The Product of Fantasy and Themed Hotels in remote peripheral locations of Northern Sweden.
(Case of Treehotel, Stora Hotellet and ‘Rock Hotel’)

Student: Angyrette Nangah
# CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION 1
   1.1. Gap in Knowledge 3
   1.2. Aim of Study 3
   1.3. Research Question 4

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND 5
   2.1. Definitions 5
      2.1.1. Periphery 5
      2.1.2. Fantasy 5
      2.1.3. Theming 6
      2.1.4. Themed environments 7
   2.2. Related Concepts 7
      2.2.1. Fantasy Destination 7
      2.2.2. Destination or place as product in theming 8
      2.2.3. Theming and destination branding 9
      2.2.4. Attractiveness 11
         2.2.4.1. Pull or supply factors 12
            a) Attractions 12
            b) Destination support services 13
            c) People related factors 13
      2.2.5. Studies on Theming in Peripheries 13

3. METHOD 15
   3.1. Background to Empirical Study 15
      3.1.1. Northern Sweden 15
         a) Norrbotten 15
         b) Västerbotten 15
      3.1.2. Tourism in Northern Sweden 16
         3.1.2.1. Tourism production Control in Northern Sweden 17
   3.2. Methodological Research Strategy 17
      3.2.1. Qualitative research 18
      3.2.2. Methodology 18
      3.2.3. Research Paradigm 19
      3.2.4. Research Approach 19
      3.2.5. Research Strategy 20
      3.2.6. Research Method/Instrument 20
      3.2.7. Interview Design 21
      3.2.8. Sampling 21
      3.2.9. Case study and the Cases 22
      3.2.10. Data Collection 22
      3.2.11. Data Analysis 23
      3.2.12. Reliability and Validity 24
      3.2.13. Ethics 25
      3.2.14. Limitations 25
      3.2.15. Importance of the study 26

4. DATA DESCRIPTION 27
   a) The Treehotel 27
   b) The Rock Hotel 28
   c) Stora Hotellet 30
4.1. Suppliers

4.1.1. Product of theme hotel and Experience offered
4.1.2. Environment in which product is located - attraction
4.1.3. Highlighted attractions aimed at attracting clients
4.1.4. Knowledge of attractions demanded by tourists
4.1.5. Importance of Complementary activities
4.1.6. Going “North”
4.1.7. Effect of distance on Demand
4.1.8. Challenges
4.1.9. Theme Hotel idea creation
4.1.10. Theming for business
4.1.11. Location of choice
4.1.12. Repeat experience
4.1.13. Future projects
4.1.14. Demand for more themed establishments in the region
4.1.15. Profile of clients
4.1.16. Theme Hotel as a destination in itself
4.1.17. Recommendation to upcoming entrepreneurs
4.1.18. Local community importance
4.1.19. Contact with locals

4.2. Incoming Tour Operators

4.2.1. Outstanding touristic attractions in Northern Sweden
4.2.2. Location as part of the attraction
4.2.3. Destination support systems
4.2.4. Cost: attraction or detraction
4.2.5. Highlighted attractions aimed at attracting clients
4.2.6. Knowledge of attractions and products demanded by tourists
4.2.7. Importance of activities
4.2.8. Going "North"
4.2.9. Distance: attraction of detraction
4.2.10. Challenges
4.2.11. Theming for business
4.2.12. Journey to the location of choice
4.2.13. Demand for more themed establishments in the region
4.2.14. Profile of clients and main market
4.2.15. Theme Hotel as a destination in itself
4.2.16. Recommendation for future themed enterprises
4.2.17. Contact with locals

5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

5.1. Product of Fantasy and Theme Hotels
5.2. Role of Location in the product of Fantasy and Theme hotels
5.3. Challenges
5.4. Limitations of the study

6. CONCLUSION

7. REFERENCES
Master Thesis

The Product of Fantasy and Themed Hotels in remote peripheral locations of Northern Sweden.
(Case of Treehotel, Stora Hotellet and ‘Rock Hotel’)

Supervisor: Katarina Haugen

Student: Angyrette Nangah:

Date: 14th October 2015

1. INTRODUCTION

Swedish tourism geography like all other tourism geographies is shaped by the nature of the environment within which it dwells. It is embedded either in an urban or a rural geographical location, on which its progress and development depends. The social, economic, and political development of the various locations depend on private and public stakeholder activities in and out of the region. Some of these activities involve the creation of enterprise; and just like all other enterprises tourism businesses contribute in developing the region within which they are located. In her 2006 study Lundmark, remarks that work in tourism in some mountain municipalities that were experiencing depopulation actually lead to more in-migration to the region, contributing to a positive development of the local service base, infrastructure and public facilities. As such, the success of such locations determines the extent to which the local population’s needs are catered for and to an extent dissuades out migration. She further points out that this favourable outcome can be heightened further by making these places attractive to investors, tourists and possible additional in-migrants, (Lundmark, 2006).

However, for most tourism businesses to go operational, in contrast to all other enterprises, they depend heavily on the exploitation of local resources and the natural attractiveness of the region, as they constitute distinctive and sometimes unique features that attract visitors. Nevertheless not all destinations are blessed with attractive and or unique features especially when one takes the case of peripheral regions, that are mostly dominated by nature, which, is often a common and thus non-unique assert in most peripheries. For example snow and trees are common in Northern Scandinavia as sand is common in the Sahara dessert. In these locations these elements of attraction ‘snow’, ‘trees’ and ‘sand’ are not unique elements if one compares Northern Scandinavia and the Sahara to other Nordic and desert locations respectively. Because of the necessity of developing destinations that attract tourists
and visitors, with the aim of boosting the local economy through tourism activity, stakeholders use among others a strategy called *theming*, which is usually applied to non-unique landscapes.

In Wilson, J. (2012) one of the contributors, Lew, states that “the theming of places is a major form of market positioning used by communities to differentiate themselves from the crowd” and that “in some instances this involves the development of an iconic image or historical event that is associated with a place”, for example. Theming therefore elevates the value of the rather usual non-special elements of such a destination thus creating a worth-visiting attraction out of them. Most peripheries lacking in outstanding exclusive features employ this technique. The European periphery, Northern Scandinavia, and in particular Northern Sweden, possesses some of the most emblematic themed enterprises in the region in the name of the Icehotel and the Treehotel and most recently, Stora Hotellet. (It should be noted that while references shall be made on the Icehotel, this establishment shall not be part of this study due to issues of confidentiality.) There is information on other upcoming establishments of this kind in this region. An example of such will be the case of one, which for the purpose of this study and following the concept ‘rock’, on which it shall be themed, will be called the “Rockhotel”. These enterprises are constructed and themed based on the surrounding landscape within which they dwell. Ordinary products from these landscapes are turned into extraordinary ones to attract visitors.

Tourism literature and studies on themed environments are extensive especially in American and Anglo-Saxon literature. However, a small amount of these studies focus on theming in peripheral locations. It is not clear, for example, why some of the most renowned themed establishments in the Swedish case, are located in remote semi-arctic and arctic regions of the country. And, considering the fact that tourists travel all the way to these places to experience themed hotels makes one wonder what the product they visit consists of. Will the product be just the theme hotel or does the remote location count toward the product of that destination? The question here is if the hotel is attractive enough to attract tourists or does the periphery also contribute. In this situation, tourism literature is unclear on what the tourist destination or product is for themed hotels located in the periphery.

According to Cooper et al (1993) “the destination represents the raison d’être for tourism; it is the reason for travelling, and the attractions at the destination generate the visit.” Framk (2002) on the other hand defines destination as “place”, “the mix and agglomeration of agents and products and services, varying with the tourists’ historically changing demand”, (Framke, 2002). He further explains that it is the “sum of interests, activities, facilities, infrastructure and attractions that create the identity of a place”. Destination can therefore be seen as a dynamic product, place and a social construct within which a variety of stakeholders interact. However in the case of this study it is unclear what the destination is especially assuming that both the hotel and the periphery have the potential to attract tourists to the region. For this reason this thesis will focus on analysing fantasy and themed hotels in peripheral areas to understand to what extent they make up a destination or product of their own.
1.1. Gap in knowledge

As discussed above, despite the success of fantasy and themed hotels in peripheries and remote areas e.g. Treehotel and Stora Hotel in the Swedish Case, academic literature on fantasy and theme hotels in peripheral areas is unsurprisingly scarce. Focus on this subject is often placed on large-scale developments in urban areas with cases such as Disneyland, Las Vegas, just to name a few, or in centrally located rural areas. Meanwhile, minor developments like the two mentioned hotels located in peripheral areas are seldom acknowledged. The few studies that make mention to them do not treat the peripheral aspect and above all are more business focused than geo-touristically oriented. In the Swedish case, an example of such study is that carried out by Franchetti and Forsgren, (2005) where investigation is based on examining how hotels use unique concepts or themes to market themselves. Focus on this study is definitely not geospacial; it does not centre on the landscape or on the geographical location in which the hotels are situated, but rather on an intrinsic business component of the hotels– one which contributes to the financial success of the business. Contrary to common business practices, fantasy and themed hotels in the remote peripheries are located away from their markets.

It is therefore controversial in the case of fantasy and themed hotels in peripheral areas that they are located far away from their customers, especially considering the fact that businesses needing to make profit ought to situate themselves close to their markets. The gap in literature is that there is little knowledge as to why some fantasy and theme hotels are located in the periphery. In the case of Sweden these hotels are located in the north most part of the country, an area that is in theory less accessible not only to the international but also to national tourists, as opposed to the southern part that houses the Swedish capital Stockholm and other important big metropolis like Gothenburg and Malmo, which are some of the main tourist hubs of the country. Also, the fact that they are themed and set in a particular periphery with the intention of attracting tourists implies that they are either a destination in themselves or part of one. And, considering the fact that peripheries can also be attractive by themselves it is unclear what attracts tourists to a periphery in which fantasy and themed hotels are situated. Therefore, there is also a gap in knowledge regarding the extent to which fantasy and themed hotels, by themselves make up the tourist destination or product in a remote area or periphery. Analysing to what extent they make up a destination of their own will shed light onto those factors that make them suitable attractions that can be located or are already located in the periphery.

1.2. Aim of Study

The aim of this study is to analyse stakeholder views and perceptions on what comprise the destination and/or product of fantasy and themed hotels in the peripheries of Northern Sweden.

The notion of stakeholders in this research represents tourist destination suppliers like hotel owners and complementary services and tourist activity suppliers; and incoming tour operators who are those local agents that purchase tourism services in their own country from local suppliers and then package them into products that are eventually
marketed abroad by partners. Thus, an analysis of the assessment made by tourism industry suppliers on what constitutes the destination and/or product they offer; and the analysis of incoming operator opinion on what attracts tourists to these establishments, will together inform on what makes up the destination and/or product of fantasy and themed hotels in Northern Sweden.

1.3. Research Question

This study will try to find out why fantasy and themed hotels in the Swedish northern periphery are sought by tourists when there are similar and more accessible offers in other parts of Sweden and the world. Finding out what comprises the product of these hotels will be useful to both academia and the business world. Therefore, this research will endeavour to answer the question:

What is the product of fantasy and themed hotels in Northern Sweden?

This question will enable an exploration of the fantasy and themed hotel product and location as elements of attraction. This information could be useful in planning new themed destinations like the Rockhotel. From the above ones thus realises that a study analysing fantasy and themed hotels in the periphery might provide inside knowledge on what to take in consideration when setting up establishments of like characteristics in remote areas. It will shed light on what actually attracts tourists to these places from the viewpoint of stakeholders who have got inside knowledge on such issues.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

To understand the notion of theming in the Scandinavian context it will be worthwhile revisiting for a while the origins of modern day theming. The opening of the first Disneyland theme park in California in 1955 did not only offer an entirely new leisure space for Californian local residents and Americans as a whole, it also provided ‘an encounter for its visitors that was so unique and compelling that it became a new form of commercial enterprise’ (Gotttdiener 1997: 109). This new leisure form was different from other leisure spaces in three main ways. First, unlike in traditional coastal resorts, visitors had to pay not only for the rides but also to be admitted in to these new theme park; as such they were paying to experience the built environment as the architecture provided fantasy and entertainment through the concepts they represented, 2) the resorts were “carefully constructed, heavily regulated and well-choreographed” (Shaw & Williams, 2004) places such that they contributed to the very essence of visitor experience as much as they controlled the visitor within the park and 3) these leisure spaces provided a strong contrast to the “spaces of daily life.” As Gotttdiener (1997), argues, the success of Disneyland and related theme parks is ‘largely because it liberates people from the constraints of everyday life’ (p. 114).

Before delving into the various notions that are related to the topic of this paper, it will be instrumental to define some relevant terms that will be used repeatedly. Some important aspects of the topic of this research as well as general conceptions related to this topic will be dealt on here below. The concepts of fantasy, themed, periphery will be defined and discussed to ensure a clear understanding of the research idea.

2.1. Definitions

2.1.1. The periphery

Since the notion of the periphery is vast but important to this study, it is important to give it some consideration, to clarify the type of periphery this study is referring to. Peripherality implies the opposite connotation of central places or the core. However, it is important to know that although the term periphery is a matter of location, it is also a matter of perception meaning that it refers to different things to different people. People who were born and who live in the periphery often see it as “being disadvantaged in terms of access to social, cultural and economic activities” but “for those who visit the periphery, it is the same remoteness which prompted the journey”, (Brown & Hall, 2000). They further argue that a place that is remote and difficult to reach may be perceived by tourists to have certain qualities symptomatic of its situation, such as natural beauty, quaintness and otherness. And, according to Urry (1990) “such places are seen as authentic, rich in symbolic representations of the unspoilt, the pristine and the traditional”.

2.1.2. Fantasy

The term fantasy and themed were deliberately employed in the topic of this research as such a deeper exploration on their applications ought to be discussed. To begin,
although there is no clear definition of what ‘fantasy’ in tourism is, this study will try to deduce the meaning from the context in which the word has been used in this same literature in conjunction with the definition of the word in the general reference dictionary. Fantasy according to Hannigan (1998) in the definition of the Fantasy city implies a combination of following concepts; theme-o-centric, branded, day and night or 24-hour operations, conglomeration of modular activities, solipsistic nature and postmodernity. Fantasy thus can be defined as something based on a theme (which guarantees a certain level of comfort as it is uniform over time); situated in a branded atmosphere with operations running all day round; involving activities fashioned to please a variety of publics; located away from urbanised areas thus situated in a world of its own where the use of simulated technology is a normality- all of these for the sake of entertainment. Fantasy is therefore what exceeds the normal occurrences in daily life verging on the realms of the imaginary. The materialization or an attempt at creating fantasy results in the creation of fantasy hotels. These hotels are places where tourists “escape” to in real life to have a real life experience of fantasy. For this reason one can say that to be able to enjoy a fantasy experience one ought to visit these establishments as it entails a huge financial and resourceful burden to create such experience for oneself at home.

2.1.3. Theming

Theming in Olson’s, (2004) work designates “buildings, product packaging, or physical environments around a single idea or icon, such as a corporate logo”. Here “theming is the brand image or identity” of a product placed in the market. The aim of theming expressed in this work is to “overwhelm the consumer with the omnipresence and omnipotence of a given brand identity”. In the work of Wilson, (2013) the application of theming on places “is a major form of market positioning used by communities to differentiate themselves from the crowd”. This is archived through the development of an iconic image or historical event that is associated with a place. These may be represented in the urban fabric, mostly associated with heritage retail districts (Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000), or through special events (Getz, 2004; Prentice and Andersen, 2003). An example of such theming is the symbol of Disney represented by “three intersecting circles in an inverted pyramid recognized around the world as Mickey Mouse’s silhouette”, (Olson, 2004). This image is restated in different situations with the aim of familiarising people to the theme. For example “the shape of the lake at Walt Disney World; The Michael Graves-designed housewares sold at Target stores; The crown on the water tower at MGM Studios Florida; and The Disney channel logo” (Olson, 2004). etc.

Bringing the two concepts of fantasy and themed hotels thus gives the idea of establishments conceived around ideas that in normal disposition will exist only in the imagination. Establishments take upon themselves to materialise these imaginations and sustain the idea through time, incorporating the concept of this idea to every image that relates to or activity carried out around the establishments in other to create a unified memorable experience. The sum of all the components create a synergic experience effect which leaves the tourist visiting such establishments in awe,
as these hopefully provide the visitor with an irreplaceable experience foreign to their daily life occurrences.

### 2.1.4. Themed environments

Thus fantasy and theme hotels owe their origin from themed environments like themed resorts. These environments are mostly designed to appeal to tourists and visitors, and as literature puts it, they “are other-directed places (Jackson 1970; Hoelscher 1998) such as restaurants, gas stations, motels, airports, historic business districts, city parks, casinos, theme parks, shopping malls, resort communities, and even local festivals” (Paradis, 2004). By “other-directed” (Jackson, 1970) means suppliers or providers of services are not alone in the product design process- they do not have total control over this process as consumers partake in the creation of the service before during and after the purchasing moment. Tourism has coincided with and uses themed environments as a major form of economic development for destinations, reason why most literature on the subject is directed towards ‘touristed landscapes’. In Fantasy city, Hannigan (1998) explores how large and small American cities, which were in the past ‘tired downtown cores’ are now moulded into ‘postmodern centres of entertainment and leisure’. Themed environments are thus a product of postmodernism. Mansfield (1999: 330, cited in Page and Hall 2003: 32) summed the main characteristics of postmodernism influencing today’s world metropolises as:

“A focus on difference, diversity, discontinuity, and fragmentation as opposed to the modernist ideals of sameness and universalism; an emphasis on the consumption and reproduction of images, whereby social identity is formed in relation to the sphere of consumption (e.g. leisure) rather than production (e.g. work); and an increasing acceptance (and encouragement) of pastiche, collage, spectacle, and the associated promotion of commodities designed specifically for differentiated markets”.

### 2.2. Related concepts

#### 2.2.1. Fantasy destination

Fantasy and themed establishments in this light are a response to one of the many needs of the postmodern consumer. Hannigan, (1998), provides insight into what a themed environment is as he defines and explores six central features of the fantasy city. The first and most important of these characteristics is that the city has to be “theme-o-centric” by which he means, “everything from individual entertainment venues to the image of the city itself conforms to a scripted theme, normally drawn from sports, history or popular entertainment”, (Hannigan, 1998) or created “around a distinctive geographic locale, historical period or type of cultural activity”. The second characteristic of the fantasy city is that it is “aggressively branded”. Its purpose is not only to provide a “high degree of customer satisfaction and fun” but also to sell licenced merchandise on site. Third, it functions day and night to attract postmodern consumers who have the money and time to employ on leisure. The postmodern
The consumer as seen by Firat and Shultz (1997) is "a creature defined by consumption and experiences derived therefrom". This consumer is very much influenced by “changes in technology and the media”, and pays great emphasis on “style, packaging, the aesthetic form and the ‘look’” (Lee, 1993).

The fourth characteristic feature is that the “Fantasy City is modular, mixing and matching an increasingly standard array of components in various configurations” in order to attract visitors of diverse interests. It seeks to satisfy a wide variety of customer needs within the same destination and the offer of different fantasy and themed attractions within the same fantasy city accomplishes this mission. Meanwhile, the fifth characteristic has to do with its “solipsistic” nature. This refers to the fact that the destination is situated away from surrounding residential areas “physically, economically and culturally”, (Hannigan, 1998). Thus, it is in essence what Christine Boyer (1993) calls the “city of illusion” – “a metropolis which ignores the reality of homelessness, unemployment, social injustice and crime, while eagerly transforming sites and channels of public expression into ‘promotional spaces’”, (Hannigan, 1998). And finally, the fantasy city is postmodern in nature as it is dynamic, ‘constructed around technologies of simulation, virtual reality and the thrill of the spectacle’ all characteristic of the postmodern era. Most of these features can be identifiable and applicable to the themed environment.

### 2.2.2. Destination or place as product in theming

Tourism landscapes, and the memories associated with them, invoke all of our senses - they are multisensory, experienced simultaneously as smellscapes (Dann and Jacobsen, 2002; 2003), soundscapes (Schofield, 2009) and tastescapes (Everett, 2008), (Wilson, 2013). All of these affect the way tourist/resident and stakeholders perceive a place. Pursuing this line of thought, it will be helpful to discuss what is considered ‘place’, analyse how places are made and see how a place can be a tourist product.

According to Tuan, (1977) ‘place’ refers to the spaces that people endow with meaning and identity such that these spaces become centres of felt value and security. Accordingly experiences, personal encounters and significant events are important elements that help in imbuing place with meaning. As such place is created through the relationships that take place within a given space. In tourism literature there are contrasting views as to what tourism activities do to place.

The terrains of place could be considered across a global–local divide as such contrasting the role of tourism in place across scales. According to Paradise (2004) the globalising tendencies of place focus on Enterprise and profit making while the localizing impulses heritage theming and place identity formation with the aim of fostering a sense of community spirit. As such it can be said that the “the simultaneity of making and unmaking places thus occurs across contending global–local processes”, (Wilson, 2012). However he goes on to argue that the “the notion that locals make places while tourists unmake them” has to be reconsidered as he observes that “with the rise in special interest travellers, visitors come to destination sites with knowledge and understanding that often rival and even surpass that of the residents”.

---

Student: Angyrette Nangah
As such, from the above one sees that “both local and global forces, national and vernacular values, as well as tourist/resident interests make a persuasive case for tourism’s dualistic tendencies to meet the needs of multiple scalar stakeholders” (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2004) and in the process create place. As Wilson, (2012) observes, “it is not just producers who contribute to place identities and authenticities, but consumers whose patronage and practices also determine the success or failure of a project”, or product. In short, “users – tourists, locals and service providers” engage in a co-creation process through which their collective actions/opinions constitute the overall production of a place.

In conclusion to this section one can quote Wilson (2012) where he states that “the making and unmaking of place represent two sides of the spatial transformation coin” and tourism is considered “instrumental in this dual process because of its potential to create landscapes for economic development and cultural interest, as well as its ability to commercialise and destroy”. However the author reasons that “by casting tourism in its rightful role in the cultural economy of space, we can appreciate the power of place in tourism discourses, as much as we can glimpse the power of tourism in place making”, (Wilson 2012). All these one sees that if tourism creates places then one can say that fantasy and themed hotels as elements of tourism in Northern Sweden contribute in creating destination-place.

2.2.3. Theming and destination branding

As Hannigan (1998) reports, “success in the theme park economy depends on being able to develop brand recognition both domestically and internationally”. Although branding has always been applied to consumer goods since the origin of the term, in the last two decades academic literature has started applying the term more and more in destination place marketing as seen above. In order to understand the concept of destination branding it will be wise to look at branding first of all. Accordingly, the American Marketing Association defines brand as a “name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition” (AMA, 2011). Keller, as cited by Baker and Cameron (2008) defines it as “a product, but one that adds other dimensions that differentiate it in some way from other products designed to satisfy the same need” (p. 85). Recognizing the customer perspective, by citing Lynch and de Chernatony, Dinnie, (2008, p. 14) defines brands as “clusters of functional and emotional values that promise a unique and welcome experience between a buyer and a seller”. The goal of branding is to create an “emotional connection” (Baker and Cameron, 2008) with all who come in contact with the brand “through the development of a unique personality or image for a product or service”. The process of branding according to Anholt, (2007) involves designing, planning and communicating the name and the identity, in an attempt to build or manage the reputation of the brand based on four different elements – brand identity, brand image, brand purpose and brand equity (Anholt, 2007). These will be applied to the destination below.
In the same way that strong consumer product brands can influence behaviour and perceptions, and create expectations of quality, so too can a positive destination brand establish the destination as a place worth visiting (Morgan et al, 2010). In this way destination branding offers a framework through which destinations can differentiate themselves from others offering similar experiences. As Bierzynski, (2011) highlights, “the promotional efforts of a destination branding strategy are the first points of contact many potential visitors have with the destination. This is the point where their perceptions and first impressions are formed”. In a revised definition, Destination branding, according to Blain et al (2005), is the:

Set of marketing activities that (1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination; that (2) consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; that (3) serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitor and the destination; and that (4) reduce consumer search costs and perceived risk. Collectively, these activities serve to create a destination image that positively influences consumer destination choice (p. 337).

Most destination branding is geared only towards the customers. It is therefore important to include the stakeholder take on this concept since they are the ones undertaking the development process. By this it is understood that everyone who comes in contact with the visitors is part of the strategy to make the brand promise a reality. The citizens of the destination, from the bus drivers and hotel employees to the friendly person on the street offering directions are just as important and have an impact on the destination brand image (Freire, 2007, p. 435) as the attractions and activities that are promoted as part of the destination brand. Anholt, (2007) argues that the “people are the brand – the brand reflects the genius of the people [for] without some sense of the people and their particular nature and ability, a place is just an empty landscape”. According to Pike, (2005), “there is a fine balance to be struck between community consensus and brand theory because a top down approach to destination brand implementation is likely to fail, [as such] without buy-in from these stakeholders the strategy will fail” (p. 259).

In order to incorporate the stakeholder take to destination branding one can mention the effort made in Berry’s (2000) service-branding model, which is a reference in services marketing literature that has been adapted to the tourist destinations. The model includes six main components: (1) PB or the product brand which conveys the brand message; (2) external brand communications (publicity and word-of-mouth communications); (3) customer experience with the organization; (4) BA or brand ability which is the ability to recognize and recall a brand (Aaker, 1991; Berry, 2000) reflected in the salience of the brand in the customers mind (Aaker, 1991), and it is a main element of a brand’s effect on tourism (Oh, 2000); (5) BM or brand memory refers to the stakeholders’ dominant perceptions of the brand (Berry, 2000). It is the concept or impression that immediately comes to their minds in reference to the brand (Berry & Seltman, 2007), creating attitudes/feelings on them (Aaker, 1991), and an organization’s reputation or image as well. Keller (2003) suggests three categories:
attributes, benefits and attitudes; and (6) BE that is brand equity which according to Aaker, (1991) is the real and/or perceived assets and liabilities that are associated with the brand. BE is the increased value added to a product by its brand name (Kamakura & Russell, 1991). Loyalty is a major component of BE and Aaker (1991) even says that it is the core of BE and defines it as the attachment that a customer has to a brand. This attachment leads to the purchase and/or recommendation of the product to others. Brand loyalty is the main source of customer-based BE (Keller, 2003), and, BE increases following the extent to which consumers are loyal to the brand, (Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000, p. 197) From this analysis one can see that Berry’s (2000) model adapted to destination branding considers the triple aspect of the stakeholders (entrepreneurs, local people and visitors).

From the above literature one can see that tourism destination branding contributes in creating themed destinations as fantasy and themed establishments can be seen as a resulting product from the effects of branding. Theming could be the answer to the destination that seeks to brand itself by creating a recognizable and memorable image of itself. It can be said that tourism destination branding arises from the need to activate the consumption of a place as a product; and highlighting the regions leisure activities does this.

The studies of destination image highlight the importance of destination attributes in developing positive destination images. Different destinations have different images and thereby attract different people. For this reason it will be good to discuss what attractiveness comprises of in a destination.

2.2.4. Attractiveness

Research has shown that attractiveness studies are necessary for understanding the elements that encourage people to travel (Formica, 2002). In as much as the decision to travel is explicitly initiated by the tourist one can also say it is implicitly induced by the destination- through attractions, services and marketing efforts at destination. Thus the more a destination is able to meet the needs of tourists, the more the destination is perceived to be attractive and the more the destination is likely to be chosen in preference to competing destinations. Attractiveness is complete based on the tourists’ perception and experience at destination. These shall be explored below.

According to Mayo and Jarvis (1981) destination attractiveness can be defined as “the relative importance of individual benefits and the perceived ability of the destination to deliver these individual benefits”. This ability is enhanced by the specific attributes of a destination that makeup the destination such as attractions, infrastructure or services and people providing these services. Lew, (1987) identifies three major approaches to determine the attractiveness of a destination: ideographic, organizational, and cognitive. The first relates to a specific characteristic of a site and is represented by descriptive groups of attributes. This approach is linked to the supply component of tourism. The second approach (organizational) describes the spatial and temporal relationships between attractions. Lastly, the cognitive approach expounds on the experiential characteristics that relate to the attractions and focuses on the demand component of tourism, (Formica et al, 2006). However, the subject of this
paper is interested in the pull or supply factors of attractiveness.

2.2.4.1. Pull or Supply Factors

Pull factors result from the attractiveness of a destination and are believed to help establish the chosen destination. This supply approach as defined by Kaur (1981) assumes that tourism attractiveness is the drawing force generated by the overall attractions existing in a given place at a certain time.

2.2.4.2.1. Categories of Pull destination attractiveness attributes

a) Attractions

According to Ferrario, (1979) “for a destination to be attractive there should be something very special within it (i.e., an attraction)”, This assertion, supported by Crouch and Ritchie, (1999, argues that attractions are the primary elements that pull and motivate people to visit, and that make prospective tourists to choose one destination over another. Thus, destination attractions are the main tourism core assets a tourism destination posse and which make up the great part of destination attractiveness, Reisinger, (2009) comments.

