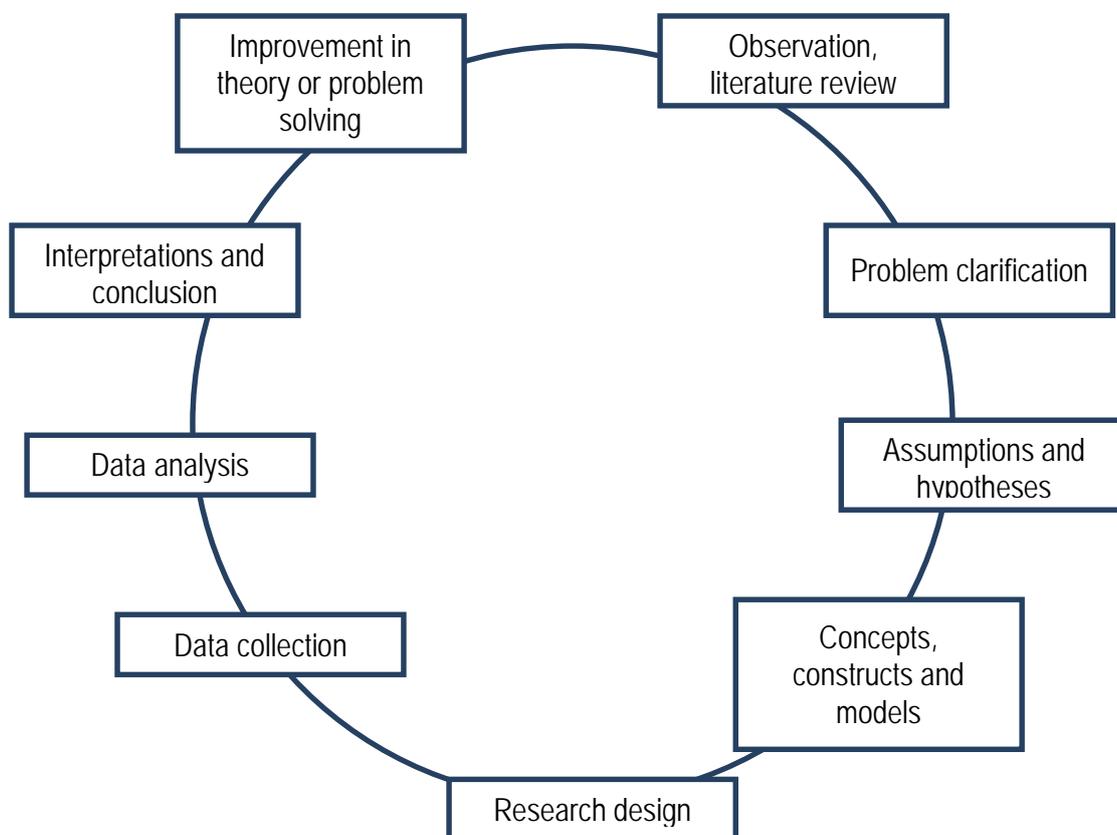


FIGURE 9. The wheel of research Ghauri, P. &Grønhaug, K. 2005, 19)

The figure 9.illustrates the never ending research activity. Conclusions can be drawn through this interpretation, meaning also that researchers coming after us by working in the same topic and will start where we left off, reviewing earlier knowledge, including our study. (Ghuri, P. & Grønhaug, K. 2005, 19.)

## 5.2 Quantitative research

A quantitative research approach was chosen for my thesis due to the study is the survey research. Study is furthermore result oriented, which also supports the use of the quantitative approach.

Quantitative method has an emphasis on testing and verification as well as the method has a logical and critical approach to the analysis of data. When conducting a quantitative research, it is normal for a researcher to form various hypotheses, which are then examined. (Ghauri, etc., 2010, 111.)

The main points in quantitative research are:

- Hypothetical deductive; focus on hypothesis testing.
- Emphasis on testing and verification.
- Generalization by population membership.
- Controlled measurement.
- Focus on facts and/ reasons for social events.
- Result oriented.
- Particularistic and analytical.

(Ghauri,etc., 2005, 110.)

## 5.3 Survey data collection method

This research is a survey research where quantitative research methods are used, because it is result oriented and has a logical and critical approach. Traditional research strategies are divided into following three groups: an experimental research, a case study and a survey research (Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara 2007, 134).

Questionnaires are considered more suitable for quantitative types of research methodology, hence this quantitative research approach was chosen by using survey research as a main study strategy. The reason for this is the research problem and the focus and purpose of the study (Ghauri,etc., 2005, 124.)

When the research problem is detailed, and suitable design and data collection tool developed, the next stage in the research process is to choose those elements from which the information will be collected. One option is to collect information from each member of the population. Another possibility is to collect information from a portion of the population by taking a sample of elements from larger group. Especially for quantitative studies

sampling is extremely important. Saving time and costs are at least two reasons for taking a sample of population when collecting information. (Ghauri, etc., 2005, 145.)

One object in a research is to avoid errors of results, thus it is important to evaluate reliability and validity of the research. There are many methods for measuring results of research. Validity is the ability of a research method to measure what it should measure. For example, a researcher assumes the respondents understand the survey questions in a certain way. Validity decreases, if the questions are interpreted in a different way as the researcher meant. Validity is ensured by using the appropriate research method, appropriate measurement and by measuring appropriate issues. Moreover, reliability means the permanence of the measuring, aiming that, when the same research is done again the results will be the same. (Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara 2009, 231).

In order to design relevant questions for this survey, the empirical part of the research was divided for two phases. In the first phase the questionnaire was pre tested and face-to-face discussions with other winter swimmers around Finland were concluded in National Championships in March 2014 in Oulu. Moreover, discussions with other winter swimmers in Tuira, Oulu during winter 2014, increased the understanding and helped a lot to create appropriate questions.

Second phase of quantitative research was the survey for members of Oulun Talviuimarit ry. The target group was selected among members of Oulun Talviuimarit ry. with e-mail access, because it is easier to collect data when questionnaire was able to send by using Webropol software. The questionnaire was sent for 150 members and the survey was conducted between following dates 13.8-6.9.2015. Selected people had three weeks of time to respond and the response rate was 30 %. The questionnaire questions were designed so that they are linked to the theoretical background of Christian Grönroos' (2009) theory of service quality measurements and SERVOQUL and Parasuraman's, Zeithaml's and Berry's (1988) ServQual tool.

## 6 RESEARCH RESULTS

The survey was sent for 150 members of Oulun Talviuimarit ry., and was conducted in Finnish language. Commissioner have an e-mail register of members, therefore the survey was easy to conduct this way. Number of respondents was 44, except questions 13 and 16 where it was 26. An approximate response rate was 30 %.

### 1. Gender

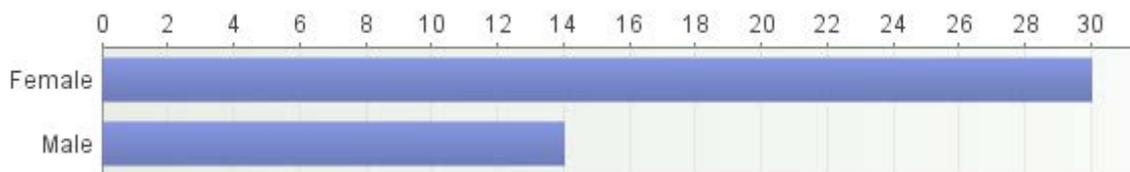


TABLE 1. Gender

The gender distribution demonstrates that women are majority respondents in this survey, 68%.

### 2. Age

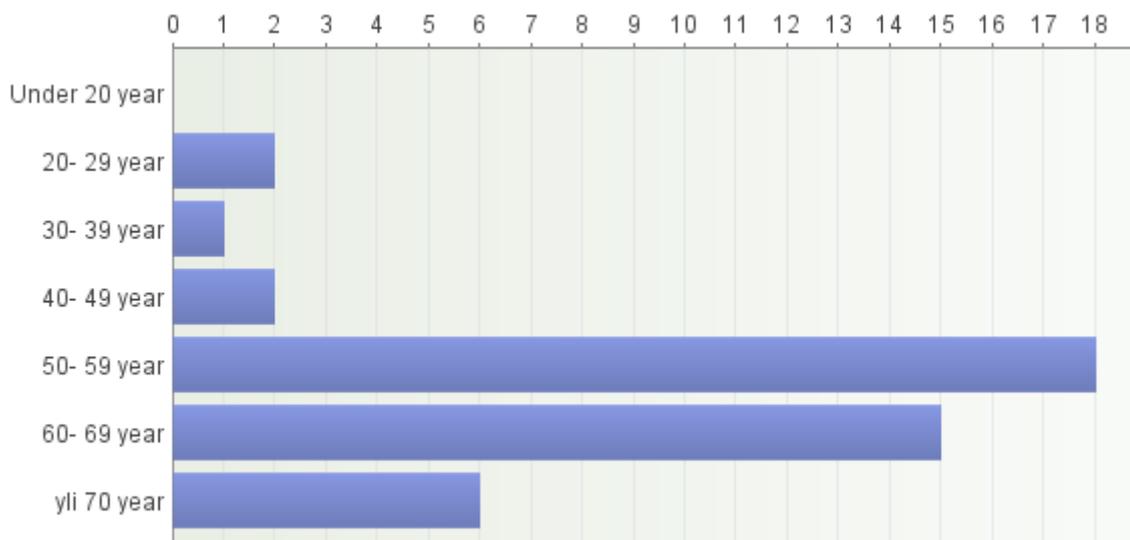


TABLE 2. Age

The age distribution demonstrates that age groups 50-59 (41 %) and 60-69 (34 %) participated for the survey most actively.

### 3. How many times do you go winter swimming?

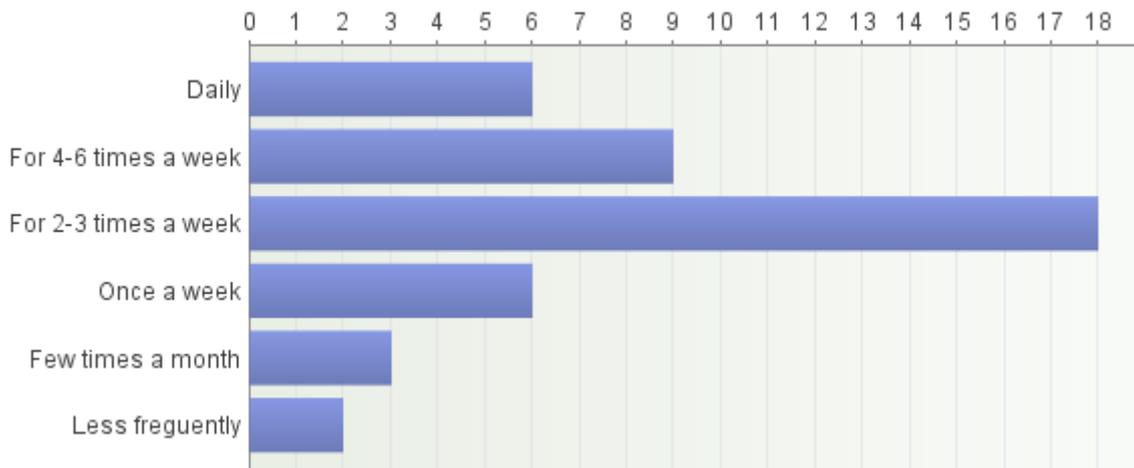


TABLE 3. Amounts to exercise winter swimming

In the question 3. the most common amount to exercise winter swimming was 2-3 times a week, 41 %.

### 4. How long have you done winter swimming?

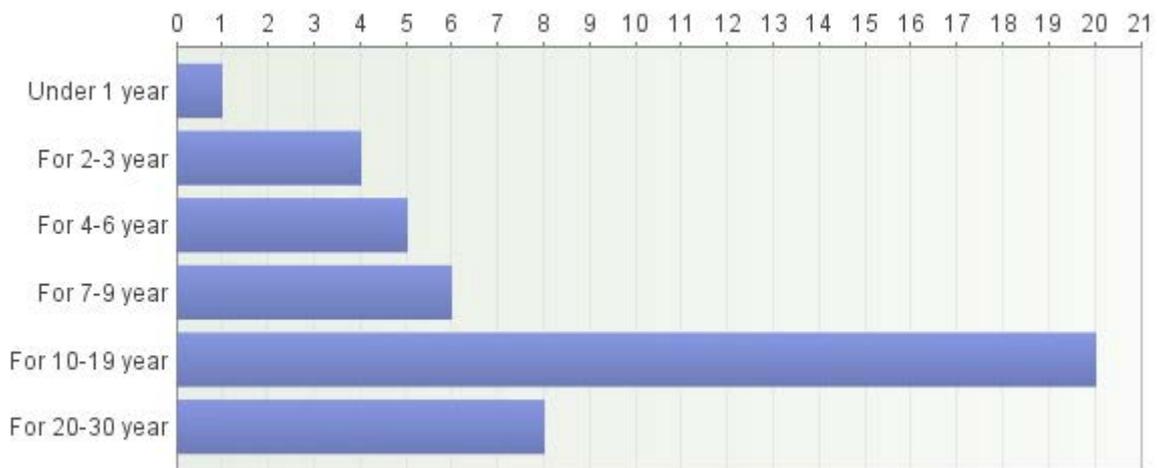


TABLE 4. Duration for doing winter swimming

In the question 4. the most common answer how long have you done winter swimming was 10-20 years, 45 %. This result indicates answers quite high age distribution.

Table 5. demonstrates the most common reason for starting winter swimming is friend’s recommendation, 41 %. Second common reason is well-being, 27 %.

**5. For what reason you started winter swimming?**

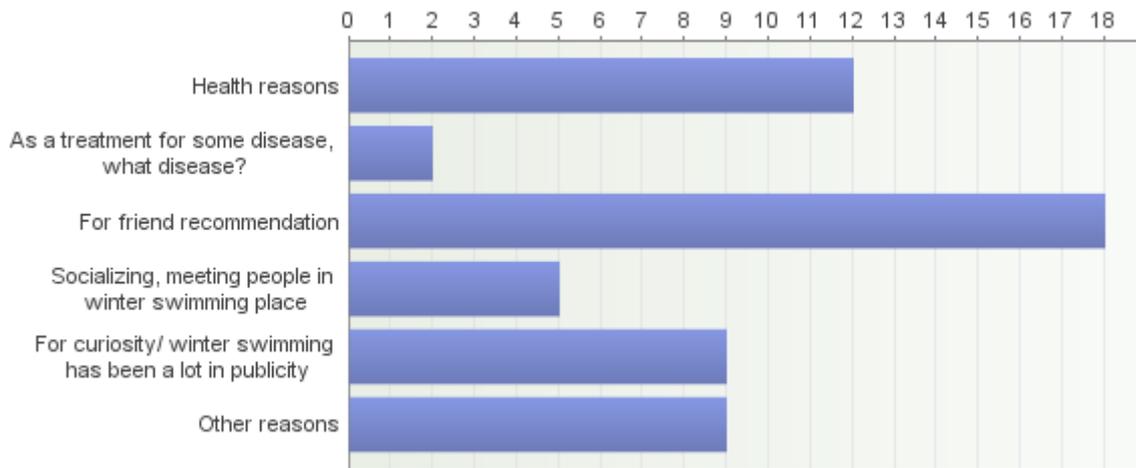


TABLE 5. Reasons to start winter swimming

From the open-ended answers findings are:

- To refresh oneself after hard working day
- Winter swimming relieves bad circulation of blood, osteoarthritis and fibromyalgias
- Winter swimming relieves symptoms of menopause
- Group of workplace’s employees go swimming while lunch break
- Good experience addicted in the army

Table’s 6. answers are mostly rated for opinions that place’s cleanness is good 54% and poor 36%.

**6. How do you evaluate cleanness and tidiness inside of the premises? (shower- and dressing room)**

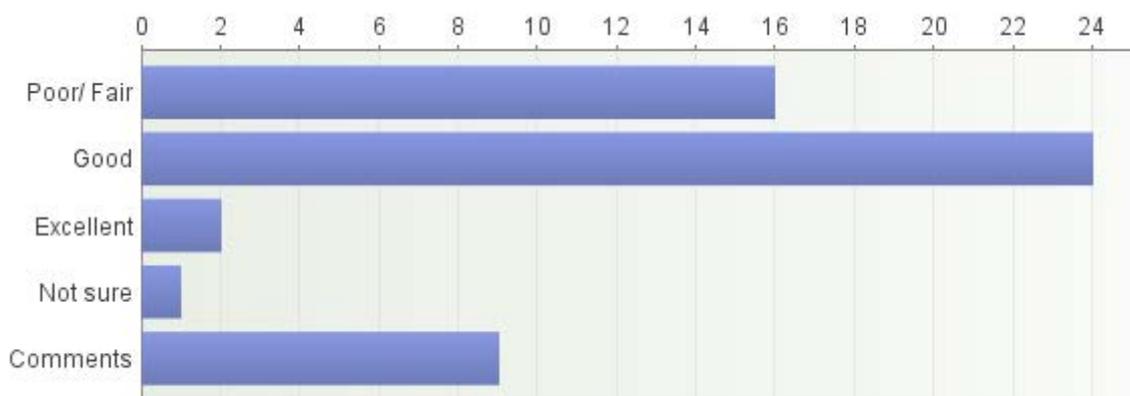


TABLE 6. Cleanness

From open-ended answers findings are:

- Place smells bad.
- There is no floor drain in another dressing room, which might help tidiness when the sand is not frozen.
- Cleaning service should be carried out more often.
- Feet shower would be nice.
- Corners of room are usually dusty.
- Premises are too old and broken to get clean enough.

Table 7. shows that safety issues are evaluated for the level of good (77%) and for the level of poor (20%),

### 7. Winter swimming place´s safety (heated carpet, stairs, handrail, ice hole, condition of pumps, lighting)

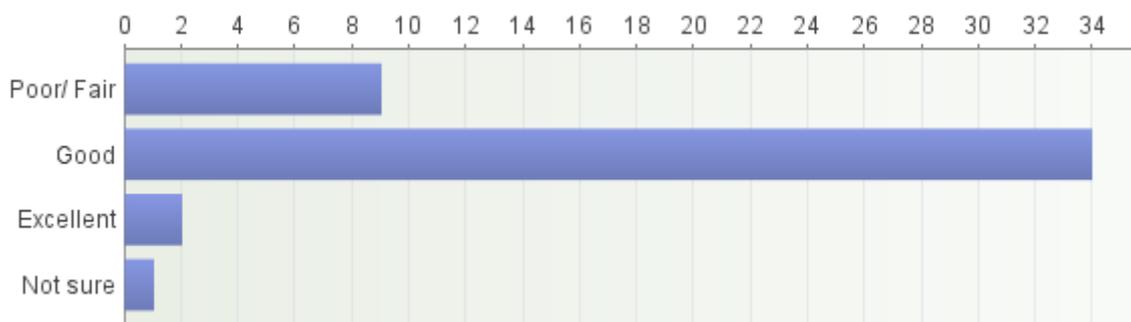


TABLE 7. Safety conditions

Following reasons for poor conditions are:

- Stairs and handrails are icy quite often which is dangerous especially for elderly people.
- Instead of wooden handrails and stairs, should have non- frozen aluminium ones, like another winter in Oulu.
- Heated carpet does not work in very cold climate and is broken quite often.
- Lighting is very bad, compare for skating and skiing areas in Oulu.

Table 8. demonstrates how swimmers evaluate current conditions of premises. 56 % assess condition for level good and 41 % for level poor. Findings for open ended answers were that premises are in very bad condition and might be dangerous for health.

**8. How would you evaluate current condition of the premises in the winter swimming place?**

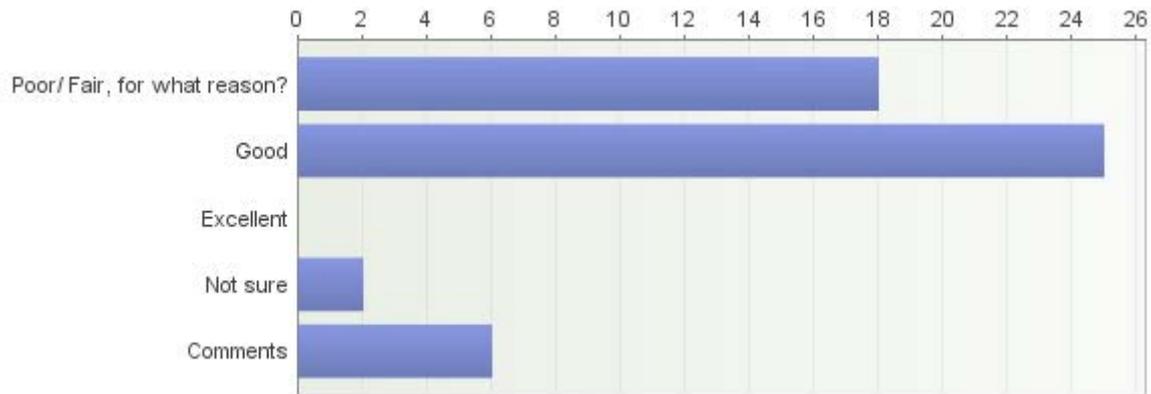


TABLE 8. Current condition of the premises

When asking need of another winter swimming place in Oulu, 36 % of respondents would like to have another place.

**9. Would you like to have another winter swimming place in Oulu?**

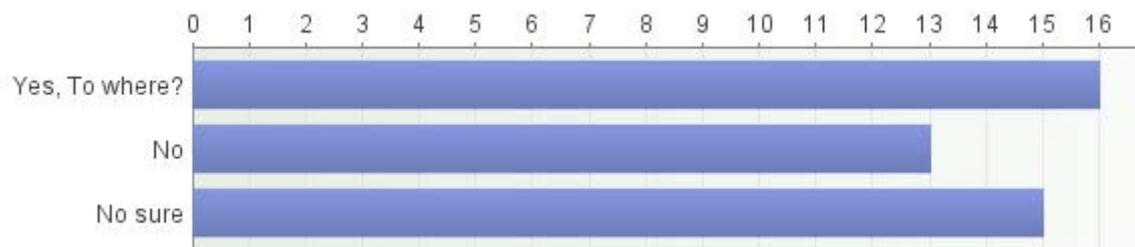


TABLE 9. Is there need for another winter swimming place?

Following suggestions was given:

- Kiiminkijoki
- Merenrantaan
- Värtö
- Kuusisaari
- Tukkiisaari
- Maikkula
- Haukipudas (Table 9.)

Table 10. demonstrates the most desired additional services are cafeteria (30%) and sauna (23%)

10. What kind of additional services would you like to have in the winter swimming place?

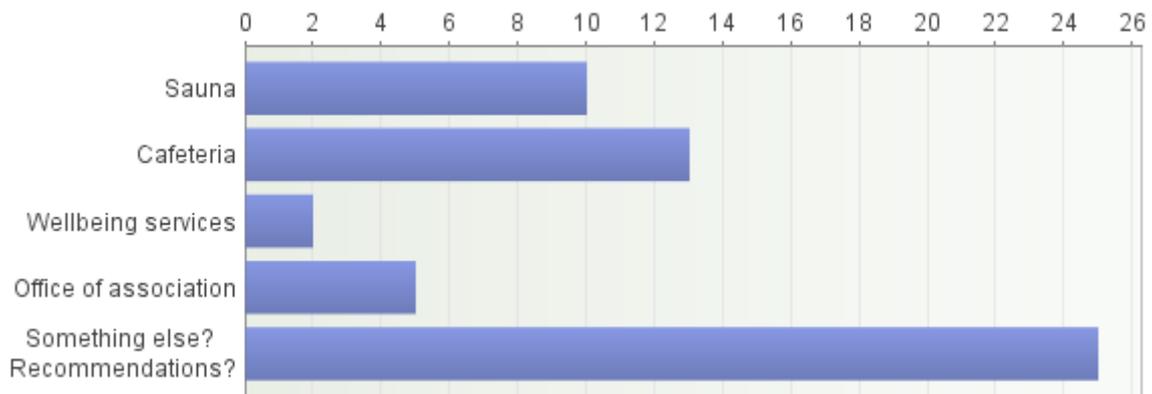


TABLE 10. Additional services

Table 11. demonstrates which factors swimmers value the most.

11. Which factors do you value the most in winter swimming place?

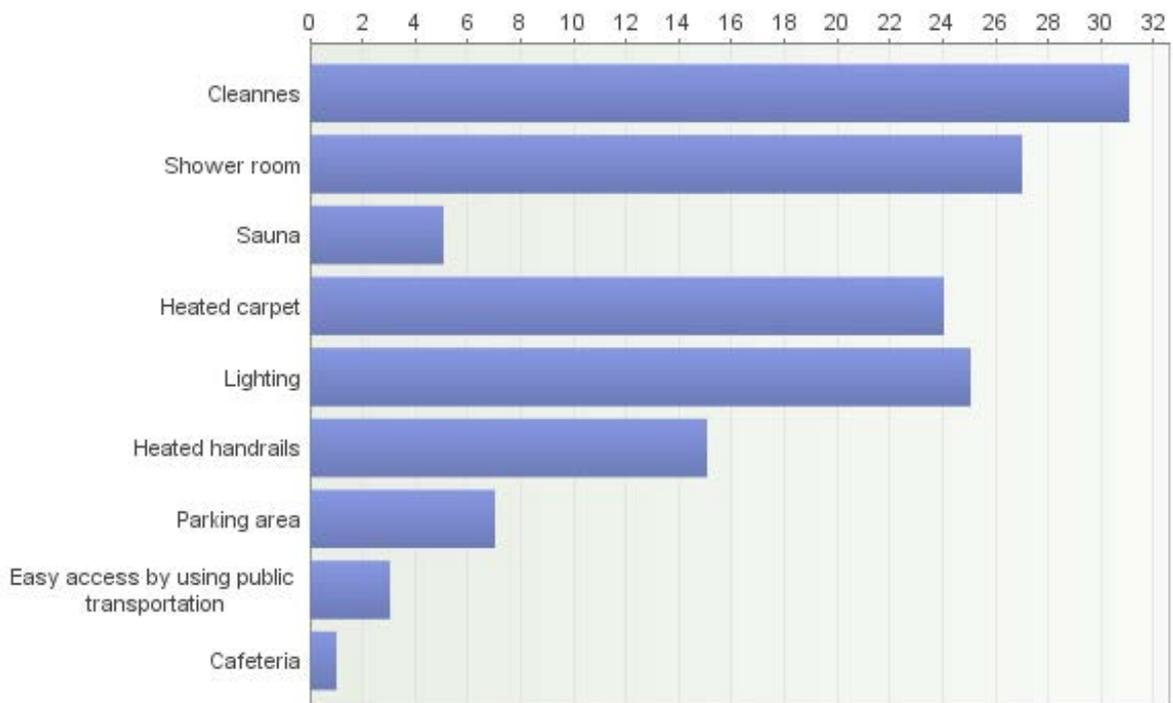


TABLE 11. The most valued factors in the winter swimming place

Rank order as follows:

1. Cleanness

2. Shower premises
3. Lighting
4. Warmed outside carpet
5. Warmed handrails
6. Parking area
7. Sauna
8. Easy access by public transportation
9. Cafeteria

**12. How much extra would you pay, for example for using sauna?**

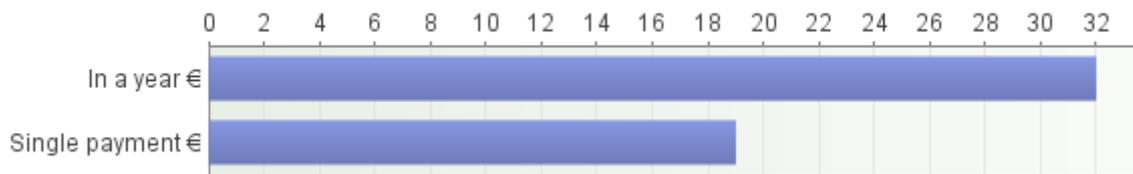


TABLE 12. Willingness for extra payment

Question 12. indicates that mainly people are ready to pay 0-10 € / year, second common answer was 20-50 €/ year.

Single payment per each time was approximately between 0-5 €.

**13. Developing ideas for winter swimming place and what is your vision for the best possible winter swimming place on earth?**

Developing ideas as follows:

- Existing location is good, but premises should be updated and outside lighting should be much better.
- Premises are too expensive to renovate, should built entire new buildings.
- Need to have lockers in dressing room.
- Location is good, but premise smells very badly of mold.
- Shower for legs beside door.
- At least two showers would be needed.
- Toilets needed to have in all dressing rooms.
- More space would be needed.
- Good mirror and table where is easy to make-up. (before go to work)
- Cleaning service should be also in weekends.
- Sauna would be a nice luxury as well as wellbeing services.
- Cafeteria services would benefit socializing with other swimmers.
- Sauna and cafeteria would bring people just hanging out and might ruin the peaceful atmosphere.
- Existing premises are good enough.
- Most important are safety issues when using walking paths, landing-stage and handrails.
- People referred many placed outside of Oulu where premises are good and included also sauna.

- Swimming area should be deep enough for long distance swimming.
- Should pay attention also outside environment, at the moment like old DDR vegetable warehouse.

Opinions of the best possible winter swimming place on earth as follows:

- Peaceful place in some wilderness river would be my dream place.
  - Joyful, nice place.
  - Cozy atmosphere.
  - In Heinola and Kajaani has nice places.
  - Protection of privacy in important.
  - Swimming place premises should be available all year around.
- When asked would people like to have more social events, 50 % of answerers do not need. Some people would like it, and provide following ideas:

- Get together swimming events.
- Events, just for relaxed small talk.
- Need to have more members to join activities.
- Sauna would be nice for socializing. (Table 14.)

#### 14. Would you like to have more social events with other winter swimmers?

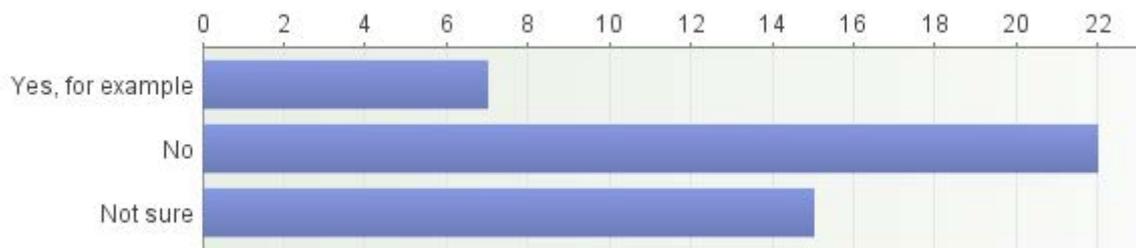


TABLE 14. Needs of social events

The last open-ended question of survey shows that the most suitable way of sharing information was e-mail, (82 %), the second common answer was message board in winter swimming premises. (Table 15.)

#### 15. Where information should be shared?

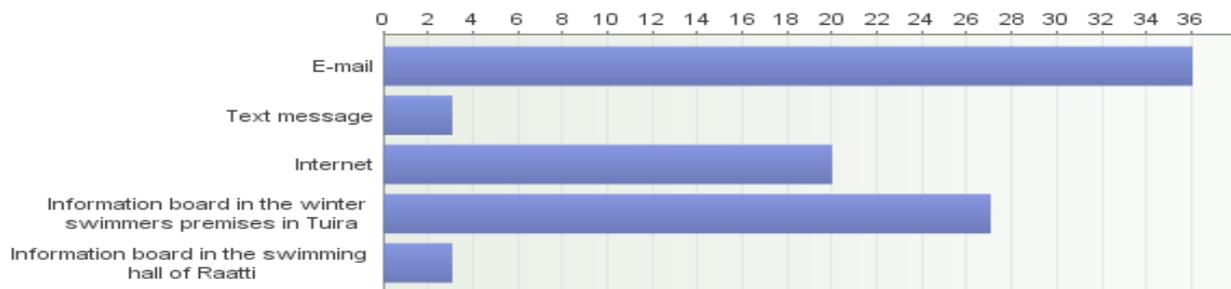


TABLE 15. Channels for sharing the information

## 7 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of the thesis work was to provide the case company with a customer satisfaction survey.

The objective of this thesis was to find the answer to the research question- how does the customer experience the service quality- and what does the customer wish from the service provider.

The results are analyzed to determine the current situation and customer satisfaction level. Answerers or customers gave a lot of valuable feedback especially for open-ended questions. The survey results clearly indicate the importance for improvements of winter swimmers premises. Large number of customers also wished for sauna and cafeteria services. Customers evaluated safety issues for very high level of importance and complain about handrails and the fact that stairs are too often icy. On the other hand, the findings pointed out many opinions that existing premises suits well for the purpose. Those swimmers are afraid that costs are increasing after improvements and hope that if sauna or other additional services would become reality, they still have possibility just swim in the river without extra services in peace and not surrounded by too many people. Winter swimmers have been very pleased to the service of Raatti Swimming hall, where is the key service point.

Commissioner was very pleased to the answering percentage and found this survey as very important knowledge for future developing ideas. Results are also introduced for Suomen Latu ry. and city of Oulu's sport and exercise service office. Those instances appreciated this kind of survey, because there was not survey like this conducted before. The result of survey might have a different results if survey would have been addressed to all winter swimmers in Oulu. Association already have cooperation partner to build up new sauna and other premises, but city of Oulu have not given a permit to start building process. Hopefully they find mutual understanding and are able to start cooperation in future.

Winter swimming is natural way to take care of oneself well-being. It is cheap, simple and time-saving hobby. Ecological footprint is also very good point why this kind of sports should be supported. This sport should been seen more seriously, because it is suitable for so many people. It also relieves different kind of pains, decreasing pain medication. Sauna and cold water swimming is a great tradition in Finland and it is worth of supporting.

In addition, I would recommend later on a new research of this same topic to compare with these existing results. To determine if there will be any changes in customer satisfaction and have any improvements been done based on these results of survey.

My thesis process path has been complex in beginning, but when the topic of my thesis finally clarified it started to mature little by little. The process was motivating, because I knew this really might help to improve Oulu's winter swimming culture. I have been into winter swimming for years, so I felt very close to this topic. I participated also for national winter swimming championships 2015 to get more experience and gathering information from other competitors about referring winter swimming places in Finland, and in order to support composing my questionnaire questions. I was very surprised to get a silver medal in this competition. My next challenge is to participate in World Championships 2016 in Thymen, Siberia. I have learned a lot in this process in every aspect and obviously it has been very educational period in my life.

I would like to thank you my commissioner Maarit Sihvonen, the chairman of Oulun Talviuimarit ry. for the cooperation during my thesis process. Special thanks to my instructing lecturer Ms. Outi Sutinen for guiding me to find right way to finishing this process. I would also like to thank you Head of Degree Programme in International Business Mr. Jyrki Holappa for encouraging me for choosing this topic for my thesis.

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# APPENDICES

## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE MEASUREMENT OF THE SERVICE QUALITY

## APPENDIX 1

### General Information

1. Gender

- Female
- Male

2. Age

- Under 20 year
- 20- 29 year
- 30- 39 year
- 40- 49 year
- 50- 59 year
- 60- 69 year
- Over 70 year

3. For approximately how often you are doing winter swimming?

- Usually daily
- 4-6 times a week
- 2-3 times a week
- Once a week
- Couple times a month
- Occasionally

4. For approximately how long have you been doing winter swimming?

- Under 1 year
- 2-3 year
- 4-6 year
- 7-9 year
- 10- 19 year
- 20- 30 year

5. For what reason did you start winter swimming?

- Healt reasons  
As a treatment for some disease, what disease?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- A friend recommended
- Socializing, meeting people in winter swimming place
- Curiosity/ winter swimming has been a lot in publicity  
Other reasons  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**How do you experience outside circumstances in the winter swimming place in Tuira?**

6. How do you estimate cleanness and tidiness of the premises inside? ( shower and dressing room)

- Poor/ tolerable
- Good
- Excellent
- Not sure
- Comments  
 \_\_\_\_\_

7. How do you estimate safety issues in the winter swimming place? (heated carpet, stairs, handrails, ice hole, condition of water pumps, lighting)

Poor/ tolerable, for what reason?

\_\_\_\_\_

Good

Excellent

Not sure or don't know

8. How would you evaluate current conditions of the premises in the winter swimming place?

Poor/ tolerable

Good

Excellent

Not sure or don't know

Comments

\_\_\_\_\_

### Developing ideas to improve quality of service.

9. Would you like to have another winter swimming place?

Yes, where?

\_\_\_\_\_

No

Not sure or don't know

10. What additional services you prefer to have in the winter swimming place?

Sauna

- Cafeteria
- Well-being services
- Office services of association
- Something else?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

11. Which factors you valued the most in winter swimming place? Enumerate the 3 main criteria with numbers 1,2,3. (number 1. the most important)

Cleanness  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Shower room  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Sauna  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Heated carpet  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Lightning  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Heated handrails  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Parking area  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Easy access by using public transportation  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cafeteria  
 \_\_\_\_\_

How much would you be ready to pay for additional fee, for example using sauna?

In a year €

\_\_\_\_\_

Single payment €

\_\_\_\_\_

13. Developing ideas for winter swimming place and what is your vision of the best possible winter swimming Place on earth?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

14. Would you like to have more social events with other winter swimmers?

Yes, for example

\_\_\_\_\_

No

Not sure or don't know

15. Where should the information be shared?

E-mail

Text message

Internet

Information board in the winter swimmers premises in Tuira

Information board in the swimming hall of Tuira

**16.** How would you evaluate the services in the swimming hall of Raatti and your developing ideas for better service quality.

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## 6.-8.3.2015 in Oulu

## 1. Gender

- Female
- Male

## 2. Age

- under 20 year
- 20- 29 year
- 30- 39 year
- 40- 49 year
- 50- 59 year
- 60- 69 year
- over 70 year

## 3. How often you do winter swimming?

- Usually every day
- 4-6 times a week
- 2-3 times a week
- Once a week
- Couple times a moth
- Occasionally

## 4. How long have you done winter swimming?

- under 1 year
- 2-3 year
- 4-6 year
- 7-9 year
- 10-19 year
- 20-30 year

## 5. County of your residence

- Etelä-Suomen lääni
- Itä-Suomen lääni
- Länsi-Suomen lääni
- Oulun lääni

- Lapin lääni
- Ahvenanmaan lääni

7. Name of winter swimming place / club

---

8. Winter swimming place includes:

- Shower
- Sauna
- Café
- Heated carpet to ice hole
- Heated handrails
- Club's office
- Something else: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Have you satisfied to cleanness of winter swimming place?

- Yes
- No

Developing ideas in your own winter swimming place and what is your vision of best possible winter swimming place on earth?

10. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_