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**SUSTAINABILITY AS NEW LUXURY?**

Discourses shaping luxury tourism as a social phenomenon – the perspective of the DMOs  
in Lapland

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### **Abstract**

The concept of luxury constantly evolves and takes new forms. Finland is not deemed to represent a traditional luxury tourism destination, but rather to possess advantages adhering to the new form of luxury, foregrounding intangible elements over the focus on material. Luxury is occasionally considered to conflict with sustainability, but on the other hand, they are considered as concepts reinforcing each other. Sustainable values gain ground within the luxury context, especially along with the expansion of the notion of luxury. Furthermore, accessibility represents a notable factor in terms of tourism development, which may pose diverse implications to luxury tourism and sustainability.

The study aims to contribute to increasing the understanding of luxury as a social phenomenon and of the circumstances regarding sustainable and accessible luxury tourism development in Lapland. Two diverse sets of empirical data were used. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews from six representatives of destination management organizations in Lapland, representing pivotal tourism actors in their own areas. Secondary data consisted of a guidebook produced by the national tourist board Visit Finland, "What is Finnish luxury tourism?" (originally in Finnish). By combining the two means of data, the study aspires to compose a more comprehensive outlook of the phenomenon in the Finnish context. Social constructionism as the paradigmatic approach and discourse analysis as the analysis method enable to study the social and discursive formation of luxury tourism from the perspective of the DMOs.

The findings of the study suggest that Lapland is socially and discursively constructed by the local DMOs as an applicable luxury tourism destination leaning on the natural and cultural strengths as the foundation for luxury to stem from. Sustainability was opined to be an intrinsic component in the new form of luxury tourism in Lapland, even though the problematic nature of tourism in general was recognized. Accessibility was regarded crucial in terms of ease and inclusivity, thus concurrently promoting social sustainability by contesting the inequality luxury may classically unveil. Instead of the traditional aspects of price and exclusivity, the diverse levels of luxury may uplift novel kind of values instead. Ultimately, the Finnish lifestyle, composed by the mentalities, values, and the societal, cultural, and environmental aspects are suggested to create the premises for the Finnish notion of luxury. The views of Lapland DMOs and the national level guidebook were largely compatible, reflecting parallel meanings attached to luxury in the Finnish context. The study was conducted in cooperation with national FIT ME! project which pursues to develop the accessibility of rural destinations.

**Keywords:** Luxury tourism, New luxury, Sustainable tourism, Accessibility, Social constructionism, Discourse analysis, Destination management organization

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# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Thematical Introduction**

What is luxury to you? Perhaps champagne and caviar relished in a luxurious hotel suite. Or rather a memorable experience shared with your loved ones. It could be either of these, or alternatively, something completely different. Luxury can be understood in many ways, it represents diverse things to different people, and no coherent definition has been established for it. The meaning of luxury is claimed to remain unclear as it has several significations depending on the context (Cristini, Kauppinen-Räsänen, Barthod-Prothade & Woodside, 2017; Mortelmans, 2005). Various aspects have an impact on the perception and description of luxury, such as culture, location, and one's own background and circumstances (Kiessling, Balekjian & Oehmichen, 2009). The definitions and perceptions also transform over time (Mortelmans, 2005).

Therefore, luxury tourism likewise has occurred in many forms throughout the times. Similarly, no coherent, general definition can be indicated for luxury tourism (Bakker, 2005). A few elements traditionally associated to luxury tourism are exclusive destinations with premium facilities, high prices not affordable for masses, as well as prestige and status gained for purchasing a luxury tourism service or product (Cerović, Pavia & Floričić, 2019). To illustrate, one of the typical forms of luxury tourism is manifested in five-star hotels. However, as stated by Kiessling, Balekjian, and Oehmichen (2009), it is no longer about the number of stars of the hotel but rather about luxurious experiences and personalized service which meets the needs of the guests as individuals. Therefore, luxury tourism experience can be argued to expand towards the new form of luxury in addition to the traditional type of luxury tourism products.

The new form of luxury can be described for instance as experiential, authentic, meaningful and conscious (see Kauppinen-Räsänen, Gummerus, von Kon skull, & Cristini, 2019; Yeoman, 2011). According to Iloranta (2019a), Finland does not really fit into the description of a traditional luxury tourism destination as no such classic style luxury culture exists here. Therefore, she argues that Finland as a destination can offer an attractive setting for authentic and unique experiences based on unconventional and inconspicuous luxury tourism, in other words, the new form of luxury tourism. Luxury

tourism is recognized as a significant tourism sector nationwide, as the national tourist board Visit Finland runs a Finnish luxury tourism program with the aim to develop and invest in luxury tourism in the country.

The features of sustainability have gradually intertwined with the luxury sector in tourism as well, along with the arisen awareness amongst the diverse actors. In terms of luxury consumption in general, an increasing trend of calmer and simpler lifestyle with lower consumption can be recognized, particularly amongst the elite (Joy, Belk & Bhardwaj, 2017, p. 447). Sustainability can also entail greater meaningfulness and contribute to enriching the luxury experience (Kapferer, 2015). The findings of Iloranta's study (2019a, p. 4) indicate that in the Finnish context, one essential value connected to the meaning of luxury is sustainability in all dimensions. However, various views have emerged regarding the combination of luxury and sustainability, and they are occasionally considered as conflicting issues (Kapferer, 2010). Therefore, deeper looks into the subject are deemed relevant.

Both of the concepts of tourism and luxury are socially constructed, as they are sustained and shaped by the meanings attached to them amongst the interactions of people (see Pernecky, 2012, p. 1127–1128; Roper, Caruana, Medway & Murphy, 2013). The social world is constructed and interpreted through discourses, as language depicts and concurrently constructs, organizes, and recreates the social reality and makes it meaningful through diverse cultural and historical contexts (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012; Jokinen, Juhila & Suoninen, 2016). Therefore, social constructionism and discourse analysis provide a framework to study the social and discursive formation of the phenomenon of luxury tourism from the perspective of the destination management organizations (DMOs). DMOs are pivotal tourism actors in their own regions, with respect to tourism development and coordination of the collaboration between various tourism actors (Regional Council of Lapland, 2019). Therefore, their role in the development of sustainable luxury tourism in Lapland can be momentous. Furthermore, a constitutive part of sustainable luxury tourism development is comprised by the accessibility features of the tourism destination. The northern location of the sparsely populated region with vast

wilderness areas poses particular attributes for the accessibility of Lapland as a luxury tourism destination.

## **1.2 Previous research**

Branding and marketing literature have addressed luxury as a concept for relatively long (Krupka, Dobra & Vlašić, 2021), and luxury goods have been studied widely through various disciplines, such as economics, sociology, and history (Tynan, McKechnie & Chhuon, 2010). However, both Holmqvist, Diaz Ruiz and Peñaloza (2020) and von Wallpach, Hemetsberger, Thomsen and Belk (2020) identified a research gap in the definition of the qualities of luxury experience. Similar situation can be recognized in tourism research. Iloranta and Komppula (2021) state that in terms of luxury tourism and luxury services, previous studies have principally focused on the traditional type of luxury tourism products, which emphasize conspicuous consumption. Furthermore, many of the tourism studies were conducted in USA and Asia, where the traditional form of luxury has strong roots, and the studies focused on luxury hotels and restaurants to represent the luxury tourism product (Iloranta, 2022).

Hence, according to a recent study of Iloranta and Komppula (2021), there appeared to be a lack in studies regarding luxury tourism experiences in the Nordic context.

Consequently, apart from the work of a few researchers (see Iloranta, 2019a; Iloranta & Komppula, 2021), luxury tourism research focused on Finnish Lapland seems to be likewise scarce. Furthermore, luxury tourism studies have principally been implemented by using quantitative research methods (Iloranta, 2022). On that account, Iloranta (2022) argues that there has been a lack of studies in terms of unconventional luxury tourism experiences within other cultures and continents outside USA and Asia, as well as of qualitative research methods. Therefore, in their study, they brought the concept of new, unconventional luxury – a term also used for instance by Thomsen, Holmqvist, von Wallpach, Hemetsberger and Belk (2020) and von Wallpach, et al. (2020) – into discussion in the Finnish tourism context.

Furthermore, consumer point of view has been prevailing in studies on luxury tourism (Iloranta, 2021), and it has mainly leaned on conspicuous consumption and brands

(Iloranta, 2022). However, in terms of luxury goods context, Tynan et al. (2010) argue that managerial perspective has surmounted the consumer one in the traditional marketing literature. Moreover, besides of the prevalence of the managerial approaches in luxury branding literature, there has been a call by various scholars for implementing more interpretive views considering luxury as a fluctuating concept which is shaped within consumer discourses (Roper et al., 2013, p. 378). O'Reilly (2005) points out that every brand is constructed socially, and they convey meanings between service providers and consumers. Furthermore, Mortelmans (2005, p. 497) argues that luxury has been regarded as an extremely economic concept, whereas it has been addressed rather scantily in the context of social theory. Therefore, notable differences between disciplines can be recognized in the approaches towards luxury. In terms of luxury tourism, a few research have additionally included the perspective of service providers (Iloranta, 2019a; Iloranta, 2021) and some involve a range of destination stakeholders (see Cerović et al., 2019). Nevertheless, it appears that the perspective of DMOs is not excessively covered in the context of luxury tourism.

Social constructionism emerged in tourism research in the 1990s and is nowadays one of the prevalent qualitative approaches in the field (Butowski, Kaczmarek, Kowalczyk-Anioł & Szafranska, 2021). However, in the context of luxury tourism, the approach seems to be rather rarely applied, leaving luxury quite unexplored as a social phenomenon in the tourism context. Furthermore, Thomsen et al. (2020) recognized a research gap in considering luxury as a social construct, which is dependent on the way consumers value and construct luxury in the ever-changing world. However, it can be argued that luxury is not constructed as a social phenomenon merely by consumers, but various parties contribute to the construction alike, such as the actors of luxury sector. Furthermore, Roper et al. (2013) discovered a lack in discursive approaches in luxury branding discussions.

The phenomenon of new luxury and its relation to sustainability seem not to have been researched widely in the context of tourism. According to the systematic literature review by Gurung, Brahma and Goswami (2022), a lack in the research of sustainable luxury tourism exists as it is still a relatively emerging theme. Moreover, based on her recent

literature review, Iloranta (2022) notes that out of a comprehensive selection of 119 international scientific articles about luxury tourism published between 2004 and 2019, only nine of them addressed sustainability themes. Hence, even though sustainability is an increasing universal trend, the studies in luxury tourism context still seemed to remain rather low. However, according to Joy et al. (2017), there is a growing interest amongst researchers to study the connection between sustainability and luxury in general.

Accessibility of the destinations has been studied rather broadly in the context of tourism. Moreover, the concept of sustainability has been entwined in the studies to some extent as well. The relation of luxury tourism and accessibility of tourism destinations have been addressed for example by Krupka et al. (2021) and Deng, Gan and Hu (2021). The studies were conducted from the perspective of physical accessibility, the transportation system in particular, the former dealing with tourism destinations at large, whereas the latter focused particularly on the hotel business besides the mere destinations. However, the interconnection of luxury tourism and accessibility appears not to be profusely covered in research, not to mention their affiliation to sustainability.

### **1.3 Lapland as the geographical and touristic setting**

The empirical part of the study takes place in the northernmost part of Finland, in Lapland region. Lapland covers almost one third of the total area of Finland but only slightly over 3 % of the total population (Statistics Finland, 2020b). Therefore, the region is relatively sparsely inhabited, and the arctic nature plays a major role in the big picture. Tourism sector is a significant segment in Lapland's economy which was growing faster than other industries in the region by the year 2017 (Regional Council of Lapland, 2019, p. 13). In 2019, the share of GDP produced by tourism in Lapland was remarkable, 7,5 %, as in comparison to the whole country, the share was only 2,7 % (Visit Finland, n.d.). Nature-based tourism constitutes the main share of the tourism sector in Lapland, on account of the ample nature and the various national parks in the region (Tyrväinen, Uusitalo, Silvennoinen & Hasu, 2014, p. 2). There has been an ascending trend of growth and investing in high-end tourism services in Lapland in recent years (House of Lapland, n.d.).

Since the 1980s, tourism development has been an ongoing process in Lapland, principally targeted to the major tourism destinations (Tyrväinen, Uusitalo et al., 2014, p. 2). Along with an intense increase of tourism in Lapland, the questions of sustainability and controllable growth have arisen (Regional Council of Lapland, 2019, p. 27). One of the main concerns is the state of delicate arctic nature which also serves as the base and the main attraction for tourism in Lapland. Furthermore, well-being of local communities, respect towards local cultures, including Sami people, and development of year-round tourism are some examples of the issues to be strived for, stated in the tourism strategy of Lapland for 2020–2023 (Regional Council of Lapland, 2019, p. 28).

The study takes place in Lapland as the area is one of the backbones of both international and domestic tourism in Finland. Furthermore, there seems to be notable potential for new luxury tourism which leans on natural environment as a basis for experiences, well-being, peace, and adventures. According to Cerović et al. (2019, p. 184), there is potential in rural areas to utilize the aspects of unspoiled nature, authenticity and the back-to-roots idea in tourism through innovative solutions. Moreover, as there are lots of delicate nature and small communities in Lapland which tourism may have a major impact on, sustainability in tourism is a salient question to be addressed in research and development. Let alone the aspect of accessibility posing both advantages and challenges for tourism development in Lapland.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the study**

The sector of luxury is constantly growing, transforming, and spreading worldwide (Joy et al., 2017). A great share of luxury consumption is related to tourism and travel (Belk, 2022) and tourism in general is a growing export sector in Finland (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2020). According to current Finland's national tourism strategy (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2020, p. 18), luxury is considered as one of the trends influencing tourist behavior, at present as well as in the future. Moreover, sustainability of tourism is one of the key elements shaping the future outlook of tourism (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2020, p. 19). Therefore, the themes of luxury and sustainability will probably intertwine increasingly in the future and become even more essential part of tourism as a growing export sector in Finland.

This study intends to contribute to the various aforementioned lacks within luxury tourism research. As the individual point of view seems to be rather encompassing, it could open diverse angles to study luxury tourism more from the social standpoint, to understand how luxury is created and maintained collectively. Furthermore, as sustainability seems to be merely slightly studied in the luxury tourism context, this study contributes to exploring their interconnection, and especially how the new form of luxury is related to sustainability. Moreover, as new luxury in tourism requires more research in general, the study will respond to this call. The Finnish context seems to fit this approach well, for being a rather unconventional milieu for luxury tourism. Hence, the study will also enrich the cultural and geographical context of luxury tourism research. From this stance, it seems reasonable to bring together luxury tourism and especially the new form of luxury, sustainability, accessibility, and their social dimension in the context of Finnish Lapland in this study.

This study applies qualitative research methods in order to study the phenomenon of new luxury and its connection to sustainability and accessibility in tourism context, from the perspective of the destination management organizations in Finnish Lapland. The aim of the study is to increase understanding of luxury as a social phenomenon and of the circumstances regarding sustainable and accessible luxury tourism development in Lapland. Therefore, the main objectives of the study include gaining an understanding of how luxury, sustainability, and accessibility are perceived to interlock in the tourism field in Lapland, and of how the phenomenon of sustainable and accessible luxury tourism is socially and discursively constructed by the DMOs. These objectives are pursued by applying social constructionism as a paradigmatic approach and discourse analysis as a method of analysis. Social constructionism allows to scrutinize the research problem from social and shared viewpoint, and discourse analysis serves as a means to explore deeper the way how the use of language and communication affects the meaning-making processes, and the way social world is constructed with discourses (see Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001, p. 3).

The empirical data was gathered through semi-structured interviews from the representatives of the DMOs during summer 2022. The DMOs participating in the study were located in Levi, Inari-Saariselkä, Salla, Enontekiö, Ylläs and Rovaniemi. Their insights were subsequently assessed in relation to a guidebook of Finnish luxury tourism produced by the national tourist board Visit Finland (Adamsson, Iloranta & Renfors, 2019) in order to understand the phenomenon in a larger context, by combining the local perspectives and the national one.

The main research question of the study is:

How is sustainable luxury tourism perceived by the DMOs in Lapland?

Sub-questions supporting the aspiration to achieve answers to the main research question are the following:

How different discourses shape luxury tourism?

How are luxury tourism and sustainability seen to be interrelated?

How does the accessibility or inaccessibility of a destination affect luxury tourism?

How do the DMOs construct Lapland as a luxury tourism destination?

The study was conducted in cooperation with national FIT ME! project (Foreign Individual Traveler's hospitality and Mobility Ecosystem). FIT ME! project pursues to create a service ecosystem supporting the mobility of individual travelers and thereby to develop the accessibility of sparsely populated regions and peripheral rural destinations, as well as to expedite the growth of the market of individual foreign travelers (VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland [VTT], n.d.). Various companies and research organizations are involved in the project, such as University of Lapland, VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland, Beyond Arctic, Matkahuolto, Kovakoodarit, Bout, Sitowise and PayiQ (VTT, n.d.). Additionally, there are diverse stakeholders that are central to the project, including Visit Finland, Business Finland and Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, to mention a few (VTT, n.d.). Improving accessibility is also one of the key aspects stated in Finland's national tourism strategy for 2019–2028, when aiming for the tourism industry to renew and grow sustainably (Ministry of Economic

Affairs and Employment, 2020, p. 26). Through this lens, the study intends to understand, how accessibility of a destination may affect luxury tourism in Lapland.

### **1.5 Structure of the study**

The structure of the study is composed of six main chapters. The first is an introductory chapter, which outlines the thematical background along with the previous research, provides a brief description of Lapland as a geographical area and a tourism destination, and presents the purpose of the study. Ultimately, the cooperation party, FIT ME! project, is introduced. The second chapter presents the theoretical framework, encompassing the phenomenon of new luxury and its relation to tourism, sustainability in luxury context, and the accessibility of tourism destinations. Furthermore, a brief presentation of destination management organizations and their role in tourism are provided, accompanied with a brief introduction of the DMOs taking part in the study.

Research methods and design of the study composes the content of the third chapter. The paradigm of social constructionism comprises the basis and framework for the research context. Primary empirical data is collected via semi-structured interviews from the representatives of the Lapland DMOs and the secondary data consists of the Finnish luxury tourism guidebook of Visit Finland. The data is subsequently analyzed with the method of discourse analysis. Moreover, the ethical concerns related to the study and the position of the researcher are addressed. Chapter four presents the findings of the analysis of the two types of empirical data, including the interviews of the Lapland DMOs and the content of the national guidebook. In the fifth chapter, interpretations of the two types of empirical data are discussed and outlined in conversation with previous literature, and the research questions become answered. Furthermore, the fifth chapter concludes with the theoretical contributions, critical evaluation of the study, and the suggestions for future research.

## 2 Theoretical framework

As discussed, luxury tourism is an ambiguous and vague phenomenon. In this chapter, the phenomena of new luxury, sustainability in luxury context, accessibility of tourism destinations as well as the DMOs as organizations and the ones involved in the study are introduced. It is topical to understand the transformation from the assumption of traditional luxury into the emerging insight of new luxury and how it affects the sector of luxury tourism. Furthermore, the growing role of sustainability in tourism field engenders wider consciousness in demand, also within the clientele of luxury tourism services. Moreover, the features of accessibility are intrinsic parts of the development and competitiveness of tourism destinations which can have a major impact on luxury tourism sector. Ultimately, as being considerably relevant actors within the field of tourism in Lapland with their knowledge, experience, and influence, DMOs play a major role in the empirical part of this study.

### 2.1 The phenomenon of new luxury

The industry of luxury services, including luxury tourism, should continuously evolve and adapt to the changing expectations of the customers, as the understanding of what is luxury alters for instance along time, lifestyles, subjectivity, and lived experiences (Iloranta, 2019a). Various terms have emerged within the discourse of traditional luxury expanding towards a new form of luxury, such as unconventional luxury (see Iloranta, 2022; Iloranta & Komppula, 2021; Thomsen et al., 2020; von Wallpach, et al. 2020), new wave of luxury (see Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019), conscious luxury (see Luna Mora, Berry & Salen, 2018), relaxed luxury (see Mäki & Tervo, 2019), and experiential luxury (see Eskola, Haanpää & García-Rosell, 2022; von Wallpach et al., 2020). The simple term of *new luxury* was adapted as the main term for this study as it came across as a universal term which may encompass all the dimensions of unconventionality, experientiality, and consciousness of luxury.

The traditional understanding of luxury based on material which only elite can afford is increasingly broadening to encompass the idea of new luxury. This new form of luxury focuses on experiences, authenticity and personal aspiration, among other things, and has stabilized as a phenomenon of everyday life (Yeoman, 2011). The values attached to self-

fulfillment may be attained for instance through free time, learning, relaxation, adventure, and calmness (Yeoman, 2008). According to Kauppinen-Räsänen et al. (2019), luxury can be comprehended as questing of meaningfulness and well-being which could ameliorate the quality of life of individuals and their loved ones. Meaningfulness can be sought via revising luxury as switching from “having-to-being and from owning-to-experiencing” (Cristini et al., 2017, p. 101). Luxury is decreasingly about mere monetary value (Yeoman, 2011, p. 47) as other meaningful and intangible values climb the ladder of significance. Yet, the aspect of “dream” is deemed to inhere in the concept of luxury (Dubois & Paternault, 1995), thus representing the object of desire and something that one does not have (Turunen, 2015, p. 2). Hence, to elucidate the previous stance from the new luxury approach, free time as a luxury value may retain its luxurious aspect as long as the share of free time is not too abundant and prevalent in one’s life.

Luxury can classically be characterized as extraordinary, exceptional, and unique (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019, p. 236). The narrow definition of luxury introduced by Mortelmans (2005, pp. 505–507) includes the elements of scarcity, high quality, and extra value, resulting in higher prices of luxury products. However, according to Silverstein, Fiske and Butman (2008), luxury is no longer overly unique or exclusive, since at present, it is accessible to a broader range of consumers. The so-called democratization of luxury has occurred as the markets have evolved both culturally and structurally, and this trajectory can be said to have led to mass luxury (Cristini et al., 2017, p. 101; Roper et al., 2013, p. 376). Nevertheless, Kauppinen-Räsänen et al. (2019) propound that luxury experiences in a non-commercial setting represent a fairly growing tendency besides the conventional commercial emphasis. Holmqvist et al. (2020, p. 504) likewise question the idea whether price is a necessary attribute for all luxury in the first place. To illustrate, a moment of “weekday luxury” represents the non-commercial aspects of luxury which can be substantially associated with personal life, without requisites for monetary implications (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019, pp. 236, 241). Moreover, Turunen (2015, pp. 47–48) refers to “everyday luxury” as converting the ordinariness into something special and valuable. This supports the idea that luxury must not always be so rare or exclusive in order to bring something meaningful into people’s lives.

In multiple studies about new luxury, the emphasis has been on individual perspective. The findings of the research by Kauppinen-Räsänen et al. (2019) suggest that interpretations of luxury are subjective, contextual, and relative, and everyone assesses luxury from their own contemporary circumstances and needs. Outer-directed motivations have been the stronger guiding force in the classic luxury consumption, whereas along with the development of consumption, the motivations have twisted towards inner-directed orientation (Iloranta, 2022, p. 8). Joy et al. (2017, p. 443) note that the subjectivity of the perception of luxury stems from individual preferences, socio-economic status, cultural background, and differences in consumption between developing and developed countries. Therefore, the importance of the role of a luxury brand or firm as a producer of luxury good or service as a sole factor decreases, and the significance of co-creation of luxury value, incorporating the customer intrinsically in the process, increases tremendously (see Eskola et al., 2022; Roper et al., 2013; Tynan et al., 2010). Overall, no coherent description can be distinguished of the phenomenon of new luxury, due to its subjective and versatile nature. The meaning of luxury has turned out ever more disputed and alterable as a result of luxury becoming increasingly affordable and accessible (von Wallpach et al., 2020, p. 491).

In the context of tourism, a new luxury consumer typically quests for personal experiences, which bring value and convey authenticity, uniqueness, and unforgettable moments (Cerović et al., 2019, p. 179). Furthermore, they often seek for adventures and novelty in destinations which offer activity and diversity (Yeoman, 2008). Various studies also promote the role of well-being in luxury tourism (see Iloranta, 2019a; Iloranta, 2021; Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019; Yeoman, 2011). Hence, according to the study of Iloranta (2021, p. 123), mere physical environment alone does not ensure having a successful unconventional luxury experience. She argues that in the unconventional form of luxury, intangible elements are significantly important as they contribute to the quality of life, to the experience of meaningfulness, and to the well-being of the consumer. Similarly, von Wallpach et al. (2020, p. 499) stress that even if luxury was associated to material or physical environment, the feeling of profound luxuriousness emerges in the moments where the sense of freedom, being alive and connected with people and nature are present. Furthermore, the findings of Iloranta's earlier study (2019a) indicate that

storytelling is a significant feature within luxury tourism experience, as it may combine the material elements and human interaction into a holistic and meaningful entity.

### *Finnish luxury*

Finnish luxury is a rather narrowly researched topic, and the existing academic literature seems to be based on the work of just a few scholars. One of them, Iloranta (2019a) argues that Finland can indeed provide unique and authentic experiences supporting the new form of luxury tourism. She notes that Finnish luxury leans on the destination's own strengths based on cultural and societal values, hence rendering luxury to appear in a simpler form in comparison to the traditional type of luxury. Albeit simple, Finnish luxury can be delineated as unique, meaningful, and deeply in the moment, stemming from purity, nature, and human encounters (Iloranta, 2019a, p. 5). Adamsson (2019, p. 12) proposes that Finland is a niche market where specializing is the key instead of offering everything to everyone, as travelers are visiting the country in the seek for unique experiences. Finnish nature is seen to constitute the basis of new luxury, and responsible business is an intrinsic part of the entity (Adamsson, 2019, p. 12). According to Iloranta's study (2019a), storytelling, authenticity and sustainability contribute to a more holistic and meaningful experience, when customer feels being part of something momentous. She emphasizes that the aim is to make customer feel special, taken care of, and to ensure their privacy. Following the insights of Iloranta (2019a), the results of the research made by Business Finland (Mäki & Tervo, 2019) reports that the core of Finnish luxury is to offer exotic and authentic experiences in a secure environment. Therefore, the imagery of Finland as a luxury destination seem to lean strongly on the natural and societal qualities of the country and nation.

Furthermore, the findings of Iloranta and Komppula (2021) suggest that customer has a relevant role as an active co-creator of value in Finnish luxury tourism experiences, in contrast to a rather passive role emerging in the studies covering traditional luxury tourism context. Similar trend has been recognized globally (Mortelmans, 2005; Roper et al., 2013; Tynan et al., 2010), and one way to co-construct and shape luxury socially is by discursive means, in other words by assigning meanings to luxury through purposeful use of language (Roper et al., 2013, p. 395). Within the range of Finnish luxury tourism

offering, when aiming to serve the consumer's intrinsic values, active participation of the customer may increase the experiential value gained out of the luxury experience (Iloranta & Komppula, 2021, p. 11). However, the preferred level of commitment might vary significantly among the customers, some wanting to get involved in the process more and some less (Tynan et al., 2010, p. 1161).

The national tourist board Visit Finland runs a Finnish luxury tourism program with the aim to develop luxury tourism in the country. They have established tools and guidebooks about Finnish luxury and luxury tourism for the utilization of various actors operating in tourism sector. Their program aims to encapsulate the definition of Finnish luxury experience, develop new kind of supply, and improve the quality of existing supply to respond to the demand of the luxury markets, as well as raise awareness of Finland as a destination of high-end experiences (Business Finland, n.d.). Hence, luxury tourism is recognized as a significant tourism sector nationwide that is constantly developed and invested in. In the analysis and discussion chapters, the main findings of the guidebook of Finnish luxury tourism by the national tourist board Visit Finland (Adamsson et al., 2019) are presented and discussed with the findings of the local interview data from Lapland.

## **2.2 Sustainability in luxury context**

Sustainability gains ground both in tourism and luxury settings. As defined in the Brundtland Commission report of *Our Common Future*, sustainable development should “meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED], 1987, Sustainable development section). Along with the idea of new luxury being reachable to a broader range of consumers, arises the issue of how to ensure the sustainable development of luxury business. The accessibility of luxury to wider public and the democratization of luxury have arguably resulted in mass luxury along with mass-produced high-end brands and commodities (Cristini et al., 2017, pp. 101, 103). However, sustainability is a value that customers have become generally more demanding of (Harju-Myllyaho & Jutila, 2021). Moreover, for instance the environmental and cultural values have a significant role in new luxury tourism (Iloranta, 2019b, p. 6) and it is propounded that eco-awareness, social values, and other deeper matters become more related to luxury

as well (Yeoman, 2011, pp. 49–50). According to Flatters and Willmott (2009), green and ethical consumption are favored among the consumer decisions. Therefore, in luxury context, sustainability can be argued to have become an element of quality (Kapferer & Michaut, 2015, p. 14).

Various views have emerged regarding the combination of luxury and sustainability, and they are occasionally considered as conflicting issues (Kapferer, 2010). Nevertheless, instead, these concepts are tightly entwined, reinforcing and inspiring each other (Hennings, Wiedmann, Klarmann & Behrens, 2013, p. 32), and studies have evidenced that sustainability is appreciated by luxury customers who see them as compatible values (see Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2015). Still, luxury sector has faced immense scrutiny lately in terms of its sustainability (Kapferer, 2010, p. 40). Luxury tourism, for instance, is denounced for exploiting resources for the sake of just a scant number of tourists (Gurung et al., 2022, p. 353). However, Kapferer (2010, p. 40) argues that luxury is contested due to its symbolic power and wide visibility, rather than its truthful impact on the resources of the Earth. The study of Legrand (2020) indicates the remarkably differing opinions of the interviewed experts from the tourism field regarding the reconciliation of luxury tourism and sustainability in remote destinations. Whereas one expert states that one concept would preclude the other for the two being so distant ideas, the other expert disagrees and rationalizes the ongoing redefinition of the concept of luxury and the slighter burden on natural resources by fewer people engaging in luxury tourism in comparison to some other forms of tourism (Legrand, 2020, p. 76). However, the interconnection of luxury tourism and sustainability is not outright undisputed.

The features of quality and durability are often associated to luxury brands, representing the core idea of luxury (Joy, Sherry, Venkatesh, Wang & Chan, 2012). Actually, these attributes are also the key to evince the relation between sustainability and luxury (Hennings et al., 2013), and therefore they provide an adequate basis for sustainable luxury business fostering environmental and social values (Kapferer, 2010). Kapferer (2010, pp. 41–42) states that luxury can be considered as “the enemy of the throwaway society”, as luxury is all about the business of enduring worth. Moreover, Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen (2015) argue that sustainability is one of the major motivational

factors in the acquisition of second-hand luxury possessions and can serve as a statement against overconsumption. Due to its reliance on rarity as a value, luxury sector restrains demand with high price levels, thus concurrently preserving the resources it utilizes (Kapferer, 2010, p. 41).

Sustainability in environmental, economic and social dimensions relates closely to business ethics and composes a salient goal to be pursued by businesses (Crane, Matten, Glozer & Spence, 2019, pp. 33–34). However, according to some reports, luxury sector is claimed to fall behind in the sustainable engagement, in comparison to other industries (Bendell & Kleanthous, 2007). To top it off, Bendell and Kleanthous (2007) note that luxury brands can be highly vulnerable to reputational harm due to the values associated to them. Nonetheless, in their article regarding fast fashion, luxury fashion and sustainable fashion, Joy et al. (2012) argue that luxury brands could take the leading position in sustainability, as they can impact consumption practices and they use innovative design to generate desire. Furthermore, another significant aspect in the pioneering role is the artisanal quality as the essence of the operations of luxury brands (Joy et al., 2012, p. 291). Kapferer (2010) shares the same vision of luxury as a redefining force of the perception of quality and the reverie of luxury, prioritizing the environmental concerns instead of egoistic gratification. Therefore, also the definition of excellence of luxury brands must be reconsidered and remodified to correspond deeper values and positive commitment instead of mere superficial splendor (Hennings et al., 2013, p. 33). Even though the discussion about luxury brands often refers to brands covering luxury products or services, the DMOs alike may hold a key position in the sustainable development of luxury tourism in their region as they often contribute to the construction of the tourism destination's brand and image as well.

Despite of the relation to quality, durability and moderation of used resources, the consumption of luxury services and experiences can often be tied to unnecessities, to something that is above the ordinariness and not related to the basic needs (Mortelmans, 2005, p. 502; Tarhanen, 2019, p. 30). In the eyes of an educated and conscious world citizen, even tourism in general may appear as an unattractive type of consumerism due to its negative consequences (Harju-Myllyaho & Jutila, 2021), let alone the luxurious form

of tourism. Therefore, according to Tarhanen (2019, p. 30) also purchasing a luxury service can engender bad conscience in consumers. However, she points out that when luxury service provider fosters sustainability and responsibility as an intrinsic part of their operations and communicates it clearly, consumer can actually feel like making a good choice when selecting the particular service.

Luxury tourism can be seen as an utter opposite to mass tourism (World Tourism Forum, 2019, as cited in Cerović et al., 2019, p. 178), therefore potentially providing a worthy, more sustainable alternative for consumers to choose when actualized and communicated properly. Indeed, Gurung et al. (2022, p. 375) report that when provided with adequate information, luxury tourists may willingly engage in sustainable practices in the tourism destination. However, the findings of the study of Joy et al. (2012) suggest that even though young consumers are widely aware of environmental and social issues and are showing their commitment through sustainable acts, they seem to experience challenges in extending these concerns to their fast fashion consumption habits as unstylish eco-fashion is seen unsuitable for expressing the identity. Therefore, it can be noted that despite of the awareness of the significance of sustainability issues, the consideration cannot always be reflected on ones' own behavior in an unbiased manner. However, along with the ongoing alteration of consumer behavior, perhaps sustainable travel options and destinations fostering sustainable values will be favored to express one's value system and identity increasingly in the future.

### **2.3 Accessibility in luxury tourism**

Certain attributes such as northern location and being a large, sparsely populated region with vast wilderness areas can have an impact on the accessibility of Lapland as a tourism destination. In their research regarding rural tourism, Kumar, Valeri and Shekhar (2022, p. 392) note that travelers often favor physically accessible destinations and the ones with accessible online information. Providing travelers realistic information about the destinations and their accessibility both in advance and on the spot is essential (Huovinen & Jutila, 2015, p. 71). Development of physical and digital accessibility is a crucial part of the updated Lapland tourism strategy goal of wise growth (Regional Council of Lapland, 2021), an objective which has been recognized nationwide alike in the current Finland's

tourism strategy (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2020). According to Eskola (2019, p. 58), a memorable customer experience begins with browsing websites when customers wish to discover what kind of a luxury experience is to be expected. Even though the focus of this study is on the physical accessibility of the tourism destinations, it is substantial to note that the holistic luxury experience composes both physical and digital dimensions, thus beginning and lasting longer than the mere journey, visit or experience.

Taking a closer look to the physical dimension, in his article, Hooper (2015) investigated the destination accessibility with a model which evaluates accessibility through determinants such as tourism purpose and distance from the destination. As the distance between tourist's origin and the destination increases, the accessibility of the destination can be enhanced for instance by targeting a more unique type of tourism (Hooper, 2015). According to the study of Hooper (2015), culture and heritage tourism is seen more unique than shopping tourism for instance, and therefore the tourists are also willing to travel further for such destinations. From the perspective of various countries, especially outside of Europe, Finnish Lapland might seem a fairly remote destination in a geographical sense. However, in terms of luxury tourism, uniqueness is one of the attributes of the destination and the experience tourists seek for (Cerović et al., 2019) which could indicate that luxury tourists are more inclined to travel to remote destinations in order to discover the uniqueness. Furthermore, the alleged description of Finnish luxury by Iloranta (2019a) seems to provide a suitable framework for unique and meaningful new luxury experiences. Therefore, the strengths of Lapland as an accessible new luxury destination could lie in its unique reputation and offering, despite of being a relatively distant destination geographically.

Regardless, on account of the relative seclusion and possible deficiency of affordable access, peripheral destinations are often underdogs to the ones with central locations within the competitive circumstances of tourism sector (Mykletun, Crofts & Mykletun, 2001, p. 493). For instance in the context of winter sports, in contrast to the destinations in Europe, Finland with its remote location does not benefit of comparable advantage of road or train accessibility but is rather dependent on flight connections (Falk & Vieru, 2019, pp. 1321–1322). Nevertheless, Krupka et al. (2021) propound that better accessibility of a

destination in consequence of a comprehensive transportation infrastructure might actually be a negative fallout from luxury tourism perspective. This stems from the more effortless mobility of tourist crowds enabling the distribution of tourists which may render the destination to appear as a mass market magnet (Krupka et al., 2021, p. 79). Therefore, it could be argued that the hindering accessibility factors such as the remote location and fewer transportation options might actually bring some advantages for Lapland as a non-mass tourism destination for new luxury tourists.

In terms of sustainable accessibility to Lapland and considering the shifting values of the consumers, development of low-emission transportation alternatives, such as rail and public transport, are in great role (Regional council of Lapland, 2021, pp. 24, 28). However, developing sustainable mobility and transport practices may be challenging in rural tourism destinations. The development tools and information are often conceived by transport geographers, thus they seldom serve for tourism purposes and even less for rural settings (Tomej & Liburd, 2020, p. 222). Therefore, the collaboration of tourism and transport service industries is in key position in FIT ME! project, enabling the utilization of both industries' resources and knowledge. By creating a service ecosystem, the project aims to support the mobility and expedite the growth of the market of individual travelers in order to ameliorate the accessibility of Lapland as a tourism destination (VTT, n.d.). The local DMOs' role as a link between the diverse actors and in promoting the visibility of the ecosystem can be remarkable. This study focuses on accessibility in terms of general physical reachability of the destination. Therefore, other specific forms of accessibility are elided from this context, such as the accessibility in relation to disabilities, as they would require wider attention and delving.

## **2.4 Destination Management Organizations (DMOs)**

A destination management organization (DMO) is “the leading organizational entity which may encompass the various authorities, stakeholders and professionals and facilitates tourism sector partnerships towards a collective destination vision” (World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2019b, p. 16). DMOs have been formerly considered as destination *marketing* organizations rather than destination *management* organizations (Presenza, Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005). However, the traditional tasks of the DMOs

regarding promotion and marketing have been increasingly accompanied by destination management and development tasks in order to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of destinations (Presenza et al., 2005; UNWTO, 2019a). Therefore, DMOs might manage a variety of functions at present, such as development planning, coordination, shaping supply, and political lobbying (Manente & Minghetti, 2006). DMOs operate in collaboration with other stakeholders of the destination. However, it is not the DMOs' duty to control the others but rather to work as a link between all actors in order to unite knowledge and resources, and to guide the entirety forth in an adequately objective and independent manner (UNWTO, 2019a, p. 10).

The DMOs in Lapland are central actors in their own regions, in terms of tourism development, coordinating the collaboration between diverse tourism actors, as well as handling destination marketing operations (Regional Council of Lapland, 2019). The DMOs have various responsibilities and activities in different regions, from developing and implementing regional strategy to tourism guidance, and maintenance of ski tracks and outdoor trails (Regional Council of Lapland, 2019, p. 18). Digitalization in marketing and coordination has an increasing importance in the work of the DMOs, and therefore requires continuous investing in competence in the implementation (Regional Council of Lapland, 2019, p. 18). Either a public-private partnership model or a single public authority is commonly the governance structure for the organizations, whereas completely private models are rather few (UNWTO, 2019a, p. 12). In Lapland, a limited liability company and a registered association are the most typical forms of organization for the DMOs (Regional Council of Lapland, 2019, p. 17).

### *DMOs participating in the study*

The DMOs participating in the study are located in Levi, Inari-Saariselkä, Salla, Ylläs, Enontekiö and Rovaniemi. Two other DMOs were contacted as well in the quest for six potential participants from diverse areas of Lapland. However, they were not able to take part in the study due to resource-related issues. The notable tourism appeal of the destinations within their region had an effect on the selection of the approached DMOs. Sizes of the participating destinations vary, some representing bigger tourist resorts and some smaller scale destinations. This was seen as an advantage for the potential of

bringing diversity into the research and its findings. Furthermore, it would have been challenging to choose six destinations representing the same size or with similar features into the study as the qualities of the Lappish destinations are heterogeneous to some extent. This alignment was believed to be able to provide a comprehensive range of perceptions from various parts of Northern Finland and from diverse set of destinations. Next, each participating DMO is introduced briefly. When reporting the findings, the DMO representatives are referred to with the letter P as for *participant* and each representative is designated with a specific number between 1 to 6, resulting in the markings of P1, P2, et cetera. The order of the following introduction of the DMOs is random and not related to the order of conducting the interviews or reporting the findings.

Lapland North Destinations (legal name Inari-Saariselkä Matkailu Oy / Inari-Saariselkä Tourism Ltd) is the DMO of North Lapland region, including the municipalities of Inari, Utsjoki and the northern part of Sodankylä (Lapland North Destinations, n.d.). It is a limited liability company which was established in 1993 and is owned by the municipalities of Inari, Utsjoki and Sodankylä as well as the regional travel firms and individuals (personal communication, June 13, 2022). The organization has gone through a few name changes in its history, and the present name and brand renewal took place in summer 2022 (personal communication, June 13, 2022). The core tasks of Lapland North include tourism marketing, tourism development and trusteeship of the regional tourism industry (personal communication, June 13, 2022).

Visit Ylläs (legal name Ylläksen Markkinointi Oy) is the DMO of the Ylläs fell area situated in the municipality of Kolari, in the north-west part of Lapland (personal communication, August 15, 2022). The limited liability company was founded in 2012 (personal communication, August 15, 2022). The key tasks of Visit Ylläs consists of marketing, communications, coordination of events, regional trusteeship, and funding of the trails, among other things (Ylläs, n.d.).

Visit Salla (legal name Matkalle Sallaan ry / Travelling in Salla Association) is the DMO in the region of Salla in the eastern part of Lapland (Visit Salla, n.d.). The non-profit association was established in 2003, and it has around 35–40 member companies from

tourism, hospitality, and retail sectors (Visit Salla, n.d.). The core tasks include co-marketing of the region, organizing events, and acting as a body of cooperation for the companies and tourism organizations in the region (Visit Salla, n.d.). Furthermore, the association takes care of the marketing of the municipality of Salla (personal communication, June 14, 2022).

The DMO of Levi area in the north-west of Lapland, Visit Levi (legal name Levin Matkailu Oy), is a limited liability company and actually a group of companies that is comprised of the marketing company (Levi Marketing Oy), travel agency (Oy Levi Travel Ltd), and event company (Lapland Productions Oy / Levi Events) (Visit Levi, n.d. a). The company was founded in 1989 and their main tasks include tourism marketing and sales, tourist information, cabin rental mediating, along with managing and contributing to events and development projects in the area (Visit Levi, n.d. b).

In Enontekiö, situated in the north-west part of Lapland, there is no separated organization, but the tourism operations compose a department under the municipality's operations (personal communication, July 5, 2022). Furthermore, the local companies, local actors, and Enontekiö municipality have a joint marketing network to promote tourism in the area with almost 50 actors involved altogether (Enontekiön kunta, n.d.). The core activities of the tourism department encompass both tourism and municipal marketing tasks (personal communication, July 5, 2022). Currently, there is a tourism development project running in the area which operates in collaboration with the municipality's tourism department (personal communication, July 5, 2022). The project organizes workshops for local entrepreneurs and implemented Enontekiö's recent tourism brand renewal in 2021 (personal communication, July 5, 2022).

Visit Rovaniemi (legal name Rovaniemen Matkailu ja Markkinointi Oy / Rovaniemi Tourism and Marketing Ltd) is the DMO of Rovaniemi region in the Southern central part of Lapland (Visit Rovaniemi, n.d.). The limited liability company was established in 2007, and its owners consist of the City of Rovaniemi (51 %) and of over 200 partner companies as shareholders (49 %) (Visit Rovaniemi, n.d.). The key tasks are comprised of image and joint marketing of the area, tourist information, and sales of local tourism services, inter

alia (Visit Rovaniemi, n.d.). Moreover, collaboration, common projects, and communications locally with the City of Rovaniemi and the other shareholders, as well as nationally and internationally with Visit Finland and similar organizations is an essential part of Visit Rovaniemi's operations (personal communication, July 29, 2022).

### **3 Research methods and design**

Social reality and phenomena are the subject of interest in qualitative research (Leavy, 2020, p. 2). Instead of being definitive and commonly acknowledged entity, the world is constructed and interpreted in various ways through diverse perspectives, contexts, and ages (Merriam, 2002, pp. 3–4). The umbrella term of qualitative research encompasses a myriad of distinct research approaches and practices, and it is developing constantly (Leavy, 2020, p. 2). Merriam (2002, p. 4) distinguishes three most common orientations in qualitative research: interpretive (understanding experiences and meanings), critical (interested in power relations and the division of serving of interests), and postmodern or post-structural approach (construction, deconstruction and questioning reality). One fundamental idea that distinguishes qualitative research from quantitative one is indeed the endeavor to understand subjective experiences and meanings instead of digging up objective facts about a phenomenon under study (Silverman, 2020, p. 3). However, Silverman (2020) points out that qualitative and quantitative research are not contestants but rather support and complete each other.

Silverman (2007, p. 37) proposes that the prevalent elements in qualitative research are to concentrate on a relatively small number of people as the subject of the study and to “manufacture” the data with them instead of just uncovering it in the field. Therefore, the researcher is said to be the primary instrument for data gathering and analysis who aims to produce a comprehensively descriptive research output (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). The role of researcher is not to be outright objective and neutral but essential is to recognize her own influence as a co-creator of knowledge and to commit to reflexivity (Leavy, 2020, p. 4). Often, the approach in qualitative research is inductive, thus striving to form findings and concepts based on the collected data rather than deductively forming them based on existing theories (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). Nevertheless, the impact of theory cannot still be denied completely in the inductive approach as the pre-knowledge of the researcher about the research subject is inescapable (Malterud, 2001, p. 486).

This study applies qualitative research methods within a social constructionist paradigm in order to study the phenomenon of new luxury and its sustainability and accessibility in tourism context. By means of discourse analysis, the aim of the study is to increase

understanding of luxury as a social phenomenon that is constructed discursively by the DMOs, and of the circumstances regarding sustainable and accessible luxury tourism development in Lapland. Therefore, the approach of the study adheres largely to the interpretive qualitative stance with its aim to understand the phenomenon (Merriam, 2002, p. 4). Qualitative interview studies should concentrate on meanings and experiences of the research participants, rather than pursuing to generalize an interpretation of a phenomenon or to designate causal relationships (King, Horrocks & Brooks, 2019, pp. 53–54). Therefore, the main research question is formulated in a way that seeks answers regarding the meanings given for luxury tourism and how the DMOs perceive it from their own framework of knowledge and experience. The main research question is:

How is sustainable luxury tourism perceived by the DMOs in Lapland?

Sub-questions supporting the aspiration to achieve answers to the main research question are the following:

How different discourses shape luxury tourism?

How are luxury tourism and sustainability seen to be interrelated?

How does the accessibility or inaccessibility of a destination affect luxury tourism?

How do the DMOs construct Lapland as a luxury tourism destination?

The research questions were formulated based on the defined research setting and the context of previous research and literature. Each sub-question aims to cover some of the main phenomena and concepts of the study in order to answer the main research question. The first sub-question delves particularly into the discourses emerging in the findings, which influence the shaping of the phenomenon of luxury tourism. The second and third sub-questions focus on the topics of sustainability and accessibility respectively, along with their relation to and influence on luxury tourism. The aim of the final sub-question is to unravel the particular meanings that are related to the notions of Lapland as a luxury tourism destination, thus reflecting its social construction. The processing of the sub-questions enables to discover answers to the main research question, to understand the perceptions of the Lappish DMOs of the entire phenomenon of sustainable luxury tourism.

In this chapter, firstly, social constructionism as a paradigmatic approach of the study is introduced. Semi-structured interviews as the tool for data collection, as well as the method of discourse analysis for analyzing the data are presented subsequently. Lastly, ethical concerns related to the study along with the position of the researcher are discussed.

### **3.1 Social constructionism**

Social constructionism emerged in the social sciences during the latter half of the 20th century, to challenge the principles of natural sciences and the idea of the physical world being the only “real” world (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012, pp. 27–28). In ontological terms, social constructionism focuses on examining the social world, and according to Crotty (1998, as cited in Pernecky, 2012, p. 1120), social reality is constructed collectively, through shared meanings in the interactions between people. Botterill and Platenkamp (2012, p. 28) explain that according to Kant’s philosophy of knowledge (being the basis of social constructionism) natural world sends stimuli to the mind but the mind itself forms the ideas of the world, senses and categorizes the stimuli, instead of simply receiving them. Therefore, ideas about the world are derived from the mind rather than from the world (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012, p. 28).

The role of reflexivity is highlighted in the constructionist research as everyone interprets social world within their own frame of reference (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012, p. 29). Related to the epistemological base of social constructionism, Botterill and Platenkamp (2012, p. 29) state that therefore, the researcher ought not to be neutral, entirely objective, as the social reality is interpreted through everyday life and the meanings given to the language and discourses. Some confusion has occurred in the use of terms of constructionism and constructivism in social sciences, as well as in tourism studies (Pernecky, 2012, p. 1120). The terms are occasionally used as equivalents, even though the latter term addresses the individual point of view instead of the social perspective (Crotty, 1998, as cited in Pernecky, 2012, p. 1120). Hence, the former term in its social meaning is applied in this study.

Social constructionism emerged in tourism research in the 1990s and is nowadays one of the prevalent qualitative approaches in the field (Butowski, et al., 2021). According to Pernecky (2012, pp. 1127–1128), it can be argued that tourism is socially constructed and would cease to exist unless tourism and the meanings given to it were constantly maintained and constructed. Tourism is based on the meanings people have assigned to places, objects and different roles people possess, as well as the systems and practices maintaining and generating tourism (Pernecky, 2012, p. 1127). Furthermore, according to Roper et al. (2013), luxury likewise is a substantially social construct which is shaped by discourses and the meanings assigned to it. Luxury brands are generated and shaped socially not only by the providers but fundamentally by the consumers (Roper et al., 2013). Han, Nunes and Dreze (2010) argue that as the core of luxury is encapsulated in its representation of something more than the mere functional product quality, the further value dimension of luxury is perceived subjectively and has social functions. Therefore, it can be proposed that social constructionism poses a suitable framework to study the social formation of different types of tourism and phenomena, luxury tourism alike.

In order to determine the methods for data collection and analysis, methodology should be considered first, based on the ontology and epistemology of the research setting, and chosen methods will be addressed subsequently (Hollinshead, 2004, p. 73). As discussed, social constructionism delves into the social world which is constructed and interpreted through shared meanings in language, discourses and interactions between people, being influenced by cultural and historical dimensions (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012).

Therefore, social constructionism can be closely affiliated to discourse analysis. Cultures are unceasingly generated, re-shaped and revised by their members through dialogues (Mannheim & Tedlock, 1995, p. 2). According to Jokinen et al. (2016), language not only depicts the world but constructs, organizes, and recreates the social reality and makes it meaningful. In discourse analysis, social constructionism has been applied as one of the prevalent paradigms (Coates, 2012, p. 96). Methodology is typically qualitative and inductive, where the data forms the base for the analysis, instead of some predestined theories or hypotheses (Jokinen, 2016, p. 251). Therefore, interviews and discourse analysis serve as a means to collect and analyze data in order to understand how tourism actors construct the phenomenon of sustainable and accessible luxury tourism in the context of Lapland.

### 3.2 Data collection

The primary empirical data for the study was gathered through semi-structured interviews taken from the representatives of six DMOs in Lapland. Data collection for the primary data was carried out during the period of June-August 2022. In social sciences, interviews have become a salient method for doing qualitative research (King et al., 2019).

Interviews are an appropriate research tool especially when studying a current phenomenon which is not yet overly well-known (Kananen, 2015, p. 143). Luxury sector constantly grows and spreads globally (Joy et al., 2017), and a considerable share of it is related to tourism and travel (Belk, 2022), making the phenomenon topical. Nevertheless, new luxury and its connection to sustainability and accessibility in tourism context seems not to be excessively covered in studies, especially in the Finnish setting. Furthermore, interviews serve well for the pursue of studying a phenomenon from the perspective of particular actors (Brinkmann, 2020), in this case being the DMOs who are central parties in the tourism sector.

In social sciences, the empirical data is commonly discursive in nature, for instance in case of interviews (Wetherell et al., 2001, p. 4). Semi-structured interview has been recognized as an efficient method to collect the empirical data to be analyzed with discourse analysis (Cachia & Millward, 2011, p. 270), as it enables the collection of profound interview transcripts, in other words, cultural texts that compose reality (Roper et al., 2013, p. 383). In comparison to structured and unstructured interviews, semi-structured interview leaves more leeway for both parties. By following the ideas of Brinkmann (2020, p. 437), in the interview situation, the interviewee could discuss rather freely around the themes and bring forth broader ideas arisen based on the interview questions and the discussion in general. Whereas for the interviewer, the discussion abided by the right path throughout the interview, and it was possible to better participate on knowledge production together with the interviewee (Brinkmann, 2020, p. 437). Furthermore, the researcher was able to pose additional follow-up questions which occurred during the interview, based on the interviewee's responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, pp. 117–118). However, in the constructionist approach of interviewing, the particular interview situation affects substantially the production of talk as both the

interviewee and the interviewer are involved in the co-construction of the discussion (Brinkmann, 2020, pp. 432, 434). Therefore, the researcher needs to recognize her own possible influence on the interviewee, as she contributes to the discussion with her subjective position, choices, and questions (Kananen, 2015, p. 143).

An interview guide was prepared beforehand which included themes, main interview questions, and some potential follow-up questions to guide the discussion in accordance with the research topic (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson & Kangasniemi, 2016). However, even though the guide provided a structure for the conversation, the intention was not to follow it rigidly (Kallio et al., 2016, p. 2995), but to retain the flexibility of semi-structured interviewing. Before conducting the interviews, the thesis supervisor and the representatives of FIT ME! project were consulted about the first version of the interview guide. A few amendments were made based on the received feedback, for instance regarding the formulation and order of posing the interview questions.

The focus of the semi-structured interviews was on the following themes: Luxury tourism, sustainability and sustainable luxury tourism, and accessibility of the destination. Particular themes were constituted based on the selected research questions and setting as well as based on the gained previous knowledge about the research subject through literature. The interview questions are presented in the Appendix 1. The representatives of the DMOs were chosen to participate in the study based on their position and working experience in the organization. They all worked in positions with at least some level of power to make decisions in the organization and had at least half a year of working experience in the organization. This was to ensure that all participants were in somewhat comparable positions and had knowledge about the organization.

The interviews were conducted in Finnish, for being the native language of the researcher and the participants. Interviews were carried out online via Microsoft Teams and recorded by using Teams recording function. The length of the interviews varied from 37 minutes to 1 hour and 24 minutes. Transcription feature of Microsoft Teams was utilized so the program transcribed the talk concurrently during the interview into a text format. Swiftly after conducting the interviews, the transcriptions made by Teams were processed with the

recordings in order to adjust all the words and phrases correctly. Moreover, the text was processed with transcript conventions to note certain remarks in the talk, such as pauses, unfinished expressions, emphasized expressions, and the transcriber's own notes (Du Bois, Cumming, Schuetze-Coburn & Paolino, 1992, pp. 13–14; Juhila & Suoninen, 2016, p. 452). The transcript conventions used in the transcription of the interview data are presented in Table 1 along with their significations and explanations. The transcription of the data was performed in a relatively broad manner. Not all common transcript conventions were marked, such as length of pauses and tunes of voices, as such a deep level of analysis was not considered relevant in terms of the research setting (Du Bois et al., 1992, pp. 13–14; Juhila & Suoninen, 2016, p. 452).

Table 1. Transcript conventions used in the transcription of the interview data.

<b>Sign</b>	<b>Signification</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
(.)	Pause	Parentheses with a dot in between
<u>example</u>	Emphasized expression	Underlining
example-	Unfinished expression	Hyphen after a word
[ ]	Substitution of identifiable information or clarification of missing terms	Brackets
(( ))	Transcriber's remarks	Double parentheses

According to Du Bois et al. (1992, p. 5), it is crucial for the researcher to differentiate between the two phases of processing empirical data, namely transcribing and coding. In this study, the data was transcribed based merely on what was heard from the recordings of the interviews, and no interpretative remarks were made before the transcribing was accomplished and the coding phase was entered (Du Bois et al., 1992, p. 5). After the transcription and removing the opening and closing discussions between the interviewer and the participants not relevant for the analysis, the interview data consisted of approximately 60 pages of text. None of the interview sections were directly excluded as

nonrelevant at this point, but the interview accounts were processed thoroughly in the coding phase.

The secondary empirical data consists of the guidebook of Finnish luxury tourism produced by the national tourist board Visit Finland (Adamsson et al., 2019). The guidebook “What is Finnish luxury tourism?” (originally in Finnish, “Mitä on suomalainen luksusmatkailu?”) was analyzed with discourse analysis in order to examine the relation to the DMOs’ insights arisen from the interviews. By combining these two means of data, the study aspires to compose a more comprehensive outlook of the phenomenon in Finland, and to relate fresh opinions from Lapland to what has been recognized nationwide.

The guidebook of Visit Finland is directed especially to the Finnish tourism companies providing luxury tourism services, not technically to the tourism destinations and the DMOs. Therefore, it was not intentional to focus as such on the particular instructions and recommendations the national tourist board provides for the companies concerning luxury services and products. Rather, the purpose was to grasp on the essence of the way Finnish luxury tourism is addressed and described by the national tourist board, the main interest being directed towards the meanings attached to luxury in the Finnish context. Hence, certain parts of the guidebook were excluded from the analysis as they did not serve the purpose of analyzing the relation between local and national understandings of luxury tourism in Finland. Such parts included for instance discussions of certain topics related to luxury on a general level without discernible connection to the Finnish context in particular, such as universal customer behavior, service design, or specific marketing practices. Furthermore, the photographs presented in the guidebook were excluded as well in order to have a coherent format of merely textual empirical data.

### **3.3 Discourse analysis**

As discussed, social constructionism can be intrinsically associated to language use and discourses as a means to construct the social world. It can be stated that discourses mediate the modern societies (Wetherell et al., 2001, p. 3). The term *discourse* is used in various ways in research and there is no coherent, settled definition to it (Alvesson &

Karreman, 2000). According to Jokinen (2000), discourse can be described as a manner of speaking and thinking, with respect to a specific context, transforming over time. Through discourses, we shape the world by making it meaningful in particular ways while concurrently the world we produce shapes us as persons, engendering us consequences (Gee & Handford, 2012). Therefore, discourses can be depicted as use of language in its context as part of social actions, and which can be used in diverse ways with various consequences (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019). Jokinen et al. (2016, p. 34) define the terms of *discourse* and *repertoire* more or less as synonyms, signifying relatively solid, regular systems of related meanings which are concurrently constituted in social practices and construct social reality.

With respect to discourse analysis, Potter and Wetherell (1987) describe it as a wide theoretical framework rather than an explicit research method. Jokinen (2000) similarly states that there is no coherent theory or methodological conceptualization embedded in discourse analysis. According to Wetherell et al. (2001, p. 3), a simple way to define the study of discourse is through its twofold nature. Firstly, the study of discourse is about language in use, thus exploring how people communicate and perform actions by using language in a certain way. Secondly, the other dimension has its focus on human meaning-making, thus intending to understand social life and world constructed with discourses. Therefore, relevant is which meanings language is given and how it enables to achieve particular intentions and purposes (Gee & Handford, 2012). Indeed, discourses may be used to produce diverse functions, which may encompass situational functions and far-reaching ideological effects, as well as both intentional and unintentional repercussions (Suoninen, 2016a, p. 51).

Hence, besides of being a theory of language and communication and providing a perspective on social world and interactions, discourse analysis contributes to knowledge production in cultural, historical, and societal contexts (Wetherell et al., 2001, p. 1). Researcher's core of interest is to probe how a certain reality is constructed by cultural texts (Roper et al., 2013, p. 383). According to Gee (2010, pp. 38–39), as part of the nature of discourses, they may split into several separate ones, coalesce, change over time, emerge, cease to exist, or occur coterminally in a certain situation. Therefore, within a

particular piece of text or talk, discourses may emerge in various forms, in concurrent, complementary but also contradictory form (Jokinen et al., 2016). In particular, the tension between regularity and variation of the use of language and social actions is in the researcher's core of interest (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019).

Discourses in luxury context have been studied for instance by Roper et al. (2013) who explored the role of consumer discourse in the construction of luxury brands. They analyzed consumer discourses through a three-dimensional model borrowed from Fairclough (1992, pp. 72–73) which includes linguistic, discursive, and social practices. Through these steps, Roper et al. (2013) were able to identify the linguistic features, such as grammar and discourse markers steering the language use, lower- and higher-level discursive processes signaling macro social discourses they take part in, and finally uniting these phases for the ultimate purpose of the discursive acts in terms of what it tries to achieve in the broader context of social and cultural reality. Meanings are not constructed merely as independent individuals but alike as members of social groups where the values and rules for language and its meanings are co-constituted (Gee & Handford, 2012). Therefore, as proposed by Roper et al. (2013), luxury can be regarded as a considerably social and discursive construct. Hence, the way the phenomenon of luxury is discussed among tourism actors constructs collective perceptions and understandings of the phenomenon through the levels of linguistic, discursive and social practices.

In this study, the empirical data is analyzed by using discourse analysis in order to explore how discourses shape luxury tourism and how the DMOs construct the phenomenon discursively. The social construction and collective understandings of the phenomenon can be explored through the ways the participants discuss and communicate about the topic and through the meanings they associate to it, letting leeway for noting the symbolic meanings besides the mere words themselves. The orientation of the study conforms to the analytical approach of discourse analysis. Hence, the core objective is to analyze social reality in detail, aiming for the analysis to be inductive and data driven with the intention to address the data as openly as possible (Jokinen & Juhila, 2016, pp. 301–302).

### *Implementation of discourse analysis*

The collected data from interviews and the guidebook was approached inductively, so that the themes, discourses, and findings were formed based on the collected data itself, instead of a deductive manner being based on existing theories (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). The data was processed systematically, and coded over multiple readings. All extracts deemed relevant for the research setting were regrouped under the main themes of luxury, sustainability, and accessibility for subsequent processing, enabling to scrutinize the extracts more systematically within and between the concepts. From this basis, the analysis was continued through further categorizing, thematizing, connecting, and comparing the data (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019; Spiggle, 1994). Through these practices, the aim was to discover similarities, contradictions, and deviations, *inter alia* (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019). Thus, it was not intended to get stuck with the concepts of luxury, sustainability and accessibility as such, or with the discrete ideas connected to them. Instead, the intention was to uncover the nexus of constructs and themes emerging between and within them, as well as the discourses shaping the constructs and vice versa.

Discourse analysis consists of a versatile selection of tools from which the researcher ought to find the ones serving own research setting. In this study, the three-dimensional model by Fairclough (1992) previously introduced in this section serves as a main discursive instrument to approach the empirical data. The model is deemed to provide a comprehensive overview to the topic, proceeding from the grass roots of linguistics and grammar towards the broader spheres of discourses and social contexts. On linguistic level, particular interest is paid for instance on the use of discourse markers and different kind of metonyms and metaphors. Discourse markers may create and reveal dualisms, binaries and juxtapositions between diverse strands of discourses, thus differentiating two distant ideas from each other and often promoting one over another (Roper et al., 2013, p. 386). Metonyms and metaphors may deliver symbolic meanings about the topic at hand, as it is not described directly but rather through the figures of speech with a differing literal meaning. On the level of discursive practices, for instance binary tensions were created (Caruana & Crane, 2011) by the problematizing, idealizing, and naturalizing discourses among the empirical data (see Thompson & Haytko, 1997). The aforementioned discourses provide cues whether some ideas are promoted over the others through idealizing them, signaled to be conventional and commonly accepted by

naturalizing them, or pointed as troublesome through problematizing them. In terms of the social practices, the widest stage of the three-dimensional framework, it was intentional to identify broader discourses as well as cultural and social contexts influencing the accounts (see Roper et al., 2013).

### **3.4 Research ethics**

Research ethics are a perpetual part of research which ought to be considered throughout the process. When generating knowledge, researcher's moral responsibility towards the participants is always entailed in the process (Ryen, 2016, p. 42). According to Ryen (2016, p. 35), research ethics are a complex issue in qualitative studies based on constructionist epistemologies, as social reality is a truly multifaceted and contextual phenomenon. In comparison to quantitative studies, ethical questions such as the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants and the conduct of the principle of informed consent are more challenging to ensure in qualitative research, as it addresses certain individuals, organizations, or communities (Hopf, 2004, p. 335). The responsible conduct of research should be applied for the study to be credible, reliable and ethically acceptable during all its phases, from planning and conducting the research to collecting data and reporting the findings (Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity [TENK], 2012, p. 30).

For this study, empirical data was gathered by interviewing the representatives of the DMOs. No ethical review was required for the study, as it did not address for example minors or sensitive issues, and by these means it did not endanger causing harm to the participants (TENK, 2019, p. 19). Furthermore, if the data is public and published, the ethical review is not required (TENK, 2019, p. 19), which was the case when analyzing the public guidebook of Visit Finland. Other kinds of research permits were not needed. Interviews as a data collection method requires consent from the representatives of the organizations. Participation is always voluntary, and no-one should feel like being obliged to take part in research (TENK, 2019, p. 9). Also, despite of agreeing to participation, the withdrawal of the participants must be allowed at any stage of the process (Ryen, 2016, p. 32). Letter of consent was given for the participants beforehand in order to provide them information regarding the study, its purpose, and the use and processing of data,

inter alia (TENK, 2019, pp. 9–10). Once been familiarized with the research project, they communicated their consent for participation. Moreover, the study and its purpose were introduced and the permission for recording the interview was asked in the beginning of the interview. The researcher remained at the participants disposal for any questions they had through all phases of the study. There were no conflicts of interest related to the study. The study received external funding in the form of a grant from the Finnish Foreign Trade Promotion Fund (SUE) in spring 2022.

The personal data of the participants collected in the study included name, position and working history in the organization, and audio recordings from the interviews. Only personal data relevant for the research should be gathered, nothing redundant (TENK, 2019, p. 14). Anonymity in the study covered the names and positions of the interviewees. The positions of the participants were addressed on general level, having at least some level of power to make decisions in the organization. Working history alike was notified in a general manner, having at least half a year working experience in the organization. However, the organizations and destinations were appointed by name in order to better understand the research setting. Also some core information about the organizations were presented to support the research setting, such as the legal name, company form, year of establishment, and core activities. The adequacy of the alignments of anonymity were verified with the participants beforehand.

In terms of the position of the researcher, normally some foreknowledge has been gained about the phenomenon through familiarizing with the theory prior to conducting the collection of empirical data and processing it. However, in this qualitative research study, it is essential to approach the data inductively and openly in order to understand the phenomenon in certain context (Merriam, 2002, pp. 4–5). Within the framework of social constructionism and discourse analysis, the researcher describes and concurrently constructs the social reality through her research findings (Jokinen, 2016, p. 253). Therefore, as the interpretations are engendered based on the researcher's resources, cues from the data, and the situational context, merely one interpretation of the social reality is constructed where particular elements are emphasized while others may be rather overlook (Fairclough, 1992, pp. 82–83). Hence, it ought to be noted that the researcher has

particular influence on the course of the study and versatile findings could be made when emphasizing different elements than the ones focused on in this study.

In qualitative research based on constructionism, trustworthiness is an essential issue to be addressed, with the focus on comprehensive description to portray an outlook of a specific situational context (Decrop, 2004, p. 158). The report of the study itself is one of the crucial methods to validate the inferences produced through discourse analysis (Wetherell & Potter, 1988, p. 183). First of all, the research process is reported in this study, encompassing the data collection, transcription, coding, and conducting the analysis. The reporting underpins the transferability and applicability of the study, helping other researchers to judge the findings and the potential for their transferability to another context or setting (Noble & Smith, 2015; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2017). Furthermore, by presenting a sufficiently comprehensive range of extracts of the empirical data in connection with elaborate interpretations enable the reader to evaluate the suitability and success of the interpretations (Wetherell & Potter, 1988, p. 183). Therefore, the multiple excerpts presented in the study can endorse the truth value and trustworthiness of the findings, as they represent directly the respondents' accounts (Noble & Smith, 2015, pp. 34–35).

## 4 Analysis and findings

The empirical data of the study was comprised of two different sorts of data acquired from distinct sources. The primary empirical data was collected with semi-structured interviews from six DMO representatives operating in Lapland. Whereas the guidebook “What is Finnish luxury tourism?” (originally in Finnish, “Mitä on suomalainen luksusmatkailu?”) produced by the national tourist board Visit Finland (Adamsson et al., 2019) comprised the secondary empirical data of the study. By combining the two means of data, the study aspires to compose a more comprehensive outlook of the phenomenon in the Finnish context, and to relate the local opinions from Lapland to what has been recognized nationwide.

Both of the data were analyzed by the means of discourse analysis, and the findings are presented in this chapter. The first two sections, 4.1 and 4.2, focus on reporting the findings based on the DMOs’ interviews. The main themes identified in the analysis of the interview accounts included *The changing nature of luxury tourism* and *The Finnish lifestyle as the basis for luxury* which both consisted of several sub-themes. The first two sections of the chapter focuses on one of the main themes each, respectively. The third section 4.3 adduces the findings derived from the guidebook, including a light conversation with the interview findings in order to cultivate the discussion between the two forms of data. In the following chapter 5 covering the discussion, the main findings of both data are presented and discussed together with literature.

### 4.1 The changing nature of luxury tourism

The main themes identified in the analysis of the interview accounts of the Lapland DMOs included *The changing nature of luxury tourism* and *The Finnish lifestyle as the basis for luxury*. The themes hence reflect the meanings attached to luxury in the context of Lapland and addedly, the premises where the Finnish understanding of luxury could stem from. Both themes were deemed relevant as the interviewees were involved in the study as local tourism actors in Lapland, thus bringing their cultural backgrounds, understandings, and experiences into discussion. Within the first main theme, *The changing nature of luxury tourism*, four topics are explored in four distinct sections, including idealizing and problematizing the meanings attached to luxury, compatibility of sustainability and

luxury, destination accessibility in relation to luxury tourism, and the changing attitudes towards tourism. By following the three-dimensional model by Fairclough (1992), the participants' accounts of the nature of luxury are approached through three levels of practices: on linguistic, discursive and social dimensions. The model is applied through the entire analysis as a comprehensive and directional framework.

Besides being constructed socially, the concept of luxury is also subjective by nature (Han et al., 2010; Iloranta, 2019a; Joy et al., 2017; Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019).

Consequently, all of the interview participants expressed challenges in defining luxury to some extent. In the beginning of the interviews, some respondents inquired whether the definition of the concept was already settled for the study in order to know how to approach it. However, as it was intentional to explore the views of the DMO representatives in particular without limitations provided by the researcher, the participants were encouraged to approach the concept as they understood it and according to the meanings they attached to luxury tourism in their own destinations. The challenge of defining luxury reflects the vagueness and fluctuation of the concept amongst individuals, on social and cultural levels, and in relation to place and time (see Cristini et al., 2017; Kiessling et al., 2009). Furthermore, even though the subjectivity of the luxury concept was recognized, the term could be seen to bear certain significations due to its historical manifestations.

#### **4.1.1 The idealized and problematized nature of luxury**

In the interview accounts, the manner of presenting the nature of luxury is rather twofold but not completely unambiguous. Participants refer commonly to the traditional or antiquated view in contrast to the current trend of luxury. The term *traditional* or equivalent is used when depicting how the luxury has traditionally been understood. However, when describing their own understanding of luxury, terms such as *contemporary*, *modern*, or *new* are not applied in the accounts as frequently for specification purposes. Luxury is described rather through the qualities associated to it than by classifying it through modernizing terms.

The transforming nature of luxury is manifested distinctly by the statement “It is definitely not a [brand] purse anymore but it certainly is about authentic experiences with high service level” (P5). The word *anymore* reflects the altering trait of luxury, from what it used to be to what it currently is deemed to be. Discourse marker *but* is a linguistic device which serves two purposes; juxtaposing or contrasting two diverse discourses in the utterance and underpinning one of them over the other (Roper et al., 2013, p. 386). Thus, in the above excerpt, the discourse marker conveys the latter strand of discourse being promoted over the previous one, experiences favored over goods, as signaled by the emphasis as well. Furthermore, the discourse markers *definitely* and *certainly* intensify the conveyed message and the strong view of the respondent. Hence, the expression creates purposive tensions (see Roper et al., 2013) between traditional/contemporary, as well as owning/experiencing, thus reflecting the material emphasis to widen and obtain more intangible and experiential dimensions. However, high quality service retains its significance within the transforming concept, thus remaining as a unitive element. Moreover, high quality in general was deemed an essential part of luxury by the respondents, conforming to the findings of Iloranta (2019a, p. 6) that suggest high quality inhering to both traditional and new forms of luxury.

The shift of the notion of luxury from owning-to-experiencing supports the quest for meaningfulness (Cristini et al., 2017), which is one of the prominent values related to the new type of luxury along with the values of improving well-being and the quality of life (see Iloranta, 2021; Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019). Indeed, the elements associated to modern view of luxury by the respondents encompassed rather immaterial values, such as the quest of well-being, experiences, authenticity, personalized service, safety, and peacefulness. Whereas according to the respondents, the traditional type of luxury can be associated substantially on material and consumption. The aforementioned attributes were problematized for instance due to their negative relation to sustainability, and were differentiated from the respondent’s destination by stating that they offer “intangible experiences sustainably on the terms of nature” (P4) instead. Indeed, the respect towards nature and the incorporated sustainable practices were emphasized in the passage to stress their significance for the actors in the destination. Therefore, dualism is engendered again between material/immaterial, unsustainable/sustainable, and traditional/modern stances, endorsing the contemporary view due to its favorable influence on the planet.

According to the interviews, the style of traditional luxury consumption was denoted as clearly visible, involving the dimension of social display. “New luxury in a sense (.) is an entirely opposite mindset for material or for that kind of social (.) luxury where one shows off the consumption of luxury services or products” (P6). Here, the respondent distinctly dissociates new luxury from the traditional stance when referring to the traditional luxury elements in relation to material and conspicuous consumption (see Thomsen et al., 2020). Indeed, the contemporary style of luxury consumption was described rather hidden than conspicuous in the interview accounts, for instance through invisible brands in goods, keeping low-profile in traveling, and staying in hideaway destinations. Some respondents described the luxury tourism offering in their destination to be relatively small and less visible, becoming supportive and relatively compatible with the current trend of inconspicuous luxury (see Iloranta, 2019a).

Other features the participants related to classic luxury included for instance very expensive prices, not being accessible to everyone, and the top starred hotels. However, expressions such as *old-fashioned definition* and “I do not consider it as modern luxury” (P5) problematize the traditional luxury as an outdated concept and not worth of pursuing any longer. Furthermore, the statements “We do not even try to aim (.) for the objectives of the international luxury tourism” (P1) associated with adjectives such as *material*, *pretentious*, and *demanding*, and “That bling bling is not for us” (P5) betoken the international luxury with gold and gleam to purportedly associate to the classic stance of luxury. Such objectives are considered as not worthy to take part in and not desirable to be pursued, thus problematizing them from the perspective of Lappish destinations or whole Finland in general. Hence, binary tension emerges between old-fashioned/modern and international/national luxury. Kiessling et al. (2009) likewise promote luxurious experiences and personalized service over hotels with numerous stars as luxury is taking new forms. Instead, in the discussion of luxury tourism nowadays versus in the traditional means, it was noted that “Now it is more about the experiential attributes, sensations, things like that where Finland is well entrenched” (P6). Furthermore, the respondent highlighted storytelling as a salient component of experiential luxury that supports the values and motives of tourists. Once more, the intangible elements of luxury were uplifted, concurrently intertwining the idealized aspects to the strengths of Finland as a

destination. These elements were also betokened to gain wider interest worldwide, thus idealizing the divergent offering of the destinations through the deemed increase of global interest.

Authenticity is one of the values cherished in the new luxury context (Cerović et al., 2019; Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019; Yeoman, 2011). Accordingly, some interviewees associated authenticity to luxury, especially through authentic experiences in authentic nature. It was contrasted to artificial and material elements, such as classic luxury handbags, top class equipment and excessively constructed environments.

I consider authenticity to be luxury as well, and that is what we offer especially in this area. We do not certainly (.) have a so-called Disneyland of Lapland but here the experiences are authentic. (P5)

The metonym *Disneyland of Lapland* symbolizes high-level artificialness through the idea of a well-known theme park incarnating the epitome of a made-up, commercialized environment. The metonym was unveiled as problematic with negative attitude showing expression *we do not have* which was emphasized with a discourse marker *certainly*. The example could be considered rather exaggerative in the Lappish context, but it manifests distinctly the acute need to sever one's own destination from this kind of impression. The juxtaposition of naturalness and authenticity with artificial, commercialized environment is manifested with discourse marker *but*. This linguistic device serves two purposes; promoting the discourse of authenticity over the discourse of artificialness, highlighted with emphasis on the former attribute (see Roper et al., 2013, p. 386). Hence, the passage promotes naturalness as something to be pursued with an idealizing discourse, whereas artificialness is addressed as something to be avoided with a problematizing discourse. This creates binary tensions in terms of the essence of a destination, as it is contrasted as positive/negative whether the destination is natural/artificial. Therefore, such opposition promotes the problematization of the traditional view of luxury, as the excessively material elements embedded in the traditional luxury stance might feel artificial from the Finnish perspective, and are thus alienated from the context of luxury in Lapland.

The elements representing the new, more desirable form of luxury were strongly connected to the destinations in Lapland.

People seek for nature, purity, peacefulness, safety. And we have precisely all of that, so (.) at the moment (.) [our destination] corresponds exactly to what people are looking for. (P1)

The idealization is evidenced with expression *people seek for* to signal the current demand which is reportedly met in the destination in question. The discourse markers *precisely* and *exactly* along with the emphasis at the end of the sentence reinforce the exact correspondence of the alleged supply and demand. The temporal expression *at the moment* denotes the altering trait of luxury, highlighting its current meanings and recognizing their difference in contrast to the significations that have prevailed in the past. Hence, the applicability of the destination for current luxury tourism purposes is underpinned. The features used to describe the destination include immaterial elements with no direct relation to consumption, thus dissociating the destination from the traditional, problematized view of luxury and approaching the modern stance of luxury instead.

### *New luxury*

The term of *new luxury* was not mooted until the very end of the interview in order to hinder the influence of the concept on the interviewee's accounts. Instead, it was intended that the respondents could describe luxury tourism outright from their own perspective, without given categories. New luxury was introduced in a form of a question, asking whether the participants were familiar with the term or not, and about their interpretation of its signification. The replies varied considerably, some participants being familiar with the term, whereas some considered it novel and unknown to them. Many of the ones familiar with the term described it compatibly with the same attributes they used earlier in the interview to describe luxury tourism in their own destination or in relation to Finnish luxury in general. "Actually I think I have already described how I understand new luxury" (P6). Moreover, after discussing the meanings and features related to the term, also the participants not so familiar with the term beforehand agreed that luxury in their destinations is constituted precisely of these elements. "Well, then it sounds like our services correspond exactly to that" (P2). The descriptions of new luxury were relatively congruent with the idealized accounts of luxury and the type of luxury tourism occurring in the destinations.

Several respondents highlighted the changing nature of luxury right from the start of the discussion of luxury tourism and luxury services in the destinations. As elucidated heretofore, the topic was commenced in the form of comparing the more traditional understanding of luxury and the luxury perspective of the Lappish destinations, articulating distinction between the views and reflecting the transformation of the concept. However, certain divergence emerged when addressing the alteration of luxury. One respondent brought the topic of transformation up when discussing the term of new luxury, thus towards the end of the interview. The respondent made a clear difference between new luxury and the type of luxury addressed heretofore in the discussion, as an exception to the rest of the respondents.

Maybe we are not necessarily talking about that type of luxury that we have discussed earlier during this interview. But rather about the emergence of novel bundles of products... (P3)

In this stance, in comparison to the previously described positions, the components related to the new type of luxury were not necessarily seen to constitute the basis for luxury tourism in the destination, but rather the elements inclining towards the more traditional notion of luxury had stronger roots. However, it did not imply the nonexistence of new luxury elements in the destination but rather the emergence of those factors to the side of the existing luxury tourism services.

The differences among the conceptions of luxury tourism were manifested in the respondents' approaches to the topic. When describing luxury services in their destination, some participants focused rather notably on enumerating services based on luxurious facilities, such as luxury accommodation, thus inclining towards the material emphasis. Whereas some other respondents approached the topic primarily through the immaterial values they attached to luxury as a concept, such as authenticity, nature aspects, well-being, motivating elements, and peacefulness. Certainly, both material and intangible features were present in all of the accounts to some extent, but the level of emphasis varied. Furthermore, some respondents expressed their initial uncertainty about partaking in the study for the "visible" luxury tourism being so small-scale in their destination. It could be propounded that the prevalent, rather traditional understandings of luxury still restrain the luxury thinking on some level, even though the changing meaning of luxury is

recognized and luxury in the Lappish destinations is principally seen to be founded on differing premises. However, once the uncertainty was overcome, the topic was approached from the standpoint of the DMOs and the destinations in particular, and the meanings they attached to the concept.

Furthermore, it may be noted that the manner of speaking varied between the participants, as luxury merely outside the Finnish context was addressed as *true* by one participant whereas in the parlance of other participants, it is described rather as *traditional* or *old-fashioned* luxury. This inspires a question whether the traditional type of luxury really is old-fashioned, or whether such terms are debatable. Perhaps the traditional luxury understanding is dated in a sense from our perspective. However, it could still be very contemporary view in the classic luxury destinations. Hence, the context and the setting have a major influence on the formation of the impression. According to Cristini et al. (2017, p. 105), the desire of owning and having is indeed topical besides the desire of being and sensing. Precisely, perhaps the nature of luxury is not facing a complete transformation and cannot be addressed bluntly as *new* or *old* in the literal sense, symbolizing the concepts as valid or outdated. Instead, the notion of luxury is rather expanding to take manifold forms, depending on the context it takes place on and the subjects assessing it. Therefore, also the level of differentiating the destinations from the traditional type of luxury, which was principally problematized, varied amongst the DMOs. Not all participants considered traditional luxury elements equally undesirable but rather as valid under certain circumstances.

Eventually, it could be purported that behind the problematizing and idealizing discourses of luxury lie diverse social contexts and broader discourses, such as the material discourse, and experiential discourse, and sustainable tourism discourse. Furthermore, the discourse of change in the luxury context is distinctly discernible. New luxury was described as “an ameba which moves constantly, and one needs to be very awake about what is happening” (P3). Such description encapsulates the essence of luxury in a relatively adequate manner, as its meaning and definition depends on the context of the particular time, space, and culture, as well as on the subjective stances (see Cristini et al., 2017; Kiessling et al., 2009; Iloranta, 2019a). In the subsequent sections of the study, the expansion of the

concept of luxury will be addressed more rigorously in relation to particular themes, including the monetary affiliation (finishing this section), position towards sustainability, synergy with destination accessibility, and the attitudes towards luxury tourism.

### *Money as the element of luxury*

Due to its traditional affiliations to excellence, rarity and quality, the monetary dimension has fundamentally belonged to luxury historically (Kapferer, 2010). Occasionally, money and high prices were considered as constituents of luxury also in the interview accounts. For instance, in some accounts luxury was addressed in relation to *wealthy people, the rich* or *high prices* without questioning the connection between luxury and the aspects of purchasing power and expensiveness. This reflects the classic mindset of luxury pertaining merely to the privileged and elite.

In some accounts, it was noted that the destination does not really have traditional luxury services to offer but rather other kind of luxury elements, “which I believe will be (.) turning into that kind of luxury the rich (.) of the world want to get to experience as well” (P4). The consumption of luxury services was still relatively tightly connected to the wealthy share of people. Hence, even though the relation between the destination and traditional luxury services was contested, the connection to traditional luxury customer segment remained established. However, the expression *as well* could denote that the rich were not the sole segment to be pursued but other target groups have been emerging addedly. Therefore, as the proportional share of wealthy people as luxury customers decreases whilst the share of other groups with less purchasing power increases, also the formerly strong significance of price as one of the singular defining attributes of luxury diminishes. Nonetheless, price as an attribute of luxury provoked contradicting views of its level of significance within the accounts. Accordingly, monetary value is deemed to lose its power within luxury context (Yeoman, 2011, p. 47) while other meaningful, intangible values gain momentum. The decreasing importance of the monetary aspect as the determinant of luxury was underlined in some accounts. The view is shared by Holmqvist et al. (2020) who similarly disputes the position of price as a necessary attribute for all luxury when its essence may be achievable by other means than just spending substantial amount of money.

The decreasing importance of monetary aspect connects to the ideas of the non-commercial dimension of luxury and the so-called everyday luxury (see Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019; Turunen, 2015). To contest the idea of expensiveness of luxury and the discourse of commercialism in the interview accounts, it was considered luxury to go hiking in the nature and to sleep in a wilderness hut without the compulsion to buy a ticket for such experiences. The expression *one does not need to pay the earth for it* appears in the form of a metonym, signifying an objection for commercialism and expenditure. Hence, the non-commercial aspect was promoted instead, embedding luxurious values alike, without monetary affiliations. Indeed, the non-commercial scope of luxury experiences is propounded to increase for instance by Kauppinen-Räsänen et al. (2019). One form related to the non-commercial context of luxury in the interview accounts was everyday luxury, represented for instance by simple and peaceful quality time with loved ones at summer cottage from the Finnish perspective. Indeed, “everyday luxury” refers to repurposing the ordinariness into something special and valuable (Turunen, 2015). Therefore, the value of meaningfulness becomes underlined in the context of non-commercial and everyday luxury, instead of the classic aspects of rarity or exclusivity for instance. Iloranta and Komppula (2021, p. 11) agree that the non-commercial context is an essential factor together with commercial attributes in the composition of a luxury tourism experience in the Finnish setting. Indeed, when describing luxury tourism in the destinations, the non-commercial side of luxury was remarkably present in the accounts of the respondents. For instance peacefulness, purity, naturalness, uncrowdedness, and well-being were adduced as salient values grounding the luxury perceptions. Naturally, the commercial aspect remains present in the context of luxury tourism services, but it is worth noting the growing significance of the non-commercial dimension in addition.

Furthermore in the interview accounts, the decreasing monetary affiliation was stressed in relation to the elimination of discrimination, so that luxury services should be achievable for everyone. “What I also shun in terms of luxury is that we would not want this [destination] to become a mere playground of the rich after all” (P5). The rich are juxtaposed to the unspoken share of people with less wealth, thus reflecting the aspect of inequality that luxury may classically unveil (Kapferer, 2010). The expression *would not want* signifies the reluctance of the DMO to contribute to enhancing discrimination

through luxury tourism but rather to ensuring the luxury offering of their destination to be attainable for others as well, besides the mere rich. The metonym *playground of the rich* could illustrate luxury as something related merely to amusement, instead of something related to the necessities of life. Indeed, luxury can be connected to unnecessities that one could actually cope well without, instead of the basic needs of people (Mortelmans, 2005, p. 502; Tarhanen, 2019, p. 30). However, the wording *mere* playground denotes the other, potentially more meaningful dimensions beyond the amusement to exist and to be desirable. For instance, along with the decreasing factor of high prices, luxury may become more accessible and less discriminating, enabling the tourism destinations to promote social sustainability through a more equal attainability of luxury tourism experiences. Hence, the discourses of non-discrimination, accessibility and sustainability all intertwine within the interview accounts.

#### 4.1.2 Compatibility of sustainability and luxury

Sustainability was manifested as a pivotal component of modern luxury within the interview accounts. Similar tendency is recognized by Iloranta (2019a) whose findings denote that one of the core values embedded in luxury is indeed sustainability in the Finnish setting. However, some variability emerged with respect to their connection among the participants' accounts. Generally speaking, the possibility of considering sustainability and luxury as contradictory elements was notified. Kapferer (2010) likewise has remarked the occasional collision of the two concepts among varying convictions. Nevertheless, Hennings et al. (2013) point out that sustainability and luxury are actually entwined, upholding each other. This is a view adopted by several respondents, especially in the context of their own destinations.

Well, certainly in some cases they [sustainability and luxury] are really far from each other, whereas I would say that (.) in [our destination] it [sustainability] is (.) comprehended as luxury, and (.) it is attended to and invested in. (P1)

The two strands of discourse are distinguished with the discourse marker *whereas*, signaling on one hand a general stance of possible dissonance between sustainability and luxury and, on the other hand, a subjective stance from the viewpoint of one's own destination of the concepts being compatible. Hence, dualism emerges between us/them and subjective/general due to the expressions *our destination* (us) and *in some cases*, the

latter implying the possible conditions somewhere else (them). Thus, the destination was dissociated from the general, conflicting description, when the idealized, harmonious condition was underlined instead. The compatible connection of sustainability and luxury was highlighted in one of the accounts with the idiom of the two *going hand in hand*, providing a vivid image of their intertwining characters. Furthermore, the compatibility was justified in the account through the connection to pure nature, diversity, and the proximity of wilderness in the particular destination. Thus, as the natural characteristics of the destination were fostered, it was opined that luxury ought not to be prioritized over the natural elements but rather, it was indeed seen to stem from them. However, the end of the aforementioned extract, *it is attended to and invested in*, depicts the effort required for the interoperability of the concepts, indicating also the commitment of the destination actors to the matter. Therefore, it is not self-evident for sustainability and luxury to coexist, but their consolidation requires volition.

On the other hand, some participants perceived the interconnection of sustainability and luxury to be more troubled, particularly in the luxury tourism context, and not as straightforward as the previous positions suggest.

Well, it [the compatibility of sustainability and luxury] is an issue I have (.) pondered quite a bit ... In general, sustainability and tourism, (.) not to mention luxury tourism when traveling with private planes, so ((thinking)) it is quite problematic at the moment. (P3)

Pausing to think between the sentence and the expression *I have pondered quite a bit* with the emphasis could indicate the issue causing notable headache to the DMO due to the severity of the issue and due to being entangled to the matter themselves as an organization. It is recognized that tourism industry in general, that is to say, the tourism actors including the DMOs, are involved and contributing to a troubling course of events with their business. Hence, the involvement of one's own organization is admitted, but coterminally, their awareness of the complexities is articulated, constructing an image of the DMO as a conscious actor. The expression *at the moment* bonds the problematicness to the present time, reflecting the impermanent and convertible nature of the current state. Even though it is not actually verbalized in the extract, it conveys a message reflecting the agency of the different actors with respect to the capability of combatting the present, problematic situation in order to ameliorate the circumstances. However, the combat is not

deemed easy with downright solutions, as may be perceived from the pondering and hesitating tone of the excerpt. Moreover, it was noted widely among the respondents that even though responsibility is already addressed in the destinations, there is yet plenty to be improved in terms of the sustainable actions. Hence, the responsibility discourse is distinguishable in the accounts as the role of the DMOs and other tourism actors in the destinations were recognized and admitted in terms of sustainability, along with the deficiencies and the development needs in their actions.

Despite of recognizing the problematic nature of tourism in general in terms of sustainability, the expression *not to mention* indicates the criticizing of luxury tourism over the other forms of tourism. The main argument the critique was based on were private planes as the mode of transport which was considered one of the major downsides of luxury tourism due to its unsustainability. However, nonetheless of problematizing flying and particularly private flying, it was coevally naturalized as a way of reaching the Lappish destinations. “It is really difficult to reach our destination by other means [than flying]” (P4). By problematizing the accessibility of the destination by any other means than airplane and by promoting the signification of luxury tourists (arriving by planes) for the destination, flying becomes thus naturalized and entitled mode of transport. Therefore, a complicated relation between Lapland and flying exists, placing the notions of sustainability and accessibility in confrontation. However, Kapferer (2010, p. 40) points out that luxury is often disputed for its symbolic power rather than its realistic effects on the resources of the Earth. Private flying is a detrimental activity to our planet, there is no doubt about the effects. But in reality, along with the discussed democratization of luxury and the expanding notion of luxury, it is not probable that all the present-day and future luxury tourists travel in such a private manner. Private flying could be seen as ultimate luxury, a term addressed in tourism context for instance by Iloranta (2019a), where privacy is a substantial criterion of the ultimate luxury experience for the wealthy, in comparison to the so-called ordinary luxury. However, along with the widening luxury clientele and the expanding conception of luxury, the symbolic power of luxury tourism through private flying might prove actually as rather stereotypical image, whereas the majority of luxury traveling could be done by other means increasingly in the future. Hence, there is no underrating the impact of private flying, but it is worth noting that luxury tourism is considerably more than solely that. The abovementioned shifts indicate

luxury to be taking more sustainable forms for instance through the modes of transport along with its transformation process.

According to the previously addressed stance, luxury tourism is considered the worst with respect to sustainability, in comparison to “ordinary” tourism. However, another view did not contrast the forms of tourism as radically:

Hmm, well, I don't know, in a sense there certainly are sustainability challenges concerning tourism overall, (.) everywhere, in any case. But I do not perceive the challenges to be greater in luxury tourism though. (P2)

Hence, the critique towards mere luxury tourism is mitigated in a sense, as the attention is indicated to be directed rather to tourism in general. The discourse marker *certainly*, and the generalizing expressions of *overall*, *everywhere* and *in any case* underpin the severity and the extent of the sustainability challenges embedded in tourism, concurrently evidencing the awareness of the DMO about the issue and its severity. Thus, the DMO may so be presented in a positive light as a conscious actor in the tourism field anew.

Moreover, the compatibility with sustainability was justified with a positive influence of luxury tourism on “getting rid of mass tourism” (P5). Luxury tourism is propounded to be an ultimate opposite to mass tourism (World Tourism Forum, 2019, as cited in Cerović et al., 2019, p. 178), therefore potentially providing a smart alternative for the tourism destinations to specialize in. As proposed by Adamsson (2019, p. 12), Finland is a niche market where it is indeed advisable to specialize rather than trying to serve each and every customer segment. The expression *to get rid of* verbalizes clearly the undesirability of mass tourism, alluding to the entailed sustainability problems, thus problematizing it as a noxious tourism type. Hence, the option to invest in luxury tourism instead of mass tourism could encourage to attain agency to the destination actors in order to have an impact on the type of tourism they want to engage with in the destination. Currently, some tourism actors have made the decision to focus on gaining equal profit through serving masses instead of engaging to serve the luxury segment in particular, as described by some respondents. Hence, the DMOs as unitive actors could have a pivotal role in terms of spreading the awareness and steering the tourism development into a collectively desirable direction in the destinations. Both Hennings et al. (2013) and Kapferer (2010) underline

that luxury has certain redefining power to redirect the notions of luxury and quality from egoistic purposes and superficiality towards positive commitment and prioritizing deeper values. Nonetheless, it is not intentional to imply that all luxury tourism would be the most preferable alternative out of various forms of tourism. For instance, as the tendency of democratization of luxury continues, the trajectory may steer towards mass luxury (Cristini et al., 2017; Roper et al., 2013). Hence, the tourism actors should be aware not to fall from one harmful form of tourism into another one. Nevertheless, by focusing on the destinations' strengths as the basis and making sustainably smart decisions with respect to luxury tourism, the actors could be capable to contribute to more responsible tourism, act among the pioneers in revising the common definitions of luxury, and substantiate their "organizational identities" as conscious and mindful actors.

According to the interviews, the three pillars of sustainability, ecological, sociocultural and economic dimensions, were seen to be relatively well balanced in the Lappish destinations in general. Moreover, sustainability was fostered as one of the core values in the destinations and almost all respondents mentioned participation in Sustainable Travel Finland program (STF) by Visit Finland that aims to guide tourism destinations and companies to adopt sustainable principles and practices (see Visit Finland, 2023). The issue of seasonality in terms of sustainable luxury tourism was introduced as a remarkable challenge for many destinations. The lack of year-round tourism was described to currently prevent the development of luxury tourism services by some of the respondents. Thus, the topic intertwined with accessibility as well, due to the challenging reachability of some destinations outside main seasons. The development of year-round tourism could promote both social and economic sustainability, as now tourism income and employment piles up on the top seasons.

Additionally, some respondents promoted the significance of safety as an element of sustainability and responsibility, besides the three more traditionally considered dimensions. Same remark has been made on the regional level in Lapland tourism strategy alike (Regional Council of Lapland, 2019, p. 27). Safety has grown in importance along with the current world situation affected by the global pandemic and the ongoing war, and thus connects to sustainable tourism development as well. Safety was underlined as one of

the advantages of Finland as a luxury tourism destination in the interview accounts, and was inherently associated to the qualities of the destination and the provided tourism services. Safety is likewise noted as an element of luxury experience in the Finnish context by Iloranta (2019a). Moreover, paralleling safety with other intangible features, such as purity, peacefulness, and naturalness, safety was naturalized as being an ordinary and fundamental characteristic of the destination. On a broader sense, some respondents associated safety to particular societal and national qualities, such as the stable society, the absence of corruption, and the ability to count on people. Indeed, criminality has been rather low, no major social divisions have occurred, and the welfare society has remained relatively steady in Finland (Virta, 2013), thus rendering the country rather safe to live in and to visit. According to the research conducted by Business Finland (Mäki & Tervo, 2019), safety is one of the six needs that define luxury tourism and is one of the competitive advantages of Finland. Hence, the relevance of safety is recognized on local, regional, and national levels.

Even though the elements constructing an image of the DMOs as conscious and mindful actors were somewhat perceptible in the interviews, the realities and deficiencies within the operations of their organizations and the other destination actors were recognized. The need of improvement was identified in terms of the level and quality of service, physical and digital accessibility, and social responsibility communication, to mention a few. "But we are no saints in this matter [sustainability and accessibility], that I certainly cannot state. (.) We do try our best, but there is still a lot to do" (P5). The discourse marker *but* juxtaposes two branches of discourse in the latter sentence. The first indicates an optimistic view of putting all the possible effort into developing sustainability and accessibility. The second branch of discourse depicts a realistic stance that despite of the effort put, plenty yet remains to be done, which is underlined by the word *still*. By applying the idiom *we are no saints*, the respondent indeed indicates that despite of the actions taken, they want to be seen in a realistic light without over-glorification. Hence, besides the image of being conscious actors, they may also be considered as rational actors with a sense of reality.

#### 4.1.3 Destination accessibility in the context of luxury tourism

In general, accessibility was seen as a vital element for the prosperity of a tourism destination, and plenty of the DMOs' resources are tied to its sustenance and enhancement. In terms of luxury tourism, ambivalent views were proposed for the general significance of accessibility. On one hand, certain ease and uncomplicatedness were seen to belong to luxury, for instance with respect to easy accessibility of a destination or a service. "I might not consider it as luxury if one needs to change plane many times or the transitions are very long" (P5). Hence, time-consuming and arduous distances and the need of putting considerable effort were problematized as non-luxurious aspects. Instead, reaching the destination should be made as effortless as possible for the luxury tourism segment. For instance, the mandatory transitions to and within the destination were seen as an opportunity to be incorporated as part of the tourism experience. For example, when going to a high-class wilderness resort, "the journey is already part of the experience when you travel there by snow mobile or by all-terrain vehicle, and (.) then you will be truly in the middle of nowhere" (P2). It was deemed essential to make the journey an experience instead of a burden, and its significance is stressed with the accent on the underlined parts of the extract. Yeoman (2008) argues that adventure is one form of actualizing self-fulfillment purposes having weight within the new luxury context. The journey on a snow mobile may replenish the meaningful luxury experience in a form of an adventure in the wilderness.

Furthermore, the abovementioned extract denotes both the experiential features of luxury and the holistic nature of the luxury experience. Indeed, the respondents described luxury tourism experiences as comprehensive entires where the details and overall smooth flow of the services are in key position. Hence, the journey was seen as a necessary element of the whole experience, since without it the experience would remain incomplete or could not be experienced at all as the locus could not be reached. The respondents underlined the significance of the way of manifesting and marketing the journey as part of the entity and not as a mere transit. Storytelling was considered to be one of the essential elements in a luxury tourism experience by some interviewees, and the stance is shared by Iloranta (2019a) who promotes the importance of storytelling in combining the material elements with human interaction in order to compose a comprehensive and significant entity. Therefore, intertwining the journey into the experience by means of storytelling could

hinder seeing the journey merely as a transit, as a necessary evil *en route* to acquire the actual luxury experience. Instead, the experience and the story embedded in it begin already in an earlier stage. Eventually, even though it would require some time or effort to access a certain luxury experience milieu, the complexity is mitigated through naturalizing the journey as part of the experience.

Accessibility of present-day luxury tourism services was considered important also for the sake of inclusivity in the interview accounts.

Discrimination should be disposed so that accessibility is possible for everyone. So that there is preparedness to pay for the services but then there is also a chance to select. (P5)

The pronoun *everyone* is juxtaposed with the unspoken *just a few*, who have traditionally been able to afford luxury. The privilege of the few is regarded as discriminating and therefore, the passage can be regarded as an objection to exclusion and inequality amongst people. The privilege relates to monetary power as signaled with the expression of *preparedness to pay*. Hence, the latter sentence of the extract reflects the diverse layers of luxury, some being bound to monetary aspects, but others leaving space for different kind of values entailed in luxury that may be selected over the valuation of purchasing power. Similarly, Yeoman (2011) recognizes the tendency of luxury entrenching as a phenomenon of daily life and adopting wider forms, inclining towards the broadening accessibility of luxury among folk. Therefore, behind the statement of the respondent could resonate the broader discourses of the democratization of luxury, thus becoming available for a wider range of consumers (Cristini et al., 2017; Roper et al., 2013), as well as the social context reflected through equality discourse. The reasons behind the stands in favor of the non-discrimination of luxury in the Finnish setting could partially stem from the principles of the welfare state and democratic form of government which can both be seen to contribute to the egalitarian conditions of people in Finland (see Kananen, 2014; Wilson, 2019). Even though the role of the welfare state or principles of democracy were not verbalized explicitly as such in the interviews, it may be noted that they could probably affect the mentalities behind the accounts about luxury through the affiliations to the egalitarian values. As luxury is a socially constructed concept, the social and cultural contexts have an impact on the personal perceptions. Overall, through becoming available

for wider clientele and taking more coequal forms, this novel dimension of luxury could enhance social sustainability through inclusivity, as the significance of the division between the wealthy and the people with average and lower income decreases in the luxury context.

On the other hand, according to some differing views of the respondents, a destination with challenging accessibility may appear as an attractive special destination if it requires effort to reach it. A more complicated accessibility without non-stop bus connections can have an impact on the appearance of the uniqueness of the experience.

I do not mean to say that accessible cannot be unique but if it is difficult to access, in other words not (.) available for everyone, for one reason or another, it will certainly affect the luxury thinking. It is luxury already if one gets to go into a place where (.) most of the world cannot go. (P6)

The delivered message is first mitigated with expression *I do not mean to say* but the discourse marker *but* distinguishes the beginning and the end of the sentence to represent disparate, adversarial ideas. The idea of associating complicated accessibility to uniqueness and thus luxury is reinforced with the discourse marker *certainly*. Thus, complicated accessibility is idealized in a sense, by expressing that *it will certainly affect luxury thinking*. Furthermore, the second sentence emphasizes the connection between a luxurious experience and a rather inaccessible milieu. Hence, the above extract relates to the ideas of Krupka et al. (2021) that effortless accessibility engendering increasing mobility of tourists may entail the impression of the destination's popularity among masses. Uniqueness being one of the qualities luxury tourists desire (Cerović et al., 2019), the image of such destinations might suffer as a result of such chain of events. Furthermore, it may be remarked that the metonym *most of the world* is juxtaposed to pronoun *one* with the aforementioned discourse marker *but*, when discussing the possibility and impossibility of visiting a certain place. Moreover, the pronoun *everyone* in the first sentence about luxury not being available for all, indicates similar juxtaposition with the unspoken *few*. These discursive contrasts bring in mind a representation of the dichotomy between the well off and the disadvantaged in the world in terms of the capability of reaching luxury. As luxury has traditionally been understood as something exclusive for the wealthy, the above stance adheres towards the traditional view. This

view takes a step further from the broader discourse of democratization of luxury which was, by contrast, approached in the earlier extract about accessible luxury.

When following the classic notion of luxury, where the meaning of luxury has been interlaced with the features of uniqueness (Cerović et al., 2019; Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019), rarity (Kapferer, 2010), and something desirable that one does not have (Turunen, 2015), it may be worth pondering whether luxury could lose its appeal if it became “too accessible”. Indeed, according to Dubois and Paternault (1995), luxury is deemed to involve the “dream” aspect, being something that one desires. Indeed, it may appear as luxury for a busy businessperson to gain free time for oneself and with loved ones. However, if the work-oriented person lost the job and had nothing but free time, the perception of luxury may transform and thus gain new forms and simultaneously lose some others. Hence, free time could lose its appeal and turn out less unique due to becoming quotidian.

Silverstein et al. (2008) promote the decreasing importance of uniqueness and exclusivity of luxury along with its increasing accessibility and becoming within reach for wider clientele. Thus, other values related to luxury could grow more important instead. Indeed, the feature of exclusivity may be diminishing along with the formerly discussed idea of luxury becoming more inclusive and accessible. This could affect the perception of uniqueness as well in case luxury became reachable more widely. However, even though the importance of uniqueness could be disputed in the context of new luxury, it regardless is a value that emerged in the interview accounts. Furthermore, it is noted to be one of the values that new luxury tourist seeks as well, through the personal experiences (Cerović et al., 2019, p. 179). However, the perception of uniqueness can be highly dependent on the personal view besides the social context. For instance, everyday luxury could be seen to affect the scale of uniqueness. Something mundane, such as a homemade bun with the afternoon coffee could feel luxurious in the middle of the quotidian. Probably, one has eaten buns before, so it is not actually new or such a unique experience. However, it may bring uniqueness into that particular moment, brightening the regular afternoon coffee break. Similarly, Turunen (2015, p. 58) argues that the perceived uniqueness is engendered through situational choices and is thus affected by the context, pointing out

the difference between everyday moment and special occasion. Hence, despite of gaining more quotidian forms in luxury, uniqueness can be present on different levels. Certainly, a luxury destination may lose its appeal in the eyes of one, however, concurrently retaining the uniqueness from the perspective of another person. Nevertheless, as one respondent denoted with respect to new luxury, “While the mass shifts to use something, the forerunners always search for something new” (P4). Hence, it may be deemed natural that along with the constant transformation of luxury, uniqueness exists on diverse levels and is perceived and pursued in multiple ways.

When taking a closer look on the outlooks of the Lappish destinations’ accessibility in particular, the problematization of the location and physical accessibility was a dominant path of discourse among the interview accounts. The location of the destinations was described as “we are really far from everything” (P4), thus affecting the accessibility as “it is really challenging to reach our destination” (P4). These extracts were the most intense examples, but many other respondents trailed the same path. The words *really* and *everything* reinforce the adjectives of far and challenging, together provoking the problematizing discourse. The excerpts approach the topic of accessibility through a realistic discourse, addressing a certain situation through deemed realities and empirical facts (Suoninen, 2016b). It was not intentional to embellish the current circumstances but to describe it truthfully. Interestingly, the stance of associating inaccessible luxury with a positive connotation was not really integrated to the conception of luxury tourism in the destinations in Lapland. Instead, the thoughts about the attractive inaccessible luxury were arisen once a general question about the interrelation between accessibility and luxury was posed by the interviewer. Thus, the ideas were pondered on rather general level, instead of taking the discussion to the level of the specific destinations in Lapland.

Actually, the challenging accessibility was considered to be one of the main reasons that luxury tourism and tourism in general was not growing year-roundly, due to the deficient transport connections during off-seasons. In the interview passage, the problematization of the location was reinforced through its connection to sustainability by hindering the development of year-round tourism, as well as due to the dependence on flight connections and private car when moving around the region. As sustainability was

fostered as one of the core values of the DMOs, the above accessibility issues were considered as serious problems. However, even though describing the physical accessibility of the destinations as challenging was rather prevalent account among the respondents, deviants emerged as well. Some respondents described its relatively good state, despite of some remaining challenging elements. Furthermore, despite of the problematization of accessibility, the DMOs aim to attain agency in order to make it less challenging. Hence, the collaboration of tourism and transport services, also supported by FIT ME! project, is in key position in order to ameliorate the accessibility of the rural and sparsely populated region of Lapland. Hence, the service ecosystem coordinated by FIT ME! project could be deemed to support to unite the forces of diverse actors into joint development actions. As derived from the findings above, challenging accessibility is not really regarded an advantage in Lapland from luxury tourism perspective, but it requires contribution in order to luxury tourism to develop. Furthermore, by aiming to improve the accessibility and service level by means of digitalization (VTT, n.d.), the accessibility information could become more equally available for everyone with access to internet. All in all, by putting effort to develop the accessibility and naturalizing the location as a fundamental characteristic of the destination, the problematic sides of accessibility could be mitigated.

#### 4.1.4 Changing attitudes towards tourism

Along with the emergence of the topic about the need for sustainable development in tourism field, observable were also the changes in the attitudes towards traveling and tourism.

As a tourism industry actor, I have to be very glad about it [new flight connections]. But making a post on [a social media platform] about the great news, every single time when making such a post, you have to know that there will be one or two responsibility activists who write under your post that ‘oh my god, more emissions’. So yes, it is extremely problematic nowadays. (P3)

The above excerpt depicts a collision between the features of accessibility and sustainability. Discourse marker *but* distinguishes again two branches of discourse. The first sentence conveys a positively charged message about improving accessibility of the destination, whereas the second one underlines the deterioration of sustainability through increasing emissions with a negative vibe. Hence, a dualism is created between

positive/negative, and thus binary tension between accessibility/sustainability as well. However, the created dualism is not purely straightforward when it comes to the different dimensions of sustainability. The expression *I have to be very glad* emphasizes the naturalness of increasing accessibility to typically be positive news to the tourism destination, as it often indicates more income entailed by the growing flows of tourists. Thus, growing income may improve economic and social sustainability for instance through vital businesses and higher employment rate, bearing further positive consequences to the destination.

As the expression is in the form of an obligation pointed with verb *have to*, it seems to suggest that happiness is the emotion a DMO is supposed to feel in such situation. Nevertheless, certain uncertainty can be sensed in the extract about what the tourism actors can rejoice at nowadays. Uncertainty about which news should be hyped publicly is surely deepened by the social media comments written by the responsibility activists who speak for combating the climate change. Hence, on a broad level, social and economic sustainability can be seen to symbolically clash with ecological sustainability within this passage. Furthermore, the contradiction between accessibility and ecological sustainability was well recognized by the DMOs, as addressed by the expression *it is extremely problematic nowadays*, depicting the challenging and discordant nature of the situation from the tourism actors' perspective. Here, the word *nowadays* could be deemed to bear an allusion towards the past. In the past, it used to be normal to be delighted with the improving accessibility, but in comparison to the present day, the issue has now turned complicated. Hence, the expression could involve an intertextual dimension through implicitly addressing certain historical and social conditions and meanings (see Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019). Therefore, the attitudes towards tourism among the tourism actors themselves are not as self-evident, straightforward and simple as possibly heretofore.

Furthermore, the DMOs' attitudes towards tourism were reflected in terms of their organizations' role and in the tourism development aspirations in their destinations. Sustainability emerged as a pivotal theme for the attitude-reflecting accounts to assemble around. The responsibility, rights, and power of the DMO are illustrated in the following

extract: “We do not want to market something that is not sustainable” (P5). The promotion and marketing of the destination and its services being one of the typical main tasks of the DMOs (Presenza et al., 2005) provides the rights to ultimately determine the service providers gaining visibility through the DMOs marketing channels. The right to decide of the inclusion or exclusion of actors from the marketing efforts is depicted with the expression *we do not want to*. Sustainability was considered such an important value that it was not assessed worthwhile to take a risk to market something not concordant with the values embraced in the destination, potentially engendering damage to the destination image. This reflects also the power the DMOs have over the other actors of the destination. Despite of being a unifying actor and in some cases even a trustee of the other tourism actors, hence advocating their interests (see Manente & Minghetti, 2006), the DMOs do have certain level of power, at least in terms of the destination marketing issues. Moreover, the above excerpt elucidates the responsibility of the DMOs as a sustainable actor. Behind the unwillingness to market anything unsustainable lies perchance the sense of responsibility to not provide support to and to not spread awareness of any harmful activities that may endanger the common objective of aspiring a more sustainable future.

With respect to the DMOs’ attitudes towards tourism development, wise growth was pursued over exaggerative visions of development, respecting the particular qualities the destination is built upon.

We are strongly unanimous in that [our destination] is under no circumstances wanted to become a mass tourism destination in the future ... . Instead, (.) we proceed (.) on the terms of nature, sustainability and the local culture when developing the operations. (P2)

Discourse marker *instead* signifies the two diverse views in discourses. Mass tourism destinations are problematized with a strong negative statement including the aspect of *not wanting to become* and the affirming saying *under no circumstances*. Furthermore, the articulated *strong anonymity* phrases the utterance of the DMO as a common stance of the destination actors about the direction of tourism development in the destination. Similarly, another respondent points out the unwillingness to “never become an enormous center full of everything” (P1), problematizing the idea of a large destination aiming to serve everyone’s needs. Actually, becoming a big mass tourism center was considered perchance as one of the worst possible scenarios for the destination, indicated distinctly

with stark expressions of *never* and *under no circumstances*. Instead, tourism is intended to be retained as small-scale, clashing with the notion of mass tourism. This idea is supported by the proposition of Adamsson (2019, p. 12) of Finland as a niche market with potential in specializing rather than serving all possible tourist segments. Furthermore, the elements considered as incompatible with mass tourism are idealized in the accounts, such as nature, wilderness, local culture, sustainability, and uncrowdedness. The connection to the idealized values is established on the idea of mass and crowds, as these problematized aspects might force to compromise for instance the state of nature, wilderness and local culture, to the detriment of the ideal, sustainable conditions of the destination. The expression *proceed on the terms of* indicate the importance of nature and local culture to the DMO and idealize them as worth of preservation and consideration. Hence, ecological and sociocultural sustainability lie as fundamental values behind the objection to mass tourism. Therefore, not any kind of tourism and volume to the destination are targeted, thus the mere growth is not pursued as such. Instead, the values of sustainable development are fostered.

As discussed, luxury tourism can be accounted as one opposite alternative for mass tourism. One respondent points out it well: “Is it worthwhile to even try to regain it [mass tourism] anymore [after the COVID-19 pandemic] or is it better to grasp on this trend which is more high-class, and people are willing to pay for services?” (P5). The excerpt verbalizes the shift in mindsets about the idea of specialization instead of pursuing the mass production and services in the tourism context. The word *worthwhile* disputes the existing trends and customs in the tourism field in relation to increasing tourist volumes. Whereas the word *better* indicates a preferable alternative, another trend to pursue instead. Even though the fluctuating significance of the monetary affiliation in the luxury context has been discussed, it is one of the justifications for the shift from mass tourism towards high-class tourism in the passage. The denotation that *people are willing to pay* imply that income could still be gained by other means than serving masses. Tourism industry is a line of business after all, thus always including the monetary dimension on a certain level and providing livelihood for its actors. Hence, when contrasting mass tourism and high-class tourism, the notion of money can be discerned to be present in both tendencies, either through volume or through higher prices. Therefore, the argument as the fundament

of the respondent's question is not merely about money, but rather about the other advantages brought by luxury tourism in comparison to mass tourism.

Besides the attitudes of the DMOs themselves, also the attitudes of tourists were presumed to alter. Their behavior was deemed to evolve to request more responsible tourism products in the future, under the influence of both social impression and personal values. One of the respondents wondered when traveling to the other side of the world becomes a matter that one does not want to share in social media any longer. Indeed, beyond the unwillingness of sharing could lie the social pressure and social acceptability in terms of engaging with unsustainable activities such as traveling long distances by plane. Hence, the common perceptions and social influence have a great impact on the way tourism is assessed by individuals, resonating with their behavior. Thus, tourism is portrayed explicitly as a socially constructed system (see Pernecky, 2012). Besides the social influence, personal values behind the choices of tourists play a major role, as addressed in the following excerpt. "Luxury tourism will never cease to exist. On the contrary, (.) those people who can, will do it increasingly. Except if they... But it depends highly on their value system" (P3). The discourse markers *except* and *but* act as divisive words between two diverse discourses. The previous sentence suggests that the capability of doing something results in undoubtedly doing it, signaled with the expression *will do*, ignoring the other possible outcomes. However, on the contrary, the latter sentence disputes the first claim, proposing that traveling is actually a choice evaluated based on one's values. According to the respondents, nowadays the subjective understanding of luxury is opined to increasingly stem from the diverse motives of the tourists, which relate to the values appreciated by them. Probably everyone will not choose to travel merely due to the ability to afford it, but will rather act according to their own values and motivations.

Hence, as the notions of luxury change, the shift towards inner-directed motivations, as experiential/hedonic, instead of the outer-directed ones, as symbolic/expressive, may affect increasingly the traveling and consumption choices (see Iloranta, 2022; Tynan et al., 2010). For instance, the need to show social status through luxury traveling might decrease when more weight is put on other kind of values. A person may consider it more

motivating and pleasure-giving to be involved in contributing to something good. This is supported by the respondents:

Tourists appreciate the understanding of what is sustainable, and it evokes a good feeling to be part of the chain of sustainability. The feeling awoken in people is part of luxury, that ‘I am doing something good’. (P5)

Hence, luxury increasingly intertwines with the feeling of meaningfulness, for instance through the sustainable values (see Kapferer, 2015; Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019) which is a notable remark concerning tourism development. On the contrary, as noted by Harju-Myllyaho and Jutila (2021), tourism may as well appear as an unattractive type of consumerism for the conscious and educated world citizens due to the negative repercussions it may bear. Hence, even though the possibility to contribute to something good as a tourist may be valued, the whole concept of tourism may seem problematic for some, following the discussions with the sustainability issues with the respondents. However, Tarhanen (2019, p. 30) argues that in terms of luxury services, consumers may feel like making a good choice when selecting a particular service in case sustainability and responsibility are intrinsically fostered and well-communicated in the service provider’s operations. Hence, as the tourist behavior is deemed to be increasingly directed by motivations and values, alternative and possibly more responsible choices could be made in the future. Such choices may be connived with clear and truthful communication about the destination and its services, as retelling one of the interviewees, “without greenwashing”. Therefore, the attitudes towards luxury tourism are composed in both individual and social contexts, reflecting the subjective and social dimensions of the concepts of luxury and tourism.

## **4.2 The Finnish lifestyle as the basis for luxury**

Another main theme identified in the analysis of the interview accounts of the Lapland DMOs was *The Finnish lifestyle as the basis for luxury*. The theme explores the premises where the Finnish understanding of luxury could stem from, divided into sub-themes addressing nature as the element of luxury and the Finnish mentality. The notion of lifestyle is understood to encompass personal values, mentality, and behavior on the individual level but also more broadly on the communal scope, obtaining societal and cultural dimensions (see Veal, 1993). Furthermore, the human-nature relationship is seen

to pertain to lifestyle, especially in the Finnish context. Hence, several environmental, societal, and cultural aspects may have an influence behind the particular notion of luxury in the Finnish context.

#### **4.2.1 Nature as the element of luxury**

In almost all interview accounts, nature was emphasized as one of the prominent elements when describing luxury tourism in the destinations or more generally in Lapland and Finland. It was promoted by stating that “Nature is luxury” (P5) and “Nature indeed is the luxury value for us, through which we encapsulate our Lappish luxury” (P3). The abundant appearance of nature in the interview discussions with respect to luxury descriptions advocates the naturalization of nature as the fundamental value where luxury stems from in Lapland. The discourse markers such as *indeed*, *precisely*, and *truly* are applied to reinforce the relation between nature and luxury, as for instance in the following excerpt: “So our luxury services are perhaps involved precisely with (.) going to nature...” (P4). In the Finnish context, nature is indeed deemed as one of the backbones of luxury likewise by Iloranta (2019a, p. 5) and Adamsson (2019, p. 12). Hence, in order to emerge as a value vigorously attached to luxury in Finland, nature may be assumed to have strong roots in the Finnish lifestyle and the comprehension of human-nature relationship.

Indeed, the role of nature in the formation of Finnish national identity and culture has been momentous (see Pitkänen, Puhakka & Sawatzky, 2011; Sjöblom & Wolff, 2017). Taking a historical glance, the inherent connection of nature and forest to the Finnish cultural heritage is articulated in the national epic, the Kalevala, written back to the nineteenth century (Tillotson, Tassiello, Rome & Helaniemi, 2021, pp. 267, 271). Approaching the present-day conventions, the Finnish nature relationship may be partially shaped by everyman’s rights. The general public rights entitle everyone to roam and enjoy nature in Finland (Tuunanen, Tarasti & Rautiainen, 2015), making the access to nature less restricted for instance for recreational activities. Interestingly, the everyman’s rights as a term was not mentioned in the interviews as such, but the topic was addressed more implicitly, for instance through the accessibility of nature. Indeed, one of the respondents opined that luxurious experiences on wilderness trails should be available for everyone.

The stance reflects the collective rights to access and enjoy nature, regardless the possession of the land or the ability to pay. According to Kettunen and La Mela (2022), the concept of everyman's rights embeds values connected to national identity and cultural heritage. Thus, the customary general public rights could be seen to affect the mindsets behind the respondents' accounts, possibly taking a form of self-evidence in the cultural context. Moreover, the conventional idea of the general public rights of almost limitless access to nature dissociates the luxurious nature experiences from excessive commercialism but promotes the non-commercial nature of luxury instead. Indeed, for many Finns, nature may represent an environment to relax, revive, explore, and enjoy recreation which may occur both in commercial and non-commercial contexts.

Furthermore, the proximity and salience of nature is reflected through cherishing the features of wilderness in the interview accounts. The aspect of wilderness was addressed for instance through a metonym *in the middle of nowhere*, when describing luxurious attributes of the destinations. Hence, the expression was applied with a positive connotation, signaling an advantage and potential positive outcomes for instance in the form of peacefulness and uncrowdedness. Continuing with similar theme, even the term *desolate* was used with a positive purport, as it may likewise signify tranquility and decontamination of the destination. Thus, such attributes of a destination were idealized due to their deemed positive implications. However, as a downside, both expressions may evoke the image of Lapland for instance as a remote and deserted region with a negative implication. Tourism is asserted to discursively generate binaries, such as center/periphery or traditional/modern, consolidating the idea of "the other" (Caton & Santos, 2008). Hence, binary tensions could shape the understandings of the features of the Lappish destinations, such as central/remote in terms of the accessible location and abundant/scarse in relation to the selection of services and objects of interest. However, by cherishing the arctic wilderness as one of the central values and the fundamental essence of the destinations, the negative connotations may be turned into a benefit, reflecting the local identity and representing the special characteristics of Lapland that luxury likewise leans on.

### *Trend of urbanization*

The trend of urbanization is perceptible in Finland along with other Nordic and European countries (Parvinainen, 2015, pp. 449), which may engender conditions of people not being as connected with nature as formerly. As illustrated in the study of Turunen (2015, p. 58), the consumption context and situation affect the perceived uniqueness as one component of the consumers' experience of luxury. Consequently, in case of nature experiences not being a frequent part of one's life or "consumption" habits, nature and the experiences it provides might be perceived as unique and thus as luxurious, something above ordinary as an opposite to mundane. As described by one respondent, the beauty and uniqueness of the nature in Finland might be surprising even for Finns themselves, as observed along the increase of domestic travel due to COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, this account may indeed reflect the broader discourses of urbanization and the alienation from natural environments. While luxurious values are attached to nature by domestic tourists and actors, not to mention the level of value of uniqueness and luxury the nature may deliver to the international clientele with even further urbanized areas as their origins. Indeed, one respondent described the Arctic region as potential milieu for future luxury:

The megatrend of urbanization will progress increasingly, people are living in hot, dense, and polluted cities. So in a sense, we are luxurious in contrast to that with pure waters, berries, nature, air. (P4)

The discourse marker *in contrast to* signals two strands of discourse, juxtaposing urban environments and natural destinations. The living conditions in cities are problematized due to the alleged pollution and density of population and infrastructure escalated by increasing urbanization. Whereas the pure, natural elements are idealized as a preferable living environment. While the latter milieu is addressed as luxurious, the former environment is seen to represent a frank opposite to the idea of luxury. Furthermore, the passage creates dualism between us/them, by stating that *we are* luxurious due to the advisable qualities (us) whereas the urban environments are regarded as non-luxurious (them). Hence, Lapland is idealized as luxurious due to its more natural state in contrast to highly urbanized areas. As the urbanization is addressed as *a megatrend* and the verb *progress* is emphasized in the passage, this course is seen to continue in the future, rendering the polarization of the living conditions potentially even more significant. Even though the phenomenon of urbanization occurs in Finland as well, the urban environments

remain relatively small-scale in comparison to the international mega cities due to the low total population (see Kummu & Varis, 2011). Hence, the connection to nature may remain stronger when the access to nature also from the Finnish cities is commensurately effortless. However, in case the course of events engendered more tourism demand to the Arctic region, or the urbanization spread increasingly to encompass broader areas, the delicate Arctic nature may face challenges with tolerance.

However, despite of the trend of urbanization, one of the components sustaining the intense connection between human and forest in Finland is the summer cottage and sauna culture (Parviainen, 2015, p. 450). These aspects tie also the urbanized lifestyles to a more natural environment and recreation in the nature. Indeed, the findings of Tillotson et al. (2021, p. 271) depict sauna as a place for restoring balance midst the stressful urban life and reinforcing the connection between nature and human. Moreover, the revitalizing qualities attached to nature actuate people to visit summer cottages to experience natural and ecological values of life (Pitkänen et al., 2011). Hence, even though the population is increasingly urbanizing, there are common elements connected to the Finnish lifestyle and traditions that may foster the human-nature relationship. Once the restorative and revitalizing effects of summer cottages and sauna have been recognized, the connection between nature and well-being on a larger scope cannot be left unnoted. Certainly, the positive influence of natural environments on well-being is widely recognized, and is studied to ameliorate the feelings of restoration, stress relief and vitality of urban inhabitants (Tyrväinen, Ojala et al., 2014). The findings of Helne (2022) indicate that among the young Finnish adults, nature is opined to contribute remarkably to individual's well-being, especially on psychological and emotional level. In the interview accounts, well-being was seen as one pivotal element of the modern notion of luxury, as well as one of the competitive factors of Lapland in terms of motivating luxury elements. Moreover, several studies support the significance of well-being in luxury tourism (see Iloranta, 2019a; Iloranta, 2021; Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019; Yeoman, 2011). Thus, the potential of well-being in luxury tourism context could be seen to stem considerably from nature, as they both intertwine to the notion of luxury in the Lappish context. According to the interview accounts, the increasing demand and the need of development were recognized in terms of well-being related luxury offering, such as sauna and ice swimming services and facilities. Well-being services were deemed to pertain particularly to the

novel notion of luxury, and Finland was reckoned to have a major potential in terms of the trend that would merely require a greater level of productization.

### *Naturalness and pristine nature*

The features of naturalness and wilderness were highlighted when describing the destinations, and contrasted them to the features of “enormous centers full of everything” (P1). The latter was problematized by depicting it as something that “we never want our destination to become” (P1), a negative denotation emphasized with *never*. With the discourse marker *but* the undesirable vision was opposed to the idealized, advisable insight of a natural destination with small-scale tourism operations. The small-scale form of tourism was not indeed reckoned as a disadvantage but rather as a prerequisite to support the preservation of the qualities of naturalness, wilderness, and pristine nature of the destination. The intense increase of tourism in Lapland and thus the concern of sustainable and controllable growth have been recognized in the region (Regional Council of Lapland, 2019, p. 27). Even though the issue of potential restrictions of tourism flows to protect the environmental and cultural qualities were not addressed distinctly as such in the interviews, the ideas behind the discourses of small-scale tourism and the wise growth of tourism seems to aim for similar outcome without extreme restrictive measures.

Furthermore, the advantages of a natural destination were justified by presenting facts (see Äijälä, 2016, p. 13) to support its relation to luxury: “But nowadays, it is certainly luxury to have only 0,6 persons per square kilometer ((laugh)), it is rather rare in many places around the world” (P1). Indeed, Lapland is relatively sparsely inhabited as the region covers one third of the total area of the country but merely slightly over 3 % of the total population (Statistics Finland, 2020b). The expression of tense, *nowadays*, may refer to the distinction between the past and the present with respect to the scarce population. In other words, how the features perchance hitherto related to peripheries and even to underdevelopment issues from the touristic perspective have today gained desirable and luxurious forms. The laugh of the respondent could indeed indicate the reaction towards the aforementioned turn, reflecting the adaptation of the local actors from the previously prevailing stance into the comprehension of the developing global outlooks and the advantages they might entail. Along with the present tense and the reference to the rarity

of low number of people arises the notion of continuum, to which direction the circumstances are evolving from here. Therefore, the broader urbanization discourse could be discerned to affect beyond the account of the respondent, reflecting its influence on the perceptions of luxury in the course of time. Moreover, when taking along the discussion of the importance of nature and wilderness in the destination, the naturalness discourse can be recognized to run beside the urbanization discourse. Even though the qualities of a natural environment might have been commonplace within the mindsets and operations in the destination for long, the importance of its conservation could be increasingly recognized along the augmentative level of urbanization, thus rationalizing the promotion of naturalness discourse within the interview accounts.

According to the interviewees, nature in the destinations is described as pristine but coterminally accessible. After Äijälä (2016, p. 13), this account can be construed to lean on cultural understandings where nature is considered as pristine despite of the signs engendered by humans. Nonetheless, when nature is accessible for people, human traces left behind are inevitable the greater the volume gets. Indeed, the boreal forests covering a major part of Finland are virtually all impacted by human activity, leaving original forests infrequently represented (Parvinainen, 2015, pp. 445, 449). Therefore, the question of the turning point evokes. When would the line be crossed that nature was not considered pristine and authentic any longer? Furthermore, which would be the repercussions to luxury with nature being one of the core values of luxury in the Finnish context? When approaching the issue through the concept of authenticity, it may be assimilated to the concept of luxury in a sense that they both are socially constructed concepts. Therefore, both service providers' and consumers' perceptions of authenticity affect the social construction and the interpretations of the concept (Turunen, 2015, pp. 57, 62), the aforementioned agents representing tourism actors and tourists in the context of this study. Pretes (1995) provides an example of the Santa Claus Village in Rovaniemi, where the perceived authenticity stems from its symbolic relation to the idea of Christmas and Santa Claus. Hence, even though the whole idea of Santa Claus construed as authentic might occur as a disputed topic, the notion of authenticity can have various levels and be interpreted from diverse, even discordant perspectives. Thus, even an environment or experience considered non-pristine and unreal by the locals might be interpreted by tourists as getting to explore the real and authentic side of the destination. Hence, the

repercussions of the nature becoming less pristine and authentic might not affect the tourists' luxury thinking imminently.

Undoubtedly, the alterations in nature could be argued to have an impact on Finnish lifestyles, human-nature relationships, as well as the impressions of the nation and country. As can be evinced by the interview accounts and the literature, nature is a strong value behind the national identity and the Finnish luxury offering. A strong nature connectedness is argued to have an affiliation to rising consciousness and responsible behavior towards the planet in the Finnish context (Helne, 2022). Furthermore, along with the everyman's rights to wander, the responsibilities are entailed with the rights as well, thus postulating that no damage is caused to nature on account of the access to nature (Parviainen, 2015, p. 449). Hence, the nature wanderer is equipped with certain responsibility in order to claim the rights to access and explore the nature. Respectful behavior towards nature is thus stipulated. The representatives of the DMOs expressed their endeavors and responsibility in terms of guiding the tourists' awareness and behavior to be in line with the nationwide policies. Hence, besides the responsibility of the individual tourists, the DMOs as central tourism actors in the destinations were regarded as salient parties to spread the consciousness and getting other actors involved in responsible acts as well.

#### **4.2.2 Finnish mentality**

Besides the environmental and societal factors, Finnish mentality could be seen to affect the understanding of luxury in the Finnish context. Realistic discourse can be identified to influence the accounts of the respondents, bringing forth the deemed realities, perceptions and empirical facts of a certain situation (Suoninen, 2016b). The issues were not embellished but described as they were seen in reality. In various accounts, expression such as "We are not competitive (.) in that kind of ... material things..." (P6), "We cannot necessarily compete with ... Michelin-starred restaurants..." (P4), and "It is absolutely pointless for Finland to try to compete with Middle East for instance" (P5) evidence the impression of the putative limits set up for the operations of the actors in Lapland and in Finland in the luxury context. The opinions are rather stark, as verbalized in a declarative manner of speaking, ruling out other possible positions. The frank, far from an

embellishing manner of speaking may stem from the straightforward style of communicating which is traditionally seen as typical for Finns (see Granlund & Lukka, 1998). Hence, the Lappish destination's positions in the luxury field are considered relatively undisputed and self-evident.

Certain humbleness could be seen to inhere in the Finnish mentality, as observable in the realistic discourse above in terms of the modest way of accepting the reported limits for operating in the luxury tourism setting. In the interview accounts, luxury offering in a Finnish way was described to be relatively modest. Moreover, Finns are typically accounted as modest consumers and boasting is not accounted as acceptable behavior (Turunen, 2015, p. 34). The humble mindset may have an effect on how the luxury offering is articulated. Furthermore, the characteristic behavior of domestic and international luxury tourists were not considered identical by the respondents, and the domestic outdoor-oriented tourists' accommodation habits were described as cost-saving, favoring to sleep in a tent. Thus, the non-commercial aspect of luxury tourism may play a major role for the domestic tourists. These behavioral patterns rooted in the national identity may partially stem from the values that can be related to Finnish mentality and lifestyle. The non-commercial aspects of luxury can connect strongly for instance in one's personal life (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019), thus associating to personal lifestyles.

One respondent encapsulates one dimension of the relation of humbleness and luxury in the Finnish context as follows: "Because of the modesty and humbleness of Finns, we also have this funny concept of everyday luxury" (P4). Everyday luxury is seen as one of the forms of luxury that Finns seek the most which could include for instance an experience in a cozy and peaceful environment at summer cottage, shared with the loved ones. The words *everyday* and *luxury* can typically be seen as conflicting terms. Indeed, the word *funny* applied in the excerpt may indicate the peculiarity of the composition of the terms. *Everyday* refers to something mundane whereas the traditional meanings associated to luxury include characteristics such as unique and rare (see Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019). Turunen (2015, pp. 47–48) states that everyday luxury is reachable, and it furnishes the ordinariness with elements of specialty and value. Hence, everyday luxury may be accounted as modest and closer to quotidian in comparison to higher-level luxury. In the

interview accounts, both tendencies of everyday luxury and higher-level luxury were portrayed in the context of Lappish destinations. Hence, it is relevant to note that even though a peaceful time spent in the summer cottage may represent everyday luxury for Finns, for a foreign tourist it might be a luxury experience above the quotidian. As stated by one of the respondents, “If you have the right target group, even the small, true Finnish summer cottage somewhere by a lake can be luxurious” (P3). The extract illustrates the idea of the ordinariness of one turning into the uniqueness of other, highlighted with the word *even*. The account reveals again the various layers and the subjective nature of luxury, its attached meanings being constructed differently depending on the personal, social, and cultural contexts of an individual or a certain tourist segment in question.

Besides addressing the suitability for luxury tourism through realistic discourse, the strengths of the destinations were recognized, as demonstrated in the following extract: “But in [our destination], maybe it (.) fulfills with our offering, and we do not even try to aim (.) for the objectives of international luxury tourism in a sense” (P1). The account reflects again certain humbleness in a form of recognizing the realities of the position of the destination, and being content with them. No ambitious intentions to pursue “international luxury” were expressed, rather vice versa, as articulated by the utterance *not even trying to aim for*. Instead, the utterances such as *but our luxury is* assertively indicated that despite of the definition of luxury applicable somewhere else, in *our* terms it may be something different. It was pointed out that despite of the paucity of traditional luxury services in the destination, different kind of things were desired to be emphasized instead. According to Iloranta (2019a), the destination’s own strengths are grounded on cultural and societal values which form the base for Finnish luxury, potentially rendering luxury to seem simpler compared to the classic understanding of luxury. Indeed, even though luxury in the Lappish context was not depicted literally as *simple* in the interview accounts, it was contrasted to *massive* and *demanding* luxury, which referred to something more complex in the international luxury context. Therefore, a sense of pride may be observed to balance the humbleness, pride of *our offering*, and how it meets the luxury demand as it stands. Hence, the sense of pride reflects an optimistic discourse that runs beside the realistic discourse in the respondents’ accounts.

Even though it was stated that the distinctly discernible luxury tourism is very small-scale in some of the destinations, also counterarguments were presented for this stance. “We do have (.) all the elements for successful luxury tourism. So Finland (.) should be proud of that, especially Lapland” (P3). Hence, despite of the reported lack of the traditional luxury tourism services, the peculiar elements of Lapland were seen exceedingly sufficient and proper for a thriving luxury tourism industry, thus been addressed through an optimistic discourse. The quantifying expression *all* signals full confidence in the luxury offering of Lapland. However, the expression *should be proud* could indicate that pride and confidence with respect to luxury tourism was not yet assumed to be a common feeling amongst the actors in Lapland. Perchance, it could stem from the abovesaid modest mentality of the Finnish people that the realities were more keenly stressed over the laudable aspects. Nevertheless, in the scale of whole Finland, Lapland was promoted to possess the leading edge (along with the capital city Helsinki as noted in the subsequent section in the interview) in comparison to other regions. Hence, the feeling of pride can be observed to evoke on the national, but also on regional and local levels.

The applicability of Finland as a luxury tourism destination was justified by presenting facts (see Äijälä, 2016, p. 13), referring to research indicating that the position of Finland and Lapland in the luxury field is not within the material things but rather within motivating luxury elements, such as well-being and happiness. Furthermore, the fact of Finland being selected as the happiest country in the world was provided to support the first proposition. The aforementioned fact is based on the World Happiness Report 2022 where Finland occupied the top position fifth year in a row (Helliwell, Wang, Huang & Norton, 2022). The results of the most recent report are based on the Gallup World Poll surveys from 2019 and 2021 which included six key factors related to life evaluation: life expectancy, levels of GDP, social support, corruption, freedom, and generosity (Helliwell et al., 2022). Hence, these aspects can be seen to interconnect for instance with the stability, support, and safety of the society which were considered as advantages by the interview respondents as well. Moreover, these were seen as essential aspects to be communicated to the tourists as they may indubitably provide a competitive edge for the tourism destinations. To conclude, the ability to appreciate little things in the quotidian life for instance through everyday luxury could denote about humbleness but moreover, it could have a connection to the position as the happiest country in the world.

### 4.3 Visit Finland guidebook: What is Finnish luxury tourism?

This section focuses on analyzing the findings of the guidebook “What is Finnish luxury tourism?” (originally in Finnish, “Mitä on suomalainen luksusmatkailu?”) produced by the national tourist board Visit Finland (Adamsson et al., 2019). The findings of this section include a light conversation with the findings of the interviews of local DMOs in Lapland in order to cultivate the discussion between the two forms of data.

When describing the strengths of Finland as a luxury tourism destination and the factors forming the basis of Finnish notion of luxury, features related to nature, such as natural environment, landscapes, and natural phenomena were considerably promoted in the guidebook. Nature and authenticity were seen as the fundamental elements for Finnish luxury to stem from when major weight was put on the Finnish origins and the stories cultivated from it. The natural elements as the components of luxury were idealized through the use of positively tuned adjectives, such as *pure* air and nature, *breath-taking* landscapes, *distinct* seasons, and *unique* natural phenomena. Describing Finnish nature-based luxury through the abovesaid elements may be seen to interrelate with the Nordic location and climate, representing typical type of nature in Nordic circumstances and engendering particular natural phenomena, such as the northern lights. Moreover, as the Northern latitudes are less densely inhabited in comparison to the latitudes closer to the equator (Kummu & Varis, 2011), the presence of nature and its pure state become increasingly plausible in comparison to highly urbanized environments. The natural wonders were described with the metonym of *horn of plenty* which symbolizes the abundant supply nature provides in its numerous forms. Similar tendency of describing the strengths of Lapland through natural elements was perceptible in the interview accounts and was considered to ground the notion of Lappish luxury. However, the respondents did not emphasize Finnish stories and storytelling as the component of luxury experience as much as the national guidebook did, apart from one participant. It could indeed be a way to bring the Finnish origins more to light and make the experience more holistic and meaningful (see Iloranta, 2019a). All in all, such ways of description aim to compose a favorable and attractive image of Finland as a destination connected with nature but also as suitable for luxury tourism due to these factors in particular.

As an opposite to the idealized naturalness, the features related to metropolis and big cities, such as hustle and bad air quality, were problematized briefly in the guidebook in contradiction to the connectedness to nature. Hence, dualism was generated between the environment being natural/constructed, thus engendering positive/negative consequences for humankind, portraying Finland in a positive light due to the natural features. Similarly, megacities and excessively urbanized environments were contrasted to natural environments by the DMOs, thus constructing an image of Lapland as luxurious due to its more natural state. Indeed, the interest towards and the appeal of Northern Europe and the Arctic region were deemed to increase by both the national guidebook and the Lapland DMOs. The values associated to luxury in the guidebook included for instance spaciousness, peace of mind, and health which may have an established connection to natural environment, tranquility, and well-being. The megatrend focusing on health and well-being was deemed to influence the behavior of consumers to ameliorate their quality of life. The role of sauna as part of Finnish luxury was foregrounded in the national guidebook, especially as an element of a holistic well-being experience. Hence, Finland was portrayed as a suitable destination for contributing to a holistic well-being which is nowadays considered to be one of the essential elements of luxury tourism (see Iloranta, 2019a; Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019; Yeoman, 2011). The significance of sauna was not equally promoted in the interview accounts, but it was present through the discussion of well-being as the element of luxury tourism, regardless.

The difference was noted in the guidebook between classic luxury mindset and the essence of luxury in Finland. It was stated that Finnish tourism destinations and hotels are not able to offer classic luxury services with sumptuous top starred rating. The statement brings forth the realistic discourse representing the deemed realities and empirical facts (see Suoninen, 2016b), through which the traditional luxury features were problematized as not applicable in the Finnish context. The utterance denying the feasibility in a declarative, indisputable manner disclosed the prevalent assessment of the alleged limits defining the operators in the Finnish luxury tourism field in a unifying manner. The national utterance is in line with some of the accounts emergent in the interviews with the Lappish DMOs, leaving the Finnish and Lappish destinations' positions within the luxury field rather irrefutable with respect to the traditional form of luxury. However, despite of the

declarative and negative form of sentence depicting the limitations regarding the tourism destinations, the discourse signals the national level stance about the Finnish strengths resting on other kind of values.

The expression *instead of* introduces a comparing stance to the classic luxury in the guidebook. The term *Nordic luxury* was introduced to culminate the idea of a novel and perhaps even pristine northern luxury culture as an alternative for the already experienced destinations like Monaco, Nizza and Bali, thus juxtaposing the two distinct orientations. Through the terms of *pristine* and *already experienced*, representing the aspects of novelty and familiarity, the term *Nordic* is equipped with positive affiliation, reflecting the peculiar nature of luxury with unprecedented and intriguing elements worthwhile to explore. Thus, through the aforesaid features, Nordic luxury, and thus Finland as a luxury tourism destination, was idealized in the account in comparison to the classic form of luxury. Furthermore, simplicity was appreciated over the complex and voluminous luxury gleam, supported by the findings of the study of Iloranta (2019a). Simplicity as a concept was not as discernible in the interviews as in the guidebook. However, luxury in the Lappish context was described by some respondents as rather small-scale and modest, and it was contrasted to *massive* and *demanding* international luxury, reflecting the favoring of simpler values over excessive opulence. As stated in the guidebook as well, “small is beautiful”, and the small-scale premium and luxury business was deemed to grow. According to the guidebook, Finland was considered as niche market, and domestic luxury tourism was deemed to be and remain as niche business. Therefore, it was seen essential to specialize as a market. As framed by one of the interviewed DMOs, perhaps the trend of high-class tourism would be worth pursuing rather than trying to regain mass tourism after the standstill caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, a parallel idea of the potential of luxury tourism was recognized both on national and local level, to specialize to certain tourism segments rather than to engage with mass tourism.

Furthermore, the current and future Finnish destinations were seen to respond to values such as responsibility, transparency, and hospitality design, according to the guidebook. The aforesaid values were idealized as significant due to their existence not only in the present time but also predictably in the future. Sustainability and responsibility are indeed

significant values intertwining with luxury and luxury tourism (see Hennings et al., 2013; Iloranta, 2019b; Kapferer, 2010; Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2015; Yeoman, 2011), and responsible business engaging in sustainable development principles was recognized as inseparable part of new luxury in the guidebook as well. Many of the DMO representatives shared the same stance, underscoring the significance of sustainable development in all tourism business in the destinations. However, as discussed earlier, the compatibility of luxury tourism and sustainability was regarded a complicated and multifaceted issue by the respondents, reflecting both of the complementary and problematic sides of the matter. The connection of luxury tourism and sustainability problems were not addressed in the guidebook as such, and traditional luxury was not judged unsustainable as clearly as in the interviews. However, the connection of new luxury to sustainability was emphasized, thus tacitly suggesting the classic view to fall behind in terms of sustainability. In terms of tourist behavior and attitudes, it was deemed in the guidebook that the traits of consciousness and criticality, as well as the ecological and ethical concerns will occur among the luxury tourists. The view is supported by the local DMOs who highlighted the social influence and personal values that will affect the pursue of more responsible tourism services, and shifting being guided by the inner-directed motivations rather than outer-directed ones (see Iloranta, 2022; Tynan et al., 2010). Therefore, sustainable tourism could be deemed to obtain bigger role in luxury tourism also due to the shifts in demand.

The monetary aspect was markedly present as an element of luxury in the guidebook. Words such as *wealthy*, *elite*, *purchase power*, and *rich* were used to describe the luxury tourists and their characteristics. Moreover, when the price level of luxury services was addressed, it was often depicted by expressions such as *high prices*, *upper-level pricing*, and *greater price requests*. The depictions correspond views that emerged among the interview accounts as well, without actually disputing the connection between luxury and the features of expensiveness and possession of wealth. Despite of the claim of the classic role of monetary value to decrease in the luxury context (Yeoman, 2011) and despite of describing other values entailed in luxury, the monetary affiliation was still substantially present in the guidebook, reflecting the classic significance of wealth. More variation was observable among the interview accounts, as some of the DMOs advocated the decreasing importance of the monetary dimension as the determinant of luxury. In the guidebook

however, when addressing the wealth of tourists, the middle class was often brought into discussion, reflecting the democratization of luxury in becoming available for wider clientele (see Cristini et al., 2017; Roper et al., 2013). Hence, luxury was recognized to become increasingly accessible in comparison to the past both on the national and local levels, regardless the disparity on the emphasis of the monetary significance.

However, the non-commercial orientation of luxury was approached briefly in the guidebook through the concept of everyday luxury (see Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019; Turunen, 2015), thus providing a counter stance to the discussion in the previous paragraph. The national stand argued that the new notion of luxury verges on a step closer to ordinariness for instance through the valuation of free time enabling relaxation, in the form of immersing oneself in a good book, for instance. Therefore, the conveyed message suggests that luxurious experience does not necessarily require monetary investment, but a stronger link is established rather to other personal values, such as time for oneself midst the hectic working life. Similarly, in the luxury perceptions of the Lappish DMOs, for instance the intangible, non-commercial elements of purity, naturalness and tranquility were valued, and the peaceful quality time with loved ones representing everyday luxury moments were articulated. Thus, the non-commercial dimension of luxury intertwined with the commercial one in a certain balance. Even though the dimension of everyday luxury was less discernible in the guidebook than the monetary tendency, both layers of luxury were recognized to exist and to complete each other.

In the guidebook, tourists were described to travel to *the back end of the North* when visiting Finland. The location of Finland per se was not actually addressed in the context, but the expression was applied rather as a substitutive term for the country. Certainly, *the North* may be a constituent of the national identity and the sense of community due to the northern location and northern conditions with their peculiarities, thus representing a relatively natural expression stabilizing in the use of language. However, as similarly noted in relation to the expression *in the middle of nowhere* within the interview accounts, *the back end of the North* may as well cultivate a negative connotation of the destination being remote and challenging to reach, thus possibly creating binaries between center/periphery and north/south, for instance (see Caton & Santos, 2008). As discussed

concerning the findings of the interview accounts, even though easy and challenging accessibility may both have their place in luxury tourism, challenging accessibility was not seen to particularly increase the luxurious appeal of the destinations in Lapland. Nevertheless, when fostering the northern status as part of the local identity and as an element of the foundation for the destinations and their particular characteristics for luxury to stem from, the negative associations may become undermined.

Various attributes related to the Finnish society and nation were introduced in the guidebook to construe an interpretation of Finns' typical relation to luxury. For instance, the notion of luxury was stated to be rather distant in democratic countries, and the habit of not showing off wealth was seen to rest on the premise of equality. From the fundamental presuppositions as the rule of the people, democracy was seen as an equal form of government and contributing to equality among citizens (Wilson, 2019, p. 2). Despite of not being explicitly uttered in the guidebook, another governmental aspect promoting equality is the procedures of a welfare state, for instance by providing social security for citizens and evening the income differences through taxation (Kananen, 2014). Furthermore, both of these societal aspects may connect to the notion of safety which emerged in the guidebook multiple times, and is noted also by Iloranta (2019a) as an element of luxury experience in the Finnish context. In the guidebook, safety represented a prerequisite and element of quality for a luxury experience, as well as a characteristic and a selling point for Finland as a luxury tourism destination. The significance of safety was equally recognized within the interview accounts, and some respondents associated it to be founded on the national aspects, such as the stability of the society. Hence, the Finnish relationship to luxury was approached through a realistic discourse (see Suoninen, 2016b) leaning on the societal aspects of the nation. Moreover, the classically discriminating nature of luxury (see Kapferer, 2010) was disputed by some DMOs in terms of present-day luxury, and the pursuit of increasingly equal attainability of luxury may indeed stem from the societal conventions of supporting the egalitarian circumstances. Thus, the societal aspects may likewise affect the Finnish outlooks on life, and further on luxury, through the social and cultural contexts, concurrently constructing Finnish tourism destinations with convenient qualities.

The consumption of Finns was described as rational in the guidebook, and the traditional luxury material has been considered somehow pointless. The passage thus problematizes material luxury consumption as unnecessary and redundant, as signaled by the word *pointless*. The rationality discourse enclosing the notion of consumption portrays Finns as reasonable consumers with feet on the ground and not indulging to buy commodities judged as superfluous and needless. Precisely, the stance is supported by the impression of Finns as modest consumers typically keeping quiet than boasting about their consumption habits (Turunen, 2015, p. 34). Whereas the material consumption was regarded inconvenient, the experiential nature of luxury could gain its ground, idealizing the modern stance of luxury in the Finnish context. In the interview accounts, the modesty and humbleness of Finns was associated to the fairly modest Finnish luxury offering and the application of the concept of everyday luxury. Hence, it could be noted that the way we see ourselves as Finns is reflected to the mediation of Finnish style of luxury. Hence, according to both national and local reckonings, the modest lifestyle of Finns was deemed to establish the foundation for the Finnish understanding of and attitude towards luxury.

Regardless the above addressed characteristic of modesty, pride over the Finnish style of luxury tourism offering was perceptible in the guidebook. It was stated that a delightful number of luxury tourism related products are already available in Finland. The view indicates the approved direction of the development of the luxury tourism field in the country. Undoubtedly, the idealization of plentiful natural elements as luxurious factors reflects the pride over the experiences the Finnish environment and nature enable, also applicable in the luxury context. Furthermore, even though it is rather bluntly stated that Finland is not traditionally considered as a classic luxury tourism destination, the negative tone was outshined by the belief in the excellent potential to cultivate luxury services and meaningful experiences, nonetheless. The pride and confidence of the peculiar luxury elements were equally identifiable in the interview accounts, emphasizing the suitability of Lapland for a successful luxury tourism destination. Indeed, the confidence on the Lappish qualities mitigates the need to pursue the international type of luxury when the notion of luxury may be established on the strengths of the destinations.

## 5 Discussion and conclusion

It is deemed that Lapland does not represent a destination classically categorized as the most fitting for luxury tourism. Regardless, Lapland is socially and discursively constructed as a luxury tourism destination in plentiful ways, constituting a peculiar and multifaceted entity, by six destination management organizations operating in the Lappish destinations. The construction is affected by diverse discourses that entwine, collide, and coexist within and around luxury tourism, shaping the phenomenon in various ways. Together with the views derived from the guidebook of Finnish luxury tourism produced by the national tourist board Visit Finland (Adamsson et al., 2019), a certain kind of understanding of luxury tourism in the Lappish and Finnish setting may be articulated.

This Master's thesis aimed to increase understanding of luxury as a social phenomenon and of the circumstances regarding sustainable and accessible luxury tourism development in Lapland. Therefore, the main objectives of the study included gaining an understanding of how luxury, sustainability, and accessibility are perceived to interlock in the tourism field in Lapland, and of how the phenomenon of sustainable and accessible luxury tourism is socially and discursively constructed by the DMOs. In this chapter, the research questions of the study become answered. The main research question, **“How is sustainable luxury tourism perceived by the DMOs in Lapland?”**, is addressed gradually through the sub-questions. The understanding of the phenomenon of sustainable luxury tourism is created through the discussion of the main findings of two sets of empirical data, the interviews of the local actors and the national level guidebook. Therefore, the intention is to create an overview of the phenomenon including both local and national level perspectives in order to produce a more comprehensive outlook in the Finnish context.

Indeed, in the accounts of the Lappish DMOs, the phenomenon of luxury tourism is shaped by various discourses which intertwine, conflict, and run side by side. Hence, the first sub-question to be addressed aiming to unravel the research problem was **“How different discourses shape luxury tourism?”**. The main thematical discourses shaping luxury tourism and connecting to broader social and cultural contexts identified in the study include the discourse of change, the naturalness discourse, and the responsibility

discourse. The two discourses related to change and naturalness are addressed first, while the third discourse concerning responsibility is discussed on a deeper level along with the second research sub-question.

The discourse of change was definitely one of the major thematical discourses weaving among the research phenomena, themes and smaller discourses appearing in the study. The change becomes the most perceptible through the altering characteristics attached to the meaning of luxury as well as the changing attitudes towards luxury tourism. The following excerpt indicates clearly the changing nature of luxury: “It is definitely not a [brand] purse anymore but it certainly is about authentic experiences with high service level” (P5). Hence, certain kind of transformation process of luxury is unquestionably observable. Precisely, the understanding of luxury alters along time, subjectivity, and lifestyles, among other things (Iloranta, 2019a). Principally, the traditional type of luxury was problematized by the interviewees for being more unsustainable due to its relative connection to material and consumption. Whereas the modern view of luxury was more commonly associated to sustainability for its experiential nature and for cherishing intangible values. In the guidebook, traditional luxury was not judged as unsustainable as clearly in comparison to the interviews. However, the connection of new luxury to sustainability was emphasized, thus tacitly suggesting the classic view to fall behind in the matter. Hence, the discourse of change merged substantially with the responsibility discourse, stressing the importance of sustainability in the luxury context. Moreover, luxury tourism in the Lappish destinations was chiefly associated to the new type of luxury, concurrently promoting the sustainable form of luxury tourism in the destinations as well. Furthermore, the interviewees and the guidebook both notified the broadening of the luxury clientele, thus signaling the discourse of the democratization of luxury (see Cristini et al., 2017; Roper et al., 2013) which likewise reflects the changing nature of luxury through becoming more widely available.

Nevertheless, despite of telling apart the notions of new and classic luxury, and the applicability of Lapland rather to the former category, the elements of traditional luxury were present in the interviews to some extent. Not all participants considered traditional luxury elements equally undesirable but rather as valid under certain circumstances.

Therefore, it may be noted that the forms of luxury are not plainly distinct, but they may also merge and coexist. For instance, high service level was opined to remain a unitive element between the modern and traditional stances (see Iloranta, 2019a, p. 6).

Furthermore, when taking a broader glance outside the Finnish context, it may be suggested that the nature of luxury is probably not facing a complete transformation and ought not be addressed bluntly as *new* or *old* in the literal sense, symbolizing the concepts as valid or outdated. Instead, the notion of luxury is rather expanding to take manifold forms, depending on the context it takes place on and the subjects assessing it.

Besides the meanings attached to luxury itself, also the attitudes towards luxury tourism alter as signaled within the discourse of change. Instead of social display and conspicuous consumption (see Thomsen et al., 2020), the notion of luxury was seen to increasingly follow a trend of less visible, inconspicuous form (see Iloranta, 2019a) amongst the interviewees. Such a change in luxury market could reportedly affiliate with the overall changing attitudes towards luxury, tourism, and consumption as a result of the condition of the planet. Indeed, in the interviews, tourists' behavior was anticipated to increasingly shift from showing social status to pursuing differing values, such as meaningfulness sought through sustainable values (see Kapferer, 2015; Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019). The tendency was recognized in the guidebook as well, reckoning the traits of consciousness and criticality, as well as the ecological and ethical concerns to inhere in luxury tourism. Therefore, luxury appears in both subjective and social levels, the tourist behavior and choices being influenced by personal values and motivations as well as the social acceptability. For the DMOs describing luxury tourism offering in Lapland less visible and extravagant, it may follow the trend of inconspicuousness and appeal to the values of meaningfulness rather than social display. Through the entanglement of discourse of change and responsibility discourse, luxury appears as a social construct that transforms according to the current times, personal values, and social behavior.

Furthermore, the DMOs' attitudes towards luxury tourism may be under constant evolution as well. Sustainability was fostered as such a pivotal value that the DMOs did not necessarily want to market something that is not sustainable, thus reflecting the rights, responsibility, and power the DMOs possess in the destinations in terms of tourism

marketing, for instance. Based on the interviews, the DMOs seemed to be highly committed on sustainable tourism development. Therefore, it was found uncertain how to react for instance to new transportation connections, as the matter reflects the clash between increasing accessibility as an advantage for the destination and detracted ecological sustainability through the growing emissions. Hence, the matter is complicated and generates pressure for the tourism destinations. Moreover, within the context of sustainability, the collision occurs between the social and economic dimensions versus the ecological scope, in terms of tourism flows, income and employment versus the tolerance of the delicate arctic nature. Hence, one of the main discourses discovered in the study, responsible discourse, seems to have a strong influence on both tourism actors and tourists attitudes in the expansion of the notion of luxury.

Another main thematical discourse, naturalness discourse was present in the analysis on multiple levels. Both the local views of Lapland and the national outlook offered by the guidebook of Visit Finland promoted nature as one of the core elements of luxury and the foundation where Finnish luxury stems from. The excerpt “Nature indeed is the luxury value for us, through which we encapsulate our Lappish luxury” (P3) elucidates explicitly the signification of nature in the Lappish context. Indeed, nature is an intrinsic part of the cultural heritage, national identity and general public rights in Finland (see Kettunen & La Mela, 2022; Pitkänen et al., 2011; Sjöblom & Wolff, 2017), thus explaining the nature-based luxury stemming from the cultural, societal, and environmental qualities. Nature may indeed form a constituent of Finnishness through lifestyles, identities, human-nature relationships, well-being, and recreation, inter alia.

Naturalness discourse possessed a rather prevalent outlook in terms of tourism development, as the features of a natural destination with a relatively small-scale tourism operations were emphasized by several respondents. Small-scale and simple luxury was favored in the national guidebook as well. The small-scale activity was not regarded as a drawback but rather as a requisite to support the conservation of the qualities of naturalness, wilderness, and pristine nature of the destinations. Indeed, Cerović et al. (2019, p. 184) have recognized the potential for rural destinations to benefit the aspects of unspoiled nature, authenticity and the back-to-the roots idea in tourism through innovative

solutions. Thus, focusing on the strengths of the destinations including the natural and cultural elements of Lapland, luxury tourism may indeed be composed around the authentic and simple offering, without a compulsion to reach for overly sumptuous and gleaming form of luxury. Drawing from the macro social discourses (see Roper et al., 2013), it could be conveyed that excessive artificialness and commercialism could pose a threat for authenticity. Thus, they could menace luxury as well, as authenticity and nature were considered one of the core elements of luxury and one of the strengths of the destinations in Finland. Hence, naturalness discourse intertwined with responsible discourse through the respectful attitudes towards nature, for nature being one of the major characteristics of the destinations but also forming the basis for various forms of tourism business in Lapland (see Tyrväinen, Uusitalo et. al, 2014). Thus, the naturalness and responsible discourses go much hand in hand, circulating in the contexts of luxury tourism and sustainable tourism.

Furthermore, naturalness discourse was stressed through the urbanization discourse. Urbanization was considered a threat for naturalness, however, currently turning into an advantage for Lapland and also Finland on the national level. Namely, along with the ongoing trend of urbanization and the increasingly dwindling connectedness between human and nature, Lapland was deemed to become an increasingly attractive and unique destination in the interview accounts due to its contiguity with nature and the predominance of natural elements. Indeed, less densely populated and less polluted Nordic and Arctic environments were seen as future luxury, entwining the urbanization and naturalness discourses to the discourse of change in the temporal dimension. Similarly, the interest towards Northern Europe was deemed to increase according to the guidebook. However, sustainable tourism discourse becomes entangled as well, through the potentially increasing tourism demand to the Arctic, thus leading to a threat of growing strain on the delicate environment. Thus, the wise tourism development in Lapland becomes increasingly important in order to preserve the delicate nature and the communities of Lapland.

To conclude and answer the research sub-question, various discourses shape luxury tourism, the major thematical discourses including discourse of change, naturalness

discourse, and responsibility discourse. However, other discourses intertwine with main discourses as well, such as urbanization discourse and the discourse of democratization of luxury. The discourse of change shapes luxury tourism through the altering and reforming meanings and characteristics attached to luxury, as well as through the changing attitudes of tourists and tourism actors towards luxury tourism. Naturalness discourse, in turn, shapes luxury tourism to cherish nature-based values as the basic elements for luxury to draw upon. Moreover, both of the discourses entwine tightly with responsible discourse, revising luxury tourism towards more sustainable practices in terms of tourism development, for instance. Ultimately, the discourses shape luxury tourism in a way that promotes Lapland as an applicable luxury tourism destination, leaning on the region's strengths in the environmental and cultural contexts for luxury to stem from.

One of the main thematical discourses connecting to wider social contexts, responsibility discourse, became relatively present in terms of the next research sub-question. The sub-question seeks to reveal the connection between luxury tourism and sustainability, **“How are luxury tourism and sustainability seen to be interrelated?”**. The stances of the respondents towards the compatibility of the concepts of sustainability and luxury were not concordant but rather two-fold. The relation was coterminally addressed as harmonious and troublesome by the interviewees, as elucidated by the opposite style of expressions *going hand in hand* and *it is extremely problematic*. On one hand, the notion of harmony was related to the Lappish destinations in particular, even though the concepts could clash in another environment. This reflects the findings of Iloranta (2019a, p. 4), according to which sustainability indeed is a pivotal value affiliated to the meaning of luxury in the Finnish setting. However, on the other hand, the problematic nature of tourism industry in general was recognized with respect to sustainable development, including the involvement of the Lappish destinations and DMOs. For instance, flying as the mode of transportation places the notions of sustainability and accessibility in confrontation in the Lappish context. Therefore, the question of compatibility was regarded as complex with no effortless solutions. The connection of luxury tourism and sustainability problems were not actually addressed in the national guidebook as such. However, the connection of new luxury to sustainability was emphasized, thus tacitly suggesting the classic view to fall behind, and underpinning the sustainability in Finnish setting through the modern stance of luxury.

Nevertheless, as the sustainability challenges were principally associated to luxury tourism and basically any tourism sector in general, the problem was universalized to encompass the whole industry, thus in a sense turning the focus from the Lappish destinations on the global scope. Meanwhile, the contributions for sustainable tourism are performed and manifested in the Lappish destinations, as naturally all actors may do their part but cannot solve the entire problem gripping the industry. Indeed, the interoperability of sustainability and luxury was deemed to require effort and commitment. Moreover, regardless the globalized conviction, the involvement of the DMOs and the other destination actors to the sustainability problems was not denied, and neither it was deemed that the destinations would have reached the ultimate level of sustainability within their actions. Hence, the image constructed of the DMOs in the interview accounts included both conscious and mindful aspects promoting the contribution and engagement to sustainable development, as well as the rational trait including the sense of reality in terms of the prevailing challenges and the involvement of the DMOs in the troubling course of events.

Furthermore, luxury tourism was seen as a favorable and principally more sustainable alternative for mass tourism, supported by the national guidebook recommendation for Finland to specialize as a niche market. The specializing could encourage the destination actors to attain agency in terms of having an impact on the type of tourism to be engaged with in the destination. Here, the DMOs as unitive actors could have a central role in spreading awareness, unifying forces to combat the present, problematic situation, and steering the tourism development into a collectively desirable path. Indeed, according to Legrand (2020, p. 77), in order to enable the interoperability of luxury tourism and the three dimensions of sustainability, tourism industry actors have a major role in repositioning luxury tourism away from the mindsets revolving around conspicuous consumption and towards sustainability as a prerequisite instead. Indeed, the general understandings of luxury could be shaped by the tourism actors by setting an example of attaching differing, more responsible values to luxury tourism, following the ideas of Kapferer (2010) and Hennings et al. (2013) about the redefining force of luxury to redirect the attention from the superficial splendor towards the green concerns and values. Precisely, by focusing on the destinations' strengths as the basis and making sustainably

smart decisions with respect to luxury tourism, the actors could be capable to contribute to more responsible tourism, act among the pioneers in revising the common definitions of luxury, and substantiate their “organizational identities” as conscious and mindful actors.

Therefore, to answer the research sub-question, it could be suggested that sustainability and luxury tourism were deemed to interrelate in a relatively positive and supportive manner in the destinations of Lapland. Nevertheless, the problematic facet of luxury tourism (and tourism industry in general) was widely recognized as well, also on a universalized level. Hence, the interoperability of sustainability and luxury was seen to require commitment and effort from the destination actors. Therefore, responsibility discourse as one of the major thematical discourses emerging in the findings underlines the role and the agency of the DMOs in the discussions. The DMOs are delineated both as conscious and rational actors, as well as to possess the position to unify forces to revise the notion of luxury and to steer tourism development towards increasingly sustainable direction.

The following sub-question of the research setting aims to find an answer to **“How does the accessibility or inaccessibility of a destination affect luxury tourism?”**. From the general perspective, the accessibility of luxury tourism destinations was idealized from two diverse stances in the interviews. On one hand, the effortless and smooth accessibility was considered important as an integral part of a luxury experience, as the experience should be as uncomplicated for the luxury guest as possible. However, on the other hand, a rather complicated accessibility was idealized as well due to its relation to the perceived uniqueness of a luxury destination. According to this angle, a destination may appear as unique due to not being available for everyone and thus differentiating from mass tourism destinations (see Krupka et al., 2021). Thus, certain attributes of the classic luxury thinking emerged within the accounts, promoting the access of the mere few, which could be traditionally associated to the issue of wealth. Despite of associating Finnish luxury closer to the modern view of luxury, the traditional luxury features were incorporated into the interview discussions to some extent.

Nevertheless, when scrutinizing the other view more closely, the increasing accessibility of luxury entwined with non-discrimination discourse amongst the interview accounts, as the attainability among wider clientele and the expansion of the notion of luxury were considered as objections for the inequality that luxury may classically unveil (see Kapferer, 2010). Therefore, an entirely opposite view was proposed for the classic, exclusive type of luxury. Some of the diverse layers of luxury would undoubtedly include the monetary aspect but it could coevally serve different kind of values and clientele as well. Indeed, the formerly firm weight of price as one of the major singular defining elements was seen to diminish along with luxury expanding to take new forms, supported by Holmqvist et al. (2020) suggesting that the essence of luxury may be achievable by other means than high expenditure. For instance in the contexts of the non-commercial dimension of luxury and everyday luxury, the value of meaningfulness outweighs exclusivity and rarity, the classic aspects of luxury. The discourse of the democratization of luxury and the equality discourse are discernible within the non-discriminating account, promoting social sustainability though inclusivity. However, the national guidebook did not address similar themes of non-discrimination or, actually, the accessibility of luxury tourism destinations as such at all. Perhaps, when providing guidance for the tourism companies, other elements such as the components of luxury services, and the incorporation of sustainability into the practices required more attention than accessibility. Nevertheless, the non-discrimination discourse seems a rather notable and topical theme as luxury transforms, and it could deserve more attention in the future in general.

Hence, contradictory views were propounded regarding the accessibility of luxury within the interview accounts. It could be pointed out that the challenging or limited accessibility relates more closely to the traditional view of luxury, involving the idea of not being attainable for everyone. Whereas the greater accessibility is inclined towards the new form of luxury which emphasizes the ease and inclusivity in terms of attainability. Therefore, the discourse of change is observable in the context of accessibility of luxury tourism destinations. Interestingly, despite of many respondents describing the physical accessibility of the destinations as challenging, the idealized idea of inaccessible luxury was not really integrated to the conception of luxury tourism in the destinations in Lapland. This tendency could stem from the prevalent conceptions of the essence of luxury tourism in the destinations, consisting of the compatible elements with the modern

stance of luxury rather than the traditional one. Hence, as the destinations were not deemed particularly as classic luxury destinations and the easier accessibility was rather cherished and pursued, the inaccessibility was not seen as one of the fundamental elements in terms of the luxurious attractiveness of the destinations in Lapland. Instead, the elements of uniqueness and luxury lie in other values than in the complicated accessibility.

Therefore, to summarize and answer the research sub-question, both good accessibility and challenging accessibility of a tourism destination may prove advantageous from luxury tourism perspective in general. Nevertheless, with respect to Lapland, accessibility was regarded crucial in terms of ease and inclusivity. Moreover, challenging or limited accessibility was not seen to cultivate particular uniqueness or feeling of luxury, but these senses were rather seen to stem from other elements. Hence, convenient accessibility was associated firmly to luxury tourism in Lapland. From the point of view of FIT ME! project, the relevance of the findings lie in understanding the potentially twofold significance accessibility may possess in the luxury context. As the project covers also other parts of Finland besides Lapland, the findings of this study provide one perspective from Lapland region with respect to luxury tourism where convenient accessibility is cherished and requires contribution.

Through the above discussed major thematical discourses about change, responsibility and naturalness, along with the themes of sustainability and accessibility, the social construction of Lapland as a luxury tourism destination is gradually developed. With the final research sub-question **“How do the DMOs construct Lapland as a luxury tourism destination?”** the deliberations are taken closer to the main research question. Besides of the discourses addressed in previous sections, Lapland as a luxury tourism destination is constructed also through two other distinct and complementary discourses, realistic and optimistic discourses.

Realistic discourse becomes discernible in both local and national stances, as they agreed that Lappish and Finnish tourism destinations are not competitive in the traditional luxury

market with classic and sumptuous top starred hotels. Through the realistic discourse, the putative circumstances were described in a frank and humble manner, with no intention to embellish the perception. Actually, it was not even seen as worthy to be pursued and the respondents principally differentiated the Lappish destinations from the excessively glamorous and material luxury due to not fitting the Finnish setting. Indeed, the material elements inhering in classic luxury might feel artificial from the Finnish perspective, and were thus alienated from the context of luxury in Lapland. These views reflect the discourse of change when luxury transforms from traditional to more unconventional shape (see Iloranta, 2022; Thomsen et al., 2020; von Wallpach, et al. 2020) to befit the destinations of Lapland, and the naturalness discourse where authenticity outweighs artificiality. By contrasting Lappish luxury to international luxury, the domestic form of luxury was depicted as something peculiar and current, whereas the international luxury was considered more generic and old-fashioned. The Lappish DMOs seemed not to consider themselves being confined to the limits of the traditional type of luxury, but on the contrary, luxury was approached from a more unrestricted stance, resting on the qualities and assets of the destinations.

The realistic discourse could be seen to stem from the context of Finnish lifestyle, encompassing mentality, behavior, as well as societal and cultural aspects (see Veal, 1993). Finnish modest mentality as consumers (Turunen, 2015, p. 34) may drive to seek everyday luxury in the midst of quotidian more than high level luxury which may shape the Finnish perception of luxury in general. Furthermore, both local and national accounts referred to societal attributes, such as the stable, safe, and democratic society to resonate behind the Finnish understanding of luxury. Hence, also the pursuit of increasingly equal attainability of luxury may stem from the societal conventions of supporting the egalitarian circumstances. Moreover, describing Lapland and Finland through the expressions *in the middle of nowhere* and *the back end of the North* reflect the national and local identities entwined to the particular qualities in relation to the geographical location, environmental features, and cultural setting. Hence, the possible negative connotations of the expressions may be turned into an advantage when cherished as part of the fundamental essence and inherent characteristics of the destinations, representing the optimistic discourse and the sense of pride over the Lapland destinations.

Instead of the traditional form of luxury, the Lappish destinations were associated more to the modern, experiential luxury through an optimistic discourse. Indeed, the optimistic discourse balanced the realistic discourse in the accounts, reflecting a confident view of Lapland as a luxury tourism destination.

People seek for nature, purity, peacefulness, safety. And we have precisely all of that, so (.) at the moment (.) [our destination] corresponds exactly to what people are looking for. (P1)

The excerpt encapsulates a set of core values embedded in the notion of Lappish luxury, shared by several other respondents alike. Furthermore, it provides a distinct stance of the destination applicability for luxury tourism purposes, precisely due to the aforementioned values and strengths related to the destination. The account reflects pride and confidence on the particularities of the destinations, the destinations meeting the luxury demand as it stands, which balances the modest approach to the traditional form of luxury. Indeed, the prevailing environmental attributes of Lapland and broader societal aspects of Finland as a safe and stable country merge with the intangible and experiential elements supporting the modern view of luxury. As von Wallpach et al. (2020, p. 499) suggest, the feeling of profound luxuriousness springs from the connection with nature and people, as well as the sense of freedom and being alive, rather than the material or physical environment. Hence, the material values were de-emphasized in comparison to the intangible elements, supporting to the emergence of the sense of luxury in the Lappish context.

The national guidebook alike conveyed the feeling of pride over the Finnish style of luxury and luxury tourism offering through optimistic discourse, especially over the experiences the Finnish environment and nature enable, also applicable in the luxury context. The abovementioned ideas is supported by Iloranta (2019a) who argues that Finnish luxury is precisely leaning on the cultural and societal values and the destinations' strengths which may render luxury to appear in a simpler form than traditional luxury. The idea of simplicity in luxury context was appreciated in the guidebook over the complex and voluminous luxury gleam, whereas within the interviews, it was addressed in a more implicit manner through the idea of small-scale luxury tourism in contrast to massive and

demanding international luxury. Furthermore, the immaterial strengths and values of the destinations were firmly connected to the sustainable nature of luxury, concurrently underpinning the destinations' contribution to sustainable tourism. Indeed, as discussed, luxury tourism and sustainability were regarded relatively compatible in the destinations of Lapland.

To conclude and answer the final research sub-question, Lapland was not constructed as a luxury tourism destination merely as one big region, but above all through the construction of its singular destinations and their particular characteristics. Furthermore, Lapland was addressed through the delineation of Finnishness, encompassing the mentalities, lifestyles, conceptions, and customs immersed in the wider cultural and societal context. Besides the major thematical discourses presented in the discussion, the construction rested highly on realistic and optimistic discourses, reflecting the local and national level stances about the attached meanings to Lapland as a luxury tourism destination along with the fundamental features in the cultural context where the impressions could stem from. To sum it up in a particular way, Lapland could represent a luxury “dream” (see Dubois & Paternault, 1995) to a luxury tourist seeking for experiences in peaceful and secure environment away from the urban hassle, and wanting to make conscious choices in terms of their traveling habits.

#### *Concluding remarks of discussion*

By the aid of the discussions and responses to the sub-questions, the main research question **“How is sustainable luxury tourism perceived by the DMOs in Lapland?”** ultimately becomes addressed as well. Even though the visions of the respondents were not entirely uniform – which would have technically been rather strange if they were – there were certain elements that recurred within the interview accounts and were chiefly supported by the view of the national guidebook as well. First of all, sustainable luxury tourism was affiliated to intangible and experiential aspects, and articulately dissociated from the material splendor. Luxury tourism was seen to stem from the Lappish nature, and the experiences and services were well entangled with natural elements and environment. Therefore, the value of respecting nature and treating it responsibly became highly appreciated, entwining sustainability tightly to luxury tourism.

Furthermore, the dimension of social sustainability was approached through the factor of increasing accessibility when luxury tourism is taking new forms. Thus, the more equal and non-discriminating attainability of luxury tourism was promoted through the diverse levels of luxury, uplifting other values related to the concept besides the traditional exclusivity and monetary affiliation. Moreover, the effortless physical accessibility of the destinations was advocated as part of present-day luxury, as challenging or limited accessibility was not seen to cultivate any particular luxurious value for the destination in the Lappish context. Ultimately, luxury tourism represented an alternative for mass tourism, potentially offering a more sustainable option for Finland as a niche market to specialize in. Indeed, tourism was aspired to be retained relatively small-scale by several DMOs in order to preserve the natural and cultural qualities and characteristics that make the destinations particularly unique and luxurious.

Luxury tourism is thus portrayed as a social construct that is affected by diverse discourses and attached meanings. Indeed, tourism and luxury are both depicted as socially constructed concepts, as they are sustained and shaped by the meanings attached to them amongst the interactions of people (see Pernecky, 2012, p. 1127–1128; Roper et al., 2013). Therefore, the role of the DMOs and other destination actors may grow in importance in terms of steering the tourism development to a more sustainable direction through the redefining force of luxury (see Hennings et al., 2013; Kapferer, 2010) and through repositioning luxury tourism towards the prerequisite of sustainability, while shifting away from the idea of conspicuous consumption (see Legrand, 2020, p. 77).

We do have (.) all the elements for successful luxury tourism. (P3)

The above passage reflects explicitly the optimistic discourse emerging within the interviews and depicting Lapland as an applicable luxury tourism destination, leaning on the region's and destinations' strengths in the environmental and cultural contexts for luxury to stem from. Above all, the excerpt encapsulates the idea of being luxurious in the own particular way with pride, without letting the prevalent assumptions to overrule,

despite of their historical roots. Therefore, conforming towards the new form of luxury, the peculiar elements of Lapland are seen highly proper and attractive for a thriving luxury tourism business.

### *Theoretical contributions*

The study contributes to a better understanding of the phenomenon of new luxury and the relation to sustainability and accessibility in tourism context. As the study offers a glance on luxury tourism in the Finnish setting, it thereby contributes to bringing other than traditional forms of luxury more to the light, thus increasing the general awareness of the alternative, unconventional forms of luxury. Furthermore, it could be reckoned essential to gain better understanding of luxury tourism in Finland, as Finland is not deemed competitive with traditional luxury tourism destinations but should utilize different drawcards and advantages. Therefore, the study also contributes to raising awareness of Finnish luxury in general, of the offering and what elements to focus on in tourism, in order to be pursuit in a sustainable manner. Moreover, the findings of the study contribute to the scientific discourse by bringing forth the opinions of the DMOs as salient tourism actors in their region, and by creating an example of the construction and shaping of luxury tourism in a certain cultural and social context in Lapland. The outlooks of the DMOs may provide essential perspectives for other actors in the region, such as tourism companies and other businesses, to develop their services and products in order to comprise an attractive and sustainable network of services.

As sustainability seems to be merely slightly studied in the luxury tourism context, this study contributes to exploring their interconnection, and especially how the new form of luxury is related to sustainability. By promoting their compatibility in Lapland which chiefly represents a differing setting in comparison to the classic luxury destinations, the connection of sustainability and the modern view of luxury becomes underpinned. Moreover, the study contributes to understanding the role of accessibility in contemporary luxury tourism. The classic luxury values of exclusivity and being attainable only for the few, reflecting challenging or limited accessibility, might not gain similar ground in modern luxury tourism destinations, but accessibility could be regarded pivotal in terms of ease and inclusivity. Furthermore, by applying social constructionism and discourse

analysis to the study, wider understanding could be gained of the social and discursive nature of luxury. Thus, the study could help to understand the social dimension of the phenomenon, how it is constructed in the interactions between people, what kind of discourses have an impact on it, and how it may fluctuate culturally and over time. Even though luxury is a subjective concept, the personal perceptions are influenced by the common prevailing understandings and the trends existing at a certain time in a certain context, inter alia. As the meaning of luxury transforms over time and according to the context, the supply of tourism destinations must develop along.

### *Critical evaluation of the research*

The methodology in its entirety served well for the purposes of the study. The data collection method through semi-structured interviews with the representatives of the DMOs enabled a profound and comprehensive view of their insights about the research phenomenon. However, the empirical data of six interviews with an interview guide equipped with relatively many interview questions was rather extensive for the methodological approach of discourse analysis. Thus, not all the material was ultimately analyzed in the study, and it was not possible to analyze the data in a truly detailed manner. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the research setting not representing a purely linguistic study, it was not even intentional to pay attention to every possible aspect in the use of language. Moreover, before collecting the data, it might be challenging to know which data turns out the most substantive, and too few interview questions could result in a defective set of data. Furthermore, the sampling of six DMOs gave one perspective for the studied phenomena in Lapland but did not cover all the areas and the DMOs in Northern Finland. Hence, a wider set of represented destinations could have provided a more encompassing view of the phenomenon in the region.

Moreover, the influence of the researcher on the interviewee is to be recognized, as the interview discussion reflects the subjective position, choices, and questions of the researcher (Kananen, 2015, p. 143). The aspiration was to approach the concept of luxury as openly as possible, giving the respondents the chance to define luxury from their perspective, and for instance disclosing the concept of new luxury towards the end of the interview. However, the posed interview questions and follow-up questions around the

research topics of luxury, sustainability, and accessibility affected the speech of the interviewees, cultivating discussion around certain topics on diverse levels with different respondents. Furthermore, digital accessibility of the destinations was included in the original research plan besides the physical accessibility, and it was discussed with the interviewees as well. However, in the phase of proceeding with the analysis, the findings related to digital accessibility seemed not to contribute to the research problem in relation to luxury tourism in particular but rather on a broader level with respect to tourism. Therefore, an alignment to exclude the topic of digital accessibility from the study was made.

The comparison and discussion between the interview data from Lapland and the luxury tourism guidebook of Visit Finland enabled to scrutinize the phenomenon in a wider context, by combining the local perspectives to what has been recognized nationwide. Even though the guidebook material was provided for tourism companies rather than DMOs, the meanings attached to the Finnish notion of luxury were discernible and applicable for the purposes of the study. Even though the guidebook served well for the purport, a more comprehensive understanding of the national level outlooks could have been achieved by interviewing the professionals of Visit Finland organization. Moreover, the connection between the study and FIT ME! project (Foreign Individual Traveler's hospitality and Mobility Ecosystem) was intentionally rather loose, according to the agreement with the representatives of the project. The research did not aim to produce practical instructions for developing the accessibility of the tourism destinations. Rather, the intention was to increase the understanding of the influence of destination accessibility to the luxury tourism context in Lapland. However, if accessibility had a bigger role in the study, also more versatile findings could have been made to benefit the project.

### *Suggestions for future research*

The findings of the study indicated the intertwining of the concepts and phenomena of luxury tourism, sustainability, and accessibility in Lapland. A wider collection of discourses and diverse findings regarding the phenomenon could be identified with a greater number of DMOs involved around Lapland and by involving other actors as well, such as tourism businesses, tourists, locals, and other administrative parties. Indeed, it

could be interesting to learn for instance how domestic and international tourists perceive luxury tourism in Lapland, and how the views differ between the two groups. In that context, understanding the role of digital accessibility could mount in greater significance as well. Furthermore, studying sustainable luxury tourism in other regions in Finland could provide interesting outlooks from diverse parts of the country and would contribute to a more encompassing view on the national level as well. Moreover, the phenomenon of non-discrimination in the luxury context could be a rather notable and topical theme as the notion of luxury expands. It could deserve more attention in the future in general, as the classic luxury may unveil the aspect of inequality which might be less present in the modern trend of luxury.

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## **Appendix 1. Interview questions**

The interviews were conducted in Finnish, so the below interview questions were translated beforehand and posed in Finnish in the interview situations.

### **Background info**

- How long have you been working in the current position and have you had other positions in the destination management organization?
- Basic information about the organization: Legal name, company form, year of establishment, number of personnel, and core tasks (*in case not found from the website*)

### **Opening question**

- How would you describe sustainability from the perspective of your organization? How is it understood and what kind of practices and actions are related to it?
  - *Follow-up: Are the dimensions (ecological, socio-cultural and economic) in balance or does some of them dominate the others?*

### **Luxury tourism**

- What kind of luxury tourism services are provided in your destination?
- Do you think the supply of luxury tourism services in your destination meets the interests and demand of the tourists?
  - *Follow-up: If not, how could it be improved?*
- Which are the greatest challenges in your destination regarding luxury tourism?
- Does your destination have a strategy or plan concerning luxury tourism?
- Do you see luxury tourism as an important sector in your destination in the future?
- How would you describe luxury tourism in Finland in general? What kind of qualities are related to it? (*From the perspective of a Finnish luxury product, service or experience*)

### **Sustainability and luxury**

- What comes to your mind when thinking about the compatibility of sustainability and luxury?

- In your destination, do tourism actors contribute to sustainability in (luxury) tourism and how?
- Are there some factors to be focused on in order to make luxury tourism more sustainable?

**Accessibility** (*Physical and digital accessibility of the tourism destination, not concerning disabilities in this context*)

- Is it important that a tourism destination is accessible, and why?
- How is the state of accessibility of your destination? (Physical and digital)
  - *Follow-up: How could it be improved?*
- How do you think accessibility or inaccessibility of a destination can affect luxury tourism? *In other words:* How different accessibility factors may contribute to defining luxury or luxury experience?

### **Closing question**

- Is the term *new luxury* familiar to you and what do you think it could mean?
  - *Can be asked as a final open question, kind of an informal one*

## Appendix 2. Letter of consent



LAPIN YLIOPISTO  
UNIVERSITY OF LAPLAND

### LETTER OF CONSENT

Dear Participant,

My name is Miira Lehto. I am Master student at University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland under the supervision of Adjunct Professor Mitja Gorenak (mitja.gorenak@um.si, Tel. + 386 41 545 965). You are invited to participate in my master thesis study entitled "Sustainability as new luxury? Discourses shaping luxury tourism as a social phenomenon – the perspective of the DMOs in Lapland". The purpose of the study is to explore the destination management organizations' perceptions of luxury tourism in their own region and to gain understanding of luxury tourism as a social phenomenon. Thereby, the study aims to increase understanding of the possibilities to develop luxury tourism in Lapland, for instance from the angles of sustainability and accessibility.

The result of the study will be published as part of my master thesis. The thesis is conducted as part of the Master's Degree Programme in Tourism, Culture and International Management (TourCIM).

By signing this letter, you give consent to use the interview material confidentially and exclusively for research purposes. The research follows the principles for responsible conduct of research dictated by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research. The data will be handled anonymously. Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw your permission even after signing this document, by informing the below mentioned contact person.

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor, if you would need further information regarding the study and the use of the research data.

Sincerely,

Miira Lehto  
TourCIM Master student  
+358 44 0616426  
miirleht@ulapland.fi

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I give consent to use the interview as data for the purpose mentioned above.

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Signature

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Date

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Print Name