For the purpose of this study it shall be important to look at Gearing et al. (1974)’s classification of attractions as the list is comprehensive enough to include both direct (geared directly at attracting tourists) and indirect (existing at destination for the use of residents but also serving visitor needs) attractions of a destination. According to these authors, the most comprehensive resource/ attractions inventory that can be used in determining the attractiveness of a tourist destination are the following:

a) Natural factors, which include “general topography; flora and fauna; proximity to lakes, rivers, sea; islands and islets; hot and mineral water springs; caverns and waterfalls; amount of sunshine; temperature; winds and precipitation; and a discomfort index.

b) Social factors. These may comprise of local architectures, mosques, monuments, art museums, music and dance festivals, sport events and competitions, folk music and dances, local cuisine, handicrafts, specialized products, fairs and exhibits, and local congeniality/treatment of tourists.

c) Historical factors. On their part, these are made up of the existence, condition, and accessibility of ancient ruins; the religious importance in terms of present religious observance and practices; the extent to which a site may be well known because of important historical events.

d) Recreational and shopping facilities. These include the offering of hunting, fishing, swimming, skiing, sailing, golfing, horseback riding facilities. Archaeological and ethnographic museums, zoos, botanical gardens, aquariums. Mineral and hot water spas, hiking trails, and picnic grounds. Gambling casinos, discos, theatres, cinemas. Souvenir and gift shops, handicraft shops, auto service facilities, groceries and necessities.
e) *Infrastructure, food and shelter.* Highways and roads; water, electricity and gas; safety services; health services; communications; public transportation facilities. Hotels, restaurants, vacation villages, bungalows, motels, camping facilities.

b) Destination support services

The second group of attributes consist of destination support services and facilities. According to Reisinger, “the major destination support services are provided by accommodation, transportation, and communication facilities.” According to her “these support services enable tourism destinations to develop as well as to monitor negative aspects of this development and take corrective actions in order to remain sustainable. These services help to nurture destinations and monitor their development so as to maintain an acceptable growth pattern capable of providing that both visitors and residents well developed and well maintained high standard destination services such as roads, water, sewage management. Ritchie and Crouch (2000), uphold that destination support services and facilities play a complimentary role in predicting the success of a destination.

c) People-related factors

The third group of attributes include people-related factors. Tourism is reputed for being an industry that is labour-intensive, implying that there will be a frequent interaction between people (tourists, residents suppliers etc). According to Reisinger “people-related factors compliment the role destination attractions play in determining the attractiveness of a destination”, (2009). As far as destination attractiveness is concerned, “the social interaction between tourists and local people is crucial in attracting people to a destination”, (Smith, 2000). And as Reisinger comments, “the most attractive and reputable tourism destinations are well known for the friendliness of their residents”, (2009). As such local residents, be they employees of the tourism and hospitality industry or the general public, influence the attractiveness of a destination.

2.2.5. Studies on Theming in Peripheries

The notion of theming in the periphery, unlike that in cities and rural areas, presents certain traits particularly in terms of accessibility that differentiates them from others. This implies, only those customers that are able to overcome this obstacle will benefit from the product and as such this acts as a segregation tool towards the users of these establishments. As such users of themed establishments in the periphery cannot be identified with those in the niche of mass tourism. In the Words of Wilson, (2013), “although the theming of tourism spaces is in itself nothing new—British and American resorts were certainly also organised to cater for mass pleasure (Lencek and Bosker, 1998; Walton, 2000) – those in the pleasure-periphery are clearly the products of the global process of post-modernism and neo-Fordism with their emphasis on aspects of consumption and lifestyle”. Lifestyle products most often target those specific market niches that can afford them and thus are not oriented to mass tourism consumers, whom characteristically are usually on moderate travel budgets.
Moreover, even though international literature on themed environments, fantasy and themed cities, (e.g. Sorkin 1992; Hannigan 1998; Gottdiener 2001; Paradis 2004) is vast, there is considerably little research on this phenomenon in small communities, (Shaw & Williams, 2004) and scarcely in the periphery. This scarcity of literature also concerns Sweden the object of this study. Basing this claim on Anglo-Saxon academic literature, very few studies have been carried out on themed environments in peripheral areas, including those located in Northern Scandinavia. So far, the only such study located in the case of Sweden is that carried out by Franchetti and Forsgren, (2005). Though acknowledging their important contribution, it should be noted however that it is not a study of significant academic and scientific relevance as it is barely a Masters’ thesis. Also, the study dwells only on the ‘Marketing Role of Unique Concepts for Hotels’; the location aspect is absent.

Here investigation is focused on eight hotels located in distinctive regions of Sweden differentiating themselves by marketing their product with a unique concept. For example, it treats hotels like the Stora Hotellet- Fjällbacka, which is themed around the experiences of the famous ship captain named Klassen. The concept related to the hotel is that of storytelling. Another example is that of Park Inn Hotel- Värnamo, themed around its location. It is situated in a historic Swedish furniture district where famous furniture designers worked and made a name for themselves in the field. In this hotel examples of their most emblematic works are represented. Of course, the study also talks about the Treehotel and the fact that it uses local resources like trees as a unique concept through which they market themselves. The study however does not duel on what the product of these hotels is in remote areas.
3. METHOD

3.1. Background to the Empirical Study

3.1.1. Northern Sweden

This study shall be conducted in the area comprising Northern Sweden which covers Norrbotten and Västerbotten, which are the two most northern counties of the country and which lie within the artic and subarctic circle respectively. Within the periods 2001–2006, the EU deposited 3.3 billion Swedish kronor (SEK) for the programme ‘Objective 1 Norrbotten and Västerbotten’. This programme was aimed at providing “economic support from the EU structural funds to these regions with the purpose of lessening both economic and social differences between regions, (Müller & Jansson, 2007).

a) Norrbotten

Norrbotten, which lies between latitudes 65 and 69 and spans 25% of Sweden’s land mass. As of the year 2014, it has an almost stagnant population of 249,987 although the tendency in earlier years has been that of a falling population. Of the said amount 75,966 people reside in the county’s capital Luleå, which is situated at about 930km from the nations capital- Stockholm. Thus, the county with respect to other Swedish counties is located in the periphery since the bulk of the country’s population is located in the southern metropolis. This region can be accessed by air, land and sea.

Tourism in Norrbotten county is managed under the brand Swedish Lapland by the organization Swedish Lapland Tourism “a collaboration platform representing the interests of the tourism industry in every municipality across Norrbotten County, as well as Skellefteå Municipality” (investinnorrbotten.se). It has a unique nature landscape and fascinating local culture. In fact it can be considered the melting pot of peoples and cultures as its unique border position between two countries make it home to the Sami, Norwegian, Finnish and Swedish cultures, not to mention the continuous influx of new people that give the county its multicultural characteristic.

Tourism in this region attracts tourists from around all over the world. This activity grew by 75% between 2000 and 2010, with overseas guests making up around 35% of guest nights in this period, amounting to a 4.1 billion turn over in 2010, a figure they hope to double by 2020. According to investinnorrbotten.se “Swedish Lapland Tourism is financed by membership fees, EU Structural Funds, every municipality in the region, Norrbotten County Council and Norrbotten County Administrative Board”.

b) Västerbotten

Västerbotten is the second largest province in Sweden, covering more than one eighth of the total area of Sweden and has 15 municipalities. It stretches from the Northern part of the golf of Bothnia to inwards to the west to the magnificent mountains bothering the region with Norway. As a peripheral location this region was also made beneficiary of the EU’s 3.3 billion Swedish kronor (SEK) programme “‘Objective 1 Norrbotten and Västerbotten’” (Müller & Jansson, 2007) mentioned
above. In this programme both regions are considered as located in regions that suffer from economic and social infrastructure bias implying they are both regions located in the periphery. This county had a population of 262,362 in 2014 out of which 119,613 of them come from, Umeå, the capital of this region.

This region’s most important touristic assets are nature- fauna and flora and culture. It is known that “between 1993 and 1999, Naturum (Nature Centres) and Kulturum (Culture Centres) were built, with exhibitions and other information concerning the interesting cultural environments and natural scenery in Västerbotten”, (lansstyrelsen.se). Its tourist target groups include: activities for extreme skiers, adventure seekers, health and wellness travels, meetings and incentives and extended business trips, (viavasterbotten.se) and lovers of culture as can be seen through the variety of museums located within the region, for example the Västerbotten’s museum being one of the most prominent. According to this same publication there is still “demand for new products and services, e.g. hotels and activities” as the region is experiencing growth impulse by important institutions like Umea University and the Umea Hospital. These institutions are responsible for attracting lots of international students, young talents and researchers to the region. This region has IKSU sports centre in Umeå, which is said to be the largest sports training facility in Europe. The area can be accessed by air, land and sea. Tourism in the region is managed through various municipal committees, private business owners and with the Västerbotten Tourism Board acting as an umbrella organization coordinating and promoting the efforts of the region as a whole trying to give it a single brand.

3.1.2. Tourism in Northern Sweden

Analysing tourism geographic literature on the region that covers Norrland and Västerbotten one realises that tourism has been used most often as a tool to develop the sparsely populated regions of the north, which have the tendency of suffering from negative population development. As the welfare model, that has traditionally supported wellbeing and living conditions in the periphery through regional development policies, is challenged by a) the pressure placed on the heavy subsidy based regional structures caused by Sweden’s involvement with the centralised focused European Union policies and b) the recent global financial crises, there is the eminent precondition that these peripheral regions will suffer from uneven regional development. This will happen should they keep losing their population and with it their means of economic subsistence.

Initially, as in all Nordic tourism, research in Northern Sweden was focused on “economic issues and impacts; [where] enquiries were ... driven by the needs of the [tourism] industry to boost the industry” (Anton Clavé & Wilson, 2013. Pg37). As the industry boomed focus changed to cautionary, orientated not only towards minimising its negative impacts on the environment but also on the society as “political and economic imbalances in North-South relations” (Britton, 1982), started occurring which signalled the need for adaptive measures in order for tourism to continue being a development tool in the region. Most research carried to this respect is geared towards the regional analysis of tourism and its development (Eriksson & Wikstöm, 1961; Helle, 1968), core-periphery relations, power and development (Lundmark.
However, there has also emerged a sub-focus in literature based on the “analysis of tourist resorts or attractions and their development, change and connections to surrounding regional structures” (Anton Clavé & Wilson, 2013. Pg44). How ever from the literature review and from this case background one realises that there is scarce literature dedicated to the product of fantasy and themed hotels located in a peripheral region like that of Northern Sweden.

To precede it will be important to explore the nature of tourism production control in the region since this element is essential in determining what kind of development strategy a region adopts through the use of tourism and themed tourism in this case. The development strategy might involve a gradual and controlled process or a speedier one. Obviously the production control determines to what extent tourists or tourism suppliers influence the creation of these tourism establishments and as such lead to the creation of a destination or place. All of these play an important role in the choice of theme, the nature of the themed establishment and its execution within a given location.

3.1.2.1. Tourism production control in Northern Sweden

In tourism, local production can either be supply-oriented or demand-oriented, (Aasbrenn, 1995; Slee et al., 1996; Westerdahl & Westlund, 1996). Supply-oriented tourism “is dominated by the destination and the attraction and is either tourism offered by a supplier with almost no marketing effort or by suppliers with a good contact with tour operators in the market”. Meanwhile, demand-oriented tourism is “dominated by the market”, where the tourist decides to visit a destination to satisfy their curiosity, or, is “stimulated by marketing efforts”, (Brown & Hall, 2000). Thus, according to the authors, “Northern Scandinavia offers predominantly supply-oriented tourism. In such a situation the producer is in full command of the situation “but there will probably not be much to control”, (Brown & Hall, 2000). For this reason it is common at times to find entire communities promote themselves aiming on highlighting their locality on the tourism map in order to attract tourists. This is essentially the case of Norrbotten and Västerbotten who have taken upon themselves to create attractions though theming with the aim of attracting tourists and locating themselves in the worldwide tourism map as the wilderness of the North and the business centre of Northern Scandinavia. Examples of such attractions, and the focus of this study, are fantasy and theme hotels in the name of, Treehotel, Stora Hotellet and the “Rock Hotel”. These shall be discussed below in the cases.

3.2. Methodological Research strategy

This section of the dissertation shall inform on the methodology used to obtain data used in this study. It shall expose the various techniques used to achieve research aims and to answer questions raised by this study. In addition to this the research paradigm will be defined to further justify why this particular methodology has been chosen. Then the method, that is how the research is carried out will be discussed in detail. Here there shall be a description of the cases and a justification of their relevance. There shall also be a discussion on the process of selecting informants. In this sub-
section, the different instruments used in data collection and the actual process followed shall be detailed with the different focus areas considered in the interviews. After that the objectives of the study shall be discussed followed by the ethical concerns considered in data collection and analysis shall be discussed. Then lastly the limitations of the study shall be considered.

3.2.1. Qualitative Research

This type of research method uses a “naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, such as real world setting [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2001, p. 39). It “produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 17), but rather arrived at from real-world settings where the "phenomenon of interest unfold naturally" (Patton, 2001, p. 39). This kind of research according to Hoepfl, (1997) seeks to provide illumination, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations. This is going to be the case of the present research.

3.2.2. Methodology

This section of the paper will explain the research methodology and design applied in this study. Based on the aim of this study an analysis of the assessment made by tourism industry suppliers of fantasy and themed hotels in Northern Sweden on what constitutes the product they offer; and the analysis of incoming operator opinion to Sweden on what attracts tourists to these establishments, will together inform on what makes up the product of fantasy and themed hotels in remote peripheries.

Departing from the basis that the study shall by analysing industry stakeholder perceptions and opinions, the methodology applied to this study shall be the case study research methodology. The study shall be based on a qualitative research method constructed on case studies with interviews on issues within, and related to the cases. The idea here is to examine exiting cases to see what they consider is their tourist product. The different issues emerging from the cases and from literature require an evaluation of contributions from different fields of study, as seen in the literature review: for example from tourism- theming and theme parks; marketing-destination branding and attractiveness; economics- the experience economy. Therefore, to be able to find out stakeholder views on all these issues it is thought that a more qualitative approach is the most appropriate as it permits respondents to respond in detail over a variety of issues.

The relevance of this methodology for the purpose of this study is related to the nature of the research aim and question and to the case studies applied. The only similarity among the cases is that they are located in peripheral areas and are developed through the concept of theming. Apart from that they are different: on the one hand, the nature of the research aim and question, which is: to analyse the perceptions and opinions of fantasy and theme hotel suppliers and incoming tour operator suppliers, requires that the researcher interview these different stakeholders to obtain this information since interview respondent profiles are varied. On the other
hand, related to the case studies, the number of cases found within the area of study is few, yet each case is different from the others in terms of the fantasy and theme used in each particular hotel concept and in terms of the unique geographical location in which the hotel is situated. Besides, although the hotels are located in the periphery, they are not in close proximity of each other. This implies that they do not benefit from synergic advantages of proximity. Therefore each hotel has a unique reality different from the others. Only a qualitative methodology will be able to grasp the complexities of this study. Merging these different contributions and perspectives to the different realities originating from the distinctive locations in which the hotels are found will require a more qualitative case study research methodology with interviews that will make it possible for the different opinions to be expressed and analysed in an attempt to respond to the research question.

Research Paradigm

The nature of this study implies that an interpretative constructivist paradigm would be the appropriate option to use in seeking any answers for this study. The interpretative philosophy holds that social sciences follows a different logic of research procedure from that of natural sciences in interpreting the world since its subject matter is also different from that of the natural sciences, (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). The logic of this research procedure allows the researcher to study elements in the social world to see if laws and patterns originate from these capable of explaining wider principles, (Anderson, 2004). The truth is reached through induction as opposed to deduction used in natural sciences. This paradigm holds that a concept can have different manifestations, a result of the different ways in which individuals perceive the same reality or occurrence. Therefore this paradigm is the most appropriate for this study as stakeholder opinions and perspectives on what the product of fantasy and theme hotels in the periphery consists of is perceived at individual managerial and case study level.

Linking this paradigm to the present study one realises that there is no single reality of analysis in the study. By this one means that each case, (hotel), is unique and must be scrutinized individually as they do not exhibit the same contextual and conceptual reality: the Icehotel is different from the Treehotel as shall be seen in the description of the different cases. Therefore, to be able to understand the reality of what the product of fantasy and themed hotels in the periphery is, different stages of opinion analysis have to be undertaken. First, one will have to know what fantasy and themed tourism industry suppliers consider constitutes the product they offer in the periphery. Then one needs to find out what, according to incoming operators, attracts tourists to these establishments. After gathering these different views from the various stakeholders, they ought to be analysed in order to draw conclusions and inform on what the tourist product actually is in this case. As such, the answer to the aim and question of this research shall be interpreted and constructed by induction from the conclusions drawn from the opinions of the various stakeholders involved. Therefore, the interpretative constructivist paradigm should be considered the most appropriate for the study.

3.2.4. Research Approach
The research approach that will be used in this study as introduced above will be the *inductive approach*. This approach starts from specific observations to broader generalizations and theories, (Patterson and Williams, 2002) a ‘bottom-top’ approach as opposed to the deductive approach which is a ‘top-down’ model where research goes from more generalisations to specific conclusions. As such the inductive approach uses data collected to generate ideas rather than justify of disapprove of an idea as would be in the case of a deductive research, (Tashakkori, and Charles, 2003). In the case of this research the specific opinions and perceptions of stakeholders shall be used to generate the idea of what consist of the product of fantasy and theme hotels in the periphery. An advantage of this approach is that it captures the very minute details necessary in drawing conclusions. However this research approach has a limitation being that results obtained cannot be generalised to all case scenarios as these are true only to the particular cases studied.

### 3.2.5. Research Strategy

This section of the paper will discuss the strategy or direction the researcher employs to identify the right sample population from which information shall be collected, (Patterson and Williams, 2002). The *ethnographic research strategy* has been employed in this research, as it is effective in obtaining stakeholder opinions and perceptions with regards to what they consider the product of fantasy and theme hotels in the periphery. The reason for this strategy is because each company is different, and not only that, the perceptions and opinions of each manager might be different from that of peers and the established order within the company. Thus only an ethnographic study will be able to bring these divers points of views to light. Advantages of this strategy are that firstly, information is obtained directly from the very source. Secondly it allows for flexibility during data collection making necessary adjustments during the research period easy to be incorporated.

However, there are also disadvantages to this strategy. To begin, it relies on the memory of respondents meaning that any information forgotten deducts accuracy from data collected and this could lead to discrepancies in results. Also, when dealing with people it is known that neither do they always say their minds, nor mean what they say. In the case of this study managers may even be prompted to use the interviews as a means of marketing their hotels. This could affect the quality of conclusions drawn, (Punch, 2005). To overcome these shortcomings, the study shall establish its discussion on existing relevant literature. Also interviews shall be semi-structured to curb any digressions leading away from the researchers intended focus.

### 3.2.6. Research Method/Instrument

According to Alvesson, and Sköldberg, (2000), accurate results in a research shall be obtained only if suitable instruments for data collection are used in accordance with the nature of the study at hand. Thus for this studied it is viewed that the most appropriate method for data collection should be the *semi-structured in-depth interviews* with selected managers. When it comes to collecting in-depth knowledge on views, opinions, impressions and perceptions this instrument can prove the most suitable in capturing these subtle details. This instrument allows the researcher to be
able to clarify uncomprehended questions on spot and help respondents to interpret difficult questions as such help in a timely manner to establish accuracy of responses to interview questions.

3.2.7. Interview Design

Interviews for each group of respondents will be slightly different since they are meant to give their views following their line of activity within tourism. However, some questions would still be general to the two groups. So interviews will find out four mains issues- First of all it will find out what managers of theme hotels think the product of such an establishment in the periphery is and to what extent the hotel is consumed exclusively as a sole attraction. Secondly questions will find out what incoming operators think attract tourists to Northern Sweden and particularly to theme hotels. This will lead to an exploration of the various attractions that they highlight in their marketing endeavours aimed at attracting inbound tourists into Sweden and into the Northern region in particular. The next set of questions directed to both groups will find out the role of place in the location of theme hotels in the periphery. The last group of questions shall focus on the creation of fantasy and theme hotels in the Periphery, challenges they have to face and how future establishments of this kind should proceed in the creation of future theme hotels. This will try to see if there is a gap for such establishments in Swedish Northern Sweden. It will investigate what these establishments should take into consideration when locating themselves in such locations. It will find out the role of complementary activities, of nature, of local services, accessibility, importance of the chosen theme, design and architecture, the act of going away far up north, just to name a few. The study will also find out from both groups what they think are the challenges of doing tourism with and in the Northern region a what recommendations can be given to future stakeholders planning on setting theme hotels in the region.

From these interviews, the study will then analyse the responses to see if a relationship can be established between the responses obtained from both groups of respondents. It is hoped that their views and perceptions shall help to inform on what makes up the destination and /or product of fantasy and themed hotels in the periphery. Understanding what the product of these hotels consists of might help determine to what extent endeavours towards destination development through fantasy and themed tourism would be successful in such locations. Success here depends on the consumption of place through tourism. This means that the success of these hotels in the periphery would only come about if tourists find them attractive enough to visit recommend and possibly revisit.

3.2.8. Sampling

By sampling one means the identification process of a suitable study population for the study. Sampling gives the researcher the possibility to interview only those informants that are suitable for the study as such guaranteeing the accuracy of data. It also enables the research to safe time as it makes it possible for unnecessary informants and interviews to be excluded on time. To be able to achieve these, a selection criterion ought to be employed in the identification and choice of informants. For the purpose of this study quota sampling is seen to be the most appropriate sampling
method. This is so because it enables the researcher to determine the amount of informants that will be interviewed according to the given characteristics they possess. These characteristics are deemed important towards achieving the aim of the study and answering the research question.

Therefore, informants for this study ought to be managers or experts: usually individuals holding some post of responsibility or management within the company. These informants are supposed to be experts within their fields of expertise. In relation to this study they must be part of the operations and or sales and marketing teams within the company. It is understood that employees in such positions ought to have expert knowledge and exercise expert responsibility on the conception, design and execution of the company’s products or services in order to perform efficiently in their tasks. The first level of sampling shall involve choosing managers from the different cases that shall be used in this study. Here, three managers shall be interviewed one from each of the case studies that shall be analysed. The second level of sampling involves managers or experts from incoming tour operator agencies located around Sweden. It is important for them to be dispersly located as it enables for a well-informed opinion and experience from different parts of the country in connection with theme hotels located in the northern region. Four of them shall be interviewed. Interviews are planned to be between 25 minutes and one hour depending on the availability of the informants, as they are characteristically difficult to access for interviews.

Advantages of this sampling method to the present study are that first of all it allows only for expert knowledge from industry to be collected. It makes it possible for researcher to identify suitable informants for interview. The small amount of information obtained if compared to that obtained from convenient sampling makes it easier for data to be analysed in record time. However this also brings out the limitation of the study. The small amount of informant may lead to data misrepresentation especially if one ignores the fact that having purposefully hand picked informants could lead to an incompleteness in data collection and flawed results eventually. To overcome this limitation the study on the one hand covers the most renounced fantasy and themed hotels in the region. Depending on expert knowledge guarantees the fact that one does not need a lot of interviews to get a comprehensive view of the question at hand. Rather the quality of the interview is what matters since one can get a lot of detail information from just one in-depth interview with an expert.

3.2.9. Case study and the Cases

The cases used in this study are three: The Treehotel, Stora Hotellet and The Rock Hotel. These cases are located in the Swedish Northern peripheries close to and in the arctic region. A detailed description of these cases will be found later under data description.

3.2.10. Data Collection:
Interviews are the means through which this study shall get data. Interview schedules are made when most convenient for the managers so that they are psychologically prepared of the time they shall spend with the interview meeting. Interviews are scheduled for April since it is a low season just after Easter breaks where activity at hotels is lesser and when most incoming operators are less busy with attending trade fairs. Trade fairs are venues where incoming tour operators make the most contacts for their products. So it is advisable to approach them when they are less preoccupied with preparations for one.

Initially it was intended to locate the managers of Swedish incoming companies at the Gothenburg TUR 2015 trade fair. But as it proved the companies of these managers were not exhibiting at this fair, which implies they either, only do so in international trade fairs out of Sweden or through professional networking meetings held at business saloons. This there led to a change of plan in the way informants were approached. Informants hence were located first of all through the corporate websites of the various companies, in the contact section. After going through the company’s list of employees, the researcher selected those informants that fell within the sampling criteria chosen for this study. Their information was collected into an excel file. Then a letter to informants soliciting interviews was drafted and sent by emailed. This was later followed by telephone calls to the various possible informants, with the aim of finding out their availability for an interview. Depending on their availability the researcher then selected 11 informants that were to be interviewed. Four of the informants were hotel managers and the remaining seven managers were from incoming companies serving the Swedish market. In the end informants consisted of three suppliers and four incoming operators.

The primordial intention was meant for all interviews to be carried out in person but because of financial constraints on the part of the researcher and also because some informants were physically out of reach, most interviews were therefore carried out by telephone. In any case interviews carried out with the physical presence of the researcher were conducted at informants offices which was considered an area usually with less intrusion be it from noise or other persons not intended for interview. All interviews were recorded, this way there will be no risk of missing any valuable information. The instruments used were the iPad to record, the phone and a speaker. To ensure quality interviews by telephone, a speaker was attached to the telephone and the interview was carried out in a quite room. Even so, in all cases a field notebook was kept, as it is handy to jot down observations, to which one can quickly refer to for follow-up questions during interviews.

3.2.11. Data analysis
The form of data analysis in this research shall consist in content analysis of the various opinions and perceptions gotten from the various informants. Content analysis is the research tool that is used to detect the presence of certain words or concepts in a text or recording. These words or concept shall then be quantified and analysed for meanings and relationships. To carry out this analysis the interviews shall be transcribed and broken down into manageable categories and coded on the bases of themes. After coding all the interviews, the conceptual analysis, one of the content
analysis’ basic methods shall be employed to analyse the different themes arising. The conceptual analysis establishes the existence and frequency of concepts, that might be related or not, usually through words or phrases in a text or recording. This method would enable the researcher to establish any similarities and differences that may arise in data, (Patterson and Williams, 2002).

At this point recordings shall be listened to carefully, transcribed and analysed to identify the different themes arising. These shall then be recorded in writing so as to make it easy to define any relationship rising among concepts. Ideas arising and related shall be grouped according to themes. From the relations and differences arising in data the researcher shall be able to attempt some generalisations among the cases in order to make specific conclusions. This approach creates room for critical reflection on one’s own assumptions as a researcher, (Goodson and Phillimore 2004; Hollinshead 2006) making it easy for one to consider the role of reflexivity and of the self in research.

An advantage of content analysis employed in this study will be that it shall be used to interpret opinions and perceptions of managers for purposes such as the development of expert in-depth structures. This results from the fact that knowledge can both be coded in terms of explicit statements about the relationships among concepts obtained from the managers – whom are expert informants on the topic. However this method of analysis does not go without limitations. First and foremost it is time consuming. This method is usually lacking in theoretical bases reasons why meaning is usually drawn from inferences obtained from relationships implied in the study. Also, care has to be taken not to disregard the context within which words and phrases are used. Another limitation will be that an in-depth relational analysis, a more detailed method of content analysis, shall not be applied. However, since the most important aspect of the research is to get the opinions and perceptions of managers, it is thought that a conceptual analysis shall be enough to derive the conclusions needed to attend the aim and answer the questions raised by the research question.

3.2.12. Reliability and Validity

While quantitative studies employ these two terms as the essential criteria to guarantee quality, these notions in qualitative studies are used to encompass the ideas of “credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness, (Golafshani, 2003) on the one hand and neutrality, confirmability, dependability and applicability, (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), on the other. These terms shall be examined at the level of the researcher’s distance in influencing results and from the level of the type of data analysis tool used to see if this tool has been used as prescribed to analyse data with the aim of obtaining valid conclusions. In General, the level of standardization used in administering interviews (Anderson, 2004) determines the research’s level of reliability and validity.

Reliability
According to Joppe (2000) reliability is determined by how an accurate representation of a total population [or cases] reproduces results that are consistent over time, i.e. replicable and repeatable. Should results of a study be reproduced through the same
methodology, the research instrument would be deemed reliable. In the case of this study to ensure the replicability of results, the researcher made sure to collect the data personally from screened expert respondents. Respondents were allowed to delve deep into the subject matters raised in order that they brought up details needed in understanding the question of this study. Then interviews are adequately recorded to enable the retrieve of information easy and accurate and possible to be re-listened to should the need arise. However, the number of respondents selected for this study might be considered small to represent this particular tourism industry sector. However, these respondents are experts, as such one does not need a huge sample to get expert knowledge.

Validity
According to Winter, (2000) this concept is not a single, fixed or universal concept, but “rather a contingent construct, inescapably grounded in the processes and intentions of particular research methodologies and projects” (Winter, 2000, p.1). Thus following the definition given by Joppe, (2000) validity is “meant to truly measure that which method was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are”. To achieve validity first of all interview questions were drawn from issues raised in previous studies, that is, extracted from the different concepts related to the study and treated in the literature review. Validity shall further be assessed at the end of the study from how data analysis method was faithfully employed to achieve results and conclusions of the study. Therefore by employing the notions of reliability and validity it is hoped that results obtained would be consistent over time and be an accurate representation of the situation under study.

3.2.13. Ethics
Informants and managers will be informed of the purpose of the study and their permission shall be asked for interviews to be recorded. Also, in order to increase trust important points, opinions expressed and issues discussed and all noted during interviews shall be electronically sent to the various informants through email for them to review and if the case, rectify any discrepancies that may arise. At the end of the research a copy of the manuscript shall be sent to them by email so that they can see how they participated in the study and at the same time have a copy of the work for their personal reference.

3.2.14. Limitations
The first imitation would arise from a linguistic point of view. The researcher’s working language is English meaning it is possible the researcher might have missed out on literature on the subject in other languages. This is so especially in the case of Swedish the language of Sweden, the country in which this study is carried out. Also, informants that are not native speakers might find it hard communicating the required information correctly. Another limitation yet will arise from the method used. Following the method of analysis, the case study, results will not be generalizable to a certain extend given the fact that they are impressions from only three exemplary cases situated in a given location- the Swedish Northern Periphery. However, this
might be the premise from which further research on the topic could arise. Results obtained from this study and setting could be tested in other remote peripheries different from that of Swedish Scandinavia to see if the tourist product is the same.

3.2.15. Importance of the study
The *societal relevance* of this study is that it will provide more insight on the phenomenon of fantasy and themed hotels in Northern Sweden and highlight important information that can be used to foster development in the area and consequently contribute in strengthening the position of the region on the national and international tourist scenes.

The *economic relevance* of the study will be that it would provide a working document on the product of fantasy and themed hotels in peripheral regions and stakeholders could use these to create successful businesses of this type in the periphery in the future.

The *academic relevance* of the study stems from the fact that it will contribute knowledge on the nature of the product of fantasy and theme hotels in the Northern Swedish periphery. This knowledge can be used to examine the phenomenon in other peripheral locations and inform on how these peripheries should develop fantasy and themed experiences in order to attract tourists. Also the study could lead to further studies in the field for example based on theme hotels as a tool for regional development in the Scandinavian periphery.
3. DATA DESCRIPTION
Cases used for this study are explored below.

a) The Treehotel in Harads

The Location and Origin

The Treehotel was founded by Britta, a former nurse and health care project manager, and Kent, her husband, from the educational system. Their experience in project management and provincial development finally led them to undertaking the Treehotel project. Treehotel is located in Harads, a locality in Norrbotten approximately fifty kilometres outside the capital of the county, Luleå, buried in magnificent surroundings of miles of forest and the views to the Lule River. Treehotel is located at approximately one hour by car from Luleå (Kallax) airport. It can be accessed by helicopter, snowmobile, private jet, rental car and by bus. Harads has a small population of about 600 people.

According to the hotel website, the inspiration for this business venture was taken from the movie “The Tree Lover” by Jonas Selberg Augustsén. In this movie, the tree protagonists are men from the city who indeed to rediscover their roots decide to move way into the woods and build a tree-house together. The website explains that the story is a philosophical one “about the tree’s importance to our people, both historically and culturally”, (treehotel.se). Therefore exploring the importance of the ‘tree’ led to the concept of the Treehotel.

Concept

“Why not create a hotel that gives people a chance to experience nature amongst the tree-tops, while also providing a uniquely designed housing experience?” (Treehotel).

So, the whole concept of the Treehotel is focused towards creating a restful sophisticated experience for guests, offering an experience embedded in nature and to make “minimal ecological footprint in the production”, (treehotel.se) and consumption process. Therefore, it offers the unique experience of high-standard contemporarily designed tree rooms in the middle of an untouched environment in the Harads woodlands. It is an experience created to help visitors leave behind the stress of day-to-day life and immerse themselves in the sophisticated tranquillity and purity offered by the woods and the views of the Lule River flowing close by, far away from the urban fuzz. Each of the uniquely designed rooms is built at 4 to 6 meters above ground facing the Lule River. They are built with ecological resources in a sustainable manner seeing to an efficient energy consumption solution as well.

Attractions

The main attractions of the Treehotel are the rooms and the nature in which the hotel is submerged. These rooms are designed by some of Scandinavia’s leading architects.
converting the rooms in to works of art both on the inside and outside. The whole hotel project plans to have 24 treerooms in the Harads forest. The project started with five treerooms completed in 2010. “The rooms vary in size between 15-30 m², with the largest rooms accommodating up to four people”, (treehotel.se). Each is custom designed in terms of furniture, lightening and fabrics. There is the Mirrorcube with mirrored walls that reflect their surroundings. Then there is the Cabin accessed from a high platform on the hillside overlooking the Lule River. In addition to these there is the Bird’s Nest, accessed by a retractable stairway, and whose exterior looks like a giant bird’s nest. While the Bird’s Nest offers a harmonious lodging in its surroundings the UFO, yet another room offers the “out of place” experience. Then there is the Blue Cone which is a simple wooden cabin accessed by a bridge from the maintain side. In addition to all these is the Tree sauna that can take up to 12 people. Partnerships like that with the famous Swedish lighting company, ateljé Lyktan, to supply lighting fixture only help to add to the sophistication of the design.

Apart from the design the personal service experience created by the hosts is part of the attraction. Guests are received at Britta’s guesthouse where meals are served by “hosts Kent and Britta in their genuine 1930’s-1950’s setting”, (treehotel.se) - thus giving a human touch to the experience. After this they are then guided to their treeroom. However, should guest demand privacy, meals can also be served in the rooms. Should guests want some activity they have a bunch of activities from which they can chose, depending on the season. For example, they can engage in Kayak along the Lule River, go fishing or engage in dog sled rides, snowshoe hike, or check out the Northern lights as well as visit the Sámi village among others.

b) The Rock Hotel

Location and Origin

The Rockhotel conceived in 2009, is a project still in the planning stage. It shall be constructed in Bjurholm when the project goes through and is accepted for funding. Located within Västerbotten at close to 60 km of Umeå, the capital of the county, Bjurholm is considered Sweden’s smallest municipality according to viavasterbotten.se. The largest foreign markets to the region in order of importance are; Norway, Germany, Finland, England and Switzerland which is a reflection of the general tendency at the county level as can be seen on Statistics Sweden.

The idea of the hotel came from discussions with local tourism business owners on what was needed to attract tourists to the Bjurholm locality. It was noted that the locality had many camping sites with basic lodging facilities like cabins offering basic services that did not satisfy different market niches. Mostly it lacked high class and luxury lodging facilities aimed at those seeking the pleasures of the natural environment in conjunction with the comfortable relaxing setting of a hotel. Not long it was realised that creating a high class, themed lodging facility in the region would not only provide alternative high class lodging in the locality but will also attract another kind of tourist to the region – ones who would principally come to the region
to visit, experience and stay in the hotel like it happens with cases like the Icehotel. Also, this lack of quality hotel accommodation made private and conference tourists driving around the region to end up being only day visitors to Bjurholm.

Apart from attracting a different kind of client to the region this lodging facility would also accommodate excess conference and private tourist lodging demand from Umea. It was noticed that there were not sufficient hotel rooms to house guests visiting Umea. This usually led to the allocation of lodging to surplus visitors attending conferences in Umea to hotels in neighboring localities when Umea experienced such shortages. Bjurholm however lacked facilities to take advantage of the shortages in Umea. Therefore, hoping to create a new attraction and at the same time provide a solution to the shortage of hotel lodging in the region gave a reason for the creation of the Rock Hotel. The advantage of Bjurholm’s close proximity to Umea made the destination management consultants to conclude that a theme hotel as an attraction would be the most convenient and suitable activity to set up within the locality capable of attracting more tourists to the Bjurholm and offering lodging to existing ones. The very idea that it is going to be a hotel implies it will be able to serve the different purposes as mentioned above.

Concept

Having decided on what the locality needed- the hotel, the next step was to decide on what the theme of the hotel will be. It was agreed that the theme concept should originate from nature since Bjurholm is rural in nature with a lot of attractive flora and fauna on which most activities taking place in the region were based on. Calling in Link Arkitektur, a renounced design bureau working in Scandinavia, to survey the landscape for a good location for the hotel gave them the chance to explore the area and come up with different nature theme ideas. They realised that Bjurholm is known for nature, the mountains and stone. So they though the hotel could be themed in line with nature geared towards some kind of mineral and in this case the ‘rock’ stood out as the most appropriate choice to go with. It is thought that this concept will go well with the local scenery. Presently, apart from the fact that lack of investment is holding back the actual realization of the hotel, the project managers are still deciding on the site of the hotel.

Attractions

The hotel itself is meant to be an attraction. There is divided opinion as to what kind of client the hotel should target. Some of the managers think it is going to be a place for business people, high-class couples and all from the top niche to relax in. Meanwhile others think it should be for all, families included and should principally provide lodging and other complementary activities in the region. Some think the idea is to create high-class hotel-quality cabin-like accommodation. From all these views it is clear that the hotel attraction is not yet defined- the developers are still working on defining the concept and experience that is hoped the hotel will deliver. Yet the one thing that stands out is that the hotel should be attractive enough to draw people to Bjurholm.
As for complementary attractions in Bjurholm apart from being in nature there are activities like canoeing, climbing, camping, skiing, hiking, golf, horse riding, visiting the moose farm and other rural activities. The cuisine of the region as well as artesan products like cheese are all very important attractions. Yet not all clients visiting Bjurholm to practice and experience these activities would like spend the night in the usual camping sites that the locality offers for lodging. The need for an alternative high-class accommodation facility justifies the need for a project like the Rock Hotel in the region.

Stora Hotellet

Stora Hotellet is an impressive hotel that was established by the Umea’s Seaman Mission, thus the present Stora Hotellet is a refurbished older hotel that was built and completed in 1895. The new hotel re-enacts the old hotel’s grandeur and sea influences. It aims to retell the story of the Umea’s great hotel and the adventures of its first manager.

This part of the paper will consist in describing the information obtained from both groups of informants- suppliers of theme hotels and incoming operators. The first part shall be focused on information obtained from suppliers concerning the nature of the product their establishments offer or plans to offer. Information was obtained from one of the managers to the Treehotel, from the CEO of Blå Huset Hotell Umeå AB on Stora Hotellet- one of the newest fantasy and theme hotels in Umeå and also from one of the tourism municipal coordinators and project leader to the Bjurholm county on the Rockhotel- a project still in the making based on a fantasy and theme hotel concept.

4.1. Suppliers

Exploring the attraction or the product that fantasy and theme hotels in peripheral and remote areas of Northern Sweden offer

4.1.1. Product of the theme hotel and the Experience offered

These groups of experts were then asked what they considered to be the product of the theme hotel they were offering in the periphery. To this the manager of the Treehotel informed that they were selling a hotel- which comprised accommodation, food and activities. He explained that the Treehotel concept has three important parts. To begin, they offered “modern designed tree houses lodged in the forest, in nature”. These houses offered a “comfortable stay” and lastly they were an “ eco-friendly accommodation”. The experience they want their clients to carry away is that of having been “to a very unique place, with very nice and spectacular design” and having “tried local food”. He goes on to note that part of their product is offering hospitality where their clients can come to a “remote, quiet” place “where they can relax”.

The CEO of Stora Hotellet to this question highlighted that the product is that of “boutique hotel” accommodation through which a story is told. The story of
seamanship which highlighted the experiences of Gotthard Zetterberg, the first manager of the hotel, who was well versed with life at sea as well as with the hotel business. He is well known in Umea for his generosity and hospitality skills. As such, hospitality is the central “experience” that the hotel wants the clients to carry away with them. The visitor should at every moment feel at home, and well attended to. Proximity is key here. The CEO informed that preferably the story should be told by word of mouth. Every worker is educated on the story of the hotel so that they can in turn be the ambassadors of informing visitors who ask about the story of the hotel. The idea here is that every one connected to the hotel should partake in creating the experience for the visitors. It is considered in this case that both the “workers and the owners make up the creative team” and the “marketing team” as they are the ones who recreate the story to the visitors.

The product of the Rockhotel on the other hand is still being defines as of now. But it is interesting to know how things are going in the creative process. Our informant expressed the different opinions that existed at this stage with the different managers. Some of them want the product of the hotel to be just a type of accommodation “where people will just come to stay at the hotel... like in the Icehotel...” for “...one or two nights”. Others think the hotel should offer more to embrace the needs of a bigger market who would not only be interested in an “interesting hotel” but will also “want to do some activities” outside the hotel too. They propose the hotel should have “complementary activities outside the hotel like Ålgenhus (the elk house), canoeing, like horse activities” all offered within the Bjurholm county.

4.1.2. Environment in which product is located as part of the attraction

The question intends to find out if the location is marketed as part of the product. To this the manager of the Treehotel replied, “yes, of course”. Then he explained that the tree hotel was meant to be in the forest so that people can enjoy nature. So in their marketing efforts they market more than just the hotel destination. They market the “Swedish Lapland with the winter season and the snow, northern lights, winter activities and the surrounding nature”

The CEO to Stora Hotellet, the whole Umea setting counts towards the location of the Hotel. Clients visiting the hotel will be able to enjoy the different attractions that the Umea as a city defining itself has to offer. Clients will be able to stay in an exclusive unique hotel just close to the beautiful scenery offered by the Umea River, shop at the city centre in the New Utopia shopping mall. They will be able to have some cultural experience on the Sami at the Västerbottens Museum or enjoy city life and dining in the pubs and restaurants of Umea. The hotel will definitely enjoy from its proximity to the main University and Hospital located in Northern Sweden. So the location definitely is seen as part of the attraction.

To the Rockhotel location will definitely be seen as part of the attraction since the hotel will be themed following the natural elements that exist in the country especially as the county is known for mountain, nature and stone”. Evidently some of its creators will want the hotel do collaborate with other local suppliers like the Ålgenhus, which is
well know, to offer additional activities to clients as such taking advantage of the location of the environment to offer a better product.

4.1.3. Highlighted attractions aimed at attracting clients
The next question has to do with those attractions that the suppliers highlight or sell to Clients and tour operators sending tourists to Sweden, with the intention of attracting tourists to the Northern region. To this the manager of the Treehotel pointed out their list of activities could be found on their webpage- but then went forward to cite activities like “transport from the airport, winter activities like dog sledge, snow bike tours, winter fishing, snow shoe tours... in summer like kayak, fishing, hiking”. The informant from the Rock hotel on the other hand informed that attractions like “Ålgenhus” and, activities like “snowmobile”, “canoeing”, “horse activities”, “climbing” just to name a few are activities that would attract people to Bjurholm. And of course “nature” and the mountains.

4.1.4. Knowledge of attractions demanded by tourists
This questions aims at finding out what according to suppliers attracted tourists to the northern region and to Lapland in particular. To this the informant from the Treehotel highlighted that the “Northern lights is important” and is a “big attraction”.

4.1.5. Importance of Complementary activities
This questioned aimed to find the opinion of the suppliers as to how important complementary activities were to clients when they booked a stay in a theme hotel. To this suppliers pointed out that most often they offer packages including activities or otherwise side activities, which the client can book on request at an additional cost. This is because the activities are sometimes organised by other companies with whom the hotel works and are usually equally costly and as such cannot be offered as complementary activities. As side activities, the manager of the Treehotel highlights notes that “most of the guests book one or two activities”. He goes ahead to emphasise that “it is [a] very important attraction for the hotel to have activities”.

4.1.6. Going “North”
This question finds out the significance attached to travelling “North” away from the big metropolitan cities for clients that book theme hotels in the North of Sweden. To this the manager of the Treehotel highlights a number of reasons:
“One is that people are interested to see the Northern lights in winter” and another reason is that, they want “to experience a real winter holiday” and carry out “a couple of winter activities”. The third reason linked to the hotel is that “they are attracted by the tree houses in extreme nature [with their] unique design. He explains also that going north means going away to a “quiet still place, away from the big cities and stress,” it is like going away to calm down in a “relaxing place”.

4.1.7. Effect of distance on Demand
To the question of how distance affected or counted as an attraction towards the demand for the theme hotel product in the periphery, the Treehotel informant pointed out that it made the product “more expensive” and far away. But also he said that the brand of the product is strong enough to out weigh the effects of this setback.
and people “book it even [if] they live in Australia or USA”. The distance according to him “makes the tree hotel itself the travel reason”, thus more attractive and so people are “ready to go and pay a lot of money” to carry out the trip.

To the manager of the Rockhotel distance will not be a limitation for the demand of the hotel in Bjurholm as “it is not so far [from] Umea and it takes just about 50mins to the airport”. She further informs that trends are changing as far as sticking to the big cities for conferences are concerned. Being just 50 minutes from Umea and the airport makes it easy for people to come from Stockholm by flight and by boat from Finland.

4.1.8. Challenges
This questions aims to find out the challenges tourism suppliers face in doing business within the Northern region. The main challenge was that of having “good connection with flights to different parts of the world”, according to the manager of the Treehotel. He mentions it would be an advantage to the are to have “direct flights from a couple of big cities in the world”. Another challenge according to this informant is related to the industrial exploitation of the area like carrying out “mining” or establishing “wind Power stations”. He emphasises that should the region convert into an industrial region there would be negative consequences to tourism related products as theirs for as he says “people look for the untouched nature as much as possible”.

To the CEO of Stora Hotellet the main challenge is that of getting qualified dedicated staff for the hospitality industry. She notes that most qualified staff use hospitality service jobs as part-time while they train or aim for other careers and this makes it difficult to maintain the level of service in an establishment like Stora Hotellet that prides itself on offering the best hospitality to its customers. However this challenge is countered when workers are well treated which lead to less staff rotation and loss of talents.

To the Rockhotel the challenge will be that of seasonality- filling the hotel during low season “in autumn and fall” and on “weekends”. The manager notes that hotels in Umea and around usually have “no problem on Monday to Thursday because there are many people [there] working, [having] meetings or conferences”. Another challenge will be that the hotel will have a lot of competition from many other “hotels in Sweden that host conference”. That would be the more reason why they “can’t just get them [tourists] to come for the hotel” alone. So she points out, “the whole destination” has to be developed to attract people for other activities other than conferences.

Fantasy and theme hotels Per-se

4.1.9. Theme Hotel idea creation
The first question to this group of informant in this section was how they came up with the idea of the hotel. To this the manager of the tree hotel explained that the idea was inspired by a documentary called “The Tree Lover” by Jonas Selberg Augustsen based on the story of three men from the city going away into the forest to construct a tree house together with the aim of rediscovering their roots and connecting with their
past. This film for the documentary was screened in Harads and the tree house used for the film is what was rented in its day to test the idea of the tree hotel and it worked as people loved to stay in tree houses. So famous architects each with an original idea were invited by the founders of the tree hotel to put up the first 6 Tree houses. Of course, to the owners of the Treehotel this was not their first venture- they already ran a guesthouse called Brittaspenionat that has 9 bedrooms and a restaurant serving local meals and products from the region. Because of the seasonality of clients visiting the guesthouse they thought having the Treehotel would be a good product to ensure they had clients all year round. And beside Harads provided a location with unspoiled nature with forests that were perfect for the project. Besides, the manager explained that deciding to theme the hotel as The Treehotel came as a natural decision since they “live in the forest area”, and as such “need to do something with the place in which” they live.

Stora Hotellet on the other hand is a refurbished 19th century hotel located at the banks of the Umea river, that reopened its door in 2014 taking advantage of Umea’s hosting of the European Capital of Culture event. The owners had realised that Umea was often in shortage of hotel accommodation, and also did not have a luxury hotel with unique characteristics. Taking advantage of the old Stora Hotellet’s past, the actual hotel rekindles the notion of seamanship that was the core of the old hotel that opened in 1895. The hotel is out to maintain and tell the story of Umea’s past as an important seafaring town from which people and good left for different destinations all round the world. Then it served as a seaman’s mission house and as a hotel where the most prominent of the society then converged. Today the hotel serves as a venue to retell that story through its 82 unique rooms that range from spacious suites to compact cabins all designed to reflect atmosphere at sea.

As for the Rockhotel, the project leader interviewed informed that, the idea of the Rockhotel came up through a questioning session on what is to be done to attract people to Bjurholm. The people in the county, companies and tourists were asked to come up with something that the county needed in order to develop itself. So they all agreed that it needed some kind of a unique hotel. They argued that Bjurholm had camping sites but did “not have attractive places where people can stay”. They had noticed that not every one coming for the “many fine attractions” in the county wanted to stay at the camping sites. So the idea of building a luxury hotel was agreed upon. The architects that came up with the model for the hotel were given the freedom to come up with ideas as to how the hotel should look like. These architects saw that Bjurholm is known for “mountains, nature, stone” so they got the idea to “go in line with nature material”. This was they decided to call the future hotel the Rockhotel. The definition of the theme for this hotel is still being defined.

4.1.10. Theming for business
The next question to this group of informants was why they thought theming was the best strategy to set up their business. To this the manager from the Treehotel informed that, “they knew and understood that design and architecture attract a lot of people” and to succeed in a remote place like Harads they had to come up with “something unique that nobody has done before”. To do this, to the 5 architects
chosen to put up the first 5 tree houses they were instructed to “come up with something new” and were not “to do what others have done before”. He insisted the “design on the concept” was the “most important part” of the theming process.

The CEO of Stora Hotellet informed that they realised the story of Stora Hotellet was “true and unexploited” and as such they realised they needed the expertise of “good designers that can transform the idea into a concept” in order to create “uniqueness” and this could only be done through theming. To do this they had to travel and see other unique hotel and resort facilities in Paris, Moscow just to name a few, in the likes of “Coste Hotel Paris”, “Disneyland Paris” to see how these managed to tell their own story in an interesting manner. The expertise of the great architect Stylt Trampoli was sort to make the theme a reality.

The informant for the Rockhotel to this question had no clear response especially as the theme for the upcoming hotel was still under definition. However theming the hotel in line with nature is seen to be an interesting idea since this has the most attractions in Bjurholm.

4.1.11. Location of choice
The next question wanted to find out why the choice of the particular location in which the product was located. To this the Treehotel informant explained that they chose Harads because “we live here and we found the business here” and wanted to develop the area in which they lived. The location was decided upon for more practical reasons. The same goes for Stora Hotellet. The Old Stora Hotellet was located in Umea close to the riverside and that is where the stories related to the hotel took place. So it was but natural for the refurbished hotel to remain and replace the old one in Umea. To the Rockhotel, the need to come up with an attraction led to the idea of creating the hotel so need was the driving force behind the idea. Then the specificities of the location (the presence of nature and the lack of hotels in neighboring localities that can hold excess demand from Umea) led to the idea of the theme and the placement of the hotel in Bjurholm.

4.1.12. Journey to the location of choice
Here one wants to determine if the actual journey embarked upon by visitors to come to a remote place for a theme hotel experience can be considered part of the attraction. To this the Treehotel informant agrees. He explains that though it’s a “long distance... at the same time it is an attraction” as people are “curious to know how it is in the Arctic Circle” as “very few people have been very far north”.

4.1.13. Repeat experience
Here I would like to find out if the theme hotel is a one in a life time destination or if there are people who repeat the experience. The manager at the tree hotel informed that 80% of guests that leave them say “they will come back” and some of them “come back soon”. This is because they “want to experience to do another thing, in another season or another time, in another room”, he explains. Then, when asked how they create new experiences for repeat customer he explains that “the most important here is the activities” that are woven into “different packages”. Also the menu is
developed constantly as “food is very important to guests”. TO the Rockhotel informant, it is important to have “alternative attractive things to do” so that repeat customers will always have new experiences to look forward to when they book a stay at the hotel.

4.1.14. Future projects
When asked if there were future projects in mind, the tree hotel informant explained that it is important to keep the concept small as the idea is to provide a “small”, “private place” to the visitors that come and as such it can only hold a “few people at the same time”. “So that is also the attraction” he says. Maybe the concept might be expanded only by one or two more rooms so as to keep the place as private as possible.

4.1.15. Demand for more themed establishments in the region
This question aims at finding out if there is room for more themed establishments in the region or if the existing ones are able to cover existing demand. The informant at the Treehotel expressed the fact that there is more demand for this kind of product as it’s the only way to “grow up here” in the north. Having “a special unique hotel” will help “attract more international guests, to have more people” in the area. However he insists that it has to be connected with some “kind of nature”. It has to be a “nature based hotel”, though not another tree hotel, it has to be based on a “unique design” with a different concept in other to diversify the offer of hotel lodging and experiences in the area. To the informant of the Rockhotel, there is need for high quality establishments related to “nature” that can contain excess demand from Umea. She points out that there are no other hotels of “this kind in Vindeln, Vännäs, Nordmaling or Robertfors”- localities close to Bjurholm. SO there is need for the creation of such an establishment in the area.

4.1.16. Profile of clients
The tree hotel informant informed that the main part of clients were “couples”, “families”, people between 25 years and 65 years. He added that they are mostly “high-end guests in general- people who have money to spend for this kind of adventure”. They have “set the price so high so that it attracts more the high-end guests” he explains. These clients are often in pursuit of active activities though a few might also ask for wellness experiences. To the informant of the Rockhotel the profile of clients would likely be “ a family hotel” for “active people who like to climb or to canoe” and business travellers even though other members of the creative team sought after “very rich” clients. Clients will mostly come from Sweden Finland and “maybe Norway”. Obviously to the Stora Hotellet the profile of clients is business, leisure, family and active travellers. These are clients looking to lodge in style while they explore what Umea can offer them. 3% of these clients are international. Most clients come related with activities at Umea University or the Norrland University Hospital.

4.1.17. Theme Hotel as a destination in itself
Questioning if the theme hotel can be in itself the destination without taking into consideration the location in which it is situated, the Treehotel informant affirms the
Treehotel is a “destination in itself” since it is “the main travel reason for most of the guest that come to Sweden”. The informant emphasised on the important part the Treehotel brand plays in attracting tourist to Harads. Harads might be an interesting destination to see for clients that come there- but the “reason they book the trip” is to see the Tree hotel so in that way the Treehotel is a destination in itself. To the informant from the Rock hotel the destination of a theme hotel is “a combination” of both the hotel and the location it inhabits for it will be nice to have an attractive place to stay in but also have “some kind of alternative attractive things to do”.

4.1.18. Recommendation to upcoming entrepreneurs
To future suppliers who want to set up a themed establishment in a remote place like Northern Sweden, the manager of the Treehotel recommends that the establishment should be “connected to design, architecture... and...nature”. And it is important for the new establishment to work on its brand idea so that “it could come out internationally directly by itself” and attract visitors even without marketing or incoming efforts from third parties. On the other hand the Stora Hotellet informant emphasised on the importance of private ownership importance. As a private owner, relationships are closer and workers are treated with care which intend minimizes staff rotation, common in the hotel industry. Also private ownership means managers will be more dedicated to see to it that their business prospers. Also the importance of a good theme and design plus the involvement of workers in creating the experience are highlighted for any ventures of this kind. To the informant of the Rockhotel, the endeavours should be related to nature as they are the key attraction for Northern Sweden.

4.1.19. Local community importance
The informant at the Treehotel highlights the importance of the local community by highlighting the collaboration that they have with the local authority -Swedish Lapland in developing the area. He explains that the “Treehotel is very important for them” because it is a “unique selling point” for the local authority that has the duty of providing marketing for the total area. Also the local community is also important in terms of collaboration between suppliers. Clients might want to experience more things at destination with a prolonged stay that will enable them see other thing since they have “travelled a long way” to come to the North. So they come with a combined trip that offers “lodges ...and activities in the area” so that they can spend a few nights at the Treehotel and “combine with the Icehotel and other places around” there. So the Treehotel organizes “all kinds of transfer to these... other places”. To the informant at the Rockhotel, the local community is important, as they will collaborate with the Rockhotel to offer a more comprehensive product. For this reason they insist on the presence of activities outside the hotel which logically will also be offered by other local suppliers within the community. These suppliers in a workshop at the very beginning of the project expressed their interest and support for it with “very positive” feedback.

4.1.20. Contact with locals
This question aims to find out if gaining contact with locals in part of the attraction to clients that visit theme hotels. The manager of the Treehotel explains that this is of
interest to the clients and that these want to “come closer to the local community, and know the local people and do local things”. For that reason activities of this kind are offered in some of the Treehotel packages. The Rockhotel counts on the support of other local suppliers to offer local activities for example the “Älgenhus” is one such supplier counted upon to offer local authentic experience to visitors since most visitors to the North of Sweden want to know the way of life of people in a cold climate.

4.2. Incoming Tour Operators

More insights on the product of fantasy and theme hotels in the periphery was gotten through interviews to incoming tour operators. It is important to highlights that most incoming tour operators to Sweden are located out of Sweden. As one incoming manager noted “the biggest incoming turnover to Sweden is not generated from Stockholm. It is really from incoming tour operators placed in Norway, Denmark or maybe in London”. And those that are in Sweden are mostly found in the Southern part of the country. However for this study I interviewed 4 incoming tour operator companies: two are located in Stockholm- one of which has the head-office in Iceland; and, two others in Umea of which one has the head office in Norway. I had also visited TUR Gothenburg 2015 with the hope of meeting incoming tour operators but unfortunately none participated.

Exploring the attraction or the product which incoming tour operators think attract tourists to fantasy and theme hotels in peripheral and remote areas in Northern Sweden

4.2.1. Outstanding touristic attractions in Northern Sweden

The aim of this question is to find out what according to these operators were those attractions that were emblematic in attracting tourists to the Northern region following their marketing endeavors. Would these attractions include themed hotels? The informant from the BOS explained that destinations are better promoted if in accordance with the expression tourists have of the said location. HE explains how different it is marketing the southern part from the Northern part of Sweden. While in the south “following the image of Sweden in Germany”, one can talk of individual expressions like the “bridge Oresund”, “Gota Canal”, “Inga Lindström”; “Stockholm” and the like, in Northern Sweden the main expression is “Lapland”. According to this informant this is the main selling argument for the Northern region. This expression encloses attractions like “the mountain... the wilderness, the winter landscape, Sami, husky tours, polar lights” and it does not matter if these are delivered in “Luleå or Kiruna or Umea.... That’s Lapland” and it is this expression that makes this destination attractive and sellable. Also following the season, in summer caravan tours and round trips for first time visitors while in winter lodges, snowmobile and husky tours are the order of the day. And most importantly in the Northern region, “Kiruna” with the “most famous land mark in Sweden... the original Icehotel” which makes Kiruna probably the “biggest winter destination in Sweden for foreign markets”. Of course the iron mine is also one other great attraction especially “during summer” but those managing it “are not [tourism] professionals. They are working with iron and not with tourists”. So this is a potential product for the region too.
The informant from Nordic Incoming supported the idea of highlighting the main expression of a region as its attraction. He notes that “foreign clients ...don't see Umea as a destination, they see Lapland”. As such Lapland is the biggest attraction in Northern Sweden. To the manager of DMC Sweden, the most outstanding attractions are those related with the destination- “activities related to snow and ice like Northern lights, snowmobile, ice sculpturing, going on an icebreaker, jumping into the frozen sea and so on.

4.2.2. Location as part of the attraction

The question intends to find out if the actual environment in which the themed hotel is located is marketed as part of the destination. To this the informant at BOS pointed out first of all that focusing on the the location of Northern Sweden as a destination was a matter of perspective, depending on “the point of view” of the one speaking since “Västerbotten”, “Sweden”, “Scandinavia” and even “Europe” “are all destinations”. So what one might consider an attraction at one level might not be considered as such at another level depending on ones perspective. Secondly depending on the demands of the market and the image the market perceives of a given destination distribution has to at “all times deliver the words they [the market] want to know or hear”. Advertising a place or destination is very expensive so they will not market for example “the word Västerbottens that nobody knows” of internationally. “You have to say Lapland which is a “very positive expression”. That is the image people perceive of Northern Sweden from outside Sweden and that is the word they want to hear for this destination. So the definition and attributes of a destination is also influenced by the demands of the market.

To the Nordic Incoming informant location is not so much an attraction rather a question of practicality. The product should be found in an accessible location for they believe that “if you have the right thing, you get the infrastructure around it”. A successful themed experience located in an accessible location shall attract the right and necessary infrastructures to the area. The above reflection was mirrored by the manager of DMC Sweden. To whom, generally the location is not an issue “as long as there are possibilities for people to... easily come from point a to point b”. However, the Nordic Incoming informant also notes that “sometimes the theme can do better in an off location” that enhances the characteristics of the activity practiced- for example a spa hotel located in a forest where one can take a walk; as such the ‘offness’ of the location could be part of the attraction. Yet, “if you [your business] are good enough you can be located anywhere”. And to the manager of DMC Sweden, after getting to destination activities should be close enough for clients to take part in them, for “travelling long and far “ for activities will “never work” In this case the nearness of location is important.

In the same line like the previous manager, the informant from Nordic Visitor sees locality in practical terms. The establishment can be anywhere, all it needs is to be “conveniently placed close to an airport and there need to be other things around to do and facilities to take care of all the people going there”; thus highlighting the importance of accessibility, activities and local support systems.
4.2.3. Destination support systems
Here the idea is to find out how destination support systems like accommodation, transport, public services and the like handle visitors that come to the region. TO this the informant at BOS pointed out the lack of services in Kiruna for example, which result from “a kind of competition between the iron mine and tourism” especially related with transport and accommodation services. Business travellers coming on a company budget would likely be able to afford high cost flights, taxi and high-cost accommodation than a regular tourist travelling on a budget income. Generally transport cost to and within the said region is high and there is shortage of taxi transfer services in some parts of the region e.g. Kiruna. THE informant of the Nordic Incoming highlighted the support received from the local administration to help local businesses bring in tourists to the region. He informs, “Västerbotten has realised that the [incoming] business is good for [the] region”. For that reason, they have invested “to create more [such] businesses”. To the informant from Nordic Visitors, the expectations of clients for this region “are a bit too high”. They forget “it is not Stockholm where there are 5 star hotels; there are no luxury vehicles”. However the informant advocates for a bit more luxurious destination services.

4.2.4. Cost: attraction or detraction
This question is aimed at finding out the economic value given to touristic attractions in Northern Sweden as perceived by incoming tour operators. Generally speaking these operators see Northern Sweden as an expensive destination. The nature of activities carried out, issues of distance, accessibility and harsher climatic conditions make the product expensive and exclusive. “For example, 4000kr for one night at the ...hotel and you have to pay 2000kr for the transfer. Maybe you’d find some clients but it’s difficult for the bigger markets”, says one informant. In addition to the above the taxes placed on activities like husky trips (25% tax in Sweden and only 8% in Norway and Finland) contribute in making the destination more expensive.
To the manager of DMC Sweden, the “lack of competition in properties” makes it “more expensive” so clients are obliged to “take it or leave it”. Yet, though a costly destination the price paid is not a detraction “for a client that is already ready to pay a lot of money” to come to the theme hotel. The manager of Nordic Visitors expressed this same idea. Although “the whole Lapland region is overpriced when it comes to activities and everything... if the clients have plans to go to the Icehotel they pay it and they go even though it is over priced”.

4.2.5. Highlighted attractions aimed at attracting clients.
The next question has to do with those attractions that the suppliers highlight or sell to clients and tour operators sending tourists to Sweden, with the intention of attracting tourists to the Northern region. To this question most of the informants highlighted the northern Lights, snowmobile, husky tours, dog sledge (all winter activities) hiking in nature. To the informant from Nordic Visitors these include “definitely nature, the Northern lights, the Ice hotel, the Sami culture, Reindeers and husky tours”; and to them “there is a big lack of luxury hotels”. To the Nordic Incoming informant, “it’s the cold”. Like to the rest of the informants “the northern part of Sweden is a cold destination”, so, it is mostly presented to clients especially to the foreign market as such. To this informant knowledge of attractions in the north is well know because of
“Google” so what they endeavour in their marketing efforts is to tell the clients “we can offer more than you expect”. So, apart from marketing the known attractions in the region they offer also products that have been created based on activities specific to the destination. For example the program called “meet the experts” geared at showing the visitor the kind of knowledge and expertise that the Umea University campus produces.

4.2.6. Knowledge of attractions and products demanded by tourists
The main attractions demanded by tourists according to the informant at BOS are husky trip, dog sledge snowmobile, the landscape and the Icehotel. On the other hand in addition to the above, the informant from Nordic Incoming pointed out that for the Northern region, clients ask for “a good flight combination” and “good hotels”. He pointed out the scarcity of quality hotels in the region. His experience with international guests show that “they, [guests] don’t like our hotels in Sweden, in the region” and, as such demand for quality hotels in the region. The opening of a hotel like Stora Hotel is the answer to this issue and more of such endeavors are welcomed. To the manager of DMC Sweden, tourists visiting the Northern region mostly demand for the “Northern lights”. They look for activities “related to snow” be it “snowmobile, dog sledge ride etc.; visiting Sami village- they want to go to the house of rural local person, who normally wouldn’t take tourists”. So they want an “authentic visit”. To the informant from Nordic Visitors, “50% of request is out for the Northern lights” and they also “want to visit the homeland of Santa” and “of course the Icehotel”. To this informant there is a demand for Spa Hotels but there is no offer of its kind yet in the region.

4.2.7. Importance of activities
This question aims at finding out how important to the incoming operators were add-on activities to the product of fantasy and theme hotels. To this the BOS informant said it should not only be the hotel and inferred how important this was by citing the examples of the Icehotel and the Treehotel and the add-ons they have e.g. snowmobile, dog sledding and Sami activities. These activities are either offered by the Icehotel themselves of offered through agreements with third-party companies. The manager of DMC Sweden explained that these properties “usually offer a variety of activities that are optional so [clients] have to pay extra for [them]”. Meanwhile the informant from Nordic Incoming highlighted the importance of activities especially for clients staying longer at the theses establishments: “they would like to experience other things well packed so that they can easily book them from the hotel” or when they plan the trip. To this the manager from Nordic Visitors emphasised that “it does not matter how cool the hotel is”, these establishments should always have “the possibility to do activities close to it” for in her experience clients “will get bored” otherwise.

4.2.8. Going “North”
The BOS informant how open minded the southern Germanic market was to the idea of Scandinavia. To them it “sounds very exotic” that they want to explore all of Lapland especially during summer. To the Nordic Incoming informant the journey north is a quest “for nature”; it is also “looking for somewhere that is not mainstream...
not so many have been to”. And to the informant from Nordic Visitor it is the quest for “something unique” that can’t be found “anywhere else in the world.” They are looking for “adventure” that may include going “out to the wilderness” and in the evening “search for Northern Lights and maybe overnight to some wooden cabin with huskies”.

4.2.9. Distance: attraction of detraction
To the question of how distance affected or counted as an attraction towards the demand for the theme hotel product in the periphery, the manager of Nordic Incoming explained that it would affect demand depending on how that distance is communicated to clients. If informed using the amount of time needed to arrive at destination say, “1 hour drive”, that will not be an issue but if expressed in terms of distance covered say, “ 175 km, they would not buy it at all”. However, to the informant 1-2 hours maximum of transfer to destination is all right for that is the same amount of time one takes to go from one point to another in a “big city”. However he informed that these establishments like in the case of the Icehotel have “small satellites” such as “ice bars” in big cities around the world which act as their “selling offices” and as such brings the product closer to their target market. Also in terms of attraction, the fact that these hotels are located so far away from main point of access make them “more exotic” and more attractive to visitors. To the informant from Nordic Visitor, distance did not really affect demand for the product since some “clients travel all the way from Australia; to fly an extra one hour isn’t that bad” but of course the availability of “good airline connections” is important. The region sometimes have problems with this taking the example of Norwegian that closed its lines to Lapland a few years back. To this informant distance “definitely” counts as an attraction since “people do believe that they are going to the North Pole”.

4.2.10. Challenges
This questions aims to find out the challenges tourism suppliers face in doing business within the Northern region. The main challenges according to the BOS informant are first of all that of the image of the destination. “We spend a lot of money in Sweden to show our own destination, to give names to all destinations...destinations that are completely unknown”. All this naming over stratifies the product unfortunately to anonymity. The second challenge is that the region though has many small suppliers most of these “have a lack of communication with the Market”, they do not offer their product following “the demands of the market” but rather pursue their personal “dream”, which sometimes is not what is in demand and distributors “have sometimes some problems to put together different [companies] to deliver what [the market] is demanding”.

The third challenge mentioned is the lack of correct marketing and organization. Marketing creates expectations and these have to be met in destination otherwise the client feels cheated. The informant here highlights the fact that “Swedish Lapland... has to do the right marketing to the markets” where they create expectations that have “to fit to the suppliers”. Indications are that suppliers in Lapland are slow in delivering what the market wants. Justified in an anecdote shared by the informant: “I sent a contract to a Norwegian supplier and I got it back the same hour... ready. But the
suppliers in Lapland I have to call them maybe 3 times, 4 times”. This same problem was expressed by the manager to DMC Sweden who thought they lacked the “resources to meet the requirement of the market; there is often delay in response”. This slows down the preparation of catalogues and all related to marketing and distribution which most times leads to the suppliers product being omitted in the general marketing of the destination. This also leads most times to the loss of clients to competition in Finland and other places that are “more efficient” in market oriented organization.

To the Nordic incoming informant the first challenge is that of marketing. Sweden had very many marketing levels. This goes from national to regional and then to the municipal and communal levels and even further on. This entails “not only strategy” but also good “structures and money” to carry out promotion effectively. Secondly, there is the challenge of matching products with client expectations. Since the distribution channel can be sometimes long, each supplier in the chain trying to make the product look as impressive as they could, this ends up stretching the reality of the product so much so that client’s expectations are shattered when they finally see the humble reality of the product. Thirdly, suppliers have to be prepared with alternatives for activities and lodging since clients sometimes think they can handle some activities for example, to do “a half day dog sledge safari” and then spend “the night in a teepee”. When they encounter the extremeness of the reality they might opt out. So suppliers are challenged with delivering these extreme encounters to clients who know almost nothing about life in the “wilderness”. And lastly the regional administration should act as a promotional body for the whole destination and leave the business to the local businesses otherwise it becomes a competitor with the local suppliers who don’t usually have the resources to measure with the administration. To the informant from Nordic Visitors the first challenge is that of “low commission rate to travel agencies from suppliers”. Then secondly “there is a lot of competition from foreign travel agencies specializing in Sweden”.

Fantasy and theme hotels Per-se

4.2.11. Theming for business
The next question to this group of informants was why they thought theming was the best strategy to set up a business in Northern Sweden. To this the manager from the Nordic Incoming informed they are one of Sweden’s “Biggest attractions” and are used as a “selling point; it is good to have them” in Sweden as pull attractions. But he insisted that theming is good when the attraction created from it is “for real...it can not be plastic” it should arise from experience and be practiced from the heart; it should be authentic even if commercialized. To the manager of DMC Sweden theming for business makes these establishments “unique accommodations” and this generates “big interest” in the product. But then it depends on if “it is a good idea, original and authentic”. However, for the Northern region the theme idea has to combine the “nature aspect in its concept” to boost its attractiveness. The informant from Nordic Visitors sees more room for themed establishments in the region and advocates for Sweden to copy the example of Finland who “are far more innovative” in this area. For
example Finland copied the concept of the Icehotel and has more establishments of this kind in Finland while the Icehotel is just one in Sweden.

4.2.12. Journey to the location of choice
Here one wants to determine if the actual journey embarked upon by visitors to come to a remote place for a theme hotel experience can be considered part of the attraction. The BOS informant pointed out that for this region it is not really an attraction as such it should be one hour maximum from the main access point for “shorter transfers mean better sales”. This is “because the landscape is not that fascinating” as compared to e.g. Norway where it was changing constantly. This same response was obtained from the manager of DMC Sweden who explained, “it is too long and too exhausting” to come up say from Stockholm to the North driving for international tourists. The attractive part of the journey in this case will be the transfer. “Being met by [for example] by snowmobile transfer to the hotel... can be an attraction”.

4.2.13. Demand for more themed establishments in the region
This question aims at finding out if there is room for more themed establishments in the region or if the existing ones are able to cover existing demand. The BOS informant inferred the need for more establishments of this kind in the region, and explained that they have to be “close to an airport because people do not want to go so far away for a stay”. He pointed out three main challenges that have to be addressed in order for this to happen. First highlighted was the problem of cooperation existing among suppliers and the importance of proximity among them as “people develop people”. For example, “if you put three or four or five big supermarkets together they will get the most number of guests” than if “you go market in the forest where there are not that many guests”, the food fall will be less. Secondly there is unfair competition among suppliers where each one thinks they are the best and start “talking about competitor’s product negatively”. Thirdly, in consequence to the above, tour operators would not like to work with an uncoordinated destination for this “would not generate business” for them.

4.2.14. Profile of clients and main market
The BOS informant highlighted the main part of their clients (especially during summer) were from the “German Speaking market” which included, mainly southern Germany, Austria Switzerland and of recent they started working with the UK which was “very important” to them “especially during winter”. The profile of clients differs with season. In winter they are mostly “couples, well-educated, have no children... have double income” and usually between 30 and 60. They travel on average 4 times a year to different destinations and they are “paying for good products”. In summer they could be of the same profile above but they are “more open minded... more mobile”, wanting to see the whole of Lapland, “but are not willing to pay the same rates as during winter”. To the informant from Nordic Incoming Northern Sweden is seen as a “active tourism” destination “mainly in summer with bus tours from Germany”. As such the profile of clients visiting the area is that of clients willing to actively get involved in activities be it food experiences, Sami cultural activities at Gamlia, for example and so on. A good number of visitors are also conference travellers
“attending conferences at the University”. These travellers usually “stay a day longer” to carry out “extra activities”. Meanwhile, the manager of DMC Sweden identifies clients from the UK and the USA and these “expect often high-end accommodation”. To the informant from Nordic Visitors the profile consists of “middle age – let’s say between 40 and 60” who belong to “the upper middle-class to upper-class.” Normally they are “quite educated and a lot of them from the English speaking countries”.

4.2.15. Theme Hotel as a destination in itself
Questioning if the theme hotel can be in itself the destination without taking into consideration the location in which it is situated, the manager of BOS pointed out it was a matter of “point of view”. He explained that several “points of interest around one city” or region make it a destination. Theme hotels are “part of a destination” and if we take the case of the Swedish Lapland “Kiruna... Abisko the hotels in the city centre and the Icehotel... are one destination”. Just by themselves “the hotels are not the important thing”, since tourists “will not book hotels without a reason” to visit a destination. On the other hand the informant from Nordic incoming reasoned that the theme hotel will be a destination in itself should it be the reason “why people book the trip in the first place”. If the theme hotel is the principal point of interest responsible in booking the trip then it can be considered a destination in itself. But, obviously when people get to their destination “they will like to experience what the destination can offer” plus the hotel, he added. The informant from DMC Sweden on the other hand said for the hotel to be offered alone without any activities “it would have to be a lot of things offered within the hotel”. But then “people don’t come all the way up to the north just for accommodation in an Icehotel”. In her opinion tourists always “want to see something, they want to do something”. Especially for the Northern region they would want to “see something connected with nature... people are coming to see scenery to see ice, to see snow, to see northern light”. And to the manager from Nordic Visitor, the destination is more than the theme hotel- the “whole destination” including the surrounding environment is.

4.2.16. Recommendation for future themed enterprises
To future suppliers who want to set up a themed establishment in a remote place like Northern Sweden, the manager of BOS recommends that these establishments should not be “too far from the airport”, transportation should be taken seriously, and they should not “spread out too much”- they should “stay close to some other points of interest” for synergic advantages. The manager of DMC Sweden recommends good “logistics” and the fact that the establishment “has to be easily reached from the airport, train stations”, should be “close to possible activities” and be “absolutely unique and authentic”. Meanwhile the informant from Nordic Incoming recommends that the new hotels should be able to offer “something that you don’t expect”- the surprise factor that is missing in many conventional hotels, for this makes marketing the hotel easy. Also recommendations are that the theme should be “in the heart of everyone who works there so that they can take care of the guests” accordingly with the expectations promised by the theme. The manager of Nordic Visitors had no specific recommendation for future themed enterprises but first recommended that Northern Sweden needed “accommodation from which [one] can actually spot the northern lights from [their] room; a focus on the Northern lights is always good” she
says. Secondly, “more luxurious cabin accommodation and luxury hotels” are needed in the region, and a “spa” accommodation would be “popular” in such a cold destination.

4.2.17. Contact with locals
This question aims to find out if gaining contact with locals in part of the attraction to clients that visit theme hotels. To this the manager of BOS informed that “there is big demand” for such interaction to tourists visiting the region. The only challenge was that distances were very wide and locals sparsely located in the very remote parts of the region as such the product has “huge amount of cost for travelling and transportation,” making such interaction a bit difficult for locals to offer. To the informant from Nordic Visitors, it is not only that their clients demand such a connection they themselves as an agency “want the local connection”, so, they “only want to work with local guys that are from the area”. And to the manager of Nordic Incoming, the visitors “would like some where to mix” with the locals. And they usually get the chance to do so “for free” when they for example “go out to dinner” in a local restaurant or go shopping in the city centre.
5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Informing on the product of fantasy and theme hotels in the peripheral areas of Northern Sweden through in-depth interviews as seen in data description has led to the generation of important feedback from hotel owners and incoming tour operators. This feedback shall be discussed below in line with the research aim and questions to see if these provide a response to the research query.

5.1. Product of Fantasy and Theme Hotels

As in theory, fantasy and theme hotels should be part of destination’s attractiveness since they aim at offering more than accommodation. According to the suppliers the product of fantasy and theme hotels in Northern Sweden is one offering a unique accommodation made possible through the use of a specific theme and the incorporation of unique design in its architecture. This is done in order to attract tourists. These hotels are a reflection of the “fantasy city”, Hannigan, (1998) as they are “theme-o-centric” that leads to them being “aggressively branded”. To fight seasonality the hotels develop strategy to have clients all year round and 24 hours round thus they satisfy the third characteristic of the “fantasy city” as they function “day and night”. They are “modular” as they mix activities in different ways to attract tourists. Obviously they are also “solipsistic” as they are mostly located in peripheries or remote areas of Northern Sweden. Lastly they are “postmodern” as they resort to technology and the use of renounced designers such as Stylt Trampoli to create unique accommodations capable of marvelling well paying clients.

The uniqueness of design enhances the specific concept or theme chosen for the hotel. Incoming operators also identified with the idea of theming for business. Since people are attracted to design and architecture theming a hotel can make it the selling point of a destination depending on how big an “emotional connection” (Baker and Cameron, 2008) the brand of the hotel creates in the mind of tourists. As discussed in theory, themes create brands as they “name, symbol” and the like the product of one seller thus differentiating it from “those of competition” (AMA, 2011). As such a fantasy and theme hotel with a positive brand in Northern Sweden can establish this location as a place worth visiting (Morgan et al, 2010). For the theme and brand to be strong it has to be “authentic”, “real”, “unique” and not fabricated. The brand created from the theme should be such that people can relate to and identify with as explained in the notions of destination branding. It should proceed naturally from those offering the product be it owners or workers, everyone in the destination should own the product as this transcends into the experience obtained by the tourists. That is why some of the hotels incorporate attributes of generosity and hospitality into the concept of the theme as these attributes heighten the experience obtained when put into practice. In turn this gives the brand a positive image. This is related to the people-related factors of attractions, as “the social interaction between tourists and local people is crucial in attracting people to a destination”, (Smith, 2000).

Both sets of informants consider activities to be part of the fantasy and theme hotel product. Northern Sweden is a nature-dominated destination that offers possibilities lots of outdoor destination specific summer and winter activities in which visitors can
participate. To a few travelling to Northern Sweden to visit these hotels offers the possibility of taking part in these unique activities and experiencing the way of life of people who live the most Northern part of Sweden, which to most international tourists is going to the North Pole. As such activities become attractions to these tourists and just as Rugg (1973) reasons, travellers derive utility from being in a particular destination for some period of time visiting, experiencing and or living in an attraction. These activities are offered either by the hotel, by third-party companies or both. Because of activities tourists stay entertained and longer at the destination

One hotel owner considered their hotel the main reason for travel thus upholding the idea that their hotel was a destination in itself. Meanwhile, according to incoming agents, the product of fantasy and theme hotels is more than just the hotel. According to them, it would have to be a strong point of interest, be the reason for travel to the given destination, be able to offer a lot of things within its premises to be considered a destination in itself, otherwise, the hotel would just be part of a destination.

5.2. Role of Location in the product of Fantasy and Theme hotels

The role of location as far as the product of fantasy and theme hotels is concerned is also worth discussing. The actual location in itself is not an attraction. Most of the hotels are found where they are for practical reasons. Yet, location or environment in which the hotel is located is important if it is embedded with an image that is identified by tourists from within and without of the destination. The location much come related to an expression which tourists recognize and want. From discussion with both sets of informants the location of fantasy and theme hotels can be anywhere within Northern Sweden but for this location or destination to be successful it has to have a strong image and an expression and the general consensus for this region is the expression “Lapland”. This takes us back to the notion of destination branding again. Informants highlight the fact that marketing Northern Sweden as “Lapland” gives the region a very positive image and it is this image that foreign visitors know of this part of the country and it is this image that they seek.

Apart from the above, the location should be located close to the airports and other access points and should be close to activities and other destination support systems. As discussed in the theory section of this paper these support systems can also make up part of the product’s attractiveness thus encourage tourists to visit a destination as they offer the promise that tourists shall be well taken care of should they need the regular services of the locals. Even if these services are absent from the beginning as one informant notes if the product is good no matter where it is located it will be able to pull in the necessary amenities. Moreover, destination support systems do not only cater for the needs of tourists they also cater for those of locals and provide incentives to local tourist businesses to develop tourism within the region. These are provided through the local administration in the case of Northern Sweden- the Swedish Lapland Organization. This organization helps in marketing as well as provides financial incentives to local businesses. This can be related to the concepts of regional development through tourism.
One informant admits that location makes the product more expensive while others claim that Northern Sweden in general is an expensive destination. Thus one can see that its less accessibility if compared to other regions in southern Sweden make the product of fantasy and theme hotels exclusive to those clients who can afford it. This reflects the idea of the postmodern consumer who seeks experience and these hotels are out to offer above all experience in a unique environment. So that those who want such an exclusive experience are those ready to pay for it. Usually those willing to undertake such a trip are not on budget economies.

As the profile of clients obtained from informants reflects, tourists coming to these establishments are usually middle age, travelling without children, with a double income are from upper-middle to upper class. These clients mostly come from the UK, US and Germany. They are often business, leisure or conference travellers who make approximately 3 to 4 of these trips annually. So then location contributes in defining the type of visitors the destination receives.

5.3. Challenges
The product of fantasy and theme hotels just like most tourism products face challenges. Those challenges faced, and prompted by the specific destination of Northern Sweden include first of all issues related to accessibility. There is need for direct flight connections from major cities of tourist emitting countries to Northern Sweden. Given the seasonality of activities and low population density in these regions it is not always profitable for airline companies to fly this route constantly. However as suggested by one informant should there be many points of interest in this destination, demand for it will be higher and as such incentivize airline companies to offer more routes to this location.

Another challenge is that of getting and maintaining qualified staff. This is a general problem faced by the tourism industry; as such it would be even more intense in scarcely populated areas like Northern Sweden. Sluggishness of suppliers in responding to business petitions is a challenged that suppliers have to address as this make them loose clients to destinations in Finland and Norway. Suppliers have to deal also with the challenge of knowing the market and what it demands of them. This will help prepare them to meet tourist expectations and to provide alternative products when the need arises. To this the local administration has to provide more support in marketing and leave the business to the suppliers so as to eliminate the competition that exists between them now. This competition usually leads to an over-stretched reality of the product as each agent tries to promise more in order to get the customer.

5.4. Limitations of the study
I am aware that conclusions derived from this study can not be aggregated to all cases given the fact that a limited number of informant were used and given the sensitive nature of the business information they were providing some questions were not elaborated upon or responded to, to the satisfaction of the researcher. Yet one cannot dismiss the fact that the contribution of these informants was futile. Information provided was expert opinions and it is better to obtain a small amount of quality
information than an excess of irrelevant information. As usual a body of information is gathered bit by bit and it is hoped future research endeavors on this topic would expanded on and complete the gaps left by the present study.

6. CONCLUSION
Looking back on theory and information obtained from suppliers and incoming agents one can conclude to a greater extend that the product of fantasy and theme hotels in Northern Sweden consists of the hotel and the location in which it is situated. It is true that these hotels are an attraction in themselves but they are not yet capable in this particular location to provide all the entertainment tourists visiting “Lapland” crave for. The nature of the destination in itself implies more activities to be carried out besides lodging.

The expression “Lapland” brings to the mind of the tourist cultural activities such as encounters with the Sami and their way of life, winter activities such as Northern lights, snowmobile, husky tours and the like and summer activities like canoeing, rafting, trekking and so forth. If these activities are linked to this destination it therefore implies that the tourist coming to visit fantasy and theme hotels will also want to partake in them. And besides, most of these activities are location specific following the climatic conditions that prevails.

Theming hotels in remote areas like that of Northern Sweden could be the way of attracting both tourists and non-tourists to the region. The successful implantation of these establishments will help bring development to the region as they provide employment to locals and in the long run attract other businesses to and stakeholders to invest in the area. It is clear that Northern Sweden still needs to develop more of these establishments as theming is seen to be one of the best ways to market the region.

In light of the above this study came up with a few recommendations for future establishments of this type. The themed concept should be connected to a unique design, architecture and to nature. The theme has to evolve into a strong brand recognizable in the market. Private ownership of such establishments is recommended, as this will guarantee a more personal relationship with the establishment as private owners tend to protect the fruits of their labour than would do commissioned managers hired to run the hotel as these might go at all cost in pursuit of excess financial gains during their mandate to the detriment of a sustainable management of the enterprise. The enterprise should be located in an accessible location. Future entrepreneurs should contemplate setting up luxurious theme hotels related to camping and to spa as there is interest in these products in the region.

To end it would be recommendable to highlight future research that might throw more insight on this study. It would be interesting to dig deeper in to how peripherality contributes to the product of theme hotels. This study has endeavoured to map out what the product of these establishments consists of in Northern Sweden. It will be interesting to see if the product is the same in all destinations in Northern Scandinavia. Secondly studying the impact of one single fantasy and themed hotel in Northern
Sweden might shed more light into the importance of this kind of product in Northern Sweden. While one awaits these possible future studies it will be beneficial to learn the lessons provided by this study in the name of the product of fantasy and theme hotels and see how future establishments should be set up for the better development of a remote location like Northern Sweden.
7. REFERENCES:


