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DALARNA

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Student satisfaction in tourism education



The case of Dalarna University, Borlänge, Sweden

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Abstract

The students' expectations must be met to ensure their overall satisfaction. Because of this student satisfaction has become a measurement tool with which the universities can compete against each other in order to attract potential students and also a higher level of internal and external funding. This thesis deals with students' overall satisfaction in tourism education at Dalarna University in Sweden. It is important to understand what it takes for the universities to be able to produce a motivated workforce for the communities and how satisfied students could help in achieving this goal. Sweden was selected because of the recent introduction of tuition fees, in 2010, which has made it even more crucial to understand the factors affecting students' satisfaction. The method chosen for conducting this study was a questionnaire where the students of Dalarna University were asked to rate different aspects of their overall experience on a Likert scale. The research was conducted via Facebook and email questionnaire. The results show different levels of satisfaction based on the tourism programmes and gender for example. The major finding from this research implicate that the social conditions and surrounding city categories are the most influential when it comes to the overall satisfaction of students at Dalarna University. The results give the university and the city of Borlänge an insight on issues that really matter to the students and how to improve them.

Keywords: tourism education, student satisfaction, Dalarna University, Likert scale, regression analysis, quantitative data

Table of content

1 Introduction	1
1.1 Problem statement and rationale for the research.....	1
1.2 Research aim and questions.....	2
1.3 Thesis outline.....	3
2 Literature review	4
2.1 Students as the customers of higher education institutions.....	4
2.2 Student satisfaction.....	7
2.2.1 Measurement of satisfaction.....	9
2.2.2 Which factors influence student satisfaction?	11
3 Dalarna University as a Case study	14
3.1 The Higher Education system in Sweden.....	14
3.2 Dalarna University.....	16
4 Methodology	18
4.1 Description of population.....	18
4.2 Description of measurement tools.....	19
4.3 Conducting the research.....	22
4.4 Limitations.....	23
4.5 Validity and reliability.....	23
5 Findings	25
5.1 Descriptive statistics.....	25
5.2 Results based on programmes.....	30
5.3 Results based on gender.....	32
5.4 Regression analysis.....	33
6 Discussion	34
7 Conclusion	40
References	42

List of figures and tables

Figure 1. Swedish higher education funding	15
Figure 2. Number of students registered in first and second cycle each autumn semester 1977-2013.	16
Figure 3. Respondent nationality	26
Figure 4. Factors influencing students' overall satisfaction.....	30
Figure 5. Satisfaction levels based on programmes and gender	31
Table 1. Questionnaire results	27

Appendix

Appendix 1 Student satisfaction survey

Appendix 2 Regression results

1 Introduction

1.1 Problem statement and rationale for the research

Tourism courses and programmes have grown in numbers over the past years due to the increase of tourism related jobs and governments seeing its economic potential (Dale and Robinson, 2001 cited in O'Driscoll, 2012). The satisfaction of students participating in these courses has been studied to some extent but researchers do not fully agree on the affecting factors, since these can vary between different countries and universities. The use of student surveys and questionnaires has increased due to the interest in students' opinion (Douglas, Douglas and Barnes, 2006). Several European countries have committed themselves into delivering quality education with similar standards by accepting the Bologna declaration in 1999. The declaration implies for example that the universities have to adopt two main cycles; undergraduate and graduate and also to ensure easily compatible degrees all over Europe (The Bologna Process, 2014).

A review of the literature shows that the issue of student satisfaction has been studied all over the world and a set of factors influencing it can be identified. Rankings, social media and word of mouth promotions all bring pressure to the higher education institutions, since potential students are using these media, when choosing their next education (Cuthbert, 1996 cited in Mai, 2005). This can be also linked to student loyalty which means if a student has been satisfied with his/her studies he/she is more likely to promote and tell about it to other people and also become part of the school as alumni after graduation (Helgesen and Nettet, 2007). Even in countries that do not charge tuition fees for studying in institutions of higher education, the students can be seen as the primary customers (Douglas, Douglas and Barnes, 2006 cited in Wilkins and Balakrishnan, 2013). Student satisfaction has also become a measurement tool with which the universities can compete against each other in order to attract potential students and also a higher level of external funding (Elliott and Shin, 2002; Wilkins and Balakrishnan, 2013). When students are not happy with their education it can cause stress and dropping out of courses and programmes (Aldemir and Gulcan, 2004).

This thesis deals with students' overall satisfaction in tourism education at Dalarna University, since similar studies were not found in Sweden. The Swedish Riksdag

(Parliament) allocates the resources to the higher education institutions based on their performance, meaning if the university gains high ranking in quality evaluations, they will be awarded with additional funding. Sweden was selected because of the recent introduction of tuition fees, in 2010 (Swedish Higher Education Authority, 2014), which has made it even more crucial to understand the factors affecting students' satisfaction. There is a need in the research world for student satisfaction studies in these countries that are just starting to introduce the tuition fees. Dalarna University was chosen because of its international tourism programmes both in first and second cycles. Also the fact that the author herself is currently studying at the Master programme has motivated the choice of study place. Statistics from the year 2008, show that the amount of applicants to Dalarna University dropped (Universitet och Högskolerådet, 2015). There is reason to believe that the amount of applicants would increase again with positive word of mouth and therefore it is crucial to study the satisfaction of already enrolled students. With the declining numbers of enrolment each year the higher education institutions are forced to compete for the new students and try to find more ways to attract the potential students (Enache, 2011; Salter and Tapper, 2002 cited in Lomas, 2007).

Previous studies for example in Poland and Turkey show how important it is for universities to recognise which factors are influencing student satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Similar studies could not be found in Sweden, but some have been made in other Nordic countries, Europe and USA (e.g. Aldemir and Gulcan, 2004; Douglas, Douglas and Barnes, 2006; Gibson, 2010; Gruber et al., 2010; Helgesen and Nettet, 2007; Mai, 2005) and their higher education institutions offering tourism education. It is crucial to understand students' expectations and how they are met so that it would lead to more satisfied students and graduates. It is also stated in a research by Elliott and Shin (2002) that students' satisfaction is the main factor influencing students' motivation towards university studies.

1.2 Research aim and questions

This thesis aims to determine the level and factors influencing tourism students' overall satisfaction with their study experience at Dalarna University. The study will also contribute to the knowledge of whether there are any differences between the satisfaction levels of the Bachelor and Master programmes taught at the university. Similar studies were not conducted in these particular university programmes and therefore the thesis will bring insight to their strengths and weaknesses. Dalarna university will also gain information on the factors related

for example to the buildings of Borlänge campus and its functions, atmosphere such as feeling safe at university and social conditions. This is a way to improve what the university has to offer for its students.

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. How satisfied are the tourism students at Dalarna University with their overall study experience?
2. Which factors influence tourism students' satisfaction with their overall study experience at Dalarna University?
3. What are the differences in the satisfaction levels between the Bachelor and Master programmes?

1.3 Thesis outline

The rest of the thesis is divided into three major parts. Chapter 2 of the thesis is a literature review based on existing knowledge on whether the students should be considered the main customers of higher education institutions. Also issues such as the meaning of satisfaction, which factors influence it and how this can be measured will be discussed. Chapter 3 of the thesis will give an insight to the higher education field of Sweden and the chosen university of study. Chapter 4 will discuss the methodologies used in the research followed by findings in Chapter 5. The thesis will end in a discussion with conclusions and recommendations for future research.

2 Literature review

In this literature review the key issues of the thesis and their importance to the research will be introduced. It is important to firstly look at the different points of view on the matter of the students as a customers, since this can even determine if their satisfaction should be a concern or not, followed by a discussion on student satisfaction.

2.1 Students as the customers of higher education institutions

The starting point for the debate of seeing students as the primary customers of higher education institution is said to date back to the year 1998 when tuition fees were introduced in most parts of the world. This meant that the universities could start taking money for their services and that there had to be a buyer/consumer for it (Brookes, 2003). Yet, literature from the United Kingdom suggests that the students were considered to be the customers even before the introduction of tuition fees (Crawford, 1991 cited in Douglas, Douglas and Barnes, 2006; Watson, 2003 and Narasimhan, 2001 cited in Dean and Gibbs, 2015). As cited in Gruber et al. (2010), Williams and Cappuccini-Ansfield (2007) mention that the introduction of tuition fee is forcing the higher education institutions to pay more attention to satisfying their customers' needs and therefore they are becoming more business-oriented. Securing private funding has also become more crucial to the universities and students are seen as a way to ensure that (Munteanu et al., 2010). The government normally funds the public institutions per student basis like Helgesen and Nettet (2007) show in an example of Norwegian universities, where they receive £ 3000 per student each year. This also leads to the fact that universities need to pay more attention to drop outs and reasons for doing that. The institutions pay more attention to their customers needs in short term and this might cause conflicts with the long term goals (Bay and Daniel, 2001 cited in Parahoo, Harvey and Tamim, 2013). Focusing only on the short-term goals of satisfying one of the customers, the universities might struggle to meet the needs of other stakeholders involved, such as the teachers, private investors and the society (Bay and Daniel, 2001).

Many authors have noted that the universities are like producers, where education is the main service (Atay and Yildirim, 2010; Sevier, 1996 cited in Elliott and Shin, 2002). This means that the students, paying a tuition fee or not, can be considered to be its customers. However in the literature there are many perceptions and arguments on the matter (Finney and Finney,

2010) and it is feared that the student as a customer paradigm affects the pedagogical aims of the institutions (Ng and Forbes, 2009 cited in Bowden, 2011). When the students are asked they normally see themselves as the customers of the university since they are gaining a degree from it. Nevertheless, as Sirvanci (1996) and Helms and Key (1994, both cited in Bay and Daniel, 2001) point out, the students hardly act like customers. They are happy to get more free time with cancelled lectures and when they have to do less assignments for university. A study made in United Kingdom by Lomas (2007) considers the views of the academic staff. From their point of view, perceiving students as customers is changing. This was mainly because the customer should be always right and this is clearly not the case with students. They attend university to learn, not knowing everything in advance (Lomas, 2007). The study also concluded that the students are not capable of reflecting upon their skills before graduating from university, and seeing in practice what they have actually gained from studying for all those years.

In Lomas (2007) Morley (2003) refers to the "industrialisation" of the universities, which can be seen as a growing number of mission statements, use of strategic planning and setting up indicators for performance inside the university organisation. This can also mean that ways of marketing are applied more to the university setting in order to attract the potential students and retain the existing ones (Bay and Daniel, 2001). Nonetheless, for the marketing to work, the university needs to understand what their customers want and which kind of issues are affecting the students' satisfaction (Sojkin, Bartkowiak and Skuza, 2011). As Atay and Yildirim (2010) point out the students are the ones who are using the educational services and giving feedback on the issues they are not satisfied with.

Alternative ways of thinking

The reviewed literature shows different views on whether students are the only group that can be considered to be the customers of universities or not. The parents, future employees, society and investors can all be seen as the primary customers of the university according to some authors (Bay and Daniel, 2001; Gruber et al., 2010; Helgesen and Nettet, 2007). The view on how to define the primary customers differs highly depending on the goals of the institution. If the goal of the university is to produce a skilled workforce then clearly the future employees are also the customers, and if the aim of the institution is to make good research, the research community would be the primary customer (Bay and Daniel, 2001).

Finney and Finney (2010) discuss in their paper the different theories about university customers' behaviour. Two main fields can be identified from the behaviour: exchange theory and service-dominant logic. The exchange theory implies that the customers, in this case the students, will want something in return for their money. This of course applies only to the institutions taking tuition fees. Yet, the student may feel deserving of something after spending so much time at the university and learning new subjects. The student may feel justified with a good grade and a diploma when they have made some kind of contribution to the school. This can be either money or their time spent on the university education. The degree is seen as a way to gain something in the future, perhaps a more highly paid job (Blau, 1964 in Finney and Finney, 2010). When the student is dissatisfied with this kind of exchange, for example if they are getting worse grades than expected, they are more willing to complain and perhaps even drop out of the course or programme.

The other theory, service-dominant logic (Finney and Finney, 2010; Vargo and Lusch, 2004 cited in Bowden, 2011), suggests that the students are willingly participating in the learning process and from that acting as co-producers of the whole education process. The students may be more focused on participation and making the lectures more interesting than the actual result of the course. The service-dominant logic is a two way street between the student and the institution, where both are involved in creating the service and adding value to the experience. However, according to the authors the problem often faced in this kind of theory is that the students are also expecting a good grade since they are participating actively. If they do not get as high grade as expected they might feel disappointed and dissatisfied.

Authors like Lomas (2007) and Bay and Daniel (2001) have agreed to this new paradigm of treating the student as a customer. However, they suggest that students could be seen more as a partner of the university. Also DeShields, Kara and Kaynak (2005, cited in Bowden, 2011) mention that forming a relationship with the students is essential. The students are highly involved in the education, so they are also co-producing it and not just passive consumers. This was also the case in the researches of Finney and Finney (2010) and Vargo and Lusch (2004 cited in Bowden, 2011) that introduced the service-dominant logic. As they point out the experience would not be the same or satisfactory without the participation of the customer, in this case the student. An interviewed psychology lecturer in the United Kingdom

(Lomas, 2007) found out that the students need to invest plenty of time and effort to their education. This kind of partnership is also important since both parties can bring their own skills and knowledge into the equation and grow together. Each student will have their own role to play in this kind of partnership and to deliver their best performance. As Guolla (1999) argues in Gruber et al. (2010) the student can be seen in many ways, for instance as a producer, customer or the product of the university. A similar view of Yang, Alessandri and Kinsey (2008, cited in Bowden, 2011) adds that the students can also be seen as a provider for economic success and as a future donor.

2.2 Student satisfaction

According to Oliver (1997, cited in Gruber et al., 2010) satisfaction can be seen as an outcome of consumption that is fulfilling a certain need or want. This outcome is always positive and pleasant. Dissatisfaction can be seen as the opposite, not fulfilling the needs or wants and being negative and disappointing. Hunt (1977, cited in Clemes, Gan and Kao, p. 295) defines customer satisfaction as "stepping away from experience and evaluating it". Satisfaction in general is said to be affected by a large number of variables such as personal opinion, ones evaluation of the situation and attitudes towards the issue (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980 cited in Munteanu et al., 2010). Appleton-Knapp and Krentler (2006) argue that satisfaction can exist in two different levels: individual encounters and the overall satisfaction for a product. Most of the studies focus on the overall satisfaction with a large number of variables measured.

In the study of Gruber et al. (2010), Elliott and Shin (2002) are cited on the connotations of student satisfaction and if it differs from the customer satisfaction. According to the authors student satisfaction can be defined as a student's continuously evolving perception on educational matters. Another definition by Elliott and Healy (2001, cited in Bowden, 2011) refers to the attitudes that come from evaluating one's experience with education. The authors also point out that the attitude is mostly only short-term. Student satisfaction according to Munteanu et al. (2010) is an important indicator when it comes to measuring the quality of teaching for example.

The literature makes a connection between quality and satisfaction and discusses whether these two mean the same or hold a relation. Chronin and Taylor (1992, cited in Mai, 2005)

argue that high quality service will lead to more satisfied customers. The research also cites Bitner (1990) who makes a distinction between these two definitions, saying that quality is a more general perception on things whereas satisfaction can be linked to any service or product. The author concludes that satisfaction is more related to human emotions and one's own perception on issues and how well the expectations are met. On the other hand, quality can be used as a measurement when comparing two or more things together, therefore it is setting some kind of standard for matters of concern. Student satisfaction is said to have a positive impact on the way the students see the university and its services provided (Helgesen and Nettet, 2007).

Attracting new students and trying to keep the existing ones has become one of the key issues for universities. Previous researches referred in this paper mentioned about student loyalty as if it is like customer loyalty, where a person comes back time after time (Appleton-Knapp and Krentler, 2006; Helgesen and Nettet, 2007). Student satisfaction is said to be directly linked to this production of loyal students. Gazeta Prawna (2011) and Rausch and Hamilton (2006, both cited in Sojkin et al., 2011) found out that in Poland 20-30 % of students do not return to the university after the first summer break.

Literature shows that satisfied students can be seen as an advantage in a competition against other higher education institutions. Satisfied students are more likely to tell good things about their study life at the university and engage themselves in different activities (Alves and Raposo, 2009 cited in Parahoo, Harvey and Tamim, 2013; Douglas, Douglas and Barnes, 2006; Elliott and Shin, 2002; Enache, 2011; Wilkins and Balakrishnan, 2013). Gibson (2010) and Bowden (2011) argue that satisfied students are more loyal to their own university. They finish the programme and also work together with the university after graduation, as an alumni for example. This kind of free marketing is priceless to the university in order to attain more students in the growing competition (Alves and Raposo, 2009). Winsted (2000) and Zeithaml et al. (1990, both cited in Gruber et al., 2010) argue that in order to provide quality service the higher education industry needs to understand what their customers desire. It is crucial for the universities to understand how the students perceive things such as education, teachers and the atmosphere at university (Alves and Raposo, 2009). Dissatisfaction may lead to drop outs, bad student performance meaning lower grades and negative word of mouth promotion. Cullers, Hughes and McGreal (1973) argue that dissatisfied students are more likely to bend the academic rules or not obey them. Gibson

(2010) points out that there has been more interest in recent years from the universities to study especially the reasons for dropping out of the programmes.

Students may choose the universities they wish to apply to and during this application period the universities try to attract potential students with different marketing campaigns (Mai, 2005). Among other things, the potential students make their decisions based on university rankings and recommendations from friends and social media (Cuthbert, 1996 cited in Mai, 2005). As mentioned in the student as a customer debate (chapter 2.1) the universities have also made special statements and created missions to fulfil the students expectations (Elliott and Shin, 2002). By analysing student satisfaction and factors influencing it the universities gain insight on matters that are of importance to the student (Enache, 2011). Student satisfaction or dissatisfaction can have totally different outcomes. When people are happy with something, they are more likely to engage themselves with different activities. In the case of students they need to motivate themselves to study and to achieve higher grades. However, more dissatisfied students may find themselves stressed and in the worst case with psychological disorders and easily dropping out of courses (Öngider and Yüksel, 2002 cited in Aldemir and Gulcan, 2004). Gruber et al. (2010) point out that the education is important to the students and is a great part of their lives. The students need to be motivated in order to gain their goals of passing the exams and finally graduating. The students who are doing well at school are more likely to feel satisfied with their education than those who are struggling with courses (Gruber et al., 2010). As Aldridge and Rowley (1998) and Coates and Koener (1996, both cited in Mai, 2005) argue there is a great need to assess the total student experience and not just one individual aspect of it.

2.2.1 Measurement of satisfaction

It is crucial for universities to understand how the students perceive their education and what are the most important factors relating to their satisfaction (Enache, 2011). This is why the universities need to come up with a system to continuously monitor the changes in student satisfaction. By evaluating student satisfaction the university gains information on its strengths and weaknesses. Ongoing feedback is also a way to ensure that the students will return to the university after holidays (Brookes, 2003; Gibson, 2010; O'Driscoll, 2012). Rowley (2003, cited in Douglas, Douglas and Barnes, 2006) has identified reasons why

student feedback should be collected. These include the ability for students to comment on courses and make future recommendations, for institutions to become more attractive in the marketplace and for the students to state how satisfied they are with their experiences at the university.

As Harvey (2003) explained in O'Driscoll (2012) the feedback from students can be collected at an organisational level, inside a department, from a course module or by evaluating a certain teacher. This shows that student satisfaction can be measured in different levels inside the institution (Elliott and Shin, 2002). The most commonly used method of evaluation is after a completed course but this only implicates the issues concerning the teachers and one course, not the overall impression and satisfaction for the programme. This kind of feedback is used for developing the teaching methods and measuring how effective the education has been. Based on these factors the institutions make decisions for example about staff on matters such as promotions and the need for extra training (Mai, 2005; Wilkins and Balakrishnan, 2013). As Richardson (2005) argues in O'Driscoll (2012) it is important to take a holistic approach to the student evaluation and especially when it comes to satisfaction issues. As Ryan et al. (1995) argue in Helgesen and Nettet (2007) the measurement can be done by asking questions in three different ways: comparing student expectations with the reality, comparing student expectations to the ideal situation or using summaries of related issues. Satisfaction is often measured as either an overall experience or related to a specific issue such as education (Fornell, 1992 cited in Mai, 2005).

Aldridge and Rowley (1998) argue that student satisfaction can be measured in two different ways. Either focusing on teachers and learning itself or assessing the overall student experience. In the past the first focus was more used but nowadays the overall satisfaction survey is seen to be a more effective way to get an overview on issues that matter the most to students (Munteanu et al., 2010). The satisfaction surveys often measure a large number of factors, such as the classroom environment, administration department, IT facilities and atmosphere at the university (Gibson, 2010). Many universities use the satisfaction surveys to make sure that the students are integrated to the higher education system and are familiar with the teaching methods of the university (Alves and Raposo, 2009). The authors point out in their study that the reliability of a satisfaction study consisting of only on one or few factors would be less than the ones with a variety of them. Also the existence of emotions need to be taken into consideration when making the surveys as every person can have their

own reflections on the same issue. Even if two people get the same grades from the same course their satisfaction levels would most probably differ from each other. This can be caused for example by personal issues or so called chemistry between the teacher and classmates (Alves and Raposo, 2009; Appleton-Knapp and Krentler, 2006).

2.2.2 Which factors influence student satisfaction?

Over 15 years authors have tried to cover the areas of student satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Gibson, 2010) so it has been studied in different countries all over the world. It is said to be a complex issue relating to many aspects of the student experience (Sevier, 1996 cited in Elliott and Shin, 2002). The studies show that whenever student satisfaction is measured differences between the results can be found. This is mainly because the variables asked are different and also the students perceive things differently (Alves and Raposo, 2009; Sevier, 1996 cited in Elliott and Shin, 2002). The indicators of student satisfaction also vary from author to author (Munteanu et al., 2010).

Dean and Gibbs' (2015) study results showed that the social factors like feeling safe at university and having close friends can affect the students' overall satisfaction. A similar result was found in a study made in Turkey by Zineldin, Akdag and Vasicheva (2011). Another research made by Hill et al. (2003, cited in Wilkins and Balakrishnan, 2013) concluded that the interaction between students and teachers, how good the lectures are and which kind of feedback the students receive at the lectures from their assignments, are the main factors influencing student satisfaction in the United Kingdom. A study made among eleven European countries by Garcia-Aracil (2009, cited in Wilkins and Balakrishnan, 2013) showed results that the influential factors were interaction among students, functioning libraries and the teaching materials. Gibson (2010, cited in Parahoo, Harvey and Tamim, 2013) examined student satisfaction through nine different variables including academic staff, curriculum, preparation for future, services and facilities, social interaction and student centeredness.

Studies conducted in Poland by Aldemir and Gulcan (2004) and by Sojkin et al. (2011) in Turkey show how similarities in the satisfaction results can be found. The affecting factors in these two countries were falling under social conditions and institutional factors. These

included issues such as quality of education, teaching material, social activities and campus life. Studies cited in O'Driscoll (2012) from Gruber et al. (2010) in Germany and Tsinidou et al. (2010) in Greece show results of teaching, placement opportunities, lecturer support, curriculum structure and administrative services affecting the satisfaction of students. Coles (2002, cited in Douglas, Douglas and Barnes, 2006) found out that the class size is affecting satisfaction, being the smaller the better. Gibson (2010) studied business students and found out that academic factors such as the curriculum and practical skills gained from courses matter the most. In his research he also cited Thomas and Galambos (2004) who argued that the students that are not into studying appreciate non-academic factors such as student life. However, Gibson (2010) found out in his study that these non-academic factors are mostly the ones that cause dissatisfaction to the overall situation. On the other hand the ones who are more occupied with studies prefer the other way around. According to the same study access to campus was one of the main satisfactory reasons for business students.

As Appleton-Knapp and Krentler (2006) mention in their report of measuring student expectations, there are personal factors and institutional factors relating to the student overall experience. In their research they also found out that student- lecturer relationship, contact with classmates and classroom input are related to the students' satisfaction level. A study from Gruber et al. (2010) showed that old and non-functioning facilities can cause dissatisfaction and that the general atmosphere among students and staff is reflected in the satisfaction level. Deming (1982) claimed in his study that the service providers inside the institution play an important role. The people who interact with students should be viewed as positive and helpful in order to satisfy the students. This also shows that the institutions should act more like a service provider.

The research discussed in previous chapters were selected because of their relation to the thesis topic about student overall satisfaction. It is crucial to understand that the students, paying tuition or not, can be considered to be the customers of the higher education. This is especially the case in the Nordic countries since the introduction of tuition fees has just recently begun. Higher education facilities need to realize the importance of understanding their customers' needs in order to satisfy them and produce motivated graduates and gain positive word of mouth promotion.

These worldwide studies showed which kind of factors have been mostly influencing the students' overall satisfaction. Tsinidou et al. (2010, cited in O'Driscoll 2012) mention teachers support, curriculum and administration services, whereas Dean and Gibbs (2015) refer to the importance of social factors in the students' life. Garcia-Aracil (2009, cited in Wilkins and Balakrishnan 2013) bring out the importance of asking questions related to the supporting facilities at the university. These researches were used as information sources for finding the right components for the study at Dalarna University and designing a unique questionnaire. An insight on the measurement of satisfaction levels was needed in order to understand the different ways of conducting a research and finding the most suitable way for conducting the data collection.

3 Dalarna University as a Case study

3.1 The Higher Education system in Sweden

The higher education field is becoming more international every day, since moving for studies or to work in a different country has become easier. The cross-border education has become more easy because of partnership agreements and branch campuses (The Bologna Process, 2009). In Sweden the Government and Parliament are responsible for organizing higher education (Swedish Higher Education Authority, 2014) and it is the government that also funds the higher education courses and study programmes. The Swedish Higher education authority controls the quality of service in the sector and the effectiveness of the institutions (Swedish Higher Education Authority, 2015).

Studying in Sweden is free for all European Union (EU) and the European Economic Area (EEA) residents and the total expenditure by Swedish government per student, per year, in 2010 was around 17 000 SEK (1800 EURO). According to an annual report of the Swedish Higher Education Authority (2014) the Nordic countries invest the most public money for the higher education system compared to other parts of the world. The Swedish funding scheme can be seen in figure 1, which shows that most of the funding for the first and second-cycle education comes from the Government, followed by public agencies. The governmental funding has increased from the year 2004 to 2013 for the first and second cycle studies together with other revenue sources. This could be linked to the introduction of tuition fees in Sweden (Swedish Higher Education Authority, 2014).

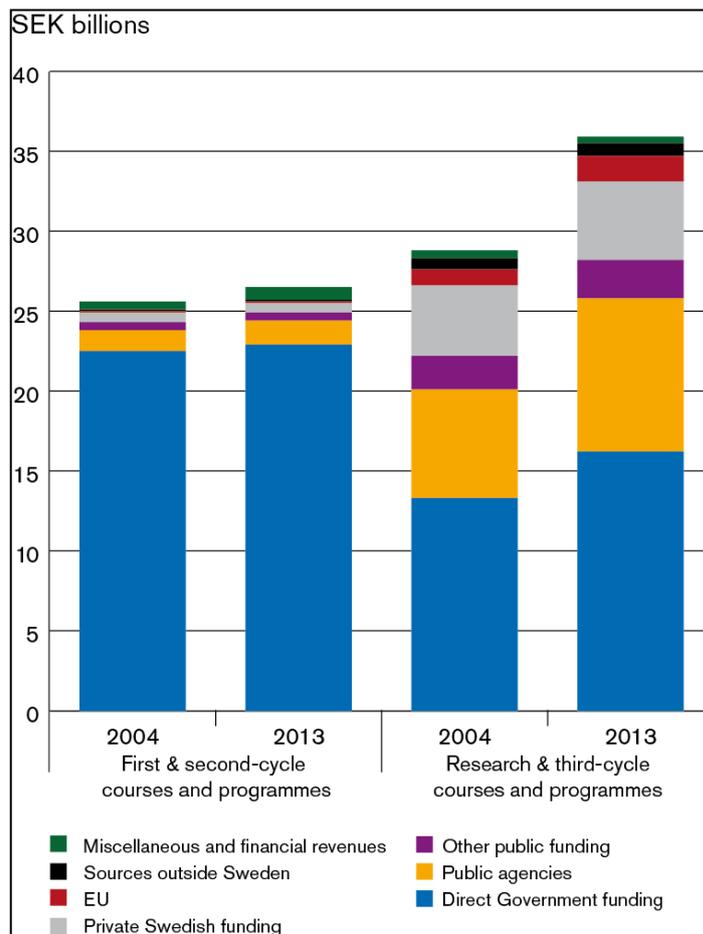


Figure 1. Swedish higher education funding (Source: Swedish Higher Education Authority, 2015)

The Swedish higher education system consists of self contained and full study programmes. These can be divided into three main cycles: undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral. The programmes consist of either 3 year Bachelor (180 ECTS), one year Master (60 ECTS) or a two year Master programme (120 ECTS). The doctoral degree cannot be specified in ECTS and years, since it highly depends on the conducted research (Study in Sweden, 2015; The Bologna Process, 2009). All of the programmes are in line with the Bologna Process, which aims to create a united European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and compatible degrees between the joint countries. The process is named after a city in Italy, in which the declaration was signed by 29 countries, in 1999. In 2009, already 47 countries had joined the Bologna Process (The Bologna Process, 2009).

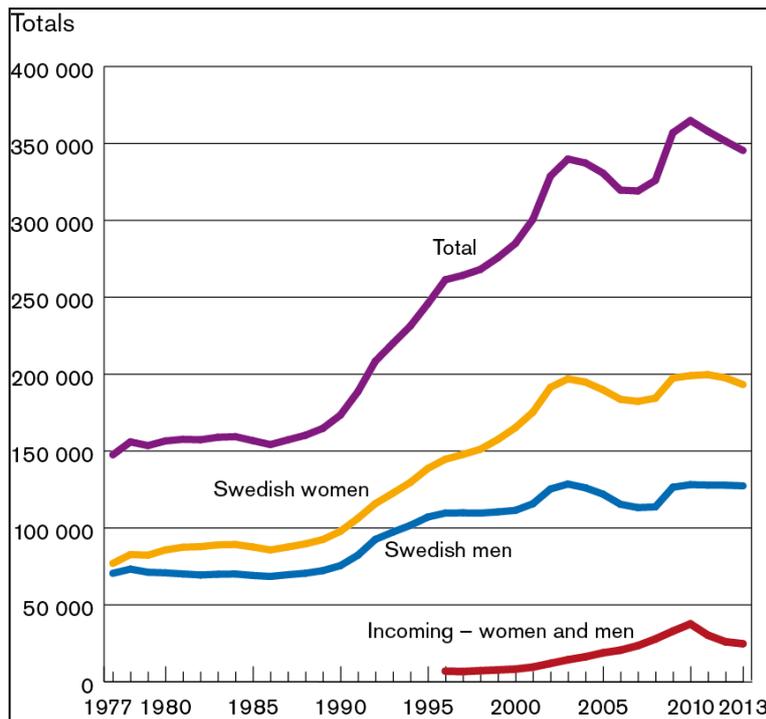


Figure 2. Number of students registered in first and second cycle each autumn semester 1977-2013. (Source: Swedish Higher Education Authority, 2015)

Figure 2 shows the amount of students being enrolled at universities in Sweden between 1977 and 2013. This shows that the amount of students in total was growing rapidly in the 1990's. However between 2010 and 2013 the enrolments started to decline. The international arrivals started in 1996 and grew steadily until the year 2010. The decline of enrolments could be linked as well to the introduction of tuition fees (Swedish Higher Education Authority, 2015).

3.2 Dalarna University

In Sweden the higher education field consists of universities (universitet) and university colleges (högskola). The difference between these two is that the latter one has restricted rights to award Master and PhD degrees (Study in Sweden, 2015). Altogether 14 universities and 17 university colleges operate in Sweden. Dalarna University is one of these university colleges, located in Dalarna county, in the cities of Borlänge and Falun. In 2013, 9429 students were enrolled at the university, from which 41 % were male and 59 % female (Swedish Higher Education Authority, 2014). The university offers two programmes in tourism, a Bachelor in International Tourism Management (ITM) and a one year Master Programme in Tourism Destination Development (TDD). These programmes are taught at the Campus in Borlänge.

Statistics for the year 2008 showed that over 3000 students applied to the ITM programme and almost 300 to the TDD. Yet, in the year 2009 the enrolment went down to 877 applicants for ITM and 92 to TDD (Universitet och Högskolerådet, 2015). Some of the affecting factors for this could be found in the literature. For example Arambewela and Hall (2009) argue that students choose a study place by looking at factors that might influence their stay. These include safety, living cost, climate, culture, tuition fees and visas. The webpage Study in Sweden (2015) gives an estimate of the living costs for students in Sweden, which is around 8000 SEK (800 EURO) per month. However, the living cost will largely depend on where the students are living and their personal spending habits.

Both of the tourism programmes in Dalarna University are taught in English, with the aim of producing professionals to the field of tourism. Some of the positions that the Bachelor graduates could have after graduation include Operations manager, Hotel manager or Tourism officer. In the TDD Master programme the students could work in tourism destination planning and marketing or continue their studies to PhD (Dalarna University, 2015). For countries in the EU and EEA countries the studies are free of charge but for others the ITM costs 306 000 SEK (39 000 EURO) and TDD 84 000 SEK (9 000 EURO). In both of the programmes students from outside EU/EEA countries can apply for scholarships (Dalarna University, 2015).

4 Methodology

Previous studies referred to in this paper show that quantitative method is the most appropriate measurement approach for studying the overall satisfaction and student experience. In a quantitative approach the researcher works with numbers and figures and most likely in large quantities. Some authors say that the minimum amount of respondents should be a hundred in order to use the method (Vilkka, 2007). The one who is conducting the research needs to be able to interpret numerical data extracted from the analysis. In a quantitative research a hypothesis can be tested and statistically rejected or not. The main difference to the qualitative method is that the results may be generalized to a wider scale (Dwyer, Gill and Seetaram, 2012; Vilkka, 2007). To fulfil the aim of the thesis a quantitative method was chosen also for this particular study. A questionnaire concerning different aspects of students' overall experience was constructed with the help of the reviewed literature. After this the data collection was conducted via Facebook and personal emails in April 2015 by the author. This primary set of data was collected only for the thesis purposes.

In this questionnaire the tourism students were asked to answer a set of questions in a Likert scale from 1-5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree and from very dissatisfied to very satisfied). The answers were given by ticking a box of the most suitable answer. There has been an ongoing debate on the matter of how to interpret the Likert scale. Some say that the Likert scale is only producing categorical (ordinal) data and the other side considers them to be on an interval-level. This discussion has been about making sure that the distances between the points in the scale are equal. For example the size of the gap between points one and two is the same as from three to four (Jamieson, 2004). There is reason to believe that in this particular study the respondents perceive the distances to be equal and therefore the Likert scale results are treated as interval data. This also makes it possible to calculate means and standard deviations for the variables.

4.1 Description of population

In a conversation on 24th April 2015, M. Eriksson from Dalarna University confirmed that both of the tourism programmes offered in the university comprise together of 117 students, 43 male and 74 female. 100 of them study the ITM and 17 the TDD programme. The students come from many parts of the world and their age varies from 20 to 40. The population is

fairly small so it was chosen as a whole to be the target of the research. There is no need to take a sample from this amount of participants, since then the answer percentage could be too small to conduct a quantitative research.

4.2 Description of measurement tools

The quantitative data for the thesis was collected via an online questionnaire. The tool for preparing the questionnaire was chosen to be Google forms, because of its easy use and clear structure. The variables chosen for this study are based on the previous research discussed in this paper, which consist of student satisfaction studies and the measurement of total student experience. Closed-ended questions and a five point Likert scale were chosen to be the best measurement tools for the answers, reflecting on the students' satisfaction towards diverse variables. A Likert scale is widely used in satisfaction research and is also called agree-disagree scale (Brace, 2008). Devlin et al. (1993, cited in Douglas, Douglas and Barnes, 2006) argue that a perfect rating scale is impossible to achieve. The author also states that in order to create a high-quality scale, factors such as "minimal response bias, discriminating power, ease of administration and ease of use by respondents" should be considered (pp. 256). Nevertheless, there has been a debate on whether the point "neutral" should be included in this scale. Like Penwarden (2014) argues in his article, it is good to involve the neutral option in the surveys in order to avoid research bias. Forcing people to choose between only good and bad options may result in falsified answers, since some variables can truly be neutral to respondents. This is why a neutral option was included in the questionnaire that was designed for the data collection in Dalarna University. Furthermore, previous research on student satisfaction (e.g. Gruber et al., 2010 and Douglas, Douglas and Barnes, 2006) have used the five point Likert-scale with a neutral option.

The survey was tested in a pre-study in order to get an insight on which factors are relevant and if the questions were clear and easy to understand. After the pilot, some alterations to clarify meanings were made to the survey and some variables were added to get a better understanding of factors. The whole questionnaire can be seen in appendix 1. All of the variables were measured in a Likert scale except the personal data and open comments.

The different aspects of the questionnaire tried to cover most common dimensions of the students' overall experience. The importance of asking several dimensions based on the

different aspects of student life. The campus services and facilities show the importance of supporting structures whereas the social conditions implicate the freedom of speech and equality. Educational aspects are a big part of the students' life since they spend most of the time at university or doing assignments for courses and therefore this variable group represented most individual variables. The surrounding city variables were included because the students would also need some places to spend their free time and have easy access to other destinations.

Personal data

The personal data consisted of variables such as age, gender, study programme and nationality. Gender and programme were asked as closed ended questions, meaning that the answers were already given and the respondent chose from the available options. Age and nationality were asked as open ended questions, where the respondents had to fill in the information themselves. These questions were asked for background information.

Campus services

Campus services included questions regarding selected services at the university. Campus services included variables such as the quality of service in the library, cafeteria, administration and reception. These were all asked because they are related to the educational aspects and are supporting facilities.

Campus facilities

Campus facilities comprised of questions regarding the university facilities. This category included factors such as availability of computer rooms, printers, university building and classrooms.

Social conditions

Social conditions questions aimed to find out how the students perceive the atmosphere at Dalarna University. These questions included the atmosphere at the university, whether the students feel safe at university, if they can work together with their classmates and whether the students are all treated equally.

Attractiveness of the surrounding city

Attractiveness of the surrounding city variables were included in the questionnaire because they are an important part of the overall experience. These variables included such as leisure opportunities, safety and whether the students would recommend the city as a study place.

Educational aspects

Educational aspects are an important part of the students' overall experience, since they spend most of their time at university or doing assignments. This category included the most variables. Aspects such as course relevance to programme, teachers' ability to motivate students and give feedback, access to course material and whether the student would recommend the study programme for future students were asked in this section.

Satisfaction to different categories

In this section the students were asked to rate their satisfaction regarding administration, courses, the programme in general, teaching, facilities, atmosphere at the university and the city of Borlänge. Also in this section the respondents were asked to answer in a five point Likert scale, in a scale from 1-5 (very dissatisfied- very satisfied).

Overall satisfaction

The overall satisfaction question related to how satisfied the students were so far with all of the previous mentioned aspects. The respondents were asked again to answer in a scale from 1-5 (very dissatisfied- very satisfied). This variable was designed to be used as a dependent variable in the regression analysis later on. The ratings from this variable could also be used in analysing the levels of overall satisfaction.

Open comments

In the open comments the respondents were asked to leave any comments regarding their overall satisfaction and related to their programmes. This section of the questionnaire was optional. However it was important to receive more in depth information from the students in order to understand the most important factors influencing their experiences.

4.3 Conducting the research

The study was conducted mainly via Facebook and later followed up with email. The social media was chosen as a platform for the study because it relates to the students and this environment made it easy to approach them. Social media is used by most of the students on daily basis. A personal visit to the classroom was considered to be too personal and that the students would not feel comfortable to answer in front of the teacher. The respondents were considered to be more honest in their opinion when the questionnaire was conducted completely anonymously.

Both of the ITM and TDD tourism programmes have their own Facebook group and the questionnaire with a message was posted firstly on the walls. This made it easy for everyone in the group to see the message and have access to the questionnaire link. However after the first day of conducting the data collection only a few people had seen the message. This was why all of the students in these groups were also contacted via a personal Facebook message. All of the students inside these groups could not actually be found in Facebook, perhaps due to deleted or changed account.

After the survey had been active for a couple days, another set of wall and private messages were sent. The message included again the link and a message asking to answer the questionnaire. At the end of the first data collection period a last message was posted reminding that it was the last day to answer and again the link to the survey. All of the reminders in Facebook led to more answers.

The Facebook round resulted in 66 answers. In order to avoid possible non-response bias a new data collection round was conducted. An email to all the tourism students in Dalarna University was sent via the programme coordinator of TDD programme, in order to reach the whole population. The answer period was extended with one and a half weeks. Also a message in Facebook was posted on the wall at the same time to remind the respondents to answer. At the middle of the week a reminder message was sent to the tourism programmes via email by the author. This second round of the data collection resulted in 13 new answers.

After the data collection a statistical software Stata13 was used for the data analysis purposes. Google forms listed all the answers into an Excel file, which made it easy to start the analysis. The first step in the data management process was to recode the existing data from text format into numbers. After this a mean value was calculated for each of the variables to show the level of satisfaction and these were then calculated together to get the average for each category. The data amount was smaller than expected and therefore a factor analysis could not be conducted. Therefore the same groups as in the questionnaire were used to give an idea of these influential factors. After this, a regression analysis was conducted, since it is good for "studying relationships between the dependent variable and one or more of the independent variables" (Dwyer, Gill and Seetaram, 2012, p.2). The thesis studied a relationship between variables such as gender, age, atmosphere, courses and overall satisfaction. The open comments were collected together and a manual search for emerging themes was conducted.

4.4 Limitations

The limitation of this study is that the population of tourism students in Dalarna University is fairly small and the results may not be generalized into other universities or countries . Also a similar issue is that the variables were created just for the purpose of this thesis questionnaire. The survey being conducted via internet tools instead of face to face, may have some effect on the response rate. The response rate could also be higher in order to prevent non-response bias. The questionnaire design lacked two aspects: the study year inside the ITM program and the program the exchange students attended. This information could have been useful in the data analysis.

4.5 Validity and reliability

The reliability of the research means that it could be repeated and the same conclusions could be made. This study was conducted via Facebook and email questionnaire and can be considered to be reliable and is possible to repeat as well. These numbers can be considered reliable and valid for the tourism programmes in general since it is expressing the opinion of more than half of the students. Since the male population was lesser represented the research is subject to be suffering from gender bias. Altogether 43 male were included in the population but only 49% of them answered to the questionnaire. This leads to the fact that the

female opinion is dominant in this particular research. Non-response bias should be considered when talking about internal and external validity.

5 Findings

This results chapter will focus on analysing the results for the groups of variables and also based on programmes and gender. All of these are discussed separately in order to get a better understanding of the variables and differences between the satisfaction levels. Later in this chapter the results from the regression analysis are explained.

5.1 Descriptive statistics

The answers for the questionnaire comprised of 79 respondents. Their age was between 19 and 42, the average age of respondents being 25. 73.4 % of the respondents were female and 26.6 % male. The respondents came from different countries and in order to keep the responses anonymous, the nationalities were grouped together (see figure 3). The most responses, 86.1 %, came from students whose country of residence was in Europe. The second largest group came from Africa with 7.6 % respondents. The last group, 6.3 %, included students with the country of residence in other continents than the above mentioned.

The largest group to answer the questionnaire was the ITM students with 54 answers, that was 68.4 % of the whole amount. This was followed by the TDD, Master programme with 14 answers and 17.7 %. Also, 11 exchange students answered to the questionnaire which was 13.9 % of the total amount. There was no distinction between the exchange students, whether they were participating on the ITM or TDD courses.

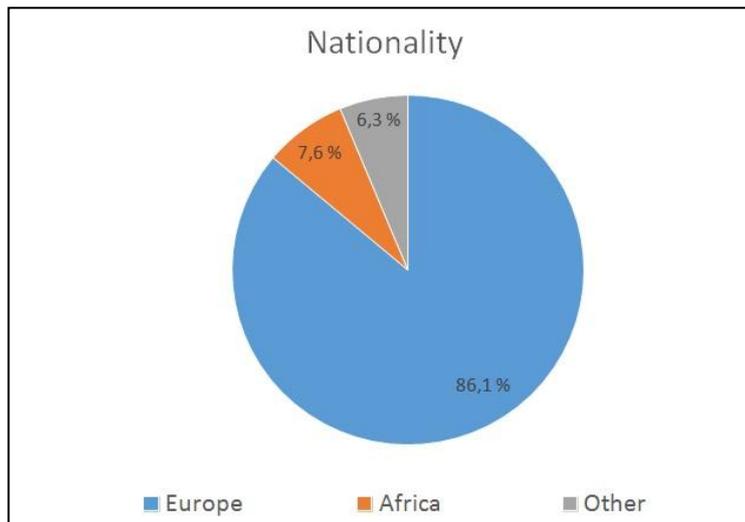


Figure 3. Respondent nationality

The individual variables used in the thesis were grouped together as in the original questionnaire (see appendix 1) since the questionnaire layout made it possible to link together the individual variables into these larger groups. These groups included campus services, campus facilities, social conditions, attractiveness of the surrounding city, educational aspects and overall satisfaction. All the individual variables in each group were calculated a mean value and based on these a mean for the whole group was calculated. Measures of standard deviation were also important to look at, since without it the mean would be difficult to interpret. The standard deviation could be small even if the range of distribution is large. The smaller the deviation, the better it describes the general opinion of the group. If the standard deviation is large the answers are more spread out and not concentrated on the mean.

The different aspects of the questionnaire tried to cover most common dimensions of the students' overall experience. In this questionnaire the tourism students were asked to answer a set of questions in a Likert scale from 1-5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree and from very dissatisfied to very satisfied). Table 1 shows the results for all of the questions asked in the questionnaire with mean and standard deviation values.

Table 1. Questionnaire results

Questionnaire results					
Campus services:	Mean	Std. Dev.	Educational aspects:	Mean	Std. Dev.
The quality of administration service is high	3.291139	1.039624	The courses are relevant to my program	3.848101	.7525786
It is easy to get information on administrative issues (e.g. registration)	3.379747	1.112906	The courses are interesting	3.835443	.8232266
I can find all the necessary books from the library	3.063291	1.223087	I have easy access to the course material in Fronter	4.139241	.7801081
The quality of service in the library is high	3.620253	.8814876	The courses are managed well by the coordinator	3.291139	1.0011946
The quality of service in the reception is high	3.772152	.9191603	I am doing well in my courses	3.835443	.807503
I am informed about exchange and internship opportunities	3.43038	1.094081	I gain practical experience from classes	2.316456	1.104122
The quality of service in the cafeteria is high	3.670886	.9159767	I would recommend my study program to future students	3.518987	1.130699
Campus facilities:	Mean	Std. Dev.	I get feedback for my completed assignments	3.582278	.8858951
I have easy access to computer rooms at university	3.962025	1.030045	Teachers and lecturers are easy to approach	3.797468	.9111805
I have easy access to a printer at university	4.278481	.7326928	Teachers and lecturers are motivating students	3.227848	.9330041
The classrooms are modernly equipped	3.924051	.8737211	Teachers and lecturers provide support for the assignments	3.443038	.8879079
The classrooms are comfortable	3.417722	1.00776	Attractiveness of surrounding city:	Mean	Std. Dev.
The cafeteria has a good product selection	3.240506	.9228605	I feel safe in Borlänge	2.924051	1.118288
The university building is modern	3.620253	.8814876	I am satisfied with the leisure opportunities in Borlänge	2.620253	.9378617
The University building is easily accessible	4.202532	.6864951	The city is easy accessible	3.797468	.7742614
Social conditions:	Mean	Std. Dev.	I would recommend the city as a study place for future students	2.974684	1.120607
I can express my own opinion freely about the university	3.3835443	.8686916			
It is easy to socialize with other students	3.822785	.7967803			
I can work together with my classmates	4.189873	.680798			
I feel safe at university	4	.877058			
The students are treated equally, regardless of age, gender and nationality	4.012658	.8547555			

Campus services

The results for variables in Campus services group (e.g. administration service quality, getting information easy for administrative issues, finding necessary books from the library and being informed about exchange opportunities) varied between 3 and 3.8. The results in this category were above neutral on average.

Campus facilities

The means of campus facility variables (e.g. computer room and printer availability, whether the classrooms were modern and comfortable, cafeteria selection and university building itself) varied between 3.2 and 4.3. The availability of a printer had the highest mean score of this group and the cafeteria product selection received the lowest. The standard deviations were relatively low on this category which implies that the scores were close to the mean. These can be considered to be representative for the population. An interesting note is that the variable "the university is easily accessible" received scores from neutral to strongly agree, receiving none of the negative scores.

Social conditions

The variables in the group social conditions included for instance if the students can express their own opinion at university, socialise with other students, if they feel safe at university, are the students being treated equally and can they work together with classmates. The means of this group varied between 3.8 and 4.2 and the standard deviations were small (close to 0) and shows that the means are good in representing the opinion of the whole population.

Attractiveness of the surrounding city

The variables in this category consisted of feeling safe in Borlänge, being satisfied with leisure opportunities in the city, whether the respondent thinks that the city is accessible and if they would recommend the city as a study place. This category received lower than neutral (3) scores for most of the individual variables. The respondents were most disappointed with the leisure opportunities offered in the city. Feeling safe and if the respondent would

recommend the city as a study place also got a score below neutral. Standard deviations of these variables varied between 0.77 and 1.12.

Educational aspects

The educational aspect group comprised of the most individual variables. These included for example course relevance, if the courses are interesting, easy access to materials in Fronter (online study material platform), if the student does well in courses and if the teachers are motivating students. The means varied between 2.3 and 4.1. However the standard deviation for the variables varied from 0.75 to 1.13 which implies that the ratings are closer to the mean.

Overall satisfaction to different categories

The questionnaire requested the respondents to give an estimate of their satisfaction in general to different aspects of their satisfaction. These included administration, courses, programme, teaching, facilities, atmosphere and surrounding city. The respondents were most satisfied with the campus facilities and atmosphere and least with the surrounding city and administration. Overall the tourism students' satisfaction level was 3.7 with the 95 % confidence interval of 3.54 to 3.86. There is a 95 % probability that this calculated interval contains the true population mean. The overall satisfaction level was calculated also based on gender and programmes. This was done to study whether there are any differences between the satisfaction levels. These are shown in Figure 5.

Open comments

The open comments field was asking students to give any feedback concerning the tourism education in Dalarna University and the students' overall satisfaction. The field was optional so not all of the students gave their feedback. However, three emerging themes could be collected from the open comments. Firstly, the respondents were mostly criticising the lack of practical aspects in the education like cooperation with local companies in Dalarna and placement opportunities. Second aspect was the curriculum of the tourism programmes. These were recommended to be rearranged. The students felt that some periods and courses are more tough than the others and this should be taken into consideration in the curriculum

planning to even the work load. The comments came from both ITM and TDD students. Thirdly, the TDD students were more concerned than the ITM students with the student housing situation. The comments regarded the safety issues of living in student accommodation Locus and also the fact that the living arrangements should be improved. The attractiveness of the surrounding city was also brought up in the same context.

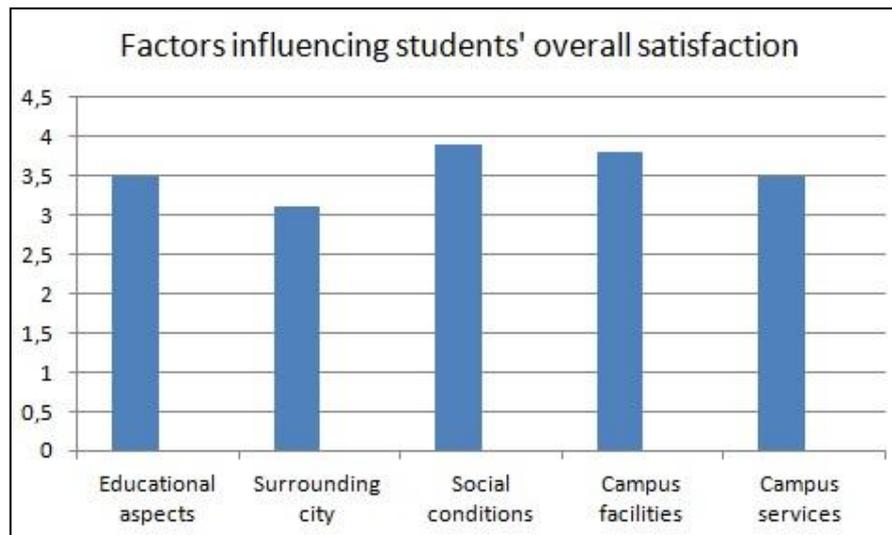


Figure 4. Factors influencing students' overall satisfaction

Figure 4 shows these results for all the group means together. From this one can see that the social conditions received the highest score among the respondents and the surrounding city the lowest.

5.2 Results based on programmes

Bachelor programme in International Tourism Management

When the students were asked whether they would recommend their study programme for future students, only 31 % of the total respondents in the ITM Bachelor programme agreed. This clearly shows there is room for improvement. Looking at the individual variables the ITM students were satisfied with for example the atmosphere at the university, courses and teaching. The least satisfactory aspects for this group of students was the city of Borlänge, lack of practical experience from courses and lack of support from the teachers. 40 % of the

respondents answered neutral when they were asked whether they would recommend the city as a study place for future students. The ITM Bachelor students were the least satisfied out of all the students (TDD and Exchange) in the overall experience with a score of 3.6 out of 5. However there was no distinction between the years of study inside the programme which means there might be great variation inside the group. The results cannot be identified based on the year of study which means that there cannot be a distinction as to whether some aspects would be more satisfactory to first year students for example compared to the third year students.

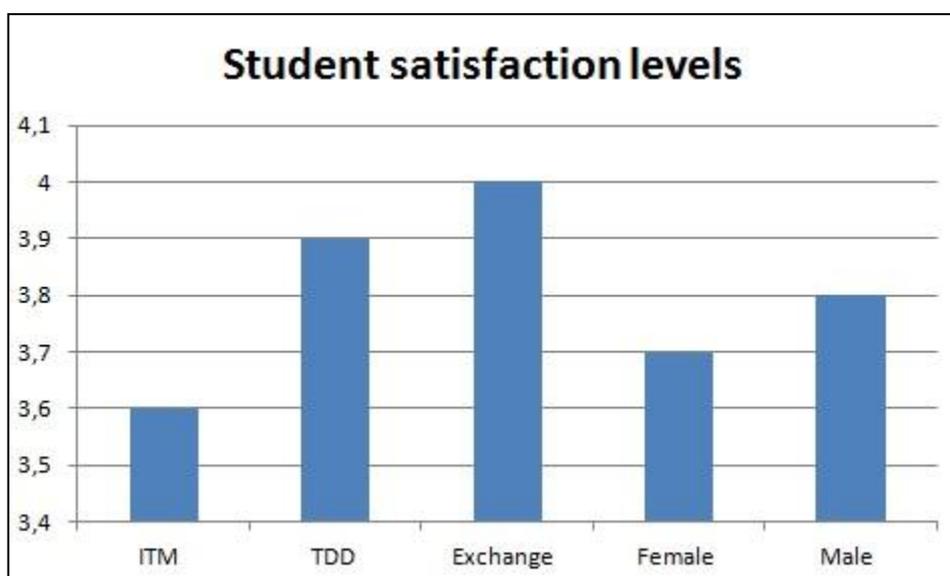


Figure 5. Satisfaction levels based on programmes and gender

Master programme in Tourism Destination Development

The Master programme students compared to the Bachelor programme students were evidently more willing to recommend their study programme to future students. 71 % of the respondents in this programme would recommend their programme for other students, which also indicates that the students are mostly satisfied. A distinctive finding from the results was that when the students were asked about their satisfaction regarding teaching, all of the respondents answered satisfied. This means that 100 % of the TDD respondents were satisfied with the teaching in their programme. Also 85 % of the respondents were satisfied with the courses offered. Yet, the same results occur in the TDD programme as in the ITM that there is a lack of practical experience from the courses. In the master programme only

half of the respondents considered to get enough practical experience from the courses offered. A similar issue with the city of Borlänge was evident also from these responses; only 35 % were satisfied with it. The TDD students resulted in an overall satisfaction score of 3.9 out of 5.

Exchange students

As previously mentioned there was no distinction to which programme the exchange students were attending and this is why the results from this group will not be discussed in detail. Also the fact that the exchange students spend less time than the programme students at the university and the city itself, only similarities to the programme studies will be introduced. The exchange students in Dalarna University received a satisfied score of 4 out of 5. The students were most satisfied with the atmosphere at the university and the teacher support. The results are also in line with the two programmes since the least satisfactory aspects were the lack of practical experience from courses and only 36% would recommend the city as a study place.

5.3 Results based on gender

Between the male and female respondents the satisfaction levels were almost equal. The male respondents' overall satisfaction score was 3.8 and the females' 3.7. 49 % of the male and 78 % of the female population answered the questionnaire. Although the female answer percentage was larger than the male there is no reason to believe that the results would significantly change. The overall satisfaction scores according to the gender are in line with the satisfaction level of the whole population which was 3.7. When looking at the individual variables between the genders the results show a great deal of similarities. For example 41 % of female and 42 % of the male respondents would recommend their programme for future students. The variable with the most variance between genders was about feeling safe in the city. 74 % of the female respondents answered with a neutral or under, whereas only 47 % of the male respondents did the same. This shows that the gender might be one affecting factor when it comes to personal safety issues.

5.4 Regression analysis

A regression analysis was conducted on the data to study whether there are any relationships between the overall satisfaction and individual variables. Based on the previous literature (e.g. Aldemir and Gulcan, 2004; Deming, 1982; Gibson, 2010; Sojkin et al., 2011) there was a reason to believe that the overall satisfaction of the tourism students would be affected by variables such as the respondents age and gender as well as educational aspects and the atmosphere at university. Nevertheless, the variables surrounding city and the programme of study (ITM or TDD) were added to the regression model. This was because the author had reason to believe that these could also be affecting factors in the case of Dalarna University. The overall satisfaction level was used as a dependent variable in the regression model. A significance value of 0.05 and a confidence level of 95% were selected for this study. The results can be seen in Appendix 3.

The regression results show that together these variables explain 52 % of the total variation of the dependent variable, overall satisfaction. However, only two significant variables in relation to the overall satisfaction level can be reported from the analysis.

The individual variable (atmosphere) concerning how satisfied the students are with the atmosphere at the university was proven to be significant. The relationship between the overall satisfaction and the atmosphere is evident from the results. If everything else is kept fixed a one unit increase in the level of satisfaction to the atmosphere would increase the overall satisfaction on average with 0.27 units. The results also show that with the certainty of 95 % the increase would fall in between 0.07 and 0.46.

The most significant individual variable was the satisfaction with the courses in general. If again everything else is kept fixed a one unit increase in the course variable would increase the overall satisfaction on average with 0.52 units. The results indicate that with a 95 % certainty the increase would fall between 0.33 and 0.70.

6 Discussion

This study has focused on determining the factors and level of tourism students' overall satisfaction at Dalarna University. The main concepts used in this study were the students as customer's and student satisfaction. The university offers tourism education in two cycles: Bachelor programme in International Tourism Management and a one year Master programme in Tourism Destination Development. Three research questions were set up to guide the research.

1. How satisfied are the tourism students at Dalarna University with their overall study experience?
2. Which factors influence tourism students' satisfaction with their overall study experience at Dalarna University?
3. What are the differences in the satisfaction level between the Bachelor and Master programmes?

This chapter focuses on discussing the results of the study and the an answer to the research questions. Also the meaning of the results regarding the city as a study destination and ways for the university to improve on these aspects will be further discussed.

Students' overall satisfaction at Dalarna University

The aim was to determine the level of satisfaction for the tourism students and this has been achieved. Nevertheless, it is important also to look at the influential factors that led to this satisfaction level. The tourism students at Dalarna University ranked their education with a score of 3.7 out of 5 which shows that the students are relatively satisfied. However, when looking at the individual factors, differences between programmes and genders can be found. The ITM students were less likely to recommend their study programme to future students. This could be caused by the fact that the ITM students' programme lasts longer than the TDD and therefore they have more say on the matter. They have had more time to observe the educational system and surrounding city than the Master students who have been in Sweden

only for 10 months. Perhaps the length of studies can have an effect on the overall satisfaction of students'.

As seen before in the results chapter the individual variables were grouped together and all of which were calculated a mean value. The attractiveness of the surrounding city received the lowest score in this study, with 3.1. The only positive individual variable inside this group was that the city is easy accessible. This could be seen as important to the students because they come from all over the world and wish to travel back home or visit friends. Also exploring the surrounding areas and Sweden in general could affect this. Borlänge has good train and bus connections to Arlanda Airport and Stockholm for example. The most negative variable was the lack of leisure opportunities in the city. However, people perceive things differently so there cannot be a clear answer to this. It is difficult to say which kind of leisure opportunities the students were expecting when choosing the city of Borlänge as a study destination. This could be anything from night clubs to events. The city being a safe place received also a relatively low score inside the group, 2.9 out of 5. This could be related to the fact that according to the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (2015) the crime rate in Sweden has been going up since the year 2000. Also the amount of sexual offences has gone up in the years 2000-2013 which might contribute to the females especially feeling unsafe. This is perhaps why the safety issues were mentioned also in the open comments. The female respondents were more dissatisfied with the safety of the city which probably led to the lower score on average with all respondents. This result is also similar to a research made by Gibson (2010) who found out in his study that non-academic factors are mostly the ones that cause dissatisfaction to the overall situation. In the case of Dalarna University the surrounding city is one factor leading to dissatisfaction and possible drop-outs.

The campus facilities and social conditions were the most influential categories in relation to the overall satisfaction of students. Dalarna University divided into two campuses, with one in Falun and another in Borlänge. The respondents were asked to give their opinion on the latter one. The respondents argue that the campus is easily accessible and the classrooms are modern. The most influential factor inside this group was the availability of printers. This is evident since the students are obliged to print out materials for their seminars and also because they most likely do not have their own printer at their home. The accessibility is ensured with access cards with which the students have 24 hour right to use the facilities. When comparing the results of the campus facilities to the campus services the first one has a

higher level of satisfaction. Just like Deming (1982) found out in his study the service providers inside the institution play an important role. The people who interact with students should be viewed as positive and helpful in order to satisfy the students. Especially in the case of Dalarna University the administration service quality results show that there is a need for improvement. The highest service quality was considered to be in the reception of the campus. This result could be improved by hiring service-oriented staff and with constant training on customer service.

Out of the two categories, the more influential was the social conditions at Dalarna University. The students are free to socialize and express their own opinion regarding the education system, courses and teaching techniques for example. This could be in relation to the open and communicative relationship between students and teachers that makes things more easy. A similar result was found in Dean and Gibbs' (2015) study where the social factors like feeling safe at university and having close friends affect the students' overall satisfaction. A similar result was also found in a study made in Turkey by Zineldin, Akdag and Vasicheva (2011). The students spend most of their time during studies with their classmates, so it is important to be able to work with them as well. A good spirit in the class could be ensured with having educational trips and bonding at the beginning of the school year. Also the findings show that 62 % of the respondents are satisfied in general with the atmosphere at the university. These results can be linked to studies conducted in Poland by Aldemir and Gulcan (2004) where the affecting factors fall also under social conditions and institutional factors. This shows that similarities can be found in the higher education institutions regardless of the nation.

The regression analysis shows that courses individually would affect the students' overall satisfaction significantly. The increase would lead to more satisfied students and perhaps it can be considered to have also the opposite effect if the satisfaction to these aspects would decrease. The students attend various courses in their studies and this can be seen as a major contributor to satisfaction. The content of the lecture, the expertise of the lecturer and work load could contribute to the satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Another contributing variable was the atmosphere at the university. If the students would not feel comfortable in being at the university they would most likely to complain, avoid it or drop out. For individuals it may seem important to be accepted and listened by classmates and teachers. Courses and

atmosphere are aspects that the students deal with almost on daily basis so it is clear that they would have some kind of effect on the overall satisfaction.

The open comments received from the tourism students back up the findings from the research. The students were mostly concerned with the lack of practicality in their studies, curriculum and student housing. The first two can be linked together since they were evident though out all the tourism programmes. The students were concerned with the work load being uneven and perhaps feel unprepared to enter the working life after graduation. The lack of practicality in the studies can lead to unmotivated and dissatisfied students and affect also their life after graduation. This shows that the curriculum should need some rearrangements.

The student housing issue can be related to the findings about the surrounding city. The students were dissatisfied with this aspect in general and it is also evident when looking at the individual variables. Some improvements could be made to the location of the student housing and the city of Borlänge could come up with new leisure activities for the students. The university can also play its part in this by creating more extracurricular activities.

Summary of strengths and weaknesses

The following bullet points will summarize what Dalarna University is already doing good and what should be improved. Also recommendations on how to overcome these issues will be presented. Later similar issues are presented for Borlänge city.

The strengths of Dalarna University

- Availability of printers
- Quality of Reception services
- Safety at university

The weaknesses of Dalarna university

- Lack of practicality in tourism programmes
- Quality of administration services
- Motivation from teachers to the students

The weaknesses of Dalarna University are easily overcome. Some of the recommendations were already discussed earlier in this chapter such as the constant training for staff and courses on customer service. The lack of practicality in the tourism programmes could be avoided with having more cooperation with local companies and having company cases to work on. Perhaps a compulsory internship as a part of the study programme would give better insight on the working life and how things are done in practice. The practicality of the programme could then also lead to more motivated students and it would solve the last problem. If not, more communication and feedback on assignments should be given in order to overcome the issue. It is crucial for the university to understand that the students may see themselves already as the customers of the education system and are expecting more. This factor should be considered when making decisions about the programmes and facilities. The understanding of these issues relates to asking the same questionnaire yearly and seeing whether there has been any progress. Also the word of mouth promotion is likely to increase with more satisfied students and this way it will be easier for the universities to attract potential students. The graduating students are perhaps more willing to work together with the university as an alumni for example if their study experience has been satisfying.

The strengths of the city of Borlänge

- Accessibility

The weaknesses of the city of Borlänge

- Safety
- Leisure opportunities

The city of Borlänge is well accessible as mentioned previously in this chapter. However, the safety issues need attention. Since the open comments received mentioned about the safety of student accommodation perhaps it would be good to patrol this area during the night. Maybe this way the students would feel more safe in walking home from clubs or other leisure activities. Another way to improve the safety issues would be to send information letters on safety issues for example such as personal safety and keeping ones belongings safe. This could be included in the welcome package for new students. The leisure opportunities in Borlänge are not well advertised and that can be seen as the major issues for students. Especially the materials and web pages in English are limited. Bringing this kind of

information to the student housing in Kornstigen and Mångatan the students would be more aware of different options. Perhaps it would be also possible to arrange an event at Dalarna University where the different leisure opportunity providers could present themselves to the students during introduction weeks.

The aim of the thesis was to answer the research questions regarding the tourism students' overall satisfaction at Dalarna University. The research conducted was able to answer these questions with primary data collected via an online questionnaire.

7 Conclusion

Students' roles in the universities can differ according to various authors but in the recent years they are becoming more like a customer. The introduction of tuition fees has led to the fact that the students' satisfaction has become a subject of more studies. Course evaluations and feedback are considered to be ways of measuring this kind of satisfaction. However, the problem is that it is only concerning a particular course and not the whole study experience. This is why the students' overall satisfaction levels and factors influencing it are considered important knowledge for the university. This information can be used in the tough competition for future students and for making improvements when it comes to aspects such as facilities, atmosphere or teaching. Sweden has only recently introduced tuition fees in their education system and was therefore chosen for this study purpose. Inside Sweden the university in Dalarna was chosen as a case study with 117 tourism students in both the first and second cycles. The thesis research was looking into which kind of factors are influencing the tourism students' overall satisfaction and what is the level of satisfaction in the specific university. The results show that the tourism students are satisfied in general with their experiences. Factors such as social conditions and campus facilities were influencing the overall satisfaction positively whereas the surrounding city was found to be affecting negatively. The results from the conducted regression analysis show that when satisfaction with individual variables such as atmosphere at the university and courses increases the overall satisfaction level also increases.

This study will help Dalarna University to become more competitive on the tourism field for future students. It also shows the areas in which there is room for improvement and leads to a better way of understanding what drives students' satisfaction. There is no need to spend time on guessing and trying to improve something that is already good. The results give clear evidence on the matters in need of fixing. The same goes for the city of Borlänge, since the results show that the students are mostly dissatisfied with the leisure opportunities. There is always room for improvement in the offerings of after school and leisure activities. This is something that the university and the city can work on together to make it a more attractive place for future students.

For future research

This study concerned the overall satisfaction of tourism students and it would be important to repeat the research each year. This could be done in order to see whether there is a decline or improvement in the satisfaction levels and if the factors have changed. A good idea would be to look into more detail within the programmes with qualitative methods since some open comments were implying a greater dissatisfaction than was evident from the numbers. With a qualitative method the underlining factors could be identified even better. Another future study could be concerning the drop outs from the programmes and to see which were exactly the factors that led to this decision.

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STUDENT SATISFACTION SURVEY

This survey is a part of a master thesis of Marianne Mokka a student in the Tourism destination development programme. The aim of the study is to determine the factors and level of satisfaction in tourism education in Dalarna University.

PERSONAL DATA

Gender <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Male	Programme and class <input type="checkbox"/> TDD, master programme <input type="checkbox"/> ITM, Bachelor Programme <input type="checkbox"/> Exchange student
--	--

How old are you? _____ Nationality _____

In the following questions please choose from a scale of 1 to 5 how much you disagree or agree to the statements (1 strongly disagree - 5 strongly agree).

	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly agree 5
Campus services:					
The quality of administration service is high					
It is easy to get information on administrative issues (e.g. registration)					
I can find all the necessary books from the library					
The quality of service in the library is high					
The quality of service in the reception is high					
I am informed about exchange and internship opportunities					
The quality of service in the cafeteria is high					
	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly agree 5
Campus facilities:					
I have easy access to computer rooms at university					
I have easy access to a printer at university					

The classrooms are modernly equipped					
The classrooms are comfortable					
The cafeteria has a good product selection					
The university building is modern					
The University building is easily accessible					
Social conditions:					
I can express my own opinion freely about the university					
It is easy to socialize with other students					
I can work together with my classmates					
I feel safe at university					
The students are treated equally, regardless of age, gender and nationality					
Attractiveness of surrounding city:					
I feel safe in Borlänge					
I am satisfied with the leisure opportunities in Borlänge					
The city is easy accessible					
I would recommend the city as a study place for future students					
Educational aspects:					
The courses are relevant to my programme					
The courses are interesting					
I have easy access to the course material in Fronter					
The courses are managed well by the coordinator					
I am doing well in my courses					
I gain practical experience from classes					
I would recommend my study programme to future students					
I get feedback for my completed assignments					
Teachers and lecturers are easy to approach					
Teachers and lecturers are motivating students					
Teachers and lecturers provide support for the assignments					

In a scale from 1 to 5 how satisfied are you with the following factors so far (1 very dissatisfied- 5 very satisfied).

STUDENT SATISFACTION SURVEY

APPENDIX 1

	Very dissatisfied 1	Dissatisfied 2	Neutral 3	Satisfied 4	Very satisfied 5
Administration					
Courses					
The programme in general					
Teaching					
Facilities (building, library, cafeteria)					
Atmosphere at University					
Borlänge city					

OVERALL SATISFACTION

In a scale from 1 to 5 (1 very dissatisfied- 5 very satisfied), how satisfied are you in general with all aspects.

	Very dissatisfied 1	Dissatisfied 2	Neutral 3	Satisfied 4	Very satisfied 5
How would you rate your OVERALL satisfaction					

Please feel free to leave any comments regarding your tourism education , teachers or any other aspect that you see effecting your overall satisfaction:

Thank you very much for your participation!

Regression model

```
regress overall Howoldareyou sex progind1 progind2 course admin atmos city
```

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs =	79
Model	20.8903083	8	2.61128853	F(8, 70) =	9.42
Residual	19.4134892	70	.27733556	Prob > F =	0.0000
Total	40.3037975	78	.516715352	R-squared =	0.5183
				Adj R-squared =	0.4633
				Root MSE =	.52663

overall	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]
owoldareyou	-.0040276	.0146973	-0.27	0.785	-.0333405 .0252852
sex	-.0858568	.1393519	-0.62	0.540	-.3637854 .1920718
progind1	-.1008003	.1828188	-0.55	0.583	-.4654208 .2638202
progind2	-.1105982	.2221895	-0.50	0.620	-.5537412 .3325448
course	.5229543	.0923979	5.66	0.000	.3386724 .7072362
admin	.1044649	.0696822	1.50	0.138	-.0345119 .2434417
atmos	.2699645	.0978845	2.76	0.007	.07474 .465189
city	.057598	.0644331	0.89	0.374	-.0709097 .1861056
_cons	.4814272	.5742485	0.84	0.405	-.6638752 1.62673

overall: overall satisfaction

owoldareyou: age

sex: gender

progind1: Bachelor program

progind2: Master program

course: courses

admin: administration

atmos: atmosphere

city: surrounding city of Borlänge