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**CERTIFICATES - A COMPETITIVE
ADVANTAGE IN INTERNATIONAL
TOURISM BUSINESS**

The City of Vantaa perspective

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Abstract		
<p>When it comes to sustainable development in the context of tourism and economy, sustainable development is still in a formative stage. The possibilities it offers and the impacts it might have are not known and cannot be predicted. Certificates verify the responsibility of companies operating in the field of tourism by determining conditions that need to be followed and audited occasionally. Thus, certificates are indicators of responsible operations but also offer a potential competitive advantage.</p>		
<p>The aim of the thesis carried out as qualitative research was to help the City of Vantaa to develop within the responsible tourism context. The study was based on the Sustainable Travel Finland programme pilot, where the City of Vantaa was accepted to participate. Initially, certificates and tourism activities reflecting responsibility in the City of Vantaa were examined, followed by thematic interviews, which collected information on companies' willingness to participate in the Sustainable Travel Finland programme and companies' experiences of the economic benefits and potential competitive advantages of certificates.</p>		
<p>Based on the collected data, conclusions are that the City of Vantaa has many certificates that verify responsible tourism, but several responsible activities are not verified in any way. By analyzing the interview materials, it became clear that small entrepreneurs operating in the City of Vantaa are ready to invest in sustainable development but think that it requires too many resources. They also state that the Sustainable Travel Finland programme is only intended for large companies and that it is impossible for small companies to achieve the Sustainable Travel Finland label due to lack of resources.</p>		
<p>The thesis also offered the City of Vantaa possible development suggestions within the research frame, that would help the City of Vantaa to achieve the position of a pioneer in responsible tourism.</p>		
Keywords		
Sustainable development, tourism, certification, competitive advantage		

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	4
1.1	Implementation and structure of the research.....	7
1.2	Background, context and research settings	9
2	SUSTAINABILITY, TOURISM AND GAINING COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE.....	11
2.1	Sustainability as a phenomenon	11
2.2	Tourism, certificates, and competitive advantage	15
3	CURRENT SITUATION OF SUSTAINABILITY CERTIFICATES.....	21
4	SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL FINLAND.....	24
5	RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODS	28
6	DATA ANALYSIS.....	31
6.1	Thematic analyses.....	32
6.2	The Six Steps	33
7	RESULTS	38
8	CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	42
8.1	Key findings	42
8.2	Reliability and validity	43
8.3	Managerial implications	44
8.4	Final reflection and further research	45
	REFERENCES	46

LIST OF FIGURES

APPENDICES

- Appendix 1. Sustainable Development Goals
- Appendix 2. Accompanying letter for the survey
- Appendix 3. Certificates used in the City of Vantaa
- Appendix 4. Semi-structured interview frame

1 INTRODUCTION

The framework of this research is built upon two concepts: sustainability and tourism. Sustainability, as a word evolved from the Latin word *sustinere* which means to keep up or hold up (Thiele 2013, 7). In its simplicity, sustainability is said to mean a capacity to maintain some entity, of an outcome or process over time. Frequently, sustainability is automatically linked to environmental concerns. However, according to Jenkins (2009, 380), sustainability can be approached from many different perspectives not only from the environment but also economic and social. Thus, as semantic approach sustainability can be linked to anything which has something to maintain, but in this research, it is associated with tourism business and the matters concerning it.

Tourism is commonly defined to be a state which moves people away from their everyday life and from their regular place of habitation (Holloway 1989, 1). It is usually associated with leisure and relaxation, but nowadays traveling for business is also joined to the context of tourism. Business is not only joined to tourism in the sense of people working in the business field travel to different places because of their work but also the whole field of tourism has become a significant business. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (2017) explained in the Tourism Account Report that tourism is the fastest-growing economic activity where only in Finland 140 200 people are directly or indirectly employed. The number is indicative and variable as the industry is continuously changing. Also, the fact that some countries involved in tourism do not have up-to-date statistics concerning the labour markets that are interrelated to tourism it makes it hard to unravel the current situation globally. Nevertheless, tourism unquestionably has a significant effect on the economy, even if the product sold is a service more than a physical subject. Based on the data revealing the importance of tourism to international business and economics this research is carried out to discover the current situation of sustainability in tourism operators in the City of Vantaa and to figure out possible development actions.

According to the Bruntland Report (1987) "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the

ability of future generations to meet their own needs." In tourism context sustainable development is tourism practice that takes into notice the current and future economic, social, cultural and environmental influence, so that tourists, tourism organizations, tourist destinations, environment and local populations needs are acknowledged now and in the future. Sustainable tourism businesses operate in a profitable and sustainable way, wherein the businesses direct and indirect impacts for the surrounding societies are noticed. Sustainable development in tourism can be classified as an aim, that corporate responsibility attempt to strive for. (Business Finland 2019.)

Since, this research is carried out as part of international business studies it is important to understand the influence that sustainability has on business and how the research about tourism and sustainability is crucial and how it interrelates to the international business. Robertson (2014) explains the way organizations move towards sustainability to gain advantage or to avoid risk. Besides, some sustainability factors are legal responsibilities and organizations need to follow those responsibilities to avoid fines. However, many sustainable strategies also provide a business sense, marketing advantages, differentiation from competitors which can lead to increased market share. (Robertson 2014, 287.) So, the future possibility in international success is to discover a balance between sustainability and business and how these two concepts can benefit from each other. Therefore, by understanding the effects and implementing successful sustainability strategies in an organization, or a company business possibility like competitive advantage may be achieved. This reveals the link between sustainability and international business

The focus of this research was to explore the current sustainable tourism actions, discover the development opportunities they offer and identify the prejudice organizations have for the Sustainable Travel Finland programme. All findings will be discussed among the entrepreneurs operating in the City of Vantaa as well as the City of Vantaa, Business Development Services.

The research is relevant, because the present state of sustainability is variable, like Thiele (2013) summarizes it “the academic field of sustainability is still in a formative stage” as well as the entity of the concept of sustainable tourism. Both of them are still evolving. To develop sustainability in Finnish tourism, Visit Finland is implementing a pilot programme, which for example contains a common label for companies and organizations working in the tourism field. The pilot is called The Sustainable Travel Finland programme and the City of Vantaa is one of the cities accepted in the programme. Since the commissioner of this research is the City of Vantaa Business Development services the topicality and demand of this research are justified. Also, the commissioner clarifies the viewpoint of the research which is the overall tourism business operating in The City of Vantaa. The author of the thesis herself has worked in Vantaa and lives in Vantaa. Thus, there are personal interests in conducting this research. The subject was decided and narrowed down together with Maarit Enberg, from the City of Vantaa, Business Development Services.

From the City of Vantaa point of view the research is relevant because of the development of tourism around the City of Vantaa. At the end of year 2019, a new Outlet Village has opened in the City of Vantaa which has attracted domestic tourists as well as foreign tourists. The most significant change in the tourism scenery in the City of Vantaa is the expansion of the airport. The aim of the expansion is according to Finavia (2019) to possibly serve 30 million passengers annually, and for all the terminals to operate under the same roof, this will be rendered possible by expanding the whole terminal area by 45%. Consequently, this sort of transformation will influence the tourist numbers in the City of Vantaa. The increased number of tourist and the intention of the *City of Vantaa aiming to be the most sustainable travel destination by the year 2025* create the relevant need to study the current situation of sustainability in tourism. (Finavia 2019.)

City of Vantaa, Business Development Services. The thesis is commissioned by the City of Vantaa Business Development Services which is responsible for the strategic planning and implementation of city vitality and business policies, the development of regional co-operation in industrial policies and creating

competitiveness strategy for the Metropolitan area. Besides, Business Development Services co-operates with Vantaan Yrittäjät, Kauppakamari and Vantaan Uusyrityskeskus which all concentrated in the City of Vantaa Local Business Center, Leija. (Vantaa.fi 2020.)

1.1 Implementation and structure of the research

The previous chapter presented the introduction and the commissioner of the thesis. This chapter aims to explain the structure of the research report and the implementation of the research.

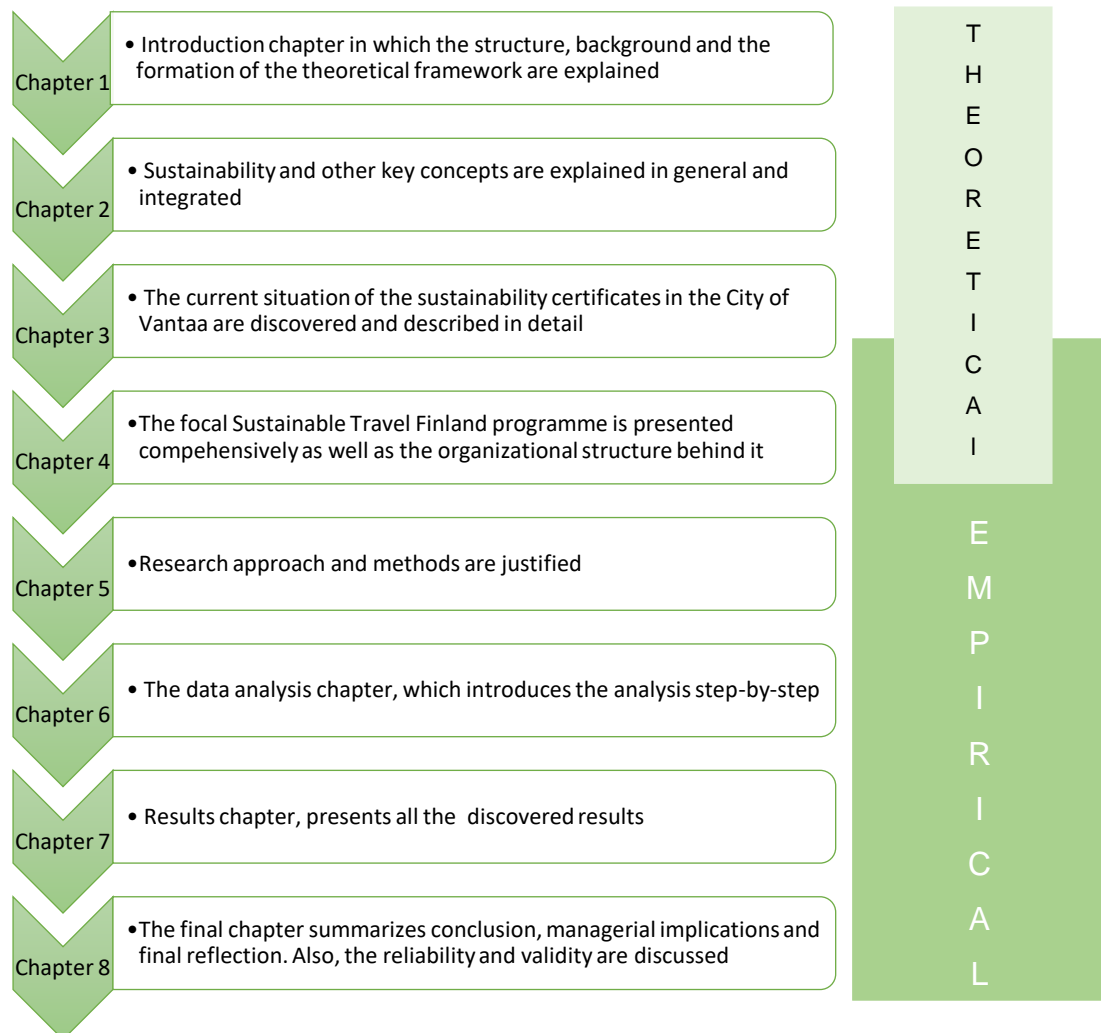


Figure 1. The framework of the study

Figure 1 illustrates how the research is a combination of two individual integrities: the theoretical and the empirical. The theoretical part consists of the introduction, the theoretical framework and the gathered data about the current certificates which are already merited in the City of Vantaa. The certificates chapter which discusses the detection of the survey leads the research to the empirical part of the study. The empirical part covers the interview, training notes and the analysis. Subsequently, the empirical part was executed as qualitative research by conducting thematic interviews and disassembling of training notes. Whereas the theoretical part was approached from the scientific perspective, the empirical is approached by the City of Vantaa and the entrepreneur's point of view.

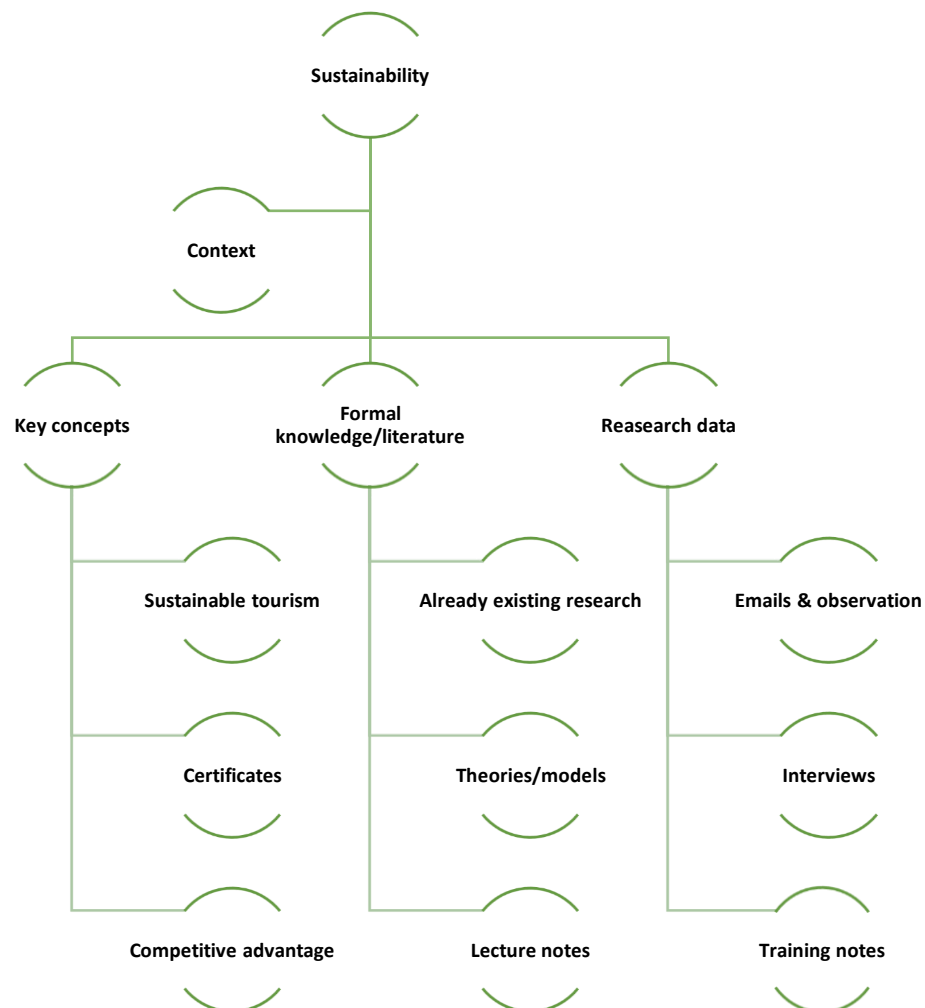


Figure 2. Structure of the theoretical framework

Figure 2 presents an overview of the key concepts used in the theoretical framework and the already existing information regarding the subject of the thesis as well as the research data, collected during the thesis process. The material for the theoretical framework was gathered from scholastic literature concerning the field of tourism and sustainability, educational publishing, scientific publications, and WWW- documents from organizations which operate in a key position in the sustainable development of tourism. The theoretical framework, for the most part, explores and identifies the concept of sustainability. As the author of this research studies International Business Management as her major, it is important to join the studied literature to the studied field. Therefore, the review focuses also on the role of sustainability in business.

1.2 Background, context and research settings

The United Nations Sustainable Development plan of action, Agenda2030, was accepted in 2015, and the Sustainable Development Goals, SDGS became valid at the beginning of 2016. The Sustainable Development plan of action includes 17 sustainable development goals which are presented in (Appendix 1.) according to the Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform by the United Nations (2015).

UNWTO (World Tourism Organization) has created a database to help the tourism industry to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The Sustainable Travel Finland programme is one of the actions planned to support the accomplishment of the goals on behalf of the Finnish tourism industry. As one of the foremost environmental risks is climate change and tourism industry has verifiable effects on the progression of it, the actions need to be implemented momentarily. The tourist industry also has a high effect on the world economy and can affect the economy to achieve the SDGS. To control the impacts of the tourism industry, it is crucial to take anticipatory measures in sustainably planned tourism and leading it locally; therefore, the Sustainable Travel Finland programme which is explained in Chapter 4 was invented by Visit Finland. (Business Finland 2019.)

One of the biggest online retail shops in tourism industry Booking.com collected data and enforced a Sustainable Travel Report 2017. The key finding shows that travelling sustainably is believed to be easy only by 5 per cent of global travellers. Nevertheless, 46 per cent of global travellers consider themselves as sustainable travellers. In 2016 34 per cent of global travellers stayed in an eco-friendly or a “green” accommodation, by 2017, 65 per cent of global travellers expressed their intention of staying in sustainable accommodations of this kind. Main reasons the eco-friendly or “green” accommodations were chosen: to help reduce environmental impact, the experience, in general, is thought to be more locally relevant, these accommodations treat the local community better, they tend to use more locally sourced or organic food or the reason behind the decision is the interest in living through the new trends of travel accommodations. To support the travellers, aim to travel sustainably the certificates are believed to guarantee the sustainability of an accommodation or service. (Booking.com 2016-2017.)

Research settings. The identified issues which create the need for this research are the lack of knowledge of sustainability actions already accomplished in companies operating in the City of Vantaa and the shortage of the existing data about it. Also, the lack of information about companies interests in moving towards sustainability actions in the field of tourism and whether the companies believe that proven sustainability would be beneficial.

Aim. According to Coventry University (no date), aim is a statement of what is intended to be done, and it answers the question “*what are you doing?*”. The intention behind this research is the endeavour of the City of Vantaa to become a sustainable development pioneer or forerunner within the tourism industry and to gain a competitive advantage from the certificates. To support this, the aim of the research is to create recommendations for the City of Vantaa, Business Development services based on the collected data.

The segments involved within fulfilling the aim are tourism companies and organizations operating in the City of Vantaa as well as City of Vantaa, Business development services.

Objective. Whereas the aim of the study is the answer to the question “*what are you doing?*”. The Objectives of the research answers the question “How are you doing it?” The primary purpose of the research objectives is to be the path to achieve the aims. (Future Learn no date.) In order to achieve the aim the objective of this thesis is to study the companies and organizations working in the tourism field in the City of Vantaa.

Research questions

Main research question: How to improve the sustainable tourism business in the City of Vantaa?

Sub-research questions: (1) What is the current situation of sustainable actions and certificates in the City of Vantaa? (2) Will companies want to take part in the Sustainable Travel Finland programme?

2 SUSTAINABILITY, TOURISM AND GAINING COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

2.1 Sustainability as a phenomenon

Sustainability, as a concept, appears in different fields. In this thesis process, it is important to understand the meaning behind the word ‘*sustainability*’. In addition, it is important to acknowledge and to logically unite the fields where the word is presented. Sustainability connects themes so; it is crucial to understand how it is connected even the context of it differentiates. Sustainability is rooted far in history, but the noun verifiable first appeared in 1972. Then, it was used in narrow terms regarding the earth life-support systems. The terms breakthrough was when it was firmly established during the 1960s’ to the 1970s’ when it interrelated to the environmental movement and especially the literature concerning it. Many influential books were then published, and the topics were the environmental effects in social and economic health. The 1980s’ created a breakthrough for the sustainability movement. As the number of sustainability organizations, programs and initiatives exploded. The change happened via technology as well as in physical locations. (Robertson 2014, 4-12.)

Between the 1990s and 2000s - the movement expanded on a larger scale; the awareness shifted outside the marginal groups and sustainability as an abstraction ended up in schools, colleges, and universities. The idea around sustainability changed from the recognizing of it to evolving the whole concept. The ways to identify the problems concerning sustainability and measure them experienced progress. This was the era in time when sustainability took a step forward. As a practical example of the advancement is the invention of the tool which enables how to measure the ecological footprint (EFA). (Robertson 2014 19-20.)

The future of sustainability seems to be sustainably oriented now that the concept is mapped and clarified. Consequently, it appears that the stage of sustainability in the academic field is still on a formative stage, which supports the ongoing research. According to Thiele (2013), the best solution for sustainability in the future is effective sustainability education. This kind of education enables behavioural change which leads to the change of attitudes and beliefs. Since sustainability is called the “lifestyle movement” that ideologue includes the idea of adaption is the key to survive for the long term. Also, this comes back to education, which encourages individuals to act responsibly and evolve their investigating and problem-solving skills.

Thiele (2013) informs “*sustainability* has been called “one of the least meaningful and most overused words in the English language.” The best response to this sort of criticism is not to stop the using of the word, but to define it clearly while making its practice more measurable and impactful.” Thiele (2013) gives a profound response to the criticism concerning the word by a profound review of the *sustainability* term from the economic, ecological, or political perspective. All these perspectives are highly dependent on each other as well as interact in co-operation.

Thiele (2013) explains that the economic conditions in sustainability have been discovered from the knowledge that the wealth of nations seems to be directly

proportional to the ecological footprint of the nation in question. Thus, our economic system is dependent on growth as it provides great equality. More significant equity and growing economies are assurances for more jobs, higher income, enormous wealth which enable higher taxes and the public good, which are a transparent outcome of higher taxes. Growth in the economy creates a circle which is prevented by the limits of growth which are principally due to the environment's tolerance. Environment's tolerance creates a platform which indicates that the economy needs to evolve in a steady and sustainable direction. The first steps for this direction are to create solutions which meet the basic needs, but do not increase throughput. Throughput in its simplicity is the amount of work, raw material and rate done in a particular time; it is an evidence of economic efficiency. To find the balance of throughput is a key task for development in economic sustainability to proceed.

Thiele (2013) approaches sustainability in the ecological setting from the environment's point of view. The environment is endangered by the extinct species, and the issue interrelate is not just the extinct but the ecological space that is crowded. By crowded, it means that the ecological space on Earth has no place for new species to develop as it is filled with humans. Even if the ecological viewpoint is more than plants, animals, and the environment but those are the ones that by sustaining their capacity will defend the Earth's balance and that way enrich the biodiversity.

Thiele (2013) reports that the political link to sustainability initially started in the 1970s' when the first "green" parties were formed. Nowadays, there are numerous "green" parties that contribute to the creation of sustainability-oriented policies and laws. For example, the development of the policies that relate to the carbon limit emissions. Also, sustainability-oriented politics improve green technology innovation.

Another approach to *sustainability* is by Willis Jenkins (2009), who wrote an article about sustainability theories and models. In his article, he separates the economic model from the economy and the political in the relation of

sustainability which as a term stands apart from sustainable development. Sustainable development is presented by the World Commission on Environment and Development to be “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability for future generations to meet their own needs.” Jenkins (2009) differs this so that sustainability concept is easier to understand about its own and how it has been used in different contexts.

In addition to clarifying the diversity of sustainability, Jenkins (2009) composes that sustainability is too complex to be defined by an ecocentric and anthropocentric model. Jenkins (2009) presents an interesting state of how “sustainability relates “the inner limits” of human needs to the “outer limits” of Earth’s resources.” This explains the inner dependency of the sustainability concept.

UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) (2019) Highlights the question which often arises when sustainability is discussed: What is the difference between sustainable development and sustainability? According to Liburd and Edwards (2010) Sustainability itself is an active process of change rather than a specific goal that should be merited. Also, UNESCO defines sustainability to be a long-term objective, as in the context of a more sustainable future. Whereas, sustainable development refers to the actions, processes, and ways (for instance, reduced consumption, education, and training) to achieve sustainability. Thiele (2013) explains it so that the task is sustainable development, and the aim is to gain an unvarying economy by meeting the basic needs of people without reinforcing the throughput.

The Brundtland Report. When studying the concept of sustainability, The Brundtland report (1987) appear in different sources and many different sources indicate to it. Thiele (2013) states that the Brundtland report is “the most popular definition of sustainability this day comes from the pages of this report” As it is said previously development is contemplated to be sustainable if it “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs”. The report is named after the chairperson of the World

Commission on Environment and Development, who was a Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland. The report was previously called the “Our Common Future” report. Sustainable Development Society (2015) summarizes the content of the report “The report highlighted three fundamental components to sustainable development: environmental protection, economic growth and social equity. The concept of sustainable development focused attention on finding strategies to promote economic and social advancement in ways that avoid environmental degradation, over-exploitation or pollution, and sidelined less productive debates about whether to prioritize development or the environment.”

2.2 Tourism, certificates, and competitive advantage

Tourism is a familiar concept, but what does it mean? How can the industry where tourism happens to be defined or is tourism more of economic activity? Tourism is customary know to be an unusual and temporary state which takes place outside our everyday lives. Weaver and Opperman (2000) incorporate that: “Tourism is the sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the interaction among tourists, business suppliers, host governments, host communities, origin governments, universities, community colleges and non-governmental organizations, in the process of attracting, transporting, hosting and managing these tourists and other visitors.” (Franklin 2003, 28.)

The idea of tourism has changed and expanded during recent years and it is defined to affect in more forms of our social life. Franklin (2003) states that tourism is “a central part of a modern person”. This state complies that today tourism is envisioned to be more than just a temporary state. Another approach presents tourism to be a significant factor in the business, and it has important social and political implications. (Franklin 2003, 26-27).

In the economic framework tourism as an industry affects the areas which it operates in. The areas might be affected on a small scale or even nationwide. Nevertheless, tourism industry affects the economy in those areas in four different ways; influence on the income, effect on the employment, enables the

balance of the payments and has an impact on the investments and deployment. (Holloway 1989, 174-177.)

Holloway (1989) Clarifies the possible impact extensively:

Income which consists of wages, salaries, interest, rent and profits. In the tourism industry, the most income is made directly from wages and salaries. The higher the number of people working in the industry in question, the higher the revenue generated. Additionally, tourism generates income throughout taxation, which increases public income.

Employment is created by tourism now and in the future, even if labour requirements have reduced because of the technology. The disadvantage of employment in tourism is the fact that a part of these jobs is part-time or seasonal.

The balance of payments (BOP) is nationally influenced by tourism. The biggest impact it has in those countries which have good tourism facilities but a small amount of other agricultural or industrial export possibilities.

Investments and deployment are made possible when a certain area achieve a standard of productive business and levels of income has increased; because of the success in the area attracts other companies to invest more in the area. This phenomenon is known as the *accelerator concept*.

Sustainability tourism industries development from a business perspective.

In the history of business, development is a significant concept. Dependency Theorist Andre Gunder Frank (1967) explains that development is an unequal approach where First World nations get richer, and Third World Nations get poorer presumably indicating to capitalism. However, dating back a bit further development especially in tourism is set into the post-world war era where it as a business was seen as a conclusion to the poor economy, in that time the negative impacts were unquestioned for example the negative impacts that Frank

pointed out. Subsequently, the tourism's economic as well as environmental impacts were finally understood and detected in the 1980s'.

(Liburd & Edwards 2010, 3-6.)

The connection between sustainable development and tourism was not recognized until the year 1997 when it was specified through The United Nations Agenda 21.

The essence of Agenda 21 is the recognition of tourism being a model form of economic development. Agenda 21 takes into consideration both the tourist as well as the local community, both of which should benefit from tourism, still maintaining the quality of the environment. Agenda 21 includes measures and guidelines that tourism businesses can commit to testifying the development of sustainable tourism. (Liburd & Edwards 2010, 5.)

When talking about the international business such as tourism and other internationally affecting business it is important to incorporate sustainable practices into companies' operations. In the context of the economy, Liburd and Edwards (2010) listed the possible positive impacts of tourism development for the economy: (1) the growth of local businesses, also encouraging local production; (2) increases employment as well as possibly upgrading the economic status; (3) enables the preservation of cultures and heritage attractions; (4) improves infrastructure; (5) lead to foreign exchange earnings for national economy (Liburd & Edwards 2010, 54-56.)

According to Franklin (2003, 26) the present-day tourism can be defined as consumerism. Consumerism is described for being a certain behaviour that is in our heredity, but it is also a pattern that creates meaning and satisfaction to people primarily through the consumption of services and goods. (The Worldwatch Institute 2010, 7-8.)

Chang et al. (2017) based their research on the hypothesis of sustainability becoming a critical perspective in managing firms in the three different

dimensions of firms. These three different dimensions are economic, environmental, and social. At the conclusion of their research, they highlight the fact of sustainability development context, having growing attention when firms are in question. This paper presents a critical review of the evolving theories on sustainability and firms. The main theory foundations when building a sustainability base for a firm are Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Stakeholder Theory, Corporate Sustainability (CS) and Green Economics. These are the theories companies need to focus on when using sustainability as a tool for developing a company and to possibly gaining the financial benefit from it.

The Corporate Social Responsibility thrives the companies to more sustainable action and stabilizes the negative effects companies might have in the business circumstances. The Corporate Social Responsibility also known as corporate citizenship is described to be corporate sectors' participation into sustainable development.

CSR is based on the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (published in 1976, the latest update in 2011) the themes that arise in these guidelines are: "employment and industrial relations, human rights, reporting business information on enterprises, the environment, preventing bribery and extortion, consumer protection, competition, taxation, and science and technology." The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (2019) listed the Government's CSR policy in practice: (1) *Producing information on CSR, such as reports or studies*, (2) *building dialogue between companies, civil society, and public officials*, (3) *services, such as training on CSR for companies or public officials*, and (4) *legislation, which mainly derives from EU*.

When talking about sustainability, in the field of business the word '*greenwashing*' rises immediately. Greenwashing is argued to be just a sales promoter when tourists as consumers make their purchasing decisions on the label or prefix of a tour or sightseeing. The Habitat Advocate Organization (2013) highlights that the problem in the advertisement in the eco-tourism concept is that the environment-friendly facilities are mostly "eco-tourism" or environment friendly by

name only. Consumers content oneself with the awareness of the labelling of green service or facility without scrutinizing the impact of their experiences. – This is why we authorized certificates is needed to prove the sustainability in a company or organizations is really happening, not just as a marketing trick.

Thiele (2013) points out a solution for the United future of sustainability and economy. It is called the *Ecological Economics*, which will possibly improve and gain an advantage to all once development happens without raising levels of consumption and waste beyond the capacity of the planet. The basic idea behind the *Ecological Economies* is that economy is connected to the environment as a subsystem; the aim is to create an economy that does not consume the natural capital, which it depends on.

Robertson (2014) business-wise explains that organizations move towards sustainability to gain advantage or to avoid risk. Besides, some sustainability factors are legal responsibilities and organizations need to follow those responsibilities to avoid fines. However, many sustainable strategies also provide a business sense, marketing advantages, *differentiation* from competitors which can lead to increased market share. (Robertson 2014, 287.)

Certificates. A wide range of sustainability certificates exists which prove the sustainability of a product, practice, or a service. Even though there is a broad spectrum on different certificates all share the same premises. Wherein all certificates are all developed by a third party, there are standards, guidelines, or development paths to be met to qualify. Confirmation is done by verification; by auditing, monitoring, and assessing. The certificates are voluntary. (Resource Management Associates, 2020.)

Financial benefits the certificates bring to companies: (1) **Give support** to the company's business values by making sure that the company is operating in a sustainable manner. (2) Use the certificate as a common thread to **formulate a comprehensive strategy** for the company in case it does not have one. While creating a strategy, opportunities might occur. (3) **Identify cost money loss** and

determine cost-saving via auditing. (4) **Getting a third-party evaluation** of the company's operation. (5) **Creating competitive advantage**. (6) **Receive a marketing benefit** as the company is mentioned interrelated with the certificate and the company may use the certificates logo as a "loss-leader". (7) **Improve the knowledge** of sustainability within the company and **prove the company's corporate social responsibility**. (Cultivating Capital 2020.) All the certificates crucial to this research are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Competitive advantage refers to a factor which allows a company or an organization to outmatch its competitors. The factor is fundamentally found in the capability of the organization or a company to differentiate itself from others. (Christoffer 2011, 4). According to Jobber (1995) achieving and possessing a competitive advantage is superior performance which can be gained throughout the differentiation of a product or a service or by cost leadership. In this context, the differentiation means the extra value customers gain when they prefer a product or a service over another. Therefore, differentiation should be focal when choosing competitive strategy. (Jobber 1995, 527.)



Figure 3. Gaining competitive advantage using certificates

Figure 3 demonstrates how sustainability creates competitive advantage via certificates. The sustainability is verified by certificates which generate differentiation which is one of the main factors to gain a competitive advantage in the international tourism business.

3 CURRENT SITUATION OF SUSTAINABILITY CERTIFICATES

To discover the current situation of certificates which prove sustainability in the City of Vantaa a survey (Appendix 2.) was implemented via email. In addition, to formulate an extensive data also the observation of the organization's webpages was carried out. An email was sent all together to 37 organizations that operate within tourism in the City of Vantaa. The findings are discussed later in the chapter and are listed in (Appendix 3.).

The participants whose sustainable actions were examined were chosen together with the commissioner of the thesis, the City of Vantaa, Business Development Services.

Overviewing the answers to the survey it can be stated that in percentage terms many participants did not answer it, observed in (Appendix 3). The number was as high as 12 out of 37. In addition, based on the findings in (Appendix 3) and by the observation of the webpages, it can be concluded that major Hotel chains answered actively and had well-managed certificates. The most common certificates used in the City of Vantaa were the Nordic Swan Ecolabel and the Green Key Award. Also, three answers revealed that TripAdvisor's citations were earned, and three respondents were certified by Eco Compass.

Certificates. Certificates are the environment certificates or tourism certification programmes that define the codes of conduct for organizations so they can prove that they are working according to sustainable development. These certificates usually contain monitoring, auditing, and evaluating. When a company follows the regulations of the certificate, it merits a certificate to prove the organization's customs. From the environmental point of view, these certificates function as guides to execute the sustainable performance. From the business point of view,

certificates can create competitive advantage. Certification can also be used as a tool to encourage sustainable business performance. (Liburd & Edwards 2010, 60.) One use for the certificate is stated to be the altering of responsibility, as once the company proves itself to be sustainable by a certificate the responsibility of the decision of supporting sustainable tourism is passed from the organization to the individual. (Kalmari & Kelola 2009, 13.)

Nordic Swan Ecolabel. This certificate is destined for hotels, restaurants, and conference facilities. To merit the Nordic Swan Ecolabel company must comprehensively acknowledge the environment while operating and fulfilling the requirements the Nordic Swan Ecolabel sets. These requirements are, for example:

- Appointed limit values for example in the consumption of energy and water
- Limit values for the produced waste
- Precise environmental requirements regarding raw material acquisition and raw material usage
- The restaurants need to have about the origins of their ingredients and ingredients should contain plenty of organic components
- The restaurants should always have the possibility to prepare vegetarian dishes

The organization behind the Nordic Swan Ecolabel arrange follow-up inspections for labelled companies to check whether the company is following the guidelines, sometimes written reports are required. (Nordic Ecolabelling 2018.)

ISO 14001. An internationally recognized standardizing system that operates as a part of a larger network which is based on the European Union regulations. ISO 14001 is the Environmental management system which by standards proves the organization's environmental consciousness. It is an extensive program, but the disadvantage is it is costly, and therefore it is used only by large hotel chains. (Moisio & Tuominen 2008.)

EcoCompass. This certificate is primarily for small and medium-sized organizations, and it is built upon ten criteria which the organizations involved in

need to follow. The criteria, as well as the certificate itself, is based on Nordic and international environmental management systems. The criteria introduced by EcoCompass are based on methods used in the company which verify that the company is acting according to regulations and laws. These methods are used, for example, for companies own environmental policies and waste management plans. Companies need to prove the responsible use of hazardous waste and chemicals. All the recording happens according to regulations, records and data need to be summarized as a report to EcoCompass annually. Also, the environmental programme needs to be prepared and updated annually. The commit to the criteria is proven by an external person who audits the company and by auditing proves the certificates ten criteria to be fulfilled. (Ecocompass 2019.)

TripAdvisor - Green Leader is a program which presents environmentally-friendly accommodations such as hotels, B & Bs', and luxury resorts. The programme is divided into five stages: bronze, silver, gold, and platinum. The stage which fills in the minimum standards is called the GreenPartner. All the stages mentioned need to meet the standards, and as the level gets better the company must rise above the standards by a determined percentage to proceed and retain the position. Furthermore, all the stages mentioned above are committed to ecological practices such as recycling, supporting locally produced food, organic food supplies, and by promoting the use of electric cars by proving customers by charging points. (Tripadvisor 2019.)

TripAdvisor - Certificate of Excellence. The Green Partner certificate is used to prove that environmental matters are taken into consideration in the company. Alternatively, TripAdvisor's Certificate of Excellence recognizes the hospitality businesses that deliver great service consistently. There is no application for this certification as it is achieved by rating, overall reviews and by being an active member. (Tripadvisor 2019.)

Green Key. Green Key is an international Danish eco-label primarily destined for leisure organizations. Started as a hotel label but is now used in over 13

countries in different tourism leisure activities. Audits and onsite checks are performed to the organizations that have already merited the Green key label. The criteria to merit and maintain the label is environmental management and responsibility, personnel involvement, and customer involvement. Also, decreasing water usage, waste reduction, sorting and recycling as well the energy-saving and reasonable supply of energy, groceries, and all the other acquisition. Green key differs from other eco-labels as it provides profound environmental education. (Liburd & Edwards 2010, 82.)

Other certificates used in the City of Vantaa are the **Global food safety systems** which include Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points and **ACA CERTIFICATES** - as some of the companies operate at the airport, they are committed to the *Airport Carbon Accreditation*. The main aim of this certificate is to reduce carbon emission (Airport Carbon Accreditation, 2009).

4 SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL FINLAND

At the beginning of the thesis process, the City of Vantaa had applied to be a part of a Sustainable Travel Finland programme pilot and as the process proceeded the City of Vantaa was eventually accepted as a part of it. As no official data existed which implicates that the companies included in the travelling scene of the City of Vantaa are working sustainably the current situation needed to be discovered for the pilot programme. This was concluded with a survey which was implemented via email. The previous chapter discussed the findings of the survey and assembled the current situation of the sustainable certificates in the City of Vantaa. Consequently, this chapter explains the details about the Sustainable Travel Finland Programme pilot.

The intention behind the Sustainable Travel Finland programme is to prove the sustainability of travelling within the different cities by integrated certificates and to improve the whole image of travelling in Finland. The Sustainable Travel Finland Programme is relevant to the City of Vantaa as the tourism around it is increasing due to the enlargement of the airport. Additionally, according to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (2019) the importance of

domestic tourism to the national economy has increased. (Business Finland 2019).

Background and organizational structure. To respond to the growth of demand and change, the development of the tourism industry must be sustainable. Besides, the development must be done to strive for the Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations. For this reason, Visit Finland has developed The Sustainable Travel Finland programme and consequently the possibility to achieve a certificate or a label. (Business Finland 2019.)

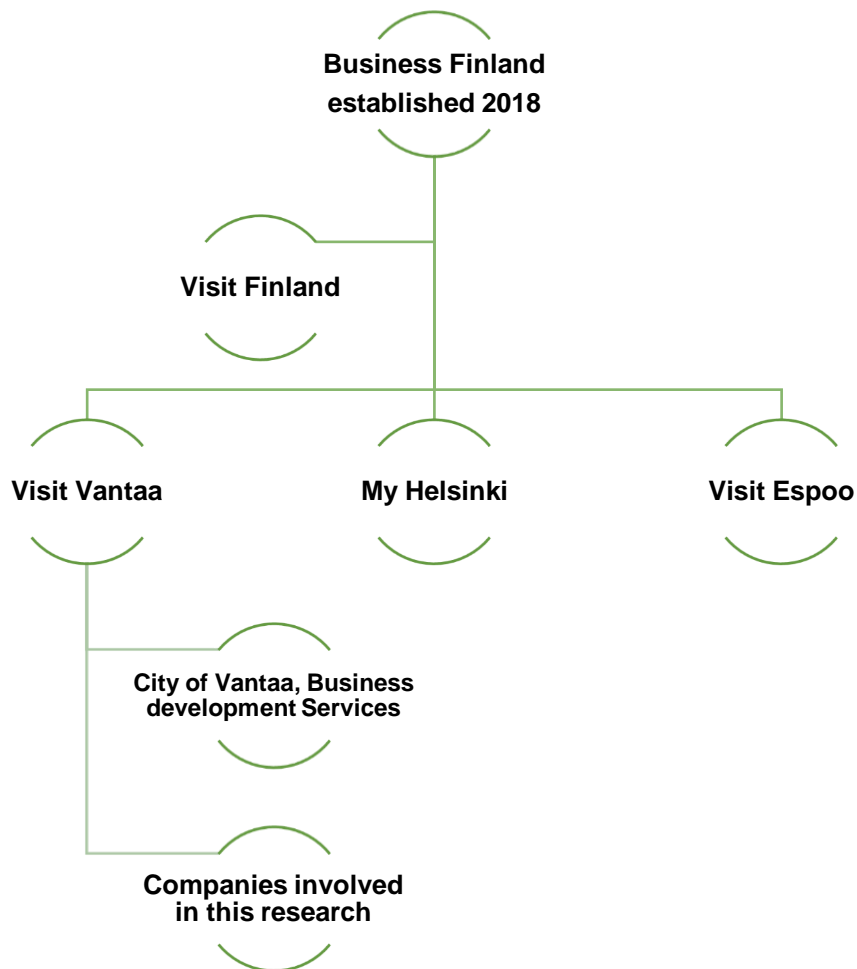


Figure 4. Organizational structure in 2019 (Business Finland, 2019.)

The organizational structure behind the Sustainable Travel Finland programme is clarified in Figure 4. Business Finland is the main administration, which is a merger of former FINPRO (a provider of internationalization advisory services) and TEKES (Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation) (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2017). Figure 4 also illustrates how Visit Finland is a part of Business Finland which is funded from The Budget. The mission of Visit Finland is to create an image of Finland as a desirable travel destination and to support different quarters of the field. Also, it helps enterprises to enter the international markets and to develop their services as well as their marketing. The regional travel supporting segments operate within Visit Finland, for example, Visit Vantaa and the sections related to it. (Business Finland 2019.)

Visit Finland provides tools within the Sustainable Travel Finland Programme, which enables and simplifies the adoption of sustainable actions in a specific area or organization. There are no expenses when joining the programme but there will be inevitable costs throughout the staff and the time consumed. The areas and companies that achieve the certificate will be provided with the ongoing development model, the latest information concerning sustainable development in the tourism field as well as increased visibility through Visit Finland Channels. (Business Finland 2019.)



Figure 5. Sustainable development path (Business Finland, 2019.)

One of the main tools Visit Finland provides is an online platform which includes the sustainable development path. Figure 5 explains The Sustainable Travel Finland programmes a 7-step sustainable development path. The path supports the companies and organizations which have been accepted to the programme advancement step-by-step. It gives profound advice starting from the commitment until the contract is made.

The Sustainable Travel Finland label is also achievable if the company or organizations already have an approved certificate which enables it to join the so-called *umbrella* certificate. The *umbrella* certificate proves the sustainability of a company or an organization even if it is not the certificate or a label earned within the programme. (Nylund 2019.)

The certificates approved within the Sustainable Travel Finland programme by Visit Finland are:

- EcoCompass
- EMAS (the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme)
- Geo Golf
- Green Globe
- Green Key
- ISO 14001 - other ISO- certificates can be accepted from an additional field of business if convenient but it needs justification.
- The Nordic Swan Ecolabel
- Roope Satama (for boating organizations only)
- ECEAT program (European Centre for Ecological and Agricultural Tourism)
- TourCert
- WWF Green Office
- Sustainable Nature Tourism (for National parks)

“Equal sustainable travel certificates can be credited if the criterion of ISO 14024 is fulfilled.” (Nylund, 2019).

5 RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODS

Research approach. Consequently, the research questions of this thesis answer “what and how” questions so, it was logical to collect data by qualitative research methods. Additionally, the phenomenon is new, and the evolutionary process of it is still in the beginning. Therefore, the qualitative method allows gaining a more in-depth understanding not only for the research itself but about the whole phenomenon.

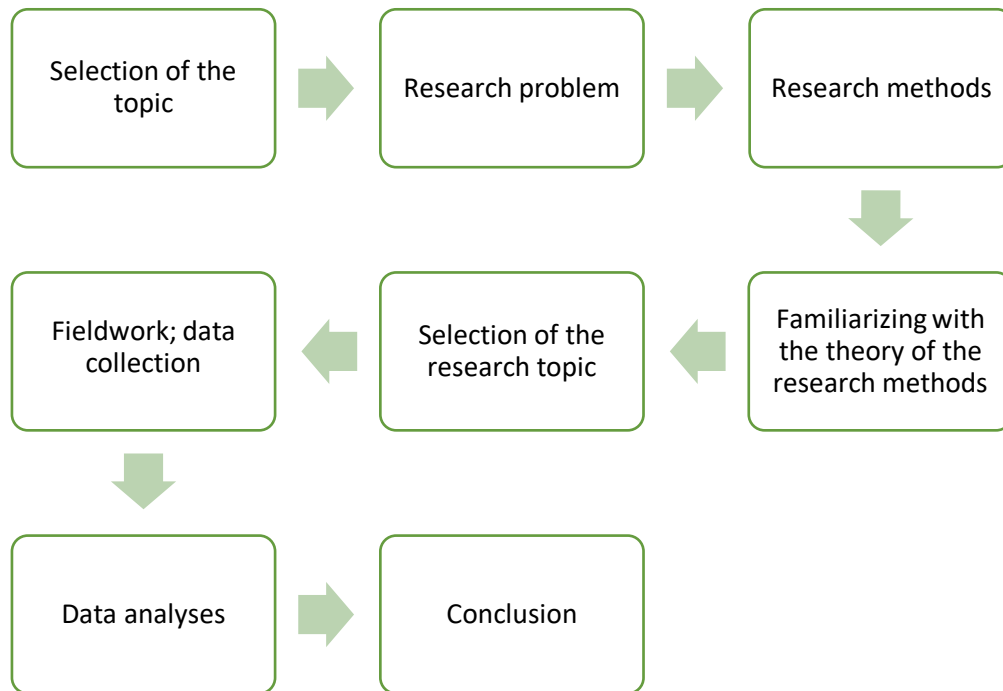


Figure 6. Qualitative research process (Kananen 2015, 128)

Kananen (2015) gives an example in Figure 6 of the phases of the qualitative research process starting from the selection of the topic and ending with the conclusion part.

As seen in Figure 6 the research methods are essential for the whole process and discussed frequently. This research proceeds in the same way as the example, only with minor changes and detailed differences. For example, this research has more than one research method, and the methods are carried out on the segment of a line, separate time. The methods used in this research are a survey, a collection of training documents and the conducted semi-structured interviews.

Documents; training notes. In August 2019 Visit Finland organized a Sustainable Travel Finland training concerning the pilot. The training consists of information about the certificate process, but also group exercises were organized in which representatives of different companies revealed the

sustainable actions that are already carried out in their work. The data collected during the training are discussed in Chapter 7 because the data proves that there are a lot of sustainable actions implemented in companies operating in the City of Vantaa. However, none of these actions is proved by a certificate or any other report.

Semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interview is integrity which is formed from two sections: the theme and the interview. Themes present the wide thematic entity as separations for questions when the questions are precise and focus on a specific detail of the phenomenon. Furthermore, themes are subjects of conversations where the questions cannot be answered with a simple yes or no answer. Because of this, the functioning contact between the interviewer and the interviewee is crucial, and it may lead to new subjects and perspectives. Dawson summarizes (2002) that the semi-structured interview is useful, on a large scale because in the semi-structured interviews the researcher wants to know specific information which can be contrasted and compared with the other information gathered like in this research the information is gathered by exploiting the literature, the surveys and training notes. The focus groups of the semi-structured interview were entrepreneurs of small operations which operate in the field of tourism in the City of Vantaa.

A complication which appears in the semi-structured interviews is that the themes or the questions are decided in advance, without any possibility of adjustment. In this research, this was avoided by keeping the interviews as casual as possible and deciding only the subject area in advance. (Kananen 2005, 148.) The main aim of the interviews in this research is to collect data from companies operating within the City of Vantaa. This data constitutes a data base which the commissioner of the research, the City of Vantaa Business Development Services will use as an indicative data when proceeding to the next steps when aiming to be a more sustainable city.

Kananen (2011, 52) points out that selecting the interviewees in some cases need independent research, just to find out the key person when trying to find out

details or more information about a special field. In this case, the possible interviewees were selected; meanwhile, the survey of the initial phase was conducted. The interviewees were selected according to their companies' size, the deficiency of certificates and the location of the company, as well as from different operating sections from the tourism business field. All the interviewees worked in a small, medium, or even micro-sized companies which according to (Yrittäjät.fi 2019) refers to companies under 50 employees. Also, these companies did not have any former certificates recommended for the Sustainable Travel Finland programme and each company operated in the City of Vantaa. All the interviews were recorded, and the material gathered all together was 3 hours and 41 minutes.

Within the semi-structured interviews also the saturation needs to be taken into consideration. According to Hirsjärvi et al. (2007), the debatable saturation happens, when the same topics appear in the interviews, and new interviews do not provide any new information and content. In this research the quantity of the interviews was not decided beforehand; the main aim was to interview as many small, medium, or even micro-sized companies' representatives as possible. Since the Sustainable Travel Finland programme is in the pilot phase, there are not so many companies that are involved. Even though there were not many participants in the interviews, the saturation already occurred, then again, it might also happen because of the low participation rate.

6 DATA ANALYSIS

According to Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2004) processing, qualitative data contain many phases. For the most part, it is analysis and syntheses. The analysis phase itemizes and categorizes the already existing data, which synthesis aims to create a general view of the phenomenon. The analysis consists of two analysis approaches: the inductive and the deductive. The deductive approach is based on the chain of reasoning, and it creates a big picture based on-premises. Whereas the inductive forms a conclusion based on limited data based by experience. In this research, the data is inductive, and the analysis is based on the gathered data.

In the qualitative research, the interpretation is performed constantly, for example, during the interview, new issues might occur, even if the frame of the interview is decided beforehand. The main aim of the data analyses is to understand the phenomenon comprehensively and to develop a perspective or a theory where the data can be placed and end up with a successful explanation. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2004, 143-150.)

6.1 Thematic analyses

When gathered data is organized by a theme like in this research, it is called *thematic analysis*. This kind of analysis is deeply inductive, and the themes are guided by the data, not the researcher. In a thematic analysis, the analysis itself and data collection happen concurrently, and even the theoretical framework of the research can form a part of the analysis process. The Thematic data analysis enables supplementing the data for the researcher by allowing the researcher to move backwards and forwards between interviews transcripts, lecture notes and the research literature (Dawson 2002, 115-117.)

According to Luborsky (1994) there is a certain repetitious characteristic which appears in interviews. The themes which arise during the analysis are based on the researcher's interpretation of the interviewees verbalizing. Besides, thematic analyze is generally an analyses approach where the data has been collected particularly for the research in question. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2004, 173.)

The main aim of the thematic analysis is to recognize essential topics or themes forming the data. Consequently, the detailed identifying and categorizing of the data allows a more comprehensive exploration. (Jyväskylän Yliopisto 2010.)

Braun & Clarke (2006) offer a guideline for proceeding thematic analysis within the qualitative analysis. These steps are presented parallel to the data analyses in Chapter 6.2.

6.2 The Six Steps

To carry out a thematic analysis on a practical level, the guidelines by Braun and Clarke (2006) are followed. The guidelines are introduced as *the six steps of thematic analysis*; it was first intended to be a qualitative analytic method within psychology but has become also widely used in other fields too.

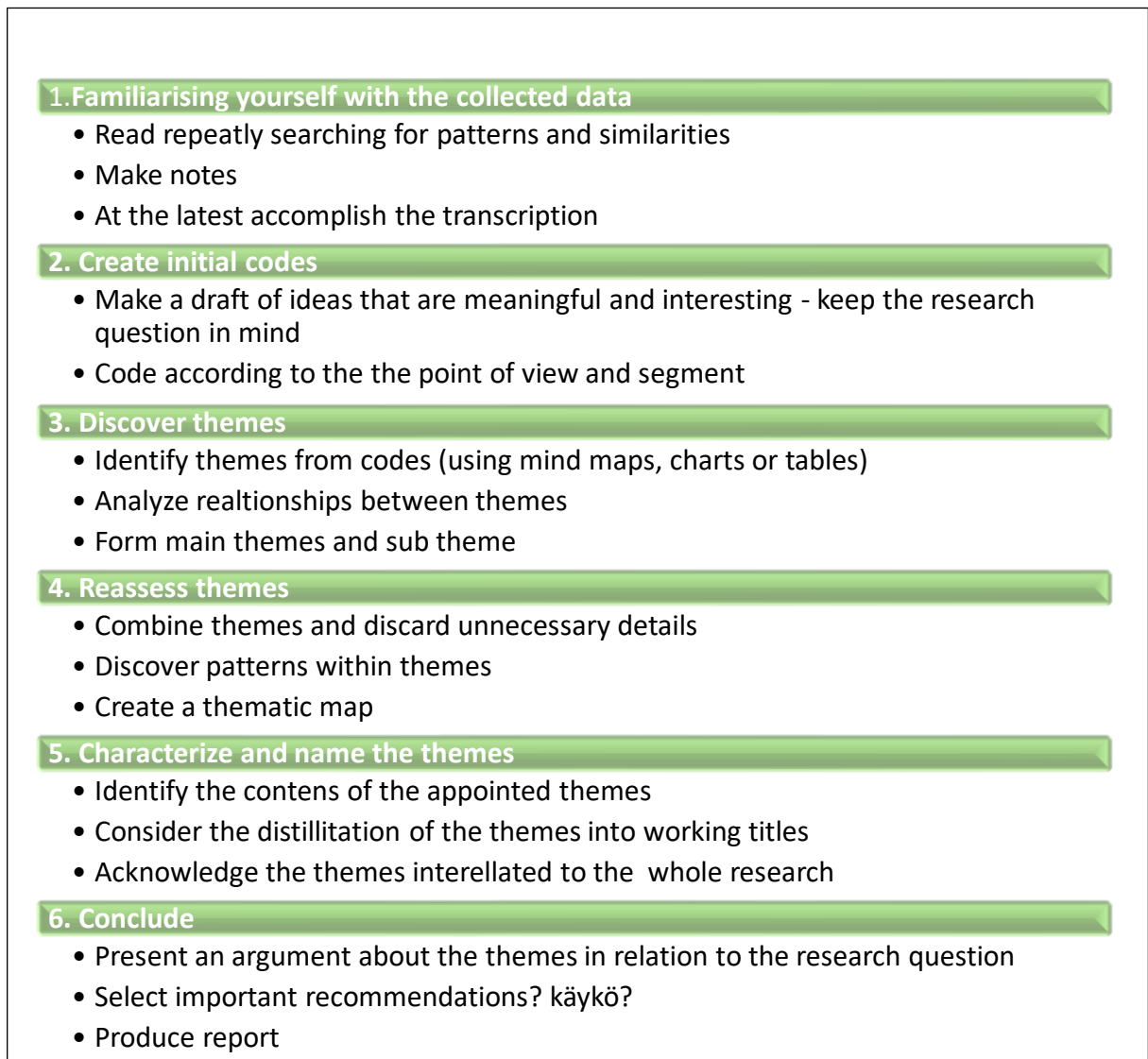


Figure 7. The six steps of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006)

The 6 steps method by Braun and Clarke (2006) was selected as a qualitative data analysis approach since it is a theoretically flexible research tool which provides clear guidelines that assist throughout the whole analysis process. In addition, it allows the researcher to use creative and manual tools for example

indicating possible patterns by highlighting and coding the data by writing within text. The six steps approach is clarified in Figure 7. Each step is explained profoundly in the post chapters alongside of the data analysis process of this research.

As seen in Figure 7, step 1: is to familiarize with the data. All the interviews that were implemented were also recorded. The recording was done by a digital recorder on a mobile device so that the interviewer could focus on the interview more than writing down answers which are more time-consuming than recording. Furthermore, the recording was done so the interviewer could return to the subject later. When all the interviews were organized and recorded the material was transcribed. Because the language and linguistic usage are not primarily under the analyses, the transcription was not done verbatim. There were 3 hours and 41 minutes of recorded data which was transcribed according to a timeline and themes. After the transcription, the transcribed data was re-read frequently without assumptions. Then it was worked through by searching similarities and questioned, whether the information was crucial or not. At the end of the phase, the obligatory data were arranged into a tabular form to clarify the entity.

Step 2: Creating initial codes (Figure 7). producing codes within the well-familiarized data. The data is encoded so the codes inform the appealing data from the analyst perspective. (Braun & Clarke 2006, 19).

The coding was done manually. All the significant data was encoded in a Microsoft Word file, afterwards the data was divided under codes and highlighted to express the order of importance bearing in mind the research question and the perspective.

Research question: "How to improve the sustainable tourism business in the City of Vantaa?"

Sub-research questions: (1) What is the current situation of sustainable actions and certificates in the City of Vantaa? (2) Will companies want to take part in the Sustainable Travel Finland Programme?

Step 3: discover themes. In relation to the research question, a theme expresses the relevant information and represents patterned data within the data transcription. Ideally, the theme would be mentioned in the data frequently, but the quantity of the mentioned data does not necessarily mean the data is crucial. Once, the data is not automatically dependent on quantifiable measures, it needs to be examined whether is the information containing key information which captures something essential regarding to the research question. Nevertheless, the researcher's role is critical when judgmentally deciding what theme is and what it consists of. (Braun & Clarke 2006, 2-11.)

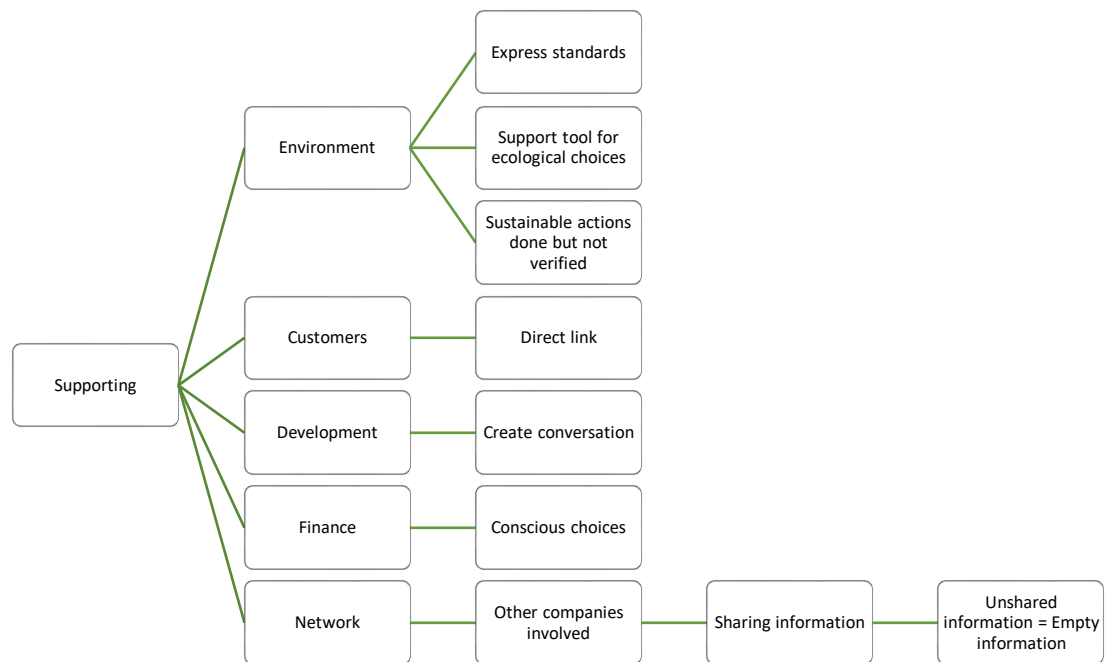


Figure 8. Thematic mind map - supporting

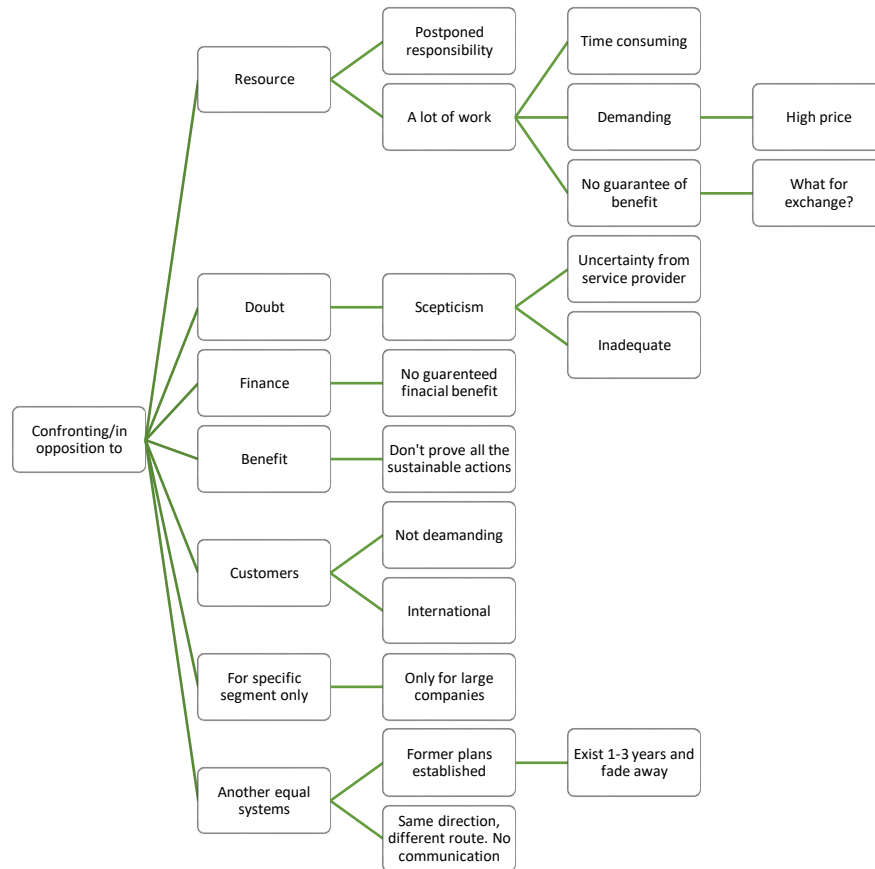


Figure 9. Thematic mind map - confronting

Figures 8-9 presents the visualization, which is implemented by using thematic mind maps. As guided by Braun & Clarke (2006) to simplify exploring the visualization of the theme is a unique tool.

The themes were decided in a non-committal way already during the interviews, but the themes changed and took their official form during and after the interviews as the themes arise from the conversations. The themes are identified from the transcribed, coded data and divided into supporting and confronting categories (Figures 8-9).

Themes are decided by the frequency and the organized by whether they emerge as primary themes or secondary themes.

Step 4: reassess themes. During step 4 all the themes are examined, reviewed, refined, and simplified. Some of the themes are removed because of the lack of

information or alternatively due to the large quantity of data. This phase proceeds from searching coherent patterns and forming comprehensive themes to reviewing and refining until the thematic map is adequate. (Braun & Clarke 2006, 21-22.)

During this phase, the thematic map was simplified. Most of the themes shown in the original mind maps (Figures 8-9) cannot be considered statistically significant because there was a minor quantity of sampling or only one opinion.

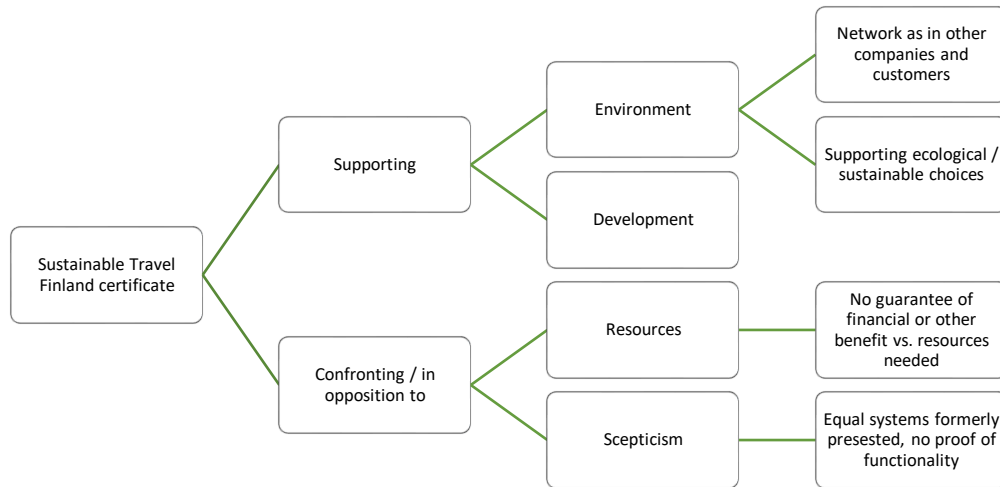


Figure 10. Developed thematic mind map

Step 5: Characterize and name the themes. Figure 10 introduces the completed thematic mind map which is the foundation of this phase. The final thematic map was created by determining what essential data captures; each theme needs to be overseen and a detailed analysis what the theme is all about needs to be formed. The analysis is possible by identifying what is interesting in the theme and why. This step is concluded with the definition of the themes and excluding what the themes are not. (Braun & Clarke 2006, 22.)

Step 6: Conclusion. When the themes and the contents are assessed it is time to accomplish the closing analyses and finalize the report. This includes a theme-based argument in relation to the research question of the research. Also, it consists of going through the key findings of the analyses and telling the overall story what the themes tell about the companies stand and give a proposition how to proceed.

(Braun & Clarke 2006, 23.)

7 RESULTS

In a thesis as in all the scientific publications, the results are based on the collected data and the conclusions made from it. Thus, only the subjects that can be found in the data can be presented as a result. All the results must be able to be proved, and the results should not contain any presumptions, speculation and believes of the researcher does not belong to the results. (Kananen 2015, 331). For instance, the results of this part of the research are the results collected from the group session as well as the conclusion of the data analyses accomplished from the transcribed interview data.

The first key results of this research are discussed in Chapter 3, where the findings of the survey via email are explained. Those results mapped the starting point for sustainable tourism development in the City of Vantaa. The current situation of the certificates is arranged and discussed in the former part of the research because even if it answers partly to the research question, it also defines a part of the background data.

The second section of key results is the sustainability actions that were discovered during the group sessions held in August 2019. These are sustainability actions implemented in the different operations in a diverse field on tourism in the City of Vantaa. These actions are not verified or proven by a certificate; therefore, the continual follow-ups of these actions seem impossible. The collected data were categorized and outlined in clear actions.

The sustainability actions were divided into different approaches:

Ecological: (1) recycling of waste, by making it possible also for customers, (2) minimizing of waste of raw materials, (3) providing a transparent chain of production, (4) In certain occasions only vegetarian food and local fish is served, and (5) nationwide availability (for example throughout virtual settings).

Sociocultural & ethical: (1) accessibility to everyone, (2) voluntary activity, (3) recommendations for public transport, (4) profits of a restaurant is used to for funding public health, (5) information shared about the fact that the tap water is drinkable, (6) sustainability is a concern of taking the well-being of staff into consideration, and (7) air travels share in the climate change tuition project for children ongoing.

Communication: (1) various sociocultural groups are acknowledged whereas the communication happens throughout different channels, (2) exhibition themes (for example in museums) concerning sustainable communication, and (3) shared transportation possibilities.

All the above-mentioned acts are conducted in small and medium-sized companies which are excluded from the Sustainable Travel programme, because of the lack of human and financial resources. The communication of these acts could promote the aim of the City of Vantaa, becoming a forerunner in the international tourism business.

The third section of key results covers the overview of the interviews. The interviews which were conducted during autumn 2019 were held to capture ideas and experiences of the entrepreneurs and to reflect the findings of the phenomenon in question. Eventually, these ideas enable us to form recommendations for the City of Vantaa, Business Development Services and create bases for future research.

After the themes were revised and the final frame for the thematic map (Figure 10) was concluded. The thematic analyses highlighted four themes, and three of those themes divided into subthemes. The analyzed data was divided into supporting and confronting themes, whether the data was endorsing to join the Sustainable Travel Finland programme or not. Here the results went over theme at a time.

All the themes are linked back to the research questions and the background of the research. The developed thematic map includes only the themes which occurred frequently but also seemed to be the most meaningful when answering the research question.

Results by themes

Supporting

Environment as the main theme, is divided in to two themes which discuss the network and the support the environmental frame offers. Environment frequently emerged along the interviews. Data concerning environment was experienced as a supporting frame by the interviewees because it encourages companies to make more environment-friendly choices. It also creates a platform which teaches more environment-friendly ways to operate and the certificate programme offers a guided network to share thoughts and tips. Besides, if a company already operates in such a manner the certificate programme proves the performed actions in the context of environment.

“As the City of Vantaa aims to be a forerunner, it would be good to organize more training – to support the conversation and sharing thoughts”

Development. All the interviewees would be ready for development as there was hope for increased coordination among the sustainable actions happening in the City of Vantaa. Moreover, all the companies were ready for sustainable development if the development was not dependent on resources.

“Of course, it is an important subject and when doing business all the customers need to be listened very attentively and general trends must be followed.”

Development also includes the development of international markets; it is believed that international customers could be influenced by a certificate but

there is no evidence the certificate is a crucial factor in the decision-making process and would pay for itself.

Confronting

Resources. The most extensive theme to arise from the interview data is the data which involves the resources and especially their lack. Resources mean that the certificate is time consuming, it requires staff and the cost is quite high when the uncertainty of the advantage it may give is unproven.

“It must be weight probably if we can afford these ecology actions.”

“Most certainly it would support the high-standard business activities, but it does not have significant impact on it.”

Scepticism exists towards the Sustainable Travel Finland programme. The scepticism originates from former similar programmes and plans that were established but never proceeded. Also, the belief or these kinds of programmes only concerning the large companies are instilled. A quote from a small enterprise owner summarizes the scepticism towards the need for the certificate:

“I send a message to instructor X to ask whether it is endorsed to join the programme? Instructor X said, she does not know.”

One of the interviewees, who is an entrepreneur said in relation to tourism that “The City of Vantaa has an advanced activity - because the City of Vantaa allows entrepreneurs to take part to travel events free of charge” – this is why there is no need for the advertisement from the Sustainable Travel Finland programme.

Taken together, these results gathered on different occasions support one and another in such a manner that all the data explain that sustainable actions are already happening, but nothing proves the existence of the actions.

8 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Key findings

The purpose of the current study was to determine the current sustainable tourism certificates and actions in the City of Vantaa and reflect them as a possible competitive advantage within the international tourism business. Additionally, it was intended to investigate whether the companies and organizations operating within the City of Vantaa are interested in joining the Sustainable Travel Finland programme and if the program would be beneficial.

The study has identified the certificates used, and the sustainable actions taking place in the City of Vantaa are listed. The following results collected from interviews suggested that companies are ready for sustainable development, but do not have the resources to join the Sustainable Travel Finland programme and experience scepticism towards the program. Additionally, the interviews revealed the situation of SME's response to the common certificate. The answers followed the same line with Liburd & Edwards (2010) that explained how monitoring the possible certificates could make them easier. – systems behind the certificates need to be reliable, certificates need to be *affordable*, the implementation should be achieved without great effort and without using huge amount of resources.

The major limitations of this study were the amount of the participants taking part in the interview, the participation of a medium-sized or a large company representative would have made the data more extensive. Although the study is based on a small sample of participants, it strengthens the idea of sustainable development being too abstract. The sustainable tourism itself requires concrete functions, for example, companies that work in the tourism field, the need to improve their communication of the sustainability within each other but also communicating their actions to their customers. Therefore, sustainability will draw competition between businesses in the international tourism sector, but it will also be proof of a responsible company.

Overall, the data suggests that there is no demand for such a certificate or programme like the Sustainable Finland Programme if it is not revised and personalized for small or micro-sized enterprises.

8.2 Reliability and validity

Where quantitative researchers aim to succeed in measuring what they were supposed to measure and that the measures are accurate and consistent the qualitative researchers need to acknowledge that participants as well as the researchers themselves might be influenced by taking part in the project or by their own background and view point. This makes the qualitative research a very personal process. (Dawson 2002). In which both reliability and validity assume that the researcher can access the objective reality and truth.

One way to define reliability according to Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2001, 184-190) is to inquire whether two valuers decide on the same results. However, in qualitative research this is not a solid practice. Preferably in the qualitative research the reliability could be measured throughout a discussion whether two valuers reach consensus on the matter.

When questioning the reliability of this research attention must be paid to the researcher's interpretations and the reflect on the objective reality. Nevertheless, the researchers own experiences of working in the service sector might affect as well as the commissioners aim. These mentioned risks are kept in mind throughout the whole process. Also, possible inaccuracies might have occurred due to translation. The interviews as well as some other data, were originally in Finnish and was translated into English.

Despite the risks to ensure the reliability along the process, a few methods have been used. First, background information is verified and questioned. As a piece of precaution information used is checked from another source if possible. The interviews were transcribed as soon as possible because the researcher herself did the interviewing as well as the transcription. In addition, the field assignment

tools were cross-checked beforehand, and the analyses methods were examined.

Validity aims at the results possible repeatability questions whether the result can be generalized for example into different situations or different personalities. In addition, validity observes whether the research concerns what is supposed to concern and if it renders to predict future research results. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2015, 183-185.) In this research, the SME's interviewed support the validity of the report as they shared the same opinions and values, but the objective truth is impossible to define as the comprehension and mode of actions differ.

8.3 Managerial implications

If the City of Vantaa, ends up proceeding beyond the pilot phase with the Sustainable Travel Finland programme there are matters to take into consideration; a platform which is up-to-date and convertible when needed to be created. This platform should contain all the certificates and the current phases of the companies within the Sustainable Travel Finland training. Also, the City of Vantaa ought to discover whether the larger companies that already have a certificate or will take part in the training cover the required 51% to proceed within the programme. In Case the City of Vantaa would not proceed in the same segment of the line as the Sustainable Travel Finland programme, further research is suggested by the researcher about a possibility to develop a certificate functioning only within the City of Vantaa. This would not allow the City of Vantaa to gain the Sustainable Travel Finland label, but it could drive forward the aim of being a sustainable travel destination.

In terms of competitive advantage in the international tourism business, in this case, we cannot gain competitive advantage throughout cost leadership, as the City of Vantaa cannot affect the companies or organizations prices it is crucial to strive the competitive advantage via differentiation. Differentiation can be done by highlighting all the completed sustainability actions and certificates that the City of Vantaa already has (Figure 3). It is recommended that as a plan of action, the commissioner should implement the competitive advantages of sustainability

actions and certificates into the competitive strategy of the City. As the certificates, acceptance to the Sustainable Travel Finland programme and the already executed sustainable actions can be used as marketing tools which as integrity form an incomparable differentiation factor.

8.4 Final reflection and further research

Thiele (2013) points out a solution for the United future of sustainability and economy. It is called the *Ecological Economics*, which will possibly improve and gain an advantage to all once development happens without raising levels of consumption and waste beyond the capacity of the planet. The basic idea behind the Ecological Economies is that economy is connected to the environment as a subsystem; the aim is to create an economy that does not consume the natural capital, which it depends on. The Sustainable Travel Finland programme is one action to move towards a functioning ecological economy, alongside with other sustainable actions. As the companies operating in the City of Vantaa have international customers and aim to take root on international markets, certificates would create a competitive advantage by the differentiation factor. This kind of competitive advantage and the location of the City would render the City of Vantaa a possibility to achieve the position of being the pioneer in sustainable tourism. (Jobber 1995, 527.)

Comprehensively, the findings within the research present that sustainability creates value, and due to that fact, further work is needed to determine and implement a competitive strategy for the City of Vantaa.

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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. The framework of the study

Figure 2. Structure of the theoretical framework

Figure 3. Gaining competitive advantage using certificates

Figure 4. Organizational structure in 2019 (Business Finland, 2019.)

Figure 5. Sustainable development path (Business Finland, 2019.)

Figure 6. Qualitative research process (Kananen 2015, 128)

Figure 7. The six steps of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006)

Figure 8. Thematic mind map - supporting

Figure 9. Thematic mind map - confronting

Figure 10. Developed thematic mind map

APPENDIX 1.

1. No Poverty – The aim is to end poverty in all its forms everywhere.
2. Zero Hunger - End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
3. Good Health and Well-Being -Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
4. Quality Education - Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
5. Gender Equality -Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6. Clean Water and Sanitation - Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7. Affordable and Clean Energy - Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
8. Decent work and Economic growth - Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure - Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
10. Reduced Inequalities - Reduce inequality within and among countries
11. Sustainable Cities and Communities - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
12. Responsible Consumption and Production - Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
13. Climate action - Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

14. Life Below Water - Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

15. Life on Land - Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions - Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

17. Partnership - Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

APPENDIX 2.

Hei,

Teen YAMK- opinnäytetyötä yhteistyössä Vantaan kaupungin elinkeinopalveluiden kanssa. Tarkoituksenamme on kartoittaa Vantaalla toimivien palveluiden tarjoajien vastuullisen matkailun tilannetta tällä hetkellä. Kerätyn datan pohjalta teemme suunnitelman, kuinka voisimme kehittää Vantaan vastuullista/kestävää matkailua.

Tiedustelin, onko teidän yrityksellänne mahdollisesti mitään yrityksen vastuullisuutta ilmentävää sertifikaattia tai merkkiä. Jos on niin mikä? Jos ei, niin olisiko tulevaisuudessa kiinnostusta sertifikaatin/merkin hankintaan?

Keväisin terveisin,

Jarna Lehtonen

MBA Student

Kaakkois-Suomen Ammattikorkeakoulu

APPENDIX 3.

Company/Organization	Certificate	More information
Flamingo Spa	Tähtikohde by likedfinland.com, Tripadvisor reference No official certificate.	
Tiedekeskus Heureka	No certificate	
Suomen ilmailumuseo	No certificate	Interested
Helsinki-Vantaa Airport (Finavia)	Airport certificates, for example Aca 3+	
Energia Areena	No answer	
Energia Areena restaurants	No Certificate	Does not experience operation as tourism
Kuusijärvi activities	No answer	
Kuusijärvi Cafeteria	No Certificate	Interested in certificates
Fazer Experience	Global Food Safety System, Tripadvisor Certificate of excellence in the years 2017-2019	Part of Karl Fazer Ab Oy
Sipoonkorven kansallispuisto	No answer	
Airport Hotel Bonus Inn	EcoCompass	
Airport Hotel Pilotti	No Certificate	Will merit the EcoCompass in the future
GLO Hotel Airport	Green key- Award	
Hilton Helsinki Airport Hotel	Nordic Swan Ecolabel	
Holiday Inn Helsinki-Vantaa Airport	EcoCompass	
Hotel Forenom Tikkurila	No answer	
Break Sokos Hotel Flamingo	Green key- Award	
Original Sokos Hotel Vantaa	Green key- Award	
Hämeenkylä Manor	ISO 9001:2015, ISO 14001:2015, OHSAS 18001:2007	Operator: Sodexo
Scandic Helsinki Aviapolis	Nordic Swan Ecolabel (coming)	
Scandic Helsinki Aviacongress	Nordic Swan Ecolabel	
Scandic Helsinki Airport	Nordic Swan Ecolabel	
Clarion Hotel Helsinki Airport	ISO 14001	
20Rooms	No answer	
Villa Jokivarsi	TripAdvisorin Green Leader	Small Enterprise – Nordic Swan Ecolabel considered to be too expensive

Backas	No certificate
Kuninkaan lohet	No answer
Kahvi Charlotte	No answer
Dylan Dixi	No answer
Tiederavintola	<i>Yhteiskunnallinen yritys-</i> certificate
La Pasteria Italiana	No answer
Superpark	CLOSED DOWN
Go experience	No answer
Moose activities	No answer
Kahvitupa Laurentius	No answer
Tikkurila Festivaali	EcoCompass
Punakettu	Participated in the interview

APPENDIX 4.

Teemahaastattelun runko	
Yrityksen nimi	
Toimiala	
Teemahaastattelun toteutus	
Haastattelija	
Ajankohta	
Haastattelun kesto	
Haastateltava henkilö	
Asema	
Teema 1	Vastuullisuus yrityksessä
Teema 2	Kansainvälisyys yrityksessä
Teema 3	Vastuullisuutta ilmentävät sertifikaatit
Teema 4	Sertifikaattien liiketaloudellinen vaikutus
Teema 5	Toiveet jatkossa