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Community as a Strength:

Understanding tourism enterprises' sustainability through stakeholder engagement

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Abstract

The importance of taking responsibility for tourism operations has grown as the tourism industry has steadily increased over the past few decades. Throughout the years, it has been noted that the impacts of tourism can affect destinations through different dimensions, including environmental, social, and economic. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) aims to address these issues by providing guidelines for companies to conduct responsible business practices. Responsible tourism practices can improve the destinations' well-being, as tourism has the potential to influence the local communities. Furthermore, understanding how companies engage with different stakeholders becomes valuable in this sense. For this master's thesis, it was chosen to study stakeholder engagement in the context of sustainability, and it aims to explain how these two concepts can be viewed as multidimensional.

Previous research on stakeholder engagement, CSR, and sustainability has been widely used around the world in tourism literature. On the other hand, research considering these aspects in Finland has been conducted, with a focus on the northern parts of Finland. To understand these aspects from a different perspective, the research area was chosen to be Suomenlinna due to its unique environment. The main research question is: How does stakeholder engagement affect sustainability in tourism enterprises? The following sub-questions are: 1) How is sustainability perceived within the destination? 2) How does stakeholder engagement affect the relationship between stakeholders? 2) How can stakeholder engagement be used to improve sustainability?

Tourism businesses are drawn to working towards sustainability, but may lack sufficient resources, such as funding or time. The study demonstrates that well-planned and organized stakeholder engagement can enhance sustainability practices within the destination itself, as well as within the tourism enterprises, through effective communication and interaction. The findings present how working together can help to learn from one another. Furthermore, cooperation enhanced trust through familiarity with each other, a sense of community; a village-like feeling was present among the operators, creating an atmosphere of working together towards the same cause. This research highlights the importance of collaboration in tourism. Reflecting on this research, the dedication of the destination demonstrated exemplary execution through engagement in developing tourism together.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, local communities, stakeholder engagement, tourism, sustainability

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

According to the Tourism Trends and Policies report by OECD (2024, pp. 17-26), even though the industry was impacted heavily due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the travel restrictions, it has been predicted that the tourism numbers will keep growing to at least the same level as they were before, if not higher. Over the past decades, the tourism industry has seen a rise overall in the adaptation of sustainability and responsibility practices (Camilleri, 2014), as tourism affects the social, cultural, economic, ecological, and political aspects of a destination. To combat the challenges brought by tourism, responsible tourism actions intend to emphasize the positive effects and minimize the negative ones. Considering tourism, sustainability aims to create a positive effect on tourism on these different dimensions (García-Rosell, 2017, pp. 229-231; Veijola et al., 2013, pp. 16-29). To show dedication to the cause, companies are implementing sustainability practices and further communicating these initiatives to their stakeholders (Camilleri, 2014). As mentioned by Veijola et al. (2013, p. 24), building better tourism and focusing on sustainability is a shared responsibility that involves all participants. Moreover, these aspects demonstrate the importance of well-planned tourism development for today.

At the same time, the world is becoming more connected than ever due to globalization (Crane et al., 2023, pp. 38-40), and accessing information is easier than ever before, driving the need for transparent business operations (Maak, 2007). Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices have been integrated by different tourism organizations, as they have been taking responsibility for their activities in these different dimensions (García-Rosell, 2017). Conversely, CSR has been criticized for being too company-focused, and the practices do not necessarily emphasize genuine responsibility for societal issues (Banerjee, 2008). To think beyond profit and shareholders, companies have begun to further communicate with other stakeholders and examine the relationships between organizations (Kujala et al., 2019; Andriof & Waddock, 2002). Tourism researchers have contributed to this by studying how to increase collaboration between stakeholders (Siti-Nabiha & Saad, 2015; Byrd, 2007), as well as emphasizing the importance of including multiple stakeholders in the evaluation processes of sustainability (García-Rosell & Mäkinen, 2013). Freeman et al. (2017, pp. 5-6) present stakeholder engagement as a framework for working with stakeholders, as it considers different dimensions of the engagement processes. These dimensions have been described as examining

stakeholder relations, communicating with stakeholders, learning with stakeholders, and integrative stakeholder engagement. To accomplish integrative engagement, all of its dimensions need to be considered. Adding the dimension of sustainability to this equation creates yet another aspect (García-Rosell & Mäkinen, 2013), especially in the context of tourism research.

In Finland, tourism has been reported to have a significant impact on the national economy and employment (the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland [TEM], 2022). Furthermore, according to TEM (2022), Finland has the resources and knowledge to become one of the leaders in different sustainability actions regarding all sectors, and the country is on the right path in terms of sustainability. Although sustainability and responsibility actions have been taken seriously, they do not exclude the importance of persistent work towards more sustainable and responsible tourism, especially as the tourism industry continues to grow (Tervo-Kankare, 2017). According to TEM (2022, pp. 14-22), tourism can help create services and infrastructure for locals in Finland. The need for collaboration between stakeholders is evident and necessary to develop sustainable tourism in Finland further, engaging all the participants.

When reflecting on the tourism industry in Finland, research on sustainability, stakeholders, and community participation has primarily focused on cases in the northern parts of the country. However, research on stakeholder engagement in the context of tourism in Southern Finland is lacking. As the capital of Finland, Helsinki (City of Helsinki, 2024), continues to be the most visited destination in the country, it is important to understand the stakeholder engagement processes in the tourism industry there. Within Helsinki, one of the most visited attractions is the UNESCO Heritage site Suomenlinna Sea Fortress. The island offers attractions and services for both visitors and locals. Most importantly, this island is a dynamic neighborhood in Helsinki, with 800 inhabitants (Association of World Heritage Sites in Finland). According to Timothy (2014), recognized cultural attractions tend to appeal to larger crowds. This highlights how Suomenlinna is a unique setting that combines a culturally significant site with increasing tourism. Moreover, as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the dimensions of sustainability become important in the context of tourism.

1.2 Previous Research

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a widely utilized concept in defining sustainability in tourism research. The concept can be described as the voluntary acts taken by businesses towards social, environmental, and economic impacts (Carroll, 1991). In the tourism industry, the attention towards different sustainability practices has been growing lately, and, for example, over the past years, the number of studies on tourism and CSR has been increasing (Camilleri, 2014; Font & Lynes, 2018; Wut et al., 2021). The use of various CSR practices has increased in response to the impact that tourism businesses are having. These practices include areas such as environmental protection, heritage conservation, fair employment, and supporting the local community (Garay & Font, 2012). Previous studies have highlighted different purposes for using CSR in tourism, presenting possibilities and hindrances. Rini and Hasim (2021) used mixed methods to investigate CSR practices in Five-Star Hotels in Denpasar, Bali. They found that environmental initiatives were viewed as sufficient, but the local communities were not present in CSR activities. However, some positive outcomes were observed, such as agreements to hire local employees. Hughes and Scheyvens (2016) argued that some tourism companies implement CSR initiatives for image or cost-saving purposes, rather than taking responsibility. They criticize this tactic, calling it a "Tourism First" planning approach, and propose a "Development First" framework, which would better prioritize community development. Despite the positive outcomes, Banerjee (2008) has proposed criticism of CSR and pointed out that the practices are occasionally too superficial, primarily symbolic, or lacking in real sustainability values.

As tourism companies closely work with the local communities, as well as other stakeholders, this creates a need for stakeholder engagement in the context of sustainable tourism. The previous research has emphasized, for example, the importance of recognizing and engaging with stakeholders in tourism development (Byrd, 2007) and the importance of involving stakeholders in the evaluation processes of tourism (García-Rosell & Mäkinen, 2013), how different stakeholders may interpret sustainability (Luoma et al., 2024), and how in managing tourism involving stakeholders in different levels is important (Kirylyuk et al., 2021). The previous research has also looked into tourism planning and stakeholder engagement (Siti-Nabiha & Saad, 2015). The research focused on tourism planning in Malaysia, and the authors found that the existing engagement processes were inadequate and lacking, for example, clear guidelines for different responsibilities. They stress the need for clear communication channels and coordination to accomplish successful engagement. When observing communication practices, tourism

and stakeholder engagement have been studied with quantitative methods through CSR communication by analyzing reporting and websites in a cross-country setting (Iazzi et al., 2020). The authors presented differences between the communication methods of smaller and larger tourism organizations, and overall, how sustainability initiatives are communicated through different channels.

Some previous studies of stakeholder engagement, sustainability, and local communities have been conducted through different perspectives in Finland. Research focusing on the Finnish Archipelago, Renfors (2020), found in her study of stakeholders' perceptions of sustainable tourism that different stakeholders have dissimilar views regarding sustainability. The author noted that usually, the most important dimension of sustainability is seen as economic. The research by García-Rosell and Mäkinen (2013) introduced a broad approach to assessing sustainability in tourism through a stakeholder evaluation process. The study was conducted in Finnish Lapland and presented how the sustainability assessment should take into account the different views and ethics of stakeholders. The authors stress the importance of multi-stakeholder involvement in the development of sustainable tourism. With a different point of view, Li et al. (2023) researched how engaging with local communities through art-based methods in the Finnish Lapland affects sustainable tourism development. This study focused on the perspectives of stakeholder engagement in cultural tourism development in multi-ethnic areas. It presented how combining art-based methods with traditional methods can assist in planning sustainable tourism. To gain another perspective, while the previous focus has been on Lapland, considering these aspects from a different perspective, Luoma et al. (2024) conducted research in the Gulf of Finland, observing how the concept of sustainability is understood, and they showed how stakeholders' interpretations in the sustainability context may differ. The authors suggest improving dialogue around sustainability and taking different stakeholders' points of view into account. Komppula (2016) examined the effect of how different stakeholders influence destination development in Ruka, Finland. The author continues to observe how the role of different stakeholders can affect the destination and its development plans. Similarly to this topic, Partanen (2022) explored the role of social innovations in tourism development in Kemi, Finland, where the tourism sector encountered some challenges related to tourism. The social innovation framework used in the research stresses the importance of the local community's cooperation in tourism through a bottom-up approach to build resilience within the community. The author concludes how the framework can help to understand resilience and improve overall sustainability in tourism.

This highlights a geographical gap in the literature, as the majority of existing research has concentrated on Northern Finland and the winter season. To further limit the research area, the goal was to encounter a location in the South of Finland, where tourism, local community, and sustainability are meaningful in the characteristics of the destination. Within the Helsinki region, one of the most well-known attractions is located in front of the capital city, an island called Suomenlinna. Suomenlinna has a unique setting, and it is a culturally significant site in Helsinki. Moreover, as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, conserving the area becomes crucial (Suomenlinna, Sustainability). Furthermore, considering these aspects, Suomenlinna has gained attention with research as well, and some other theses have covered topics related to how the residents of Suomenlinna are perceiving mass tourism (Piironen & Pennanen, 2022), and an ethnographic study on how tourism impacts the locals' lives (Latvala-Harvilahti, 2017). Furthermore, Törrönen (2016) researched how accessibility could be developed sustainably. Previous studies also covered topics related to sustainable communication (Jalkanen, 2024). Additionally, the Finnish Heritage Agency's study (2023) presents opportunities for sustainable tourism in World Heritage sites, which also includes Suomenlinna. Additionally, the Governing Body of Suomenlinna regularly conducts surveys that are directed to the locals as well as to the business operators. However, there was no present research on stakeholder engagement and sustainability, nor was there any research conducted that would further observe the relationships between the stakeholders.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this master's thesis is to explore the connection between stakeholder engagement and sustainability, and how it influences the sustainability practices of tourism organizations. Furthermore, this research aims to understand how collaboration, interaction, and social relationships affect tourism companies' understanding of responsibility and sustainability. The goal of this research is to deepen the understanding of engagement within the context of sustainability and to provide results on how to enhance approaches to collaborating and building meaningful relationships in tourism in Finland.

Tourism companies engage daily with each other and other stakeholders, such as local communities, employees, partners, and customers. Moreover, the role of destination management and other decision-makers affects how tourism is developed. How they are interacting, what

kind of relationships are formed through interaction, and how this affects their sustainability initiatives, as tourism has brought both negative and positive effects on travel destinations. The research questions gradually took shape as the study progressed, based on the research aims and the research area. The main research question for this master's thesis is:

- How does stakeholder engagement affect sustainability in tourism enterprises?

To further understand the relationship between sustainability and stakeholder engagement, the sub-questions are:

- How is sustainability perceived within the destination?
- How does stakeholder engagement affect the relationship between stakeholders?
- How can stakeholder engagement be used to enhance sustainability?

To gain a general idea of stakeholder engagement in the context of sustainability, the research will include Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a theoretical concept to understand sustainability in the context of tourism and tourism organizations. Following the aim of the research, understanding how tourism companies engage with stakeholders in the context of sustainability has become relevant in tourism research. In particular, how tourism companies interact with local communities remains significant, as tourism will affect their neighborhoods. In adherence to the prior studies, which have focused on sustainability and stakeholder engagement perceptions in general, research on stakeholder engagement in the tourism industry is missing in the urban context in southern Finland.

Based on these insights, this thesis aims to fill the gap in exploring how tourism companies are engaging with stakeholders in the Finnish tourism industry, and how it affects sustainability practices, and whether it improves sustainability. At the beginning of the research, the focus was more on local communities and how tourism enterprises interact with them. Throughout the research, the aim was altered to cover these topics more thoroughly and not focus only on one stakeholder, as it was a better fit for the stakeholder engagement approach. However, due to tourism growth, including perspectives on how local communities are considered as stakeholders and included in the practices, is relevant. Although this research's empirical context is set in Suomenlinna, an important UNESCO World Heritage Site in Finland, the aim of this master's thesis is not to study cultural tourism or heritage tourism, but to evaluate further how stakeholder engagement and sustainability practices influence each other and how these attributes are seen in the context of sustainability and responsibility.

1.4 Research Methodology

In tourism research, qualitative research has been used for exploring and researching different phenomena, with a primary focus on understanding the social context of the research. Using qualitative methods involves understanding and explaining the motivations, reasons, and opinions behind the studied phenomenon. (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004, pp. 3-6). This thesis follows the social interpretive paradigm, which emphasizes understanding social realities through qualitative methods (Jennings, 2010, pp. 41-42). The aim is to explain the current procedures and understand how they are affecting sustainability. The goal of the analysis is to gain an understanding of the interviewees' opinions on the research topic and to interpret their statements in accordance with the research questions.

As the master's thesis is conducted as qualitative research, the data collection methods are chosen accordingly. The data is collected through semi-structured interviews with owners-managers of tourism enterprises and other stakeholders in Suomenlinna. According to Puusa et al. (2020, pp. 111-112), semi-structured interviews are a more open interview type, and they allow the respondents to share their views in their own words. The semi-structured interview was chosen as the interview format, as it was the most suitable for the research, as this method aims to understand the phenomenon through the respondents' views. The data consists of seven interviews conducted during November 2024 and April 2025. The interviews were conducted online using Teams and recorded for the analysis. Afterwards, they transcribed and later analyzed using qualitative content analysis, with a theory-guided method. This method helps create an understanding of the phenomenon (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, pp. 117-122). Later, the findings were analyzed and combined with the previous knowledge of sustainability and stakeholder engagement within the tourism industry.

1.5 Structure of the Study

This master's thesis contains six chapters that present the theoretical framework, research methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusions. The first main chapter, the introduction, gives a brief outlook on the thesis. To gain a deeper understanding of the topic researched, the second chapter dives into the main theoretical concepts used. To define the difference and similarity

between the concepts, the theoretical chapter has been divided into smaller sections, firstly describing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a theoretical concept, and the following part further defines sustainability and CSR in the context of tourism. Continuing from there, the theoretical part presents stakeholder engagement and analyzes stakeholder engagement within the tourism industry. Furthermore, this section examines topics of stakeholder engagement and sustainability within the tourism industry and highlights some aspects of small and medium-sized businesses and the tourism industry of Finland.

The third chapter presents the research methodology used in the thesis and explains how qualitative research methods were implemented. It goes into detail about the use of semi-structured interviews as a data collection method, content analysis and theory-guided analysis as data analysis methods, and lastly, addresses the ethical considerations. The fourth chapter describes the findings collected from the data. The fifth chapter further discusses the results, complementing them with previous research and theory. The final chapter concludes the main points of the thesis, presents the limitations, and offers suggestions for future research.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this research combines two key concepts, Corporate Social Responsibility and stakeholder engagement, both of which are examined within the tourism context. By combining these concepts, the study seeks to portray the multidimensional nature of them and explore how they are connected. Understanding Corporate Social Responsibility and stakeholder engagement together aims to analyze how, why, and what the outcomes are of tourism businesses interacting with their stakeholders and how these interactions contribute to long-term sustainability.

These theories guide the analysis of how tourism enterprises engage with stakeholders and how collaboration, values, and relationships contribute to sustainability. The following chapters will first present the key concepts of Corporate Social Responsibility and how they are applied in tourism. Following this, stakeholder engagement as a theory and as a framework will be discussed, conclusively linking these concepts to tourism as well. Lastly, some insights into the tourism of small and medium-sized enterprises and the tourism of Finland are presented, and how they are reflected in sustainability.

2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a Theoretical Concept

2.1.1 Explaining Corporate Social Responsibility

The discussion of how companies have responsibility over their actions has emerged over the years due to the overall growth in the global economy. As of today, the world is facing challenges considering different environmental, social, economic, political, and ethical aspects. The general interest, expectations, and demands in how organizations handle their operations have increased. (Pistoni et al., 2015). This has created a direction in which businesses are being held responsible for their actions (Maak, 2007) and has led organizations to consider their practices through a more critical lens, aiming for fairer business operations (Carroll, 1996, p. 72). Previously, creating profit for the shareholders was viewed as the most important responsibility of a business. Gradually, this idea has been questioned, and society has become more conscious of ethical issues related to business companies. (Carroll, 1991, p. 39). Moreover, this is applied through observing, for example, business ethics, which intend to explain whether the decisions

made “are good and bad, and or right and wrong” (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2009, p. 242). According to Crane et al. (2023, p. 29), although laws and regulations form the groundwork for business ethics, creating the basis for determining what should or should not be done to be considered ethical, business ethics and law are not equivalent. An organization can be unethical even though they would be following the mandatory laws and regulations. Hence, the authors argue (pp. 60-61) that businesses in fact do have responsibilities to society, and responsibility over how they behave.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) describes the voluntary integration of social, environmental, and ethical concerns into business operations and stakeholder interactions (European Commission, 2011). Throughout the past decades, according to Moratis and Cochius (2011, pp. 10-12), the concept of CSR has been widely utilized in various literature and research. The authors conclude (pp. 24-26) that CSR within businesses can be defined as being responsible for their actions and aiming not to negatively impact the surrounding world. According to Werther and Chandler (2011, pp. 5-7), CSR is a comprehensive concept that involves a wide range of ethical, social, and environmental responsibilities that organizations can be expected to fulfill from their stakeholders, including customers, employees, shareholders, and the communities where they operate. Elkington has written one of the most cited definitions of Corporate Social Responsibility (as cited in Moratis & Cochius, 2011, pp. 19-20). He introduced the model of *triple-bottom-line* (people, planet, profit) to the business world over 30 years ago. This definition divides Corporate Social Responsibility actions into three widely used categories, which are typically defined as ecological, social, and economic. As explained by Liappis et al. (2019, Chapter 2.1), these categories divide the actions based on how they affect society. For example, the ecological approach includes reducing carbon emissions, using less water, and managing waste. Whereas the social dimension includes aspects such as promoting diversity and inclusion, investing in employee development, supporting locals, and ensuring product safety. Lastly, the economic dimension contains actions such as creating jobs and services, creating value for shareholders, as well as engaging in anti-corruption activities, and responsible tax payment.

CSR practices of a business can also be explained through different responsibilities. Following this further, Carroll and Buchholtz (2009, pp. 40-46) introduce four responsibility types that can be identified within an organization, based on “*The Pyramid of Corporate Social Respon-*

sibility” by Carroll (1991). This model is called Carroll’s four-part definition of Corporate Social Responsibility types and aims to conceptualize that CSR is more than just economic and legal responsibilities that society requires or expects. *Economic responsibility* refers to the fact that the business should be profitable and offer either products or services that are needed by society. Additionally, economic responsibility implies selling these products or services for a price that is perceived to be reasonable by society. Furthermore, society expects businesses to maintain economic value. Another type of responsibility required by society is *legal responsibility*. Businesses are expected to follow the laws and regulations of the country and the regions where the business is operating. Following the laws can be set as the bare minimum that businesses are required to do. To fulfill the expectations, norms, and values of society, *ethical responsibility* is needed. These are the expectations of society and what is seen as honest and fair behavior. Ethical responsibilities are continuously changing, and organizations are expected to meet these criteria. *Philanthropic responsibilities* are explained as more voluntary practices that the organization can do, such as donations, charity, or other voluntary actions, to communicate its ethical aims to society.



Figure 1. The Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility.

Source: Carroll, 1991, p. 42.

As the pyramid of corporate social responsibility is presented in Figure 1, it shows the four types of responsibility that were introduced. Although the responsibility types can be perceived separately to ease understanding them, they should be taken into consideration collectively, not individually (Carroll, 1991). Additionally, as Carroll and Buchholtz (2009, p. 46) state, even though economic responsibility lies at the bottom of the pyramid, it does not mean it's more meaningful than the others, nor should it be viewed as the first thing that should be done, but rather to create an idea of what all the components are included in CSR. Additionally, Crane et al. (2023, pp. 63-64) criticize the model as it does not provide implications of different conflicts, and question whether a company can reach all of these attributes. However, Moratis and Cochius (2011, pp. 10-13) highlight that in the context of CSR, companies that implement the approaches to their strategies demonstrate their commitment to responsible actions, not just because they are mandated to do so, but because they believe it is the right thing to do. Moreover, CSR has become visible in different strategies in businesses, such as in communication and marketing, but also used in recruitment and employment.

2.1.2 Stakeholders

One of the central aspects of responsibility within businesses can be seen as concentrating on recognizing how the practices of the organization affect its stakeholders, and whether this influence can be detected as positive or negative. Typically, stakeholders have been defined as “a stakeholder is an individual or a group that has one or more of the various kinds of stakes in the organization” (Carroll & Butchholtz, 2009, pp. 82-84). Freeman (1984, as cited in Parmar et al., 2010, p. 8) has defined a stakeholder as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives.” Hence, the definition of stakeholders as a term refers to different entities that are impacted by the company's actions, including a wide range of individuals and groups, such as the company's employees, customers, suppliers, and local communities (Font & Lynes, 2018). Additionally, non-human stakeholders such as the environment and animals can be considered in this cluster (García-Rosell & Tallberg, 2021). With these definitions, it can be understood what is meant by stakeholder, however, it is argued to be too vague (Mitchell et al., 1997, p. 854), as it does not include the relationships, ethics, or morals between the organization and the stakeholder.

However, as Carroll and Buchholtz (2009, p. 84) state, the stakeholders may be affected by the companies' actions, however, these groups can also affect the companies and the business operations. It might become difficult for the management to choose which of the stakeholders are crucial (Carroll, 1991, p. 43). Hence, this creates scenarios of various possible effects, all the previously mentioned stakeholders should be considered equal and included in decision-making (Freeman et al., 2017). This creates a need for engaging with all the stakeholders, not just with the ones that benefit from the business. According to Freeman et al. (2017, p. 6), Corporate Social Responsibility and stakeholder engagement are related to each other, where stakeholder engagement is implemented in the strategies for better and more responsible management. Furthermore, within the research of Corporate Social Responsibility, stakeholder engagement has developed into an important concept (Sachs & Kujala, 2021). Recent Corporate Social Responsibility literature emphasizes the importance of stakeholder relationships (Kujala & Sachs, 2019; Freeman et al., 2017), and thus, how these relationships are built and fostered, and what the outcomes of these said relations can have.

2.1.3 Criticism

CSR has also received criticism for a variety of reasons. Throughout the years, some academics have argued against CSR strategies. One of these arguments comes from classical economics, in which the dispute is focused on what could be said to be the only purpose of a business, creating profit. (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2009, p. 49). In 1970, economist Friedman (as cited in Crane et al., 2023, pp. 59-60) argued against Corporate Social Responsibility and the role of organizations taking responsibility in societies. The author published an article stating three main factors why businesses should not be involved in CSR. According to Friedman, his first argument states that moral responsibility applies only to human beings and not to businesses, therefore, businesses cannot be considered responsible. The second argument is related to managers' responsibility to create profit for shareholders. If the managers perform according to the laws, the only concern should be to ensure the interests of the shareholders are met accordingly. The last concern focuses on stating it is the government's responsibility to be the entity solving issues the society is facing, rather than an organization that managers might not have the correct education for.

Crane et al. (2023, p. 61) present views on how Corporate Social Responsibility can be seen as supporting capitalistic structures and therefore does not imply that there would be any real change to society. Additionally, however, Banerjee (2008) has criticized CSR, focusing considerably on the benefits to companies, rather than on issues such as those society might face. Additionally, he states that focusing on different social issues cannot become a company's core value, even though some have tried to do so, and the strategies will be done from the point of view of creating value for shareholders. Furthermore, according to Werther and Chandler (2011, p. 304), Corporate Social Responsibility has received criticism due to being brought up concerning CSR as *greenwashing*. Greenwashing relates to companies falsely communicating their responsibility initiatives, intentionally or unintentionally, to seem better in the eyes of stakeholders.

2.2 Corporate Social Responsibility in Tourism

2.2.1 Sustainability in the tourism industry

The tourism industry has experienced rapid development over the years, and the past decade has seen a significant increase in worldwide arrivals and overnight stays (Camilleri, 2014). Globalization has opened a variety of possibilities for more travelers than before (McCabe, 2018, p. 280). Due to the increased demand the tourism industry is facing, the possibilities and opportunities for travelers have changed and, furthermore, grown vastly (Goodwin, 2011, p. 9). The tourism industry has undergone a shift regarding sustainability, and more people have started to pay attention to how sustainable tourism organizations are (Camilleri, 2014), and sustainability has become one of the emphases for different destinations and their policymakers (Hall, 2019). These different sustainability initiatives in the tourism industry usually refer to addressing the challenges posed by tourism (Goodwin, 2011, p. 2; Veijola et al., 2013). UNEP and UN Tourism, formerly known as UNWTO (2005, pp. 11-12), have defined sustainable development in tourism as: "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities." The guidelines for sustainable development for tourism (UNEP & UN Tourism, 2005, pp. 11-12) have been outlined as follows:

1. Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.
2. Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to intercultural understanding and tolerance.
3. Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.

It is noted globally (The World Tourism Organization and World Tourism Alliance [UN Tourism & WTA], 2025, pp. 16-17) that tourism has a significant socioeconomic impact worldwide. However, tourism has been facing numerous challenges, such as natural disasters and economic problems. While new challenges have emerged, raising questions about how to prepare, for example, information generated by artificial intelligence (AI), virtual safety, societal and political issues, on top of the existing challenges. As we have witnessed in the past, different global occurrences tend to impact tourism globally, such as pandemics, wars, and natural disasters. Although tourism has a role in providing opportunities for employment, supporting equality, protecting nature, and creating infrastructure, if tourism growth is not managed properly, it can deepen the challenges created by tourism. Moreover, this highlights how tourism plays an important part in sustainable development (United Nations & UN Tourism, 2025, p. 6). How to handle the rising number of travelers while centralizing sustainable tourism growth, and how can tourism destinations combat these challenges?

According to the report by UNEP and UN Tourism (2005, p. 12), “making tourism more sustainable means taking these impacts and needs into account in the planning, development and operation of tourism.” According to Partanen (2022), understanding how to build resilience within the community can be one solution to combat the uncertainty and challenges of tourism. Resilience can be explained as the competence of people, places, and objectives to recognize, learn, and recover from different stress factors coming from the outside world (Amore et al., 2018, p. 235). Amore et al. (2018) note how tourism destinations can become more adaptable

to the different changes by building resilience. This happens when tourism destinations' needs are taken into consideration, instead of concentrating on the tourism industry as it is, and for example, solely on tourism growth. Partanen (2022) suggests that to improve resilience within destinations, dialogue between stakeholders is needed. Understanding different views of tourism stakeholders helps to understand their opinions towards development goals (Amore et al., 2018; Byrd, 2007). Consequently, many of the issues tourism is facing are a consequence of bad planning (Singh et al., 2003, pp. 3-4). Pyke et al. (2018) suggest using stakeholder engagement practices to improve the resilience of the destination, as the lack of good communication practices can hinder tourism planning and policy regulations.

The definition of the tourism industry can be seen as a complex, interconnected network including various services and activities, among others. Hence, describing the industry, it does not solely include companies that are related to tourism directly, but rather a combination of many industries (Kilpijärvi & Aho, 2013, pp. 30-31), and accordingly, giving a simple description of tourism is not straightforward (Veijola et al., 2013, p. 18), and thus it can be identified that the cluster of tourism operators includes multiple participants. For the tourism industry to thrive, collaboration and cooperation are needed by the stakeholders (McCabe, 2018, p. 280). As Byrd (2007) mentioned, sustainable development must consider different stakeholders' viewpoints in the processes of development and planning. There is no easy way to accomplish responsibility, as Goodwin (2011, p. 5) concluded, taking responsibility for tourism lies in the hands of everyone involved, not only one individual, who could be, in this case, the tourist or a single tourism organization, nor the government. However, the decisions made by these different participants affect tourism, shaping it in one direction or another.

According to Björk (2017), destinations can have beneficial outcomes through the work of destination management organizations. One of the main aims of these organizations can include aspects of enhancing collaboration, creating marketing for the destination, and ensuring that the residents are taken into account. Additionally, they can play an important role in directing sustainable growth and responsible acts within a destination. (UN Tourism, 2019). However, in order to create successful cooperation, it is necessary to overcome challenges regarding how to combine different views of stakeholders (Björk, 2017; Pike & Page, 2014). Conversely, Kompula (2016) notes that developing tourism does not always require a destination management organization to fulfill this purpose, but the local stakeholders can accomplish these initiatives by themselves. This is also mentioned by Thompson (2025). The author observed that, in some

cases, achieving and managing sustainable tourism does not always require cooperation with other stakeholders. He notes how individual action can be as effective in terms of sustainability as when different stakeholders work together. In his research, the author also points out how tourism operators would rather focus on their own actions. However, he mentions how in tourism destinations, collaboration is usually desired but not always crucial for mitigating the negative impacts of tourism.

2.2.2 Corporate Social Responsibility in tourism organizations

This brings the discussion on how to define Corporate Social Responsibility in the tourism industry. According to Font and Lynes (2018), this should imply how companies are making sure that their actions are not harmful. When talking about responsible tourism, it should consider all the different participants in different dimensions. Generally, these dimensions can be divided into different parts, and the most common way is to categorize the actions into three dimensions, ecological, socio-cultural, and economic (Veijola et al., 2013). Using these dimensions, it is possible to examine the different layers of responsible and sustainable tourism practices. Marin-Pantelescu (2021, p. 103) describes CSR in the tourism industry as a guideline for tourism organizations to take part in different initiatives, such as environmental, social, and economic approaches. Specifically in the tourism industry, these can include, for example, initiatives towards environmental protection, resource-saving activities (Hughes & Scheyvens, 2016), and protecting local culture (Mathew & Nimmi, 2019), providing suitable working conditions and training (Camilleri, 2014), among other possible actions taken depending on the destination.

The tourism stakeholders have an important role when it comes to developing tourism, and sustainability evaluations become more prominent when the focus is on mutual knowledge (García-Rosell & Mäkinen, 2013). As Sloan (2009) states in her article, stakeholder relationships and how to foster them have become a valuable aspect in the journey of achieving sustainability. Furthermore, recognizing different stakeholders and analyzing who they have become more central in sustainable tourism planning (Damian et al., 2022). McCabe (2018) describes tourism as an environment that combines various stakeholders from different business sectors. The cluster of tourism stakeholders includes a multitude of enterprises from different fields, tourists traveling to the destination, and governments, as well as municipalities (Kompula, 2016; Czernek, 2013). Overall, due to the multiplexity of tourism, the industry can be

described as a multi-stakeholder environment (Fennell, 2006). Correspondingly, Font and Lynes (2018) presented how various stakeholders can be divided in the tourism literature. The authors use examples of external stakeholders that mainly include customers, suppliers, government, communities, and the environment, and internal stakeholders, including shareholders, management, and employees. Additionally, according to García-Rosell and Tallberg (2021), there is a rising interest in the environmental aspects and how nature and non-human stakeholders could be considered as stakeholders in tourism. According to Chase et al. (2012), tourism stakeholders include different businesses, locals, and officials. All in all, these stakeholders can experience profit, and yet, encounter disadvantages through tourism. Font and Lynes (2018) conclude that understanding who the stakeholders are in tourism aims to understand what the responsibilities towards them are.

One of the most discussed tourism stakeholders throughout the literature is the local community, which can include individuals from the residents, entrepreneurs, or other local representatives (Byrd, 2007). According to Goodwin (2011), tourism takes place in a destination that is already inhabited by the local community, highlighting how residents of the destination have their own lives outside of the tourism industry. As traveling has been increasing rapidly over the years, tourism will increasingly affect the destination, as the said industry will influence the environmental, social, and economic aspects of a destination. It is gradually becoming more important to listen to what local communities are saying and understand their needs and wishes regarding tourism, and thus, understanding how tourism can influence the livelihood of the destination should be considered.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that tourism growth can enhance the economy (Satokangas & Vehkaperä, 2013), and tourism can contribute to improving the economic conditions of the local community, such as mitigating poverty (Scheyvens & Hughes, 2019). Due to this, tourism is often used as an example of positive economic development when discussing destinations and local communities (Moscardo, 2012, p. 702). However, according to Arikan et al. (2016), it is easy to get the impression that tourism growth equals a better economy for the residents of the host community. As the tourism numbers grow, these effects grow as well, even though tourism can create a positive impact on the destination where it is taking place. For tourism to exist responsibly, the ideas that emphasize solely creating growth need to be dismissed – it cannot be identified as a responsible method of development. As mentioned by McCabe (2018),

collaboration between stakeholders is needed in order to develop tourism. Similarly, Stubblefield Loucks et al. (2010) found that when businesses and other stakeholders, such as the community, are working together, it is more likely to reach positive outcomes rather than being opponents with different views and goals.

2.2.3 Challenges of practicing sustainability in tourism organizations

As travelers are choosing their destinations and eventually traveling to a destination, it is impossible to avoid interaction between the tourists and the people who are living there. Consequently, the local communities in different tourist destinations have been concerned about the downsides of tourism and the tourists are bringing with them, even though many positive sides have been recorded. (Postma & Schmuecker, 2017; Almeida García et al., 2015). Some of the main recurring concerns are trespassing and littering (Li et al., 2023, p. 189), rising demand for public services, such as hospitals, an increase in usage of infrastructure such as water and sewage, as well as traffic during high seasons (Hao et al., 2011), working conditions (Walmsley & Partington, 2014), and questions rising about how short-term renting is affecting the cities (Postma & Schmuecker, 2017). Furthermore, various types of events may cause disruptions to the local communities (Moisescu et al., 2019). According to Postma and Schmuecker (2017), clashes between locals, tourists, and tourism companies are possible but can be avoided through strategies and planning of tourism. One way of achieving this is, according to Dedeoğlu et al. (2023), listening to residents, and furthermore, considering the local communities' perceptions and ideas of tourism, and including them in tourism development, is necessary to overcome these issues. As Mathew and Nimmi (2022) explain, responsible tourism can increase the local communities' positive perceptions of tourism.

It is important to note that sustainability activities, however, come with downsides. As Kabir (2011) and Rini and Hasim (2021) note, it is highly important to include the local community (as well as other stakeholders) in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of CSR strategies if the actual goal is to make a difference in the communities. However, tourism has faced a lot of criticism for doing the opposite, especially in developing countries where larger companies take advantage of the resources of a destination, deepening the current issues such as inequality, poverty, labor conditions, and environmental issues (Scheyvens & Hughes, 2019).

Goodwin (2011, pp. 209-210) concludes that, while tourism keeps growing, there is a possibility of irresponsible development, and without considering how these actions are affecting the residents, creating no benefit to the local communities.

Additionally, it has been argued that in some cases tourism organizations implement these activities to appear better in the eyes of stakeholders or rather implement these activities to reduce costs (Hughes & Scheyvens, 2016). Additionally, according to the study by Font et al. (2016), the biggest hindrances of tourism organizations in sustainability, especially in the cases of small and medium-sized enterprises, were seen as a lack of resources, such as money and time, being unsure about how to be more sustainable, and stating that consumers do not require it from them. Other reasons, such as low incentives and the owner-managers' estimation that sustainability values are not seen as important by customers, were mentioned. On the other hand, their data showed that environmental protection and creating a positive impact on society were mentioned as drivers for sustainability, alongside highlighting the owner's own values rather than cost-saving and improving image. However, the motivations for taking sustainability actions are usually based on the values of the owners.

2.3 Stakeholder Engagement: Definition and Dimensions

2.3.1 A small background to stakeholder thinking

As digitalization and globalization have touched the world, people have become more connected than previously (Crane et al., 2023, pp. 38-40). Maak (2007, p. 330) argues that it is becoming harder to avoid "moral dilemmas" due to "interconnectedness" and "multiculturality". As explained by Freeman et al. (2017), the world has become more connected than ever before, and therefore, it's becoming increasingly significant to understand how businesses relate to society and their stakeholders. As of today, it is more agreed that businesses exist not only to profit shareholders but also to achieve the various expectations of stakeholders. According to Andriof and Waddock (2002, p. 19), stakeholder approaches have been developing throughout the years. Previously, the stakeholder approach had a more business-centric focus, but it has gradually changed towards examining engagement between stakeholders. The focus has shifted from focusing on economic value to understanding the connections between companies and

stakeholders, and how to maintain good relationships more effectively than before. As presented by Freeman et al. (2017), although businesses are expected to generate value for their shareholders, it is no longer their only objective.

As stated by Freeman (1984, as cited in Parmar et al., 2010, p. 4), “to understand a business is to know how these relationships work and change over time.” Furthermore, the way of approaching stakeholder thinking has been developing as society has gone through changes (Wicks et al., 1994), and the emphasis has been moving away from mainly benefiting businesses towards connecting organizations, where cooperation is important (Andriof & Waddock, 2002, p. 20). According to Kujala and Sachs (2019, p. 227), as the literature considering stakeholders has kept growing over the years, the research has moved in a direction where stakeholder relations are focused more deeply, with the focus on collaboration, cooperation, and engagement. Stakeholder thinking considers networking and maintaining the relationships between the organization and the stakeholders to increase fluent communication and understanding. This can be achieved by establishing different forms of alliance between the participants that take into consideration value creation for all. (Wick et al., 1994, p. 493). As Kujala et al. (2019) present, it can be argued that businesses create value for their stakeholders through their connections.

“Key to responsible leadership is thus the ability to enable and broker sustainable, mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders, to create stakeholder goodwill and trust and ultimately a trusted business in society – that is, one of multi-stakeholder benefit.” (Maak, 2007, p. 331)

As stated by Phillips et al. (2003, pp. 480), stakeholder theory can be described “as a theory of organizational management and ethics.” The concept of stakeholder theory helps to explain further the relationship between an organization and society (Carroll, 1996, p. 72) and what is the meaning of an organization and its responsibility to society (Wicks et al., 1994, p. 477). According to Parmar et al. (2010), one of the core ideas of stakeholder theory is how stakeholders cooperate to create value together. Furthermore, the stakeholder theory has been used to explain what kind of relations organizations and their stakeholders have and how they can be connected. After Freeman’s (1984) conceptualization of stakeholder theory, the perception has gained attention and influenced multiple themes within organizational research (as cited in Kujala & Sachs, 2019, p. 227). According to Freeman et al. (2017, pp. 1-2), the stakeholder

theory has developed into a large-scale framework and is being used to better understand business organizations. Following the idea of stakeholder theory, meaningful relationships between different groups are required for functioning collaborations.

2.3.2 Stakeholder engagement

According to Blomberg et al. (2021, p. 63), in stakeholder engagement, stakeholders are entities with whom businesses should cooperate towards the same goals. Andriof and Waddock (2002, p. 35) describe that well-planned engagement between the organization and stakeholders helps to navigate communication and manage relationships in a constantly changing society. The authors further explain how “the process of engagement creates a dynamic context of interaction, mutual respect, dialogue and change, not one-sided management of stakeholders” (pp. 9-10). Following this, Greenwood (2007, p. 315) explains that stakeholder engagement is “practices that the organization undertakes to involve stakeholders in a positive manner in organizational activities”. Authors Sachs and Kujala (2021, p. 1) summarize stakeholder engagement as “stakeholder engagement refers to the aims, practices, and impacts of stakeholder relations in businesses and other organizations”. According to Kujala and Sachs (2019), in practice, stakeholder engagement is about involving stakeholders in different activities and decision-making procedures of an organization. However, as stated by Bolmberg et al. (2021, p. 62), “there is no one 'right way' to do stakeholder interaction”.

Continuing with this, according to Freeman et al. (2017), there should be consistent interaction between the company and its stakeholders. However, a more profound way to connect with the stakeholders is with “communicating with” rather than “communicating to” the stakeholders. Stakeholder engagement can be described as the method and practical work of stakeholder theory (Freeman et al., 2017; Greenwood, 2007), where the focus lies in the relationships between stakeholders and explaining these relationships (Kujala et al., 2022, p. 1137; Freeman et al., 2017). To ease the understanding of stakeholder engagement, Freeman et al. (2017, pp. 5-6) introduce a framework in their book for this purpose. This framework includes four dimensions: examining stakeholder relations, communicating with stakeholders, learning with and from stakeholders, and integrative stakeholder engagement. This framework is presented in Figure 1.

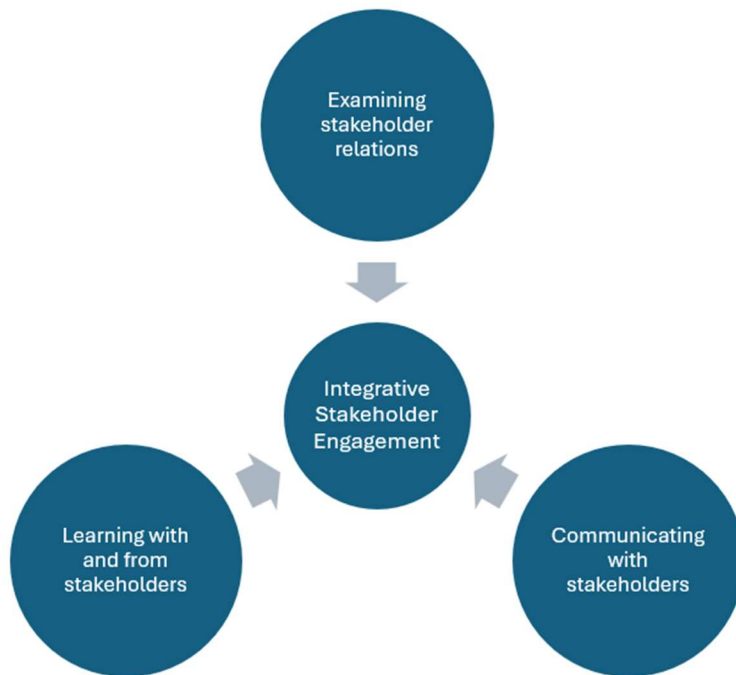


Figure 2. Framework for stakeholder engagement. Source: Adapted from Freeman et al., 2017, p. 5

Breaking down these different dimensions shortly, starting with the first mentioned dimension, examining stakeholder relations. According to Freeman et al. (2017, pp. 4-6), to better understand how society, business, and stakeholders are intertwined, it is central to grasp what happens in these relations and how value is created in a multi-stakeholder environment. The focus from looking into who stakeholders are has shifted more towards analyzing the dynamics of stakeholder interactions, and more importantly, the value creation with and for stakeholders has become the center of discussion. The second dimension, communicating with stakeholders, highlights the importance of bilateral communication between stakeholders rather than focusing solely on the message being delivered to stakeholders (Freeman et al., 2017, p. 4). As Signori (2017, p. 188) suggests, stakeholders could be seen as partners with common goals rather than opponents. When the planning and the contribution are done together with a shared aim, the results can benefit all the participants. The third dimension, learning with and from stakeholders, describes how stakeholder engagement can be used as an opportunity to learn with their stakeholders and how it could be seen as a continuous learning opportunity, even in cases with setbacks (Freeman et al., 2017, p. 5; Kujala & Sachs, 2019, p.

233). According to Heikkinen (2017) and Roloff (2008), in a multi-stakeholder context, networks work together towards solving an issue through stakeholder engagement. Heikkinen (2017, p. 250) accentuates that the benefits of open communication in a multi-stakeholder approach can result in multiple positive effects through collaboration, especially in the cases of complicated sustainability-related issues. Lastly, the fourth dimension, integrative stakeholder engagement (Freeman et al., 2017), stresses how different aspects of stakeholder engagement can result in holistic engagement. According to Kujala et al. (2022, pp. 1164-1165), integrative stakeholder engagement understands both positive and negative outcomes that might occur through engagement.

2.3.3 Stakeholder relations

As mentioned by Lähdesmäki et al. (2019), a prevalent way to describe different relationships has been to use stakeholder salience theory by Mitchell et al. (1997). According to Mitchell et al. (1997), stakeholders can be classified based on the level of importance they hold, which are known as salience attributes. Each stakeholder can have up to three of these attributes. The authors (Mitchell et al., 1997, p. 854) have defined these three attributes of stakeholder salience as: (1) the stakeholder's power to influence the firm, