

**SUSTAINABILITY IMPLEMENTATION AND
CERTIFICATION CHALLENGES IN THE ARCTIC
OPERATING ENVIRONMENT**

The case of Salla's tourism businesses

Johnson, Carla Rose

Thesis

Bachelor of Business Administration
International Business

2024

Bachelor of Business Administration
International Business

Author	Carla Rose Johnson	Year	2024
Supervisor	Anne Tolvanen		
Title	Sustainability Implementation and Certification Challenges in the Arctic Operating Environment – The case of Salla’s tourism businesses		
Number of pages	61 + 2		

Implementing sustainability strategy through sustainability certifications and eco-labelling have become increasingly popular for tourism businesses, especially in Finland with the popularity of the Green Key Certificate and the Sustainable Travel Finland (STF) Label. These sustainability standards have strict criteria that must be fulfilled to achieve these certificates and labels. Tourism businesses in Salla have suggested that the Arctic operating environment presents increased challenges on achieving sustainability implementation.

The aim of this thesis was to discover and assess how the Arctic operating environment is affecting Salla’s tourism businesses’ ability to achieve the sustainability criteria laid out by these sustainability standards, providing suggestions for further research and development. The theoretical framework was divided into 3 sections, The Arctic operating environment in Finnish Lapland, Sustainable tourism, and certification and labelling. A qualitative case study approach was conducted, focused on the Salla tourism industry, with a method of semi-structured interviews with business owners who have achieved both the STF Label and the Green Key Certificate plus a representative from the Municipality of Salla. Analysis was conducted by transcription, content analysis, coding, clustering and thematic generation.

The main results revealed that the biggest challenges that the Arctic operating environment presents to sustainability implementation in Salla was distances and freezing temperatures, effecting both the tourism businesses’ carbon footprint and energy efficiency. These challenges had operational impacts for these businesses but did not objectively prevent businesses from achieving the criteria needed for these standards. These standards remain relevant for the Arctic regions, but this is mostly due to the presence of a process-based approach, improving by a set amount periodically, typically on a yearly basis. The tourism businesses in Salla placed an emphasis on co-operation and information sharing of best practices as the success of their sustainability implementation practices.

Keywords Sustainability implementation, Arctic operating environment, Sustainability management, sustainable tourism development, Green Key, Sustainable Travel Finland

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	6
2	THE ARCTIC AS AN OPERATING ENVIRONMENT	9
2.1	Challenges and opportunities of the Arctic operating environment.....	11
2.2	Arctic challenges vs rural challenges.....	13
2.3	“Salla – in the middle of nowhere”	13
3	SUSTAINABLE TOURISM	15
3.1	Definition.....	15
3.2	Sustainability indicators	15
3.3	Finland’s sustainable tourism strategy.....	16
4	CERTIFICATION AND LABELLING	18
4.1	Differences between Certification and Labelling.....	20
4.2	Process and product-based standards	20
4.3	The Green Key Certificate	21
4.4	Sustainable Travel Finland Label	22
5	PURPOSE, OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS	24
5.1	Purpose	24
5.2	Objective.....	24
5.3	Research questions.....	25
6	METHODOLOGICAL IMPLEMENTATION	26
6.1	Approach	26
6.2	Case study.....	26
6.3	Qualitative methodology	27
6.4	Semi-structured interviews	27
6.5	Target group and choice of data	29
6.6	Description of the data collection process	30
6.7	Data analysis	32
7	RESULTS	33
7.1	Background information of subjects.....	33

7.2	Sustainability challenges	34
7.2.1	Distances.....	34
7.2.2	Freezing temperatures	35
7.3	Sustainability performance	36
7.3.1	Strengths	36
7.3.2	Challenges	37
7.4	Relevance.....	39
7.4.1	Presence within sustainability strategy	39
7.4.2	Value	40
7.4.3	Helpfulness.....	41
7.4.4	Suggestions for more relevant criteria	41
7.4.5	Green Key Vs STF	42
7.5	Actions to improve sustainability.....	43
7.5.1	Is there enough support?.....	43
7.5.2	Advice to other businesses.....	44
7.5.3	Administration efforts.....	45
8	DISCUSSION	47
8.1	Conclusion.....	47
8.2	Review and examination of reliability.....	50
8.3	Ethical considerations.....	53
8.4	Topics for further research.....	54
	REFERENCES	56
	APPENDICIES.....	62

SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS USED

STF Sustainable Travel Finland

1 INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is one of the largest industries in Finnish Lapland and growth remains rapid. For example, tourism has brought in 248 million euros in 2023, with 2024 predicted to see an increase of around 10% from the previous year (Visit Finland 2024c).

The tourism industry, like many other industries, has witnessed growing trends regarding sustainability. The demand for sustainable travel options are on the rise globally. According to the 2023 Booking.com Sustainable Travel Report, 76% of respondents said that they want to travel more sustainably over the next year (Booking.com 2023). This and demands from both regional and national governmental levels to achieve goals related to their tourism sustainability goals, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment in Finland 2024), are putting increasing pressures on tourism companies to intensify their sustainability efforts.

A popular strategy for sustainability implementation within tourism businesses in Finnish Lapland is to align themselves with sustainability standards and certification. Two popular standards are the Sustainable Travel Finland Label (STF) and the Green Key Certificate. These sustainability standards specialize in tourism, offering support, practical tool kits and third-party assessments for companies to achieve their sustainability strategy and in turn, are rewarded with these labels or certificates when they have achieved a minimum criterion (Visit Finland 2024b). Both the STF Label and the Green Key Certificate are focused on the concept of continuous development and improvement, meaning that every year, companies need to improve on their sustainability efforts throughout their operations (Visit Finland 2024b).

The Arctic as an operating environment presents both challenges and opportunities regarding sustainability. Examples of challenges include long distances within supply chains due to ruralness and freezing temperatures putting increased demands on energy usage (Lapinliitto 2024). On the other hand, the Arctic presents countless opportunities, through supporting the local economy and cultures, sourcing local food, utilizing local renewable energy and purchasing

renewable products such as wood that has been locally sourced for products and even infrastructure (Visit Salla 2024b).

The idea for this thesis came about through personal experiences, working within the tourism industry in Salla, Eastern Finnish Lapland and discussions with local businesses about their sustainability implementation and maintaining this implementation in accordance with these standards. These standards focus on the concept of continuous development and improvement, presenting increasingly larger challenges year after year, since initially achieving the Green Key Certificate and the STF Label. These businesses understand the importance of sustainability and the value of these certifications, for example in the form of providing a competitive advantage, however the companies location in the Arctic are presenting challenges with achieving some of the goals presented, meaning that businesses in the area are beginning to worry that achieving the increasing amount of sustainability criteria found within these standards may become too difficult in the long term.

This thesis conducted a qualitative case study to investigate the sustainability strategies that are currently being implemented in Salla's tourism industry and how are they are affected by the conditions of the Arctic operating environment. Even though a variety of sustainability certificates are used in the Finnish tourism industry, the Green Key Certificate and the STF Label are the focus of this thesis as these are the two most popular standards used by tourism businesses in Salla. Furthermore, the STF programme has been adopted as the main strategy for the Salla tourism industry and at a municipal level, recently achieving the STF Destination Label, with 51% of the tourism businesses in Salla having achieved the Sustainable Travel Finland Label (Visit Salla 2024b).

With a focus on the Salla tourism industry, a qualitative research approach was undertaken, in the form of semi-structured interviews with business owners who have achieved both the STF Label and the Green Key Certificate, plus a representative from the Municipality of Salla. The theoretical framework, built through national and international sustainability policy, primary sources such as manuals from these sustainability standards and local authority websites, as well as scientific articles, is divided into 3 sections: The Arctic operating environment

in Finnish Lapland, sustainable tourism, and certification and labelling. The theoretical framework provides the basis in which the interview questions are created, exploring issues such as the challenges that businesses in Salla are facing due to the Arctic conditions, relevancy and value of these standards, whilst also investigating how these businesses are still achieving these standards year after year despite these challenges.

Finally, upon assessment of the literature and the interview results, the results of this research aim open up different areas for further research and areas for development that may help tourism businesses in Salla and in other Arctic regions in regards to their sustainability implementation strategies.

2 THE ARCTIC AS AN OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

In simple terms, the Arctic can be defined as “A geographic region spreading around the North Pole” (Arctic Centre 2024). There is debate regarding where, geographically, the southern boundary of the Arctic lies. There are many definitions, and these are often based on temperature isotherm, treeline of the Taiga Forest, permafrost, or the Arctic Circle. A commonly accepted boundary is the Arctic Circle (66 ° 33'N) (Arctic Centre 2024). When referring to the Arctic in this thesis, the definition will be based on the Arctic circle boundary.

As the most northern region of Finland and the European Union, located within the Arctic, Finnish Lapland has many unique characteristics that are often associated with being “Arctic”. With an area of 100,366 km² and a population of slightly under 180,000 people (2017), Lapland is one of the most sparsely populated places in Europe (Lapinliitto 2024). This sparsely populated region, with long distances between villages and towns is a common characteristic of Finnish Lapland.

When the Arctic is mentioned, many people envision a cold barren tundra. While this is not necessarily the case for Finnish Lapland, with a significant amount of the area located within the Taiga, also known as the Boreal Forest (National Geographic 2024), freezing temperatures are a significant characteristic of this Arctic region. With mean temperatures often between minus 10 to minus 20 Celsius in the winter months, it is not unusual to witness temperatures reaching minus 30's Celsius (Lapland Above Ordinary 2024a). Another significant characteristic of Finnish Lapland is the snow cover. Like many other Arctic regions, the snow covers the ground from late October and can last often until May (Visit Finland 2023). Lastly, a common characteristic of the Arctic is that there is at least one day where the sun does not rise, known as the Polar Night (Lapland Above Ordinary 2024b).

When looking at the meteorological characteristics of Finnish Lapland, it is important to consider the seasonality of this region and the stark contrasts between the winter and the summer. During the summer months, daytime temperatures can often be above 20 degrees Celsius. Following the theme of

contrasts, the summer months host the Midnight Sun period, with at least one day where the sun does not set below the horizon within a 24-hour period (Visit Finland 2024d).

Finnish Lapland is argued to be the most accessible regions within the Arctic, with good road infrastructure, five airports and good rail connections (Lapinliitto 2024). There is also significant infrastructure related to education and digitalisation (Lapinliitto 2024). This can make Finnish Lapland a strong contender for industry, particularly the tourism industry, within the Arctic region.

Lastly, an extremely important characteristic of the Arctic operating environment in Finnish Lapland is the demographic characteristics, most importantly the Sámi population. The Sámi people are the only indigenous people in Europe, who inhabit Sápmi, a region of the Arctic, comprising of the northern areas of Norway, Finland, Sweden and the Kola region of Russia (Ministry of Justice 2024). Regarding Finnish Lapland, the recognised Sámi homeland is located in the municipalities of Inari, Enontekiö and Utsjoki. The Sámi culture and livelihoods are protected by the safeguards of the rights of self-determination, in many regions, projects must not undermine the rights or culture of the Sámi (Ministry of Justice 2024). Salla, is also home to a community of Metsäsámi, or Forest Sámi in English (Parliament of Sámi Villages in Finland 2024).

As the author does not belong to these communities, is not from Lapland and is not qualified to comment on these issues, it would not be appropriate for an assessment or comment regarding the needs of this community, how these sustainability standards impact the Sámi communities or how the standards could benefit them as this would not be for anyone else to decide except the community itself. It would be especially inappropriate to speak for them on their behalf. For these reasons, when referring to “local culture” or “local people” in this thesis, it will be in reference to residents, regardless of the community the residents belong to.

2.1 Challenges and opportunities of the Arctic operating environment

A unique operating environment creates unique challenges. The most associated challenges within Finnish Lapland are the distances and the temperature.

The long distances and sparse population effect supply chains, causing longer times between the transfer of goods and resources, despite being well connected with good infrastructure (Lapland Above Ordinary 2024c). Long distances in rural regions cause increased transit times for goods needed for business operations, in comparison to areas closer to where these goods, for example are manufactured (Hill 2008, 5-6). This can affect the tourism industry greatly, especially within hospitality where there is a dependence on perishable goods such as food for the restaurant. Food such as vegetables are more difficult to grow in the winter months due to the freezing conditions and low yield in the short summer (This is FINLAND 2016), Meaning that these goods must be imported from elsewhere, often below the Arctic circle. This not only restricts the lifespan of these goods, for when they can be used but the amount of energy, cost and emissions to get them to remote locations in Finnish Lapland are significantly more than that in more urban areas below the Arctic circle (Hill 2008, 5-6). In addition to this, the long distances can leave these goods vulnerable to disruption risks, such as the weather, effecting the roads needed to transport these goods (Osman, Xu, Akuful & Paul 2023).

These distances also act as a logistical challenge both ways, solid waste needs to be processed or recycled and often these processing sites are closer to urban areas, logistically placed near large populations. This creates challenges on recycling, especially as municipalities aim to create a cost-effective recycling programme and long distances increasing costs (Kreiger, Anzalone, Mulder, Glover & Pearce 2013, 91), therefore potentially reducing the availability of waste or recycling collections. This factor and the emissions from driving these long distances affect how much carbon can realistically be saved if these products must be driven for hours to another location.

Temperatures are another major factor that creates challenges for businesses operating in the Arctic. Freezing temperatures require more energy use than

warmer climates to keep buildings warm. The Ministry of Trade and Industry in Finland states that “the energy need for space heating is 20-25% higher in Lapland than in southern Finland” (Ministry of Trade and Industry 2006, 3). The freezing temperatures can also create issues in regards to waste management, for example in the case of Salla, located far from the biowaste processing site, it was mentioned that often biowaste was not able to be collected as the water-heavy organic waste froze to the waste containers (Nordlund 2024).

Following on from the weather, seasonal contrasts also present a variety of challenges both environmentally and socially. During the winter and spring months, it can be hard to grow anything organically due to the temperatures and snow cover. At the same time, darkness and snow from the Polar Night can affect renewable energy sources such as solar power, making this energy source less efficient (University of Oulu 2024). Seasonality of the snow-covered months and the popularity of snow-tourism present issues in social sustainability, especially in regards to employment within the tourism sector, with the majority of tourism employment restricted to these snow covered months (Rantala, Barre, Granås & Johannesson 2019, 39).

Despite these challenges, Finnish Lapland and the Arctic regions possess a wide variety of opportunities and a high potential for sustainability. Finnish Lapland’s location, largely located in the Taiga Forest allows for local renewable resource use. In addition to tourism, the bio economy has one of the largest industrial sectors such as forestry (Lapinliitto 2024). This provides ample opportunities for tourism businesses to use wood as a resource for not just infrastructure but also as a sustainable alternative for every day commercial products found within hospitality, for example, reducing single source plastics. The locality of these resources could create shorter supply chains and in turn, less carbon emitted to transport them. On the other hand, this may not be the case as mentioned before, there may not be the infrastructure to manufacture these products in the local area due to the ruralness of Finnish Lapland, requiring longer journeys, yet again.

The rich nature and remoteness of Finnish Lapland has also placed an emphasis on self-sustainability and in turn, providing opportunities for local people to sell local delicacies. Local food that is often used within the Finnish Lapland tourism

industry are local berries, mushrooms and local meat such as reindeer, moose and even bear (Lapland Above Ordinary 2024e). This provides companies with versatile opportunities to support local economies and even help to preserve local culture such as reindeer herding, economically and through educating guests.

2.2 Arctic challenges vs rural challenges

Arctic challenges and rural challenges may look similar, both including characteristics such as “wide open spaces”, low population density and small scales regarding settlements and infrastructure (Irshad 2010). They also share similar opportunities regarding natural resources and culture.

Arguably, the biggest difference between Arctic and rural challenges is related to the weather conditions and the challenges that are attributed to this. Finnish Lapland could possibly be considered rural in nature, however, poses a unique operating environment due to the unique meteorological challenges (Lapinliitto 2024). It is important to mention that when considering the Arctic operating environment, many characteristics could be considered rural. At the same time, not all Arctic areas should be generalised as rural, for example Kiruna, Tromsø and Rovaniemi are cities that are located on or above the Arctic Circle (Visit Nordic 2024).

2.3 “Salla – in the middle of nowhere”

As the municipality’s slogan suggests, located just above the Arctic Circle, Salla is Finland’s 7th largest municipality with an area of 5,872km² but also one of the least dense with around 0.5 inhabitants per square kilometre! (Sallan Kunta 2024). With long distances between Salla and the nearest city, Rovaniemi being a 150km journey by road (Visit Salla 2024a), long distances certainly present a challenge for business operations here!

Salla is also no stranger to the freezing temperatures commonly associated with the Arctic regions. The first snow commonly falls around mid-October and stays until May, with an average of 85cm snow depth and the lowest temperatures in Salla have been measured at minus 50 degrees celsius (Metsähallitus 2024).

In addition to tourism, Salla's industries also revolve around natural resources, including forestry and reindeer husbandry, with these livelihoods relying on the sustainable use of natural resources. Depending on the season, this industry also includes the foraging of berries and mushrooms, sold to either individual consumers or to local tourism businesses (Sallan Kunta 2024).

Salla's tourism industry has a strong sustainability strategy, with many of their tourism companies having achieved the STF Label and Green Key Certificate. Protecting the pure nature of Salla and preferring locality are their main goals of their sustainability strategy (Visit Salla 2024b). Through the destination's efforts over the previous years, in October 2024, Salla was awarded the STF Destination Label which requires at least 51% of tourism companies in a destination to hold the STF Label (Visit Salla 2024b).

3 SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

3.1 Definition

Sustainable tourism can be defined as “Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities” (UN Tourism 2024).

Focusing on the concept of sustainable development, defined as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (United Nations 2024a), sustainable tourism encourages qualitative sustainable growth, concentrating on a variety of factors, such as quality of life, without compromising or causing detriment to natural resources (Hall, Gössling & Scott 2015, 1).

3.2 Sustainability indicators

Sustainable development indicators are typically recognised within three dimensions:

Economic sustainability, generating wealth for different levels of society while addressing cost effectiveness in the long term.

Social sustainability, respecting human rights and equal opportunities, with an emphasis on benefiting local communities.

Environmental sustainability, conserving and managing natural resources, especially those that are non-renewable. Minimising pollution, conserving biological systems and protecting natural heritage. (UNEP & UNWTO 2005, 9)

Sustainable tourism indicators are often based on these three dimensions, creating a scale as a means to measure and observe tourism businesses sustainability performance (Zeppel 2015, 188). This means that many sustainable tourism indicators are quantitative in nature and often descriptive, focusing on energy and resource management (Zeppel 2015, 189). This may provide a reason to why tourism policy has often appeared as “environmental and

economic”, focusing on aspects such as energy and resource use plus waste management (Hall et al. 2015, 27). Social sustainability has also grown in focus however the questions rise on how to effectively measure and report social sustainability as this is not as simple as measuring quantitatively.

3.3 Finland’s sustainable tourism strategy

Finland has been no stranger to sustainable development in the Arctic, already creating and declaring, with other circumpolar states on the basis of sustainable development in 1991 with the Declaration on The Protection of Arctic Environment in Rovaniemi (Poppel 2018, 311). The declaration’s main focus was based on the protection of the ecosystems located within the Arctic, however this and the 1987 World Commission on Economic Development “Our Common Future” (Brundtland 1987) arguably began the momentum towards the sustainable tourism strategy that we see today in Finland, Lapland and the Arctic.

Fast forwarding to the previous 20 years, sustainable development can now be seen throughout international and national legislation. Since 2015, Finland has been aligned with the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and have created national strategies, in alignment with these goals (Poppel 2018, 313). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are a set of 17 goals that are to be reached by 2030, varying across social, economic and environmental targets that all United Nations member countries are aiming towards, in order to create a more sustainable future: “peace and prosperity for people and the planet” (United Nations 2024b).

Finland’s strategy for achieving these Sustainable Development Goals is through a national action plan for Agenda 2030 (Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development 2024a). For each SDG, this strategy includes a set of objectives, key descriptions of the measures needed to achieve the goals and an emphasis on a multi-stakeholder approach (Finnish National Commission on sustainable Development 2024b). The aims and monitoring of this strategy has been focused on the role of Finnish companies achieving these goals (Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development 2024c), suggesting the

indicators of sustainable development in Finland, at the national level is focused on the role of industry, including the tourism industry.

Additionally, there have also been challenges related to Finland's national sustainability strategy. One significant issue is related to the circular economy and the sustainable use of resources. Finland has the largest material footprint in Europe (Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development 2024c). Low volumes of recycled municipal waste have been identified as an area of improvement through this strategy (Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development 2024c). As a result, a larger focus on the recycling of renewable materials within the strategy, with incentivisation has been identified as a possible solution (Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development 2024c).

Focusing on the Finnish tourism industry, Finland's National Tourism Strategy for 2022-2028 outlines the national sustainable tourism strategy, with 7 foundations including: sustainability as a core value, facing environmental challenges, balancing seasonality, adapting to global tourism trends, collaboration and global involvement, cultural and social sustainability, plus innovation and digitalisation (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment in Finland 2024, 36). This strategy is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, including key measures, such as the development of a sustainability certification called the Sustainable Travel Finland Label, with the goal of having a significant number of businesses certified by 2024 (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment in Finland 2024, 37).

4 CERTIFICATION AND LABELLING

Sustainable Certification and Labelling are focused on the process of measuring and monitoring a company or destinations' sustainable management and performance (Graci & Dodds 2015, 201). Certificates and labels are a voluntary procedure of assessment and auditing, providing a written assurance that a facility, product, process of service meets specific standards, in return receiving a marketable logo to those who meet or exceed these standards (Honey & Rome 2001, 5). Essentially, it is a way of ensuring that a product or activity meets a certain level of standard (Bien 2007, 7). A third-party audit with clearly defined accreditation criteria has been agreed upon for being considered a reliable certification or label (Graci & Dodds 2015, 201).

There are many benefits for companies to apply a sustainability strategy based on achieving sustainability standards. On top of the value that marketable logo brings, benefits include more efficient business operations and reduced operational costs, as these have been witnessed in almost all certification processes (Graci & Dodds 2015, 202). Certification through respected, third-party audits can also prevent greenwashing as a business's sustainability claims can be verified (Graci & Dodds 2015, 202), however this is dependent on the guest's ability to differentiate between the variety of different sustainability standards and what criteria is monitored or included within them.

With over 100 certifications worldwide (Graci & Dodds 2015, 202), there are a wide variety of sustainable tourism standards that consist of different programs to measure a range of different indicators, from social to economic, internal, based on daily operations and external, based on the impact to the local communities (Bien 2007, 15). These standards can concentrate on regional, national and international levels which makes the issue of choosing what sustainability standard to focus on difficult for both businesses and tourists alike. The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria is the first global standards network, developing a minimum baseline for all certification programs to adhere to, with a focus on the tourism industry (Zeppel 2015, 193; Graci & Dodds 2015, 200).

However, by creating a standard for certifications to adhere to, brings up the debate to what is relevant to every region globally. For example, some of the largest organisations, such as the World Trade Organisation states that they benchmarked their standards in “varied environments” such as coastal, desert and mountain regions, in addition to heritage sites and cruise ships (Zepple 2015, 189), but the Arctic region was left out. It is understandable that global standards do not primarily focus on the Arctic environment, as compared to other regions, especially as the population and tourism industry is not as large. Moreover, even in the case of national indicators, it can be highly likely that standards were created outside of the Arctic region as Finnish Lapland is home to only 3.4% of Finland’s population (Regional Council of Lapland, 2011).

Heininen argues that, in response to national policy on sustainability, “In many cases the rhetoric indicates a more comprehensive and sophisticated method to link the utilization of natural resources to sustainable use of natural resources, particularly renewable resources.” (Heininen 2012, 33). For a sustainability standard to be able to monitor performance, they need to be measurable, feasible, comparable and cover appropriate scales, with the main types of indicators being descriptive, focusing on performance and efficiency (Zepple 2015, 188). Therefore, many indicators within standards, including the STF Label and Green Key Certificate focus on energy usage, water usage and solid waste management as these can be easily measurable in units.

Concerning quantitative, resource focused indicators, a narrow focus on these by sustainability standardisation can cause issues for sustainability certification and labelling in the Arctic, as mentioned before, due to colder conditions and long distances placing additional demands on resources and emissions. Therefore, businesses located in Finnish Lapland may struggle to fulfil these criteria if strict limits are placed. At the same time, especially in the case of Finnish Lapland, there are plenty of opportunities to support local culture, which may be harder to measure for a standard. For example, Adillón, regarding the Diamond Theory for sustainable tourism, suggests that resident quality of life and their perception of tourism are also important indicators for sustainable tourism development (Adillón, 2016).

4.1 Differences between Certification and Labelling

Despite the terms “certification” and “labelling” often being used interchangeably, there are concrete differences. A sustainability certification is awarded to businesses that comply with a set of standards, acting as written assurance that their actions meet specific standards (Graci & Dodds 2015, 200). Labelling, often known as Eco-labelling, is an award given to a business that is performing significantly better than others in their respective industry or sector (Graci & Dodds 2015, 200). Both certificates and labels focus on sustainable tourism performance often show similarities such as third-party auditing and marketable logos.

4.2 Process and product-based standards

Product based standards reflect the characteristics or results of sustainability actions, where the end “product” is the focus (Graci & Dodds 2015, 200). Product based standards are more associated with certifications, where the “end product” is within the assured standards. This shows what the actions towards the standards have been achieved already. Nevertheless, as seen in the Green Key Certificate later in this thesis, these “end products” can be progressive every year to include more and more criteria in the form of renewal.

Process based standards are focused on the performance characteristics shown from “start to finish”. Associated with improvement and continuous performance, this system can be associated with labelling, as it can demonstrate how this company’s sustainability efforts are significantly better than others in the industry (Graci & Dodds 2015, 200). Despite labelling also having an established criterion, labelling through process-based standards can also demonstrate the concept of “continuous improvement”, recognising tourism businesses that are making significant efforts towards sustainability. It could be argued already, that process-based standards may be more appropriate for the Arctic operating environment as it could highlight how businesses in the Arctic operating environment show the same amount of effort in comparison to other companies in different environments, and still be recognised for their sustainability efforts, even if the results vary and does look different.

4.3 The Green Key Certificate

The Green Key Certificate is a worldwide eco-certification standard for the tourism industry, with over 6000 certified establishments in over 70 countries (Green Key 2024a, 2). The Green Key's aims are to increase the use of environmentally friendly and sustainable methods in tourism business operations, creating behavioural changes in guests, staff and suppliers within the individual tourism establishments through a process of continuous development (Green Key Finland 2024).

Priding themselves on high environmental standards and a rigorous sustainability criterion (Green Key 2024a, 4). The Green Key Certificate is a product-based standard, requiring a set number of "imperative" criteria to be achieved in order to receive the certification (Green Key 2024b). With every renewal period, the business applying for the renewal needs to achieve more voluntary "guideline" criteria than the previous year, requiring a concept of continuous improvement (Green Key 2024b).

The Green Key Certificate base their standards from criteria created by the Foundation for Environmental Education and since 2015, the United Nations SDG'S (Green Key 2016, 2). As a result, 13 main criteria have been established with each of these criteria's having a set number of imperative criteria that needs to be established when first applying for the certificate with an increasing amount of guideline criteria for every certificate renewal. For example, in the first year, the business initially applying for the Green Key certificate does not need to achieve any of the guideline criteria, however by the 9th year they will need to have achieved 40 of the guideline criteria goals (Green Key Finland 2024b). Some criteria can be exempted if there are exceptional circumstances, but this is dependent on whether the jury has agreed. The national operator of the certification can add criteria in addition to the general international criteria (Green Key Finland 2024b; Green Key 2024b).

Recently, the Green Key Certificate has expanded their certification to include the Green Activities Certificate. This certificate is based on the Green Key Certificate framework and is designed and suited for outdoor activities in the Nordic region, offering additional criteria for example, ensuring animal welfare (Green Key Finland 2024c).

4.4 Sustainable Travel Finland Label

Established in 2020 and earned by over 400 companies in Finland, the Sustainable Travel Finland Label is an eco-label that acts as an umbrella, joining existing sustainable certification and tourism companies who have earned them together with a joint sustainable tourism plan, aligned with Finland's sustainable tourism strategy (Sustainable Travel Finland 2024a). The goal of the STF Label is to offer support for sustainable development and marketing, promoting sustainable tourism in Finland, assisting with sustainability communication whilst increasing sustainable tourism cooperation between different levels, from tourists to businesses, upwards towards municipal and national levels (Sustainable Travel Finland 2024a).

The STF Label is based on national strategy that is focused towards achieving the targets related to the national SDG's. This includes legislation such as Agenda 2030, "The Finland we want by 2050" and more specifically, Finland's tourism strategy 2022-2028 (Sustainable Travel Finland 2024b).

Furthermore, the STF Label is also a mix of process and product-based standards. To initially achieve the STF Label, the tourism company in question needs to undertake the STF development path, following a 7-step process. This process includes commitment to continuous learning, competence building, developing sustainability communication, producing a development plan and agreeing to regularly update the sustainable tourism competency of the company, in addition to the development and action plan (Visit Finland 2024b).

As part of the process and to achieve the STF Label, the participating business also needs to adhere to product-based standards such as the achievement of a recognised sustainability certification such as the Green Key Certificate (Visit Finland 2024b). This in turn, creates a baseline of sustainability criteria where the STF Label can begin to develop into a long-term process, aligned with unified national sustainability goals.

A possible reason why the STF Label does not have its own certification but rather, unifies certifications with a joint national plan is that almost a thousand tourism businesses in Finland were already involved in a sustainability certification or sustainable development programme (Levi 2024). On the other hand, having a sustainability standard or intention to participate in a sustainability program already demonstrates a certain level of commitment from the company, therefore establishing a base line of sustainability where the STF Label can help to further develop to “perform significantly better than others” as is the aim of eco-labels.

5 PURPOSE, OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

5.1 Purpose

The main purpose of this thesis is to discover, analyse and provide insights to the challenges that tourism businesses are facing in maintaining sustainability implementation due to the characteristics of the Arctic environment they are operating in. Based upon the assessment of the theoretical framework outlined in the introduction, providing insights of the Arctic operating environment in Salla and how this is affecting sustainability efforts in the area, can produce a discourse regarding how to support businesses in Finnish Lapland or other Arctic regions that are facing similar challenges.

Another significant purpose is to investigate and explain how the tourism businesses in Salla are maintaining their sustainability implementation regarding these standards and the relevancy of these standards, therefore contributing to shared knowledge regarding sustainability standardisation and sustainable development within the Arctic / Lapland tourism industry.

5.2 Objective

The primary objective of this thesis is to investigate the sustainability strategies that are currently being implemented in Salla's tourism industry and how are they are affected by the conditions of the Arctic operating environment. This objective will be achieved by analysing the interviews, based on the theoretical framework, conducted with a variety of companies in Salla and the municipality of Salla who are participating in the STF Label and the Green Key Certificate programs, to understand where and what criteria they are experiencing the greatest challenges. Once the analysis has been conducted, the last objective will be to outline the most significant issues, producing suggestions that may make sustainability implementation easier within this region.

5.3 Research questions

What are the challenges faced by tourism businesses in Salla, in maintaining sustainability implementation due to the characteristics of the Arctic operating environment?

Sub questions:

1. How are tourism businesses in Salla performing regarding implementing their sustainable strategy based on the Green Key Certificate and the Sustainable Travel Finland Label?
2. To what extent are the sustainability standards that are currently being used in Salla/Lapland relevant to the business operations in the Arctic?
3. What actions could be taken to help tourism businesses in Salla achieve more effective sustainability implementation?

6 METHODOLOGICAL IMPLEMENTATION

6.1 Approach

This thesis will conduct a case study research approach with qualitative methodology. A case study is the process studying a small number of cases and in the case of this thesis, a small geographic area (Bacon-Shone and University of Hong Kong 2013). A case study can help to understand the full scope of a problem, holistically (Bacon-Shone & University of Hong Kong 2013). A case study is also appropriate for producing knowledge about a current situation in an actual operational environment, and produce suggestions for development, which is one of the main goals of this thesis (Moilanen, Ojasalo & Raitlahti 2022). In regard to this approach, research will be conducted, supported by the theoretical framework of this thesis.

6.2 Case study

The main rationale behind the choice to pursue a case study approach for this thesis is that regarding the Arctic operating environment, operating conditions can vary amongst different countries and even regions whether these are environmental, social or political, meaning it could be hard to generalise and at the same time limit the ability to really focus in on the issue deeply and holistically, especially when in regards to the scope of a bachelor's thesis. This is also applicable to certifications due to the variety and number of sustainable tourism certifications across the world, these can also vary from region to region within the Arctic. Even in Salla, the STF Label and the Green Key Certificate are not the only sustainability standards, with some tourism companies choosing another sustainability standardization process, however these are the two most common. When focusing on the case of Salla's tourism businesses and their experiences of achieving the Green Key Certificate and the STF Label in response to Arctic conditions provide a narrow enough scope for this thesis. At the same time, the case study approach will also allow for deeper investigation into the complexity of the situation, the processes regarding sustainability standardization in Salla, reducing the risk of simplifying this topic too extensively (Moilanen et al. 2022).

6.3 Qualitative methodology

A qualitative methodology can be defined as the practice of scientific research, seeking answers to questions and producing findings but with the aim to understand the problem within the context of the local people it involves (Mack, Woodsong, Guest & Namey 2005, 1). A qualitative method was chosen for this investigation as it not only provides flexibility but can help the participants in the case study to describe their individual experiences of achieving sustainability standards in Salla, in depth, allowing participants to answer in their own words and explain “why and how”, therefore providing an explanatory factor to this research (Moilanen et al. 2022). This is important as it has already been established that tourism businesses in Salla have been achieving these sustainability standards but there has been no investigation into any potential ongoing challenges they are facing, especially due to the conditions found in Finnish Lapland. Qualitative research will provide an appropriate approach and methodology to answer these types of questions.

6.4 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are defined as the process of formulating the questions for the interview beforehand, however during the interview, the order and the exact wording of the questions may differ (Moilanen et al. 2022). The common method for a case study approach is to conduct interviews (Moilanen et al. 2022), which, in the case of this research, semi-structured interviews. One purpose of semi-structured interviews, in addition to providing clarification of an issue and to acquire in depth-information rapidly (Moilanen et al. 2022), is to use a technique that follows key themes rather than specific questions (MacDonald & Headlam 2009, 40), therefore providing the ability to develop knowledge, focused on the key themes of this thesis. These themes include the Arctic operating environment and sustainability standardization, providing a way to explore the themes deeper, in a structured way as is the aim of this case study.

A further advantage of semi-structured interviews is the flexibility the method provides when collecting information. In the practice of a semi-structured interview, the questions have been formulated in advance, based on prior knowledge and the theoretical framework, the order of the questions can be changed to quickly adapt to situations that may arise in the interview itself (MacDonald & Headlam 2009, 40). This could be to either avoid questions or to further develop on previous questions in order to gain more accurate and content rich data.

The reasoning to apply the method of semi-structured interviews is based on various main factors. The first factor is the topic of sustainability and talking about difficulties sustainability efforts can make interviewees uncomfortable or certain aspects of the questions may not be relevant. Sustainability can be a sensitive topic and therefore business owners may not want to talk too much about negative aspects of these standards. Also, as English is not the first language for the persons of interest, being able to change the wording of a potentially complicated subject may be needed to conduct the interview well, improving the flow of the interview and help the interviewee answer the question more accurately.

On the other hand, there is a possibility, especially in the case of Salla, where many businesses pride themselves on their sustainability actions, interviewees may want to focus on certain themes or questions they have been the most confident in answering or have significant experience in. Semi-structured interviews provide the freedom to allow the interview to expand on these (MacDonald & Headlam 2009, 40), therefore possibly providing additional context and knowledge that may affect the results. As the aim of a case study method through qualitative research is to explore the theme in depth and holistically, this method certainly helps to achieve this.

Nevertheless, one must remember that this thesis focuses on the challenges, businesses may want to only focus on the positives such as their results on how they have achieved certain criteria. Despite this also being relevant to the thesis, the semi-structured interview, also provides the “structure” in this research and

therefore helps to keep the interview on theme and focused on collecting the data that is necessary for this thesis investigation.

6.5 Target group and choice of data

To conduct a case study, one needs to understand the problem and the context at hand, presenting the need to understand the context regarding the situation before the study (Moilanen et al. 2022, 71). Another vital factor needed to conduct a case study is the discovery of a specific problem. Based on over 5 years of work experience in Salla, helping a business in Salla with their sustainability strategy, in addition to learning about the challenges involved in implementing this strategy created a foundation of knowledge and a topic to be researched.

As one of the main aims of a case study is to learn more about a restricted target rather than a little about a broader target (Moilanen et al. 2022), it was necessary to narrow the research to a particular target. Salla's tourism businesses were chosen due to the prior knowledge and experience of the author. When focusing on certification, the most common sustainability certification and label used by the tourism industry in Salla is the STF Label and the Green Key Certificate.

When determining the target group, purposive sampling was the preferred strategy. Purposive sampling can be defined as a sampling strategy where participants are selected based on preselected criteria (Mack et al. 2005, 5). For this thesis research project, the sample size was determined based on the scope and resources for a bachelor thesis within reasonable time limits, at the same time the Green Key Certificate and the STF Label were chosen as they would best represent the Salla tourism industry regarding sustainability standards.

The target group for this research are the tourism businesses in Salla who have the STF Label and the Green Key Finland certificate, more specifically the individuals within the company who are responsible for their sustainability strategy. To understand the challenges regarding maintaining sustainability implementation based on these standards, the businesses of interest need to be participating in these standards for at least one year. With the aim of creating more context of the situation from a destination point of view, an interview was also conducted with an expert in sustainability at the Municipality of Salla, who

has played a key role in creating the current sustainability strategy and the achievement of these standards.

As a result, interview targets were narrowed down to:

- Sallatunturin Tuvat
- Salla Wilderness Park
- Salla Museum of War and Reconstruction
- Responsible person for sustainability implementation within the Municipality of Salla

6.6 Description of the data collection process

The data collection process included a series of one-on-one semi-structured interviews with a set list of questions with representatives of the targets above. These interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes with a series of open questions to allow for the interviewee to develop their answers and help to think through what they want to say. The complete list of interview questions can be found in Appendix 1.

These interviews were mostly conducted online, over Google Meet, for convenience as there are long distances between Rovaniemi where the Author lives and Salla, meaning logistically, video calls would be easier. Online interviews also provide the opportunity to record and process the interview data for analysis later, with the informed consent of the interviewee. Video calls can create an experience of seeing and hearing the person in real time, allowing for dynamic responses to questions, therefore building rapport, despite the restrictions of distance (Bertrand & Bourdeau 2010, 2).

Being able to listen back to the recorded interview helps the author not only to accurately record results but also to discover underlying nuances or themes that might not have been noticed the first time around (Moilanen et al. 2022). As the author has worked with the people of interest before, a video call can be

appropriate as there is less emphasis on building trust / rapport as a foundation of this is already present.

One interview was conducted over email as the interviewee established interest in putting their thoughts into writing and therefore be more concise with their answers. This was deemed appropriate as one of the main benefits was convenience for the interviewee and it provided less barriers regarding obtaining answers, in this case time (Nehls 2013, 305). However, it is worth noting that, what was gained through convenience also came at a cost in the form of obstacles. One major obstacle is the lack of social queues, that might have provided more context or helped to steer the interview, therefore producing better results (Nehls 2013, 309). Despite this thesis not analysing nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, an email interview might have presented a risk that the interview questions could have been mis-interpreted or even make the interviewee uncomfortable. One of the main reasons for the choice of the semi-structured interviews in real time was to minimise these risks.

Transcription, the method of transforming spoken word into writing (McMullin, 2021, 140), was conducted to analyse the results. Putting the interview answers into written format helps to see all the answers in one place and helps the author to draw upon visual themes across the information which can therefore be interpreted to identify significant points regarding the research questions.

The data from the interviews were transcribed using an AI transcriber almost immediately after the interview and proofread by the author for any mistakes. The aim of this method is to ensure that any mistake is corrected quickly whilst the interview itself is still fresh in the mind. This creates a more accurate piece of written data to analyse.

During the thesis process, both the audio files and the transcribed information and any personal data was kept safe, on a separate hard drive that is password protected, with the author being the only one with access. Upon completion and evaluation of this thesis, all personal data will be destroyed as this data will not be used in further research by the author.

6.7 Data analysis

Once the data is collected and transcribed, two main analysis methods were used. Firstly, through the process of content analysis. Content analysis helps to Understand the key concepts within the answers (Moilanen et al. 2022) and to truly understand what each person answered. The aim of content analysis to identify what key concepts could become apparent in relation to the theoretical framework.

Based on this content analysis, the other main method, thematic generation, based upon the themes of the questions was undertaken (Macdonald & Headlam 2009, 43), through grouping results into what the interviewees answered in common in response to the questions asked and the respective themes laid out in the theoretical framework. This was mostly assisted through coding, the process of applying notes into the transcribed text that have been interpreted and related to the overlying themes (Moilanen et al. 2022). By reducing this data, only the essential observations were collected, providing more relevant results to analyse (Moilanen et al. 2022).

Direct quotes from these interviews were also cited, especially when an interview provides something significantly insightful and impactful to the results of this thesis. Each interview holds valuable information regarding the process of achieving these sustainability standards, their experiences and their advice as a business that has achieved these standards year after year that may hold valuable information that the wider tourism industry may find beneficial.

7 RESULTS

7.1 Background information of subjects

Interviews were conducted with three representatives of tourism business owners who have achieved the Green Key Certificate and the STF Label within the tourism industry in Salla and one expert related to sustainability strategy within the Salla municipality. All interviewees provided permission to use their names within the presentation of these interview results.

Subject 1: Eerika is a project manager at the Salla Municipality and Visit Salla, the Salla Tourism Association. Currently working on a project to build success in year-round tourism, sustainability is an important part of her daily tasks. Eerika also updated the municipality's tourism sustainability strategy and leads meetings around the topic of sustainable development in Salla, working with both the municipality of Salla and Visit Salla to implement any content changes regarding the tourism sustainability strategy.

Subject 2: Sara is an entrepreneur as a part-owner of one of Salla's oldest and largest tourism businesses, Sallatunturin Tuvat. Sallatunturin Tuvat is a family-owned company, offering cabin accommodation, restaurant services and snowmobile safaris. Sara has been responsible for Sallatunturin Tuvat's sustainability strategy and implementation. Sallatunturin Tuvat has achieved the Green Key Certificate for the 6th year in a row and the STF Label for the 4th year in a row.

Subject 3: Annina is the Curator at the Salla Museum of War and Reconstruction, a local museum with 2 permanent staff members. The Salla Museum of War and Reconstruction is home to a variety of exhibits that shows the history of Salla, from the 20th century, Old Salla, how people lived during those times, the war times and subsequent reconstruction. The Salla Museum of War and Reconstruction can be found in the old railway station house and the Rajakievari tavern which are both historic buildings. The museum achieved their Green Key Certificate in 2020 and the STF Label in 2021.

Subject 4: Paula is the Development Manager for Salla Wilderness Park. Salla Wilderness Park is a cooperative company with 9 local owners. The Wilderness Park used to be only a program service company, offering a variety of programs, more famously reindeer tours as they own a number of reindeer, hence their former name of “Salla Reindeer Park”. The number of reindeer remains a secret as in the culture of reindeer herding (Nordlund, 2023); however, a personal guess would point to more than three. Two years ago, the company expanded into accommodation services and 1 month ago expanded further into transfer services, with the purchase of 3 buses. Salla Wilderness Park first achieved the Green Key Certificate in 2019 (now Green Activities) and the STF Label in 2020.

For the purpose of framing the results, direct quotes will be referenced with the first name of the subjects throughout this section.

7.2 Sustainability challenges

What are the challenges faced by tourism businesses in Salla, in maintaining sustainability implementation due to the characteristics of the Arctic operating environment?

When asked about the biggest challenges that tourism businesses experience operating in Salla, all respondents stated that distances are the biggest challenge and half of interviewees said freezing temperatures also present significant challenges.

7.2.1 Distances

Distances present challenges to tourism businesses in Salla in two ways, located approximately 160km from the nearest city and over an hour away from the nearest airport, both tourists and any resources, such as food needs to embark on a long journey, often by bus or car to Salla. Paula mentioned that when talking about distances, “That is the biggest challenge, how to bring the clients here from the airport?” These long distances can present significant challenges to sustainability implementation, especially when calculating the total carbon footprint. In regard to sustainability implementation for certification, one criterion is that the services that the business uses need to be locally sourced, which can

make things very difficult when the nearest city is 160km away and a limited population also means a limitation of services.

What comes into Salla, must also go back out. When talking about the topic of distances, waste management was a common theme. Eerika, Sara and Annina explained that distances have been presenting issues when developing recycling strategies, especially biowaste. Eerika explains that “the nearest company which accepts biowaste is Oulu”, which is 327km away. This has raised questions about how sustainable or even economically viable this type of recycling is due to the cost and emissions in transportation, especially with heavier waste like biowaste.

With a low population density and long distances, sustainability challenges have also appeared within transportation with the local population and work. Sara mentioned public transportation is limited meaning many workers need to take their own cars as this is the only option and the distances are either too long, or it may be inappropriate to expect people to cycle long distances.

7.2.2 Freezing temperatures

Eerika, Annina and Sara speak about the challenges of freezing temperatures, however the specific challenges vary.

Firstly, Eerika and Sara discuss the freezing temperatures with the context of recycling. The freezing temperatures during the wintertime freeze the biowaste, that is typically water dense, into the bins. Sara says that this means that the waste collectors cannot get the waste out for transportation and processing. This is also exacerbated by the long distances, making it more expensive for companies to collect the waste and therefore the collection times are not often as businesses would like, often on a weekly or 2 weekly bases.

Annina speaks about freezing temperatures within the context of energy use. Annina says that the building where the museum is currently located, was built in 1948, which historically is appropriate for a museum but does not have modern heat saving technology. This means that to keep the museum warm in the winter, they would need to use more energy than that in a warmer climate or other businesses in more modern buildings.

It is worth noting that when speaking about these challenges, especially regarding distance, every interview mentioned that distance is also their competitive advantage, drawing visitors and offering an alternative to the busier ski resorts found in other areas of Lapland.

7.3 Sustainability performance

How are tourism businesses in Salla performing regarding implementing their sustainable strategy based on the Green Key Certificate and the Sustainable Travel Finland Label?

When asked about what criteria the tourism businesses in question are performing well or the best in, each business answered that they are performing well in different areas to each other.

7.3.1 Strengths

Sara, from Sallatunturin Tuvat, mentions that they are performing well in sustainable sourcing for their restaurant, office and cabins. When asked about examples, Sara mentioned that the cleaning products are sustainability certified and the toiletries, such as soap comes from a dispenser rather than one time use packaged items. This reduces the amount of waste that the business produces.

When asked the same question, Annina stated that they are performing the best in the criteria related to cultural sustainability and corporate social responsibility. Annina further added that regarding cultural sustainability, the criteria within the STF Label is bigger than in the Green Key Certificate meaning what they are performing well in is having a greater impact in the achievement of the STF Label, this could be due to the STF Label having more social sustainability criteria.

Lastly Paula suggests that animal welfare is where Salla Wilderness Park is performing the best in.

“We have had a higher criterion of what they are having already for like decades. How we take care of the reindeer that they have free days, and we are always having only one person per sleigh. When the criteria say that there should be two people. So, we have always one person on the sleigh and that kind of thing. So have been taking really good care of our reindeer during the years” (Paula)

7.3.2 Challenges

When asked about what challenges the companies are having in achieving these standards year after year, there was a variety of responses.

With an overview of the Salla tourism industry, Eerika suggests that the biggest challenges faced by businesses is the notion of continuous development that encompasses the concept of the Green Key Certificate and the STF Label.

“It is unfortunate that companies that do a lot of good development work with genuine intent have to come up with new development actions. I believe that, for example, after five years, it should no longer be necessary to increase development targets, but it would be sufficient to maintain the previous year’s level.” (Eerika)

Sara states that recycling is the biggest challenge. As mentioned before, the distances create a limited accessibility to recycling opportunities. For Sara, monitoring and identifying the opportunities where to achieve criteria is also a challenge. Sara mentions that decisions on issues such as what is the more sustainable alternative can be a major challenge, when criteria suggest vegetables are required as they have a smaller carbon footprint than meat, is it really better to import vegetables from different countries and fulfil the criteria or source local reindeer meat, which can support the local economy and culture as well as having shorter distances in the supply chain?

For Annina the biggest challenges in performance are related to energy efficiency. There is a trade-off between preserving a locally important and historical building or modifying it to become more energy efficient and therefore achieve more criteria within the sustainability standards. Another challenge is where to source the energy from. Annina states that as the museum is a part of

the municipality, they have no choice on where the energy is sourced, blocking the opportunity to choose greener alternatives. “The municipality buys what is cheapest and we cannot really say anything to that”

For Paula, carbon footprint and carbon monitoring are presenting the biggest challenges right now. As the Salla Wilderness Park has three different branches of business it is harder to keep track of these different operations and their energy usage. Also, like the Salla Museum of War and Reconstruction, Salla Wilderness Park does not own their building so they also cannot make any changes to the buildings to improve their energy efficiency.

When talking about the requirements for the certifications and needing to fulfil more criteria each year, it is also important to talk about the perception of the future and the ability to maintain and improve on sustainability strategy year after year. Each company responded positively towards the questions related to this topic, explaining how that in the near future, within the next couple of years, it will be possible to achieve the sustainability targets set by these standards. Sara and Paula are confident about achieving the Green Key Certificate and the STF Label in the upcoming years. Paula explains that:

“I think that we are over in the voluntary criteria in Green Activities. We know we should have something like 30% of these criteria. We have filled the volunteer criteria, and we have almost 50%. So, for coming years we won't have problems. But and there is still a lot of things, a lot of these criteria which, which I'm looking at this is this is rather easy to do still.” (Paula)

As with the method of continuous development, the fulfilment of more and more criteria each year requires higher sustainability performance of the company, raising the question of confidence in achieving these standards in the long term. Every respondent stated that in the long-term achieving these standards will become significantly more challenging, raising questions in regards to whether they will be able to fulfil the criteria within the rate of sustainability improvement every year.

The two biggest worries for the tourism businesses interviewed is the carbon footprint criteria and the costs associated with more sustainable infrastructure. Starting with the factor of carbon footprint, Paula mentioned the biggest challenge in the future is from a monitoring perspective and how to do this over a varied

business while Sara mentioned her concern with the monitoring of their carbon footprint within the context of fossil fuel powered vehicles.

“I think we do need gasoline on some things. So you can't be maybe at this point you can't be totally reliant on electricity. So, for example, for the snowmobiles now, there are not so many that can go the long distances. So, you do still need gasoline.” (Sara)

Transitioning infrastructure such as fossil-fuel powered cars to greener alternatives can require significant investment, which was a theme when considering the achievement of these standards in the long term. Annina and Sara both mention investment within their answers and the need for this investment, both in capital and time will become an increasingly larger factor in the achievement of these standards in the upcoming years.

7.4 Relevance

To what extent are the sustainability standards that are currently being used in Salla / Lapland relevant?

One way to determine the relevance of these standards to these companies is to understand what role they play in their sustainability strategy; therefore, an aspect of these interviews investigated the value of these standards, opinions on helpfulness and to what extent the companies have incorporated the Green Key Certificate and the STF Label within their operations.

7.4.1 Presence within sustainability strategy

As a municipality, the Salla tourism sustainability strategy is based on the demands of the STF Label, and the Green Key Certificate is a popular sustainability certificate of choice for tourism businesses in Salla to use in order to achieve their STF Label. When referring to individual businesses, every company interviewed stated that these standards play a role within their sustainability strategies however the extent to which they play a role, differs. Sara mentioned that Sallatunturin Tuvat's strategy is based on these standards. According to Paula and Annina, these standards play a guiding role within their own sustainability strategy. As a museum, Annina mentions that:

“Both Green Key and the Sustainable Travel Finland label, they guide our sustainability work a lot. But as a museum, our sustainability work is like, most importantly, connected with locality and presenting, saving and understanding local history and culture. And so I think in, in the area of cultural sustainability, we are doing a lot more.” (Anninna)

Paula also answered in a similar way, that the Green Key Certificate and the STF Label are important and play a part in their sustainability strategy, however the Salla Wilderness Park has their own sustainability strategy that includes targets and criteria that these standards do not consider.

7.4.2 Value

Another aspect to consider is the value of these certificates, are they worth integrating into the company's and the municipality's tourism sustainability strategy? The two biggest themes amongst the answers were regarding the guarantee of sustainability actions and the value of a competitive advantage they provide within marketing.

Every interviewee commented on the value in sustainability communication and how the certificate shows and provides “proof” that the companies and the municipality has undertaken these sustainability standards.

“Well, of course, there's a lot of work behind it, and well, the labels show it very easily that you have done certain things. And there's someone that says that it's okay how we run our business. Like, if we just tell you that might not be as believable as the third party telling you. I think the value is there that you show easily how the work is done and what goes behind it.” (Sara)

Communication and marketing is also an important value attribute for these businesses. The main value comes from international tourism, especially when marketing through a third party such as a travel agent. These certificates and labels help businesses to stand out amongst others, especially the Green Key Certificate, being a global standard and therefore potentially more recognisable to foreign tourists.

Regarding domestic tourism and the standards' marketing value, Annina is not so sure about what value they bring to the museum. The Salla Museum of War and Reconstruction does not have the same target markets as the other tourism

businesses or even the municipality as they have mostly catered to Finnish speaking tourists. Nevertheless, Annina states that there is value in being able to inform the customers about the work they have been doing, she mentioned that in a recent survey about what people liked about the museum, they received positive responses regarding the museum's sustainability efforts.

7.4.3 Helpfulness

The helpfulness of these standards in achieving sustainability strategy was also explored. One area that tourism business in Salla found that these standards were helpful to their strategy was through monitoring and identifying opportunities to become more sustainable within their operations. Annina mentions that:

“I do think they help a lot especially the Green Key criteria. It's very detailed, so I wouldn't come up with all those things to do without the criteria. So, they give a lot of ideas how to develop our sustainability” (Annina)

The Green Key Certificate and the STF Label does not only help companies in Salla identify new areas where they could become more sustainable but identify areas within their operations where they are performing well in. The term “Silent Sustainability” can be defined as sustainable actions a company may be undertaking but not identified or explicitly communicated to the customer (Halminen & Garcia-Rosel 2022). Helping to identify these silent sustainability actions can help companies to be aware of their own sustainability actions, communicate these to the clients and help to form the company's sustainability strategy. Eerika elaborates within the context of the Salla tourism industry:

“Our companies have sustainable values and made a lot already before the programs and certifications. For example, heating, electricity, cleaners and toilet papers ect. with environmental marks and local ingredients at the restaurant. These all has been natural choices for our companies for many years.” (Eerika)

7.4.4 Suggestions for more relevant criteria

When asked the question about if companies feel there needs to be more relevant sustainability criteria for business operating in Arctic environments, no new criteria were proposed however more consideration for existing criteria for businesses operating in Lapland were suggested.

Firstly, Sara mentioned that there could be more criteria for social sustainability in protecting Sámi culture, which needs its own consideration as a unique aspect of Lapland. Distances for Sara was also an area where there could be more consideration, when the criteria demand to source local, distances need to be considered and relative to the region. The word Local can look different in this region, with long distances between towns and villages. For example, Sara mentioned it can be hard to source products locally such as certain drinks, when the local brewery is either in Rovaniemi (160km away) or Tornio (270km away).

Paula also mentions the carbon footprint as a criterion. Monitoring carbon footprint reduction as a percentage of reduction rather than a strict limit to aim under will be much more relevant for companies in the Arctic. Paula feels that if there was a universal limit as a criteria, then these companies could not compete with companies below the Arctic Circle as they often operate in environments where there are less distances in the supply chain and less energy demands in regards to heating.

7.4.5 Green Key Vs STF

When exploring experiences regarding these two standards and what is easier to achieve, there were mixed responses and an overlying theme that it was difficult to answer as the two standards are interconnected. To achieve the Sustainable Travel Finland, the tourism company needs to have a sustainability certification and in within the target group of this research, the certification of choice was the Green Key Certificate.

From a municipality and destination point of view, this can present difficulties in maintaining the Sustainable Travel Finland Destination Label. This label is awarded to destinations where over 51% of the companies are involved in the STF Label. Eerika explains:

“If even a couple of companies in Salla lose their labels and no other companies can replace them (there are not many companies in a small tourism area anyway), the required 51% of companies with the STF Label in the area will not be met, and Salla will also lose its STF Label as a tourism destination.” (Eerika)

Regarding maintaining sustainability standards, Paula suggests that the STF Label is easiest to achieve, firstly it was difficult due to many steps but once that is done, there is a yearly update form that is easier to complete than the Green Key certificate.

Both Annina and Paula also feel that the STF Label is easier to achieve however this may be due to the timing of the certificates, the renewal date is closely aligned with the Green Key Certificate and therefore a lot of the information can be transferred. This raises the question on the similarities of these standards and what impact does the overlapping criteria have on the standards themselves.

Annina noticed that the STF Label is easier to achieve also due to the flexibility of the process-based standardisation. This is important when a company is specialising in different dimensions of sustainability, such as historical heritage preservation.

“I still think the STF is easier. There's not that much mandatory things you need to do. You can decide like more on your own, what you want to develop.” (Aninna)

7.5 Actions to improve sustainability

What actions could be taken to help tourism businesses in Lapland, or the Arctic region achieve more effective sustainability implementation?

7.5.1 Is there enough support?

When discussing whether there is enough support for businesses in Salla to achieve their sustainability goals, every company spoke positively about the significant support they have received in Salla, both from the municipality and through peer-to-peer support. Sara suggested this type of support could be expanded to other areas, where different businesses from other regions of Lapland or the Arctic could come together to share ideas and support in their sustainability efforts.

Sara further elaborates to suggest that there could be more support from the standards themselves regarding dialogue:

“I think, the sustainability program, I think you could get a little bit more like, conversation from the certificate providers, like show more faces to these things, like, it's just not something you fill out online, and that's it. For me personally, I would feel better if every now and then I would get, a check-up and maybe some ideas or something that you could add or, you know, more conversations and ideas on how to do things” (Sara)

Nevertheless Eerika, Paula and Annina speak about the support from Visit Finland and Going Green, the associations that are responsible for these standards. This support is provided in the form of consultancy help and auditing, suggesting areas to improve. However, as Annina suggested, the museum has not yet really used these services available meaning that this could be one action that could be taken, opening a stronger 2-way dialogue between the standards organisations and the Salla tourism industry.

7.5.2 Advice to other businesses

As already mentioned, Salla municipality is working very hard on their sustainability strategy and have made great achievements in the last few years, especially recently achieving the Sustainable Travel Finland Destination Label. Despite the challenges they have been facing, they have been able to overcome these in order to achieve what they have, so it is important to understand how this has been done.

When asked what advice you would give to other businesses undertaking sustainability implementation based on these standards, the overwhelming response was that this is a long-term process and there needs to be continuous work to achieve these sustainable goals. You need to have a desire to become more sustainable in your actions.

As a destination, Eerika suggests:

“Developing together as a region requires smooth cooperation and strong communication, as well as coordination through, for example, a development group consisting of representatives of local entrepreneurs that meets regularly.” (Eerika)

For this section, it is best providing the platform to the businesses who have made these achievements.

Sara:

“Well, I would say take your time. Like I mentioned, it can be frustrating time to time, but there is always benefits to doing that. But take your time, study the material so you know what's coming in the next year and next year and so on. And when you try to plan ahead, that, of course, always helps” (Sara)

Annina:

“I think you just need to start working, like, in a long-term perspective that you don't only think this year or you're doing things that can help even next year. And I think what has worked very well in Salla as we spoke was there is like cooperation with other businesses and doing things together.” (Annina)

Paula:

“This is an endless work. There is always something what you can do better. And like I say, we are in our own sustainability strategy. There is a lot of other things than only those criterias. And I think those ones are the most important for us because there is like our own hand mark to those things, what we really want to do. Son we are not just up filling the criteria, but there is things what we want to do for the for the local society and the nature around us and these kind of things. So there is a lot of things, what we what we are not forced to do, but we want to do. And I think those anyway, for me, those are the most important things.” (Paula)

7.5.3 Administration efforts

With the final part of the results, comes the final comments of the interview. When asked if they would like to include anything extra, Paula explained about the efforts regarding the administration side of the Green Key Certificate. She mentioned that to fill out the paperwork for the Green Key Certificate (Green Activities), took her almost 3 weeks to complete. If the business is small, with only one or two employees, then 3 weeks of dedication to completing these sustainability certificates is a significant investment of working resources for that time. For this reason, Paula noted that many small businesses may be hesitant to start the process of sustainability certification, when as a small company, it could be easier to achieve as it is easier to implement sustainability changes into

a limited area of operations. In the case of Salla Museum of War and Reconstruction, with only 2 permanent staff members, deciding to implement these standards within their operations is a big decision that requires more investment regarding working time than a bigger organisation.

Sara also mentioned:

“it's sometimes very frustrating to do the actual paperwork and actual finding all the details and stuff, but I still really like being on the program, and I like doing better with sustainability. So I even though it can be tough, I think it's still worth it.” (Sara)

8 DISCUSSION

8.1 Conclusion

Upon assessment of the theoretical framework and the results of the interview, the research results point to underlying similarities and trends that were outlined within the theoretical framework and literature.

Regarding the biggest challenges faced by the tourism industry in Salla, distance and weather conditions were the strongest themes amongst the interviewees, with distance having the strongest presence within the answers. What was particularly noticed was that even though these conditions presented challenges to tourism businesses in Salla, the challenges did not prevent companies from achieving the criteria of their sustainability standards. Nevertheless, when discussing the future and the standard's goals of continuous development, requiring an increasing number of criteria to be fulfilled, confidence in achieving these standards decreased as the length of time into the future was considered. Amongst interviewees, the largest reason for the lack of confidence was the need to make significant investments into infrastructure to meet energy efficiency criteria, such as adequate installation for buildings or the transition to green vehicles, such as electric snowmobiles and buses.

Through collaboration and innovative thinking, the tourism companies in Salla have been able to achieve these standards both individually and collectively through the STF Destination Label, despite the challenges of the Arctic operating environment. Every company discussed the value of collaboration and information sharing amongst businesses in the Salla municipality, sharing ideas and methods to achieve these sustainability criteria despite the challenges. During the interviews, one company mentioned that it would be beneficial to have a space or means to scale this up, providing a place or platform for businesses to share their knowledge and experience with sustainability implementation in the Arctic operating environment, from different regions, both within Finnish Lapland and even between different regions or countries.

Regarding relevancy, criteria within the Green Key Certificate and the STF Label are relevant for businesses in Salla. These standards are designed to be used by the tourism industry and many of the indicators such as energy usage and waste management are universal as sustainability indicators. Questions have been raised regarding sourcing local food such as reindeer, which supports the local economy and culture versus importing more vegetables to fulfil the criteria and the implications regarding, for example, the carbon footprint differences. These standards in the Green Key Certificate need to be relevant to all tourism businesses globally and in the case of the STF Label, to all tourism business within Finland, with two thirds of the country located below the Arctic Circle, therefore it is not surprising these issues are apparent.

These standards are relevant also to tourism businesses in the Arctic through their relativity. As mentioned in the interviews, energy efficiency and carbon emissions are measured as a percentage of reduction rather than concrete limits, this allows for companies in the Arctic operating environment to achieve the same criteria as companies not exposed to the same challenges. This form of process-based criteria will need to remain the case for at least the short term and implementing a product-based criteria as mentioned above could impact businesses within the Arctic who are unable to compete due to these conditions.

When focused on Salla, the companies in this region are challenged less by the product-based criteria than other regions in Lapland. As part of the local sourcing criteria created by the Green Key Certificate, there is a significant emphasis on sourcing locally, with references to distance. As Salla is located just above the Arctic Circle, the proximity of the municipality relative to major towns and cities are closer than those located in the higher Arctic regions of Lapland. The challenges presented in this thesis regarding the distance will be larger in the more northern regions of Finnish Lapland than those in the south, where the distances in the supply chains, that often flow from the more southern cities are longer than those in the more southern regions.

One suggestion from the interviews is there could be more flexibility for businesses to choose and generate ideas for their own sustainability criteria. The two main areas discussed were the distances and social sustainability. Within the tourism industry, especially within the Salla tourism industry, there is a rich variety of types of businesses who have different ideas and strengths regarding sustainability, in addition to resource management and energy efficiency. These mostly came in the form of social sustainability and the preservation of local culture, such as favouring local products and preserving local historical heritage, as the Salla Museum of War and Reconstruction prides themselves on. In regards to sustainability focused on local culture, it was also suggested in the interviews that in the case of Finnish Lapland there needs to be more focus on protection of the Sámi culture specifically also, however how this could be done and what social sustainability in this context could look like needs to be for these communities themselves to ultimately decide.

One of the main reasons that these were suggested as often standards can focus less on social sustainability indicators due to the demand that criteria need to be measurable and scalable. The biggest challenge when focusing on social sustainability, especially in the form of preserving historical heritage or local culture, is how to measure this and even more so, how to measure this universally across countries and different operating environments.

When asked about what criteria could be introduced for these standards, the interviewees could not answer right there and then. Ideas on how to consider companies operating in Salla and the Arctic operating environment better were suggested, however no new ideas were created. This could be because this question requires more in-depth exploration and consideration from these companies, therefore one suggestion could be to offer more support for businesses regarding this, with the results possibly being the development of new sustainability indicators for the Arctic operating environment. This can provide an opportunity to make the standards more relevant for this region. In order for this to be a possibility, there could be a stronger development of a 2-way dialogue between the Salla tourism businesses and the standard's organisations.

8.2 Review and examination of reliability

Throughout this thesis process, the most significant feature that stood out during the process and in the interviews is the incredible work Salla's tourism industry and the organisations behind the Green Key Certificate and STF Label placed into the concept of sustainability and turning sustainable tourism into a concrete, multi stakeholder strategy. These results have been highlighted through a dedication by Salla's tourism businesses, continued efforts and a willingness to be open enough to share best practices with other companies in the region.

The goal of this thesis was to discover and investigate the challenges faced by the tourism industry in Salla due to the conditions of the Arctic operating environment. In a review of these results, two main challenges were presented, the freezing conditions and distances. Whilst freezing conditions is a commonly associated aspect of the Arctic operating environment, distance could be regarded also as an aspect of the rural operating environment. This raises the question if distance is a characteristic of the Arctic operating environment when answering the question to this thesis. It was concluded that distance can be classed as a characteristic in the context of this thesis as this is an overlapping theme and ruralness is also a commonly associated characteristic of the Arctic. This means there is a potential, that the lessons learned by the companies overcoming the challenge of distance could also be applied to sustainability implementation for rural tourism businesses.

On the discussion of relevancy, whether these results can be generalised to other Arctic regions or even to other regions of Finnish Lapland, is dependent. The characteristics of the Arctic operating environment can be applied to other regions in the Arctic however the effect that they have on a tourism business sustainability implementation strategy will vary depending on geographic location, distances in the supply chain, plus the climate and weather conditions. As a bachelor's thesis, the scope of this research is limited. As this case study focused on one area of the Arctic, to truly assess how the Arctic operating environment presents challenges and how reliable these to other tourism businesses operating in the Arctic, a larger scale research project will need to be undertaken, where these results can be compared and cross analysed with other regions to establish the

reliability of these results through replication (Quintão, Andrade & Almeida 2020, 268).

As mentioned previously, the aim of this thesis was not to take attention away from the efforts and achievements by the Salla tourism industry and the people responsible for the sustainability strategy or to even suggest that sustainable targets could not be achieved by businesses in Salla. However, the aim was to provide a platform for these businesses to share their experiences achieving these standards year after year whilst facing the challenges of the region. A secondary aim was to identify any areas in the sustainability standard's criteria that may be especially difficult to achieve through no fault to the business but due to location and operating environment, where identifying these can create the path to possible solutions within further research. Therefore, emphasis was also placed within the "Results" section of this thesis for companies and the Salla municipality to suggest areas that could be considered as criteria for the sustainability standards in question and to also give an opportunity for these actors to provide advice for other tourism businesses facing the same operating environment within their sustainability strategies.

During the theoretical framework process, sources were examined to ensure that they were both reliable and authoritative, where they were published was considered as well as the age of the source. To determine whether these sources are legitimate, the CRAP test was used with each source. The Crap Test is a method for evaluating sources through Currency, Reliability, Authority, Purpose and Point (University of Toledo 2024). During the thesis process, issues with one source was highlighted by the thesis supervisor and reconsidered, the lesson was learned by this, and extra careful assessment of the sources were conducted throughout the rest of the thesis process.

When focused on the region of Salla, Finnish Lapland, this thesis research can be deemed reliable as almost every company bar one involved in the Green Key Certificate and STF Label were interviewed, including a representative for the Municipality of Salla tourism industry, providing both a business and municipality context. The individuals that were interviewed are responsible for the sustainability strategy within the municipality and the individual businesses,

possessing the relevant knowledge and experience to answer the questions raised within the interview. Direct quotes were used within the “Results” section of this thesis to confirm the statements made by the researcher and therefore increase credibility and trustworthiness (Eldh, Årestedt & Berterö 2020).

One major question related to reliability is regarding context. When talking about the Arctic, in interviews it is important to understand the context of the interviewees, and in this case, what does “the Arctic mean”. For someone who has lived their life in Salla and may only have experience of working in this area, it may have been hard for them to understand how their business operations and challenges differ from those outside of the Arctic regions. On the other hand, these experts know better than anyone else the daily challenges experienced by these businesses in relation to sustainability implementation. This issue was mitigated by identifying the challenges that the businesses are facing and then relating the issues to the theoretical framework regarding the characteristics of the Arctic.

Regarding the interview process itself, one interview had to be conducted over email due to the time restrictions of both the interviewee and the researcher. This means a different method of interviewing was used. As this research did not consider other aspects of the interview such as body language or tone of voice during analysis, which is an advantage of face-to-face interviews (Bertrand & Bourdeau 2010, 2), the interview was deemed appropriate to use. Nevertheless, to ensure consistency, a unified interviewing strategy would have been best.

Upon review of the interview process, a focus group discussion interview with all the interviewees physically present may have produced better results as the participants would have been able to take inspiration from each other and therefore build upon answers with their own experiences that they may not have considered in a one-to-one video call interview (Moilanen et al. 2022). Nevertheless, there would be logistical issues to this, the tourism industry can be very busy and therefore it could be difficult to get all the participants all in the same place at the same time, especially with short time constraints. Recording the results and controlling the group to focus on one topic, with many different speakers may also present challenges (MacDonald & Headlam 2009, 45).

Lastly, the authors relationship to the participants and the topic must be considered. The author of this thesis has spent 5 years working in Salla within the tourism industry, experiencing first hand, the issues raised in this thesis and the process of sustainability implementation, including helping to find sustainable solutions as a part of working life. Even though this experience has helped to identify this topic for research in this scope, there needs to be a discussion about potential biases and professionalism. To mitigate the risk of unprofessional behaviour or moving away from the topic in focus, interview questions were created and sent to the participants in advance, this and the method of semi structured interviews helped both parties to know what to expect from the interview at hand (Mack et al. 2005, 9-10). On the other hand, working closely with these participants in the past and having firsthand experience of Salla's tourism strategy has helped to build trust between the author and the interviewees, which may have allowed for more truthful results about experiences than someone from the "outside" (Moilanen et al. 2022). In order to remain unbiased, interview questions were sent to the thesis supervisor before the interview to ensure that they were appropriate.

Nevertheless, this previous professional experience was the real inspiration for choosing a thesis topic about sustainable tourism and Salla, producing a piece of academic work that may have a positive impact on this region.

8.3 Ethical considerations

When discussing ethical considerations, an assessment of truthfulness is highly important. To prevent biases or conflicts of interest, the author decided not to be commissioned by another party to separate oneself from the topic in focus. Sustainability is a significant marketing factor for Salla tourism and therefore choosing not to have a commissioner may prevent even the smallest chance of being persuaded to follow a certain discourse or frame the thesis scope to avoid a certain but important approach. Also, within the theoretical framework, only published facts or information from reliable sources, such as primary sources from the standards themselves, sources published by the government or scientific articles were used. Expert sources were chosen based on professionalism within their role.

Regarding the interview process, there was an emphasis placed on informed consent throughout the process. Informed consent means that participants received the right information about this research, ensuring this was understood and letting them know they can withdraw this consent at any point (Mack et al. 2005, 9-10). This began from the initial contact, an email was sent to all participants, with details about the thesis topic, the aims of the thesis and about the interview itself, timing and how it would be conducted. Permission was asked about recording the interview, using their name and how and where this would be used, including who would see it was explained in writing. When a positive response was received, an invitation for an interview was set up and the interview questions were also sent so the interviewee can reflect on the questions. It was also stated that consent could be withdrawn at any time and to please let the author know if there is a question that was not understood, or if the interviewee does not want to answer. During the interview, permission was asked again verbally with an explanation of what data would be recorded, how it would be used and where, and only after a positive “yes” was given, did the recording start.

For this thesis, all participants agreed for their name to be used in this research and in publication. First names were only deemed appropriate to use as there will not be too much information published publicly, and the publishing of surnames would not impact the results, therefore surnames were not deemed necessary to use. No other information was collected from the participants and all the interviews will be deleted after the thesis evaluation stage.

8.4 Topics for further research

Regarding topics for further research, it would be important, when mentioning the Arctic operating environment to assess the challenges in other regions of the Arctic, especially on a larger scale. This may not be limited to geographic regions, but further research could investigate and include other industries to see if these conditions present challenges to different industries in the same way or to what extent.

Concerning development, the suggestion from Sara that it may be helpful to have an information sharing or peer-to-peer support network, sharing experiences and solutions for sustainability implementation or new methods on how to achieve these sustainability standards. This could be undertaken in the form of development research work, learning about what these companies, involved in these sustainability standards would like to see happen regarding this. There is even potential to create a pilot peer-to-peer information sharing scheme to see what effects this possible scheme could have on helping businesses to achieve these standards and improve their sustainability implementation strategy.

Another possible topic is focused on the administration side of these standards, it was mentioned that these standards require a significant amount of time to complete the paperwork, this in turn could discourage small grassroots businesses from partaking in these sustainability standards as this can be seen as too time costly. Investigating how the administration part of these standards could be made more streamlined or what support could be created to make the process easier for small businesses, therefore making these sustainability programs more accessible for small tourism businesses.

Lastly, an interesting topic can be to investigate what new criteria could be created for sustainability standards that would be the most relevant for the Arctic regions. This can be conducted to see if there are any opportunities for sustainable actions found within this region that companies could demonstrate and communicate that may have been overseen previously due to the broad scopes of these standards.

The time and resources for these possible research topics would need a wider scope than that of a bachelor's thesis, nevertheless they would be interesting and could provide significant benefit to the Finnish Lapland tourism industry. These topics would be best investigated from a higher-level educational perspective than that of a bachelor's degree, such as a master's degree where the aim is to provide knowledge to benefit a wider aspect of society. Nevertheless, in the opinion of the author, the most interesting topic for further research would very much be developing a peer-to-peer information sharing platform for sustainability implementation between tourism businesses within the Arctic!

REFERENCES

- Adillón, R. 2016. Diamond Model: A theoretical framework for the sustainable development of tourism. Accessed on 10th September 2024. <https://medcraveonline.com/AHOAJ/diamond-model-a-theoretical-framework-for-the-sustainable-development-of-tourism.html%20->
- Arctic Centre. 2024. Basic Information about the Arctic. Accessed on 9th October 2024. <https://www.arcticcentre.org/EN/arcticregion#basic>
- Bacon-Shone, J & University of Hong Kong. (2013) Introduction to quantitative research methods. Accessed on 22nd September 2024. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265793712_Introduction_to_Quantitative_Research_Methods
- Bertrand, C & Bourdeau, L. 2010. Research interviews by Skype: A new data collection method. Canada: Université Laval. Accessed on 17th October 2024. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256117370_Bertrand_C_Bourdeau_L_2010_Research_interviews_by_Skype_A_new_data_collection_method_In_J_Esteves_Ed_Proceedings_from_the_9th_European_Conference_on_Research_Methods_pp_70-79_Spain_IE_Business_School
- Booking.com. 2023. Sustainable Travel Report 2023. Accessed on 16th September 2024. <https://globalnews.booking.com/download/31767dc7-3d6a-4108-9900-ab5d11e0a808/booking.com-sustainable-travel-report2023.pdf>
- Brundtland, G.H. 1987. Our common future world commission on environment and development. Accessed on 22nd October 2024. <https://docenti.unimc.it/elena.borin/teaching/2019/21812/files/lessons-and-recommended-readings-1/Our%20Common%20future%201987.pdf>
- Eldh, C., Årestedt, L. & Berterö, C. 2020. Quotations in qualitative studies: reflections on constituents, custom, and purpose. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. Accessed on 14th November 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920969268>.
- Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development. 2024. Global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Accessed on 22nd October 2024. (a) <https://kestavakehitys.fi/en/agenda2030>
- Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development. 2024. Finland's Strategy for Sustainable Development. Accessed on 17th October 2024. (b) <https://kestavakehitys.fi/en/finland-s-strategy-for-sustainable-development>
- Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development. 2024. Monitoring of the Strategy of the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development 2024. Accessed on 17th October 2024. (c) <https://kestavakehitys.fi/documents/205289881/212129447/Monitoring+of+the+Strategy+2024+-+summaries.pdf/6d4b1202-fea9-80a1-913d-37e2948b70bb/Monitoring+of+the+Strategy+2024+-+summaries.pdf?t=1717073596041>

Graci, S. & Dodds, R. 2015. Certification and Labelling. In C. Micheal Hall, S. Gössling & D. Scott. *The Routledge Handbook of Tourism and Sustainability*. London: Routledge.

Green Key. 2016. Green Key and the Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030. Accessed on 25th October 2024.
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55371f97e4b0fce8c1ee4c69/t/56e684cfcf80a14323d24945/1724056264690/Green+Key+and+the+Sustainable+Development+Goals+%28SDGs%29.pdf>

Green Key. 2024. Green Key – A Global Eco-Certification Program for Hotels and Tourism Establishments. Accessed on 24th October 2024. (a)
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55371f97e4b0fce8c1ee4c69/t/66e813e1dc9ba50b642456e4/1726485476611/Green+Key+Brochure+2024.pdf>

Green Key. 2024. Green Key Criteria. Accessed on 10th October 2024. (b)
<https://www.greenkey.global/criteria>

Green Key Finland. 2024. Building Sustainable Tourism. Date accessed 20th September 2024. Accessed on 10th October 2024. (a) <https://greenkey.fi/en/>

Green Key Finland. 2024. The Criteria. Date accessed 27th October 2024. (b)
<https://greenkey.fi/en/green-key-criteria/>

Green Key Finland. 2024. Green Activities Certificate. Date accessed 1st November 2024. (c) <https://greenkey.fi/en/green-activities/>

Halminen, S. & Garcia-Rosel, J. 2022. Learning about sustainability in small tourism firms – The case of Sustainable Travel Finland. *Finnish Journal of Tourism Research*. Vol. 18, 31-36. Accessed on 29th October 2024.
<https://doi.org/10.33351/mt.116840>

Heinien, L. 2012. Arctic Strategies and Policies – Inventory and comparative study Akureyri, Iceland: The Northern Research Forum and The University of Lapland. Accessed on 17th September 2024.
https://www.rha.is/static/files/NRF/Publications/arctic_strategies_7th_draft_new_20120428.pdf

Hill, H. 2008. Food Miles: Background and Marketing. ATTRA - National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service. Accessed on 11th November 2024.
<https://kapost-files-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/kapost/514a3bffc5a3a702000010b8/studio/content/5ecff6ec383d31014209573c/attachments/1590757713-56b2ec59-9077-4bbc-92d6-e79986457a23/foodmiles.pdf>

Honey, M. & Rome, A. 2001. *Protecting Paradise: Certification Programs for Sustainable Tourism and Ecotourism*. Washing DC: Institute for Policy Studies. Accessed on 13th October 2024. https://vidasilvestre.org.uy/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Protecting-Paradise_Certification-Programs-for-Sustainable-Tourism-and-Ecototourism_Institute-for-Policy-Studies.pdf

Irshad, H. 2010. Rural Tourism – An Overview. Accessed on 10th October 2024. [https://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/csi13476/\\$file/rural-tourism.pdf](https://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/csi13476/$file/rural-tourism.pdf)

Kreiger, M., Anzalone, C., Mulder, L., Glover, A & Pearce M. 2013. Distributed Recycling of Post-Consumer Plastic Waste in Rural Areas. MRS Proceedings. 91-96. Accessed on 26th November 2024. Doi:10.1557/opl.2013.258

Lapinliitto. 2024. Information about Lapland. Accessed on 10th October 2024. <https://www.lapinliitto.fi/en/>

Lapland Above Ordinary. 2024. Seasons & Weather in Arctic Lapland. Accessed on 10th October 2024. (a) <https://www.lapland.fi/film/about-finnish-lapland-for-filmmakers/seasons-weather-arctic/>

Lapland Above Ordinary. The Magical Colors of the Polar Night. Accessed on 10th October 2024. (b) <https://www.lapland.fi/visit/only-in-lapland/polar-night-colors-magical-time/#:~:text=Virtually%20all%20of%20Lapland%20sees,deep%20warm%20colors%20of%20midday>

Lapland Above Ordinary. 2024. Efficient Logistics: A Key to Lapland's Competitiveness. Accessed on 15th October 2024. (c) <https://www.lapland.fi/business/logistics-briefing-paper/>

Levi. 2024. Companies with Environmental Certificates. Accessed on 28th October 2024. <https://www.levi.fi/en/info/sustainable-levi/environmentally-certified-companies/>

MacDonald, S. & Headlam, N. 2009. Research Methods Handbook. England: Centre for Local economic Strategies. Accessed on 25th September 2024. <https://www.cles.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Research-Methods-Handbook.pdf>

Mack, N., Woodsong, C., Guest, G. & Namey, E. 2005, Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide. USA: Family Health International. Accessed on 20th October 2024. <https://www.fhi360.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Qualitative-Research-Methods-A-Data-Collectors-Field-Guide.pdf>

McMullin, C. 2023. Transcription and Qualitative Methods: Implications for Third Sector Research. Accessed on 20th October 2024. Vol. 34. 140-153 accessed 22nd October 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-021-00400-3>

Metsähallitus. 2024. Instruction and Rules in Salla National Park. Accessed on 5th October 2024. <https://www.visitsalla.fi/en/enter-salla/location-and-connections/>

Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment in Finland. 2024. Finland's Tourism Strategy for 2022-2028. Accessed on 16th September 2024. <https://tem.fi/en/finland-tourism-strategy>

Ministry of Justice. 2024. Rights of the Sámi people. Date accessed 5th November 2024. Accessed on 27th October 2024.
<https://oikeusministerio.fi/en/rights-of-the-sami-people>

Ministry of Trade and Industry. 2006. Energy Efficiency in Finland – A Competitive Approach. Accessed on 19th October 2024.
https://www.motiva.fi/files/8005/Energy_Efficiency_in_Finland_A_Competitive_Approach.pdf

Moilanen, T., Ojasalo, K., & Ritalahti, J. 2022. Methods for development work: new kinds of competencies in business operations. Books on Demand GmbH.

National Geographic. 2024. Taiga. Accessed on 10th October 2024.
<https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/taiga/>

Nehls, K. 2013. Methodological Considerations of Qualitative Email Interviews. In Sappleton, N. *Advancing Research Methods with New Technologies*. USA: Information science Reference. Accessed on 28th October 2024.
 DOI:10.4018/978-1-4666-3918-8.ch017

Nordlund, M. 2023. Salla Wilderness Park. Guide.

Nordlund, T. 2024. Sallatunturin Tuvat. Former Operations Manager. Discussion.

Osman, S., Xu, C., Akufu, M., & Paul, R. 2023. Perishable Food Supply Chain Management: Challenges and the Way Forward. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*. Vol 11 No.7, 349-364. Accessed on 3rd November 2024.
<https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2023.117025>

Parliament of Sámi Villages in Finland. 2024. Finnish Association of Indigenous Sámi Villages in Finland. Accessed on 5th November 2024.
<https://www.metsasaamelaiset.fi/english/>

Poppel, B. 2018. Sustainable development and sustainability in Arctic political discourses. In M. Nuttal, T.R. Christensen & M. J. Siegert. *The Routledge Handbook of the Polar Regions*: Routledge.

Quintão, C., Andrade, P. and Almeida, F. 2020. How to improve the validity and reliability of a case study approach?. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education*, 9(2). 273–284. Accessed on November 2024.
<https://doi.org/10.32674/jise.v9i2.2026>

Ramón, A. 2016. Diamond model: a theoretical framework for the sustainable development of tourism. Accessed on 10th September 2024.
<https://medcraveonline.com/AHOAJ/diamond-model-a-theoretical-framework-for-the-sustainable-development-of-tourism.html%20->

Rantala, O., Barre, S., Granås, B., Jóhannesson, G., Müller, D., Saarinen, S., Tervo-kankare, K., Maher, P. & Niskala, M. 2019. Arctic Tourism in times of change: Seasonality. Accessed on 11th October 2024. DOI: 10.6027/TN2019-528

Regional Council of Lapland. 2011. Lapland – the northernmost region in the European Union. Accessed on 5th October 2024.

https://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/20125/297751/Lapland_background_document_final.pdf/58b33e22-701d-6772-e841-e62e8ae33eed?version=1.1&t=1619529285499#:~:text=Lapland%20is%20the%20northernmost%20region,4%20%25%20of%20Finland's%20population

Sallan Kunta. 2024. Perustietoa Sallasta. Accessed on 10th October 2024. <https://www.salla.fi/info/perustietoa-sallasta/>

Sustainable Travel Finland. 2024. Sustainable tourism guide. Accessed on 10th October 2024. (a) <https://stfhub.visitfinland.com/guide/>

Sustainable Travel Finland. 2024. Sustainable tourism guide – Sustainable Travel. 10th October 2024. (b) https://stfhub.visitfinland.com/guide/sustainable_travel

This is Finland. 2016. Shorter season, superior quality. Accessed on 1st November 2024. <https://finland.fi/life-society/stunted-growth-superior-quality/>

United Nations. 2024. Sustainability. Accessed on 10th October 2024. (a) <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/sustainability>

United Nations. 2024. The 17 Goals. Accessed on 22nd October 2024. (b) <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

United Nations Tourism. 2024. Sustainable Development. Accessed on 22nd October 2024. <https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development#:~:text=%22Tourism%20that%20takes%20full%20account,the%20environment%20and%20host%20communities%22>

United Nations Environment Programme and the World Tourism Organisation. 2005. Making Tourism More Sustainable: A Guide for Policy Makers. Paris: UNEP. Accessed on 5th October 2024. <https://www.globalnature.org/bausteine.net/f/6955/MakingTourismMoreSustainablePart1.pdf?fd=2>

University of Oulu. 2024. Potentiality of Solar Energy in the Arctic. Accessed on 11th November 2024. <https://www oulu.fi/en/blogs/science-arctic-attitude/potentiality-solar-energy-arctic#:~:text=Seasonal%20variations%20affecting%20solar%20energy%20production&text=Winter%20witness%20high%20snowfall%2C%20sub,to%20different%20snow%20clearing%20methods.>

University of Toledo. 2024. The CRAP Test. Accessed on 19th October 2024. <https://www.utoledo.edu/success/writingcenter/pdfs/The%20CRAP%20Test.docx#:~:text=The%20CRAP%20test%20is%20a,and%20Purpose%2FPoint%20of%20View.>

Visit Finland. 2023. Everything You Need to Know About Snow. Accessed on 10th October 2024. <https://www.visitfinland.com/en/articles/everything-you-need-to-know-about-snow/>

Visit Finland. 2024. Finland – Land of The Midnight Sun. Accessed on 10th October 2024. <https://www.visitfinland.com/en/articles/land-of-the-midnight-sun/>

Visit Finland. 2024. For Responsible Travel. Accessed on 16 September 2024. (b) <https://www.visitfinland.fi/en/liiketoiminnan-kehittaminen/vastuullinen-matkailu/sustainable-travel-finland>

Visit Finland. 2024. Rudolf Statistics. Accessed on 16 September 2024. (c) <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjojYTVhODhIMTAtMmZiZC00ZjdmLWE2YWU0tN2Q0MjJIMGE2ZTNhliwidCI6IjJOTRhMjQ4LWVjZjltNDFiNi05YjQyLTkyMzY1MTEwXGIwNCIsImMiOjh9>

Visit Nordic. 2024. Arctic Holiday Destinations. Accessed on 7th November 2024. <https://www.visitnordic.com/en/arctic-circle#:~:text=Three%20of%20the%20most%20famous,real%20Arctic%20Circle%20holiday%20destination.>

Visit Salla. 2024. Location and Connections. Accessed on 10th October 2024. (a) <https://www.visitsalla.fi/en/enter-salla/location-and-connections/>

Visit Salla. 2024. Responsible Tourism. Accessed on 16 September 2024. (b) <https://www.visitsalla.fi/en/know-salla/responsible-tourism-2/>

Zepple, H. 2015. Environmental indicators and benchmarking for sustainable tourism development. In C. Micheal Hall, S. Gössling & D. Scott The Routledge Handbook of Tourism and Sustainability. London: Routledge.

APPENDICIES

Appendix 1. List of Interview Questions

1. Can you briefly introduce yourself and your company?
2. Can you describe some of the unique challenges your business has in operating in Salla compared to other areas?
3. How long have you been a part of the STF Label and Green Key certificate?
4. Is the company's sustainability strategy based on these standards, if not what else do you base them off?
5. What value does the STF Label the Green Key Certificate bring to the company?
6. How is the STF Label and Green Key certificate helpful to achieving your sustainability goals?
7. What criteria is your company performing well / the best in? Why?
 - The same question was asked for both Green Key Certificate and the STF Label
8. Where are you having the biggest challenges in achieving the sustainability standards and why?
 - The same question was asked for both the Green Key Certificate and the STF Label
9. Do you think that the Arctic environment is affecting your ability to achieve these sustainability goals? How so?
10. Do you think there is enough support for businesses in Salla regions to achieve these goals?

11. Do you feel that all the criteria for these standards are relevant / achievable for your company?

- Same question was asked for the Green Key Certificate and the STF Label

12. Do you feel that you can achieve the requirements for these standards in the upcoming years? Why yes/ why not?

- Same question was asked for the Green Key Certificate and the STF Label

13. Do you feel that there could be more relevant sustainability criteria for businesses operating in the Arctic? Could you give me some suggestions?

14. With your experiences with the STF Label and Green Key Certificate, what one do you think is the easiest to achieve.

15. What advice would you give to other tourism businesses in Lapland / the Arctic regions on achieving these standards year after year while (facing the challenges of) operating in this environment?

16. Is there anything you feel I have missed / anything you would like to include to this interview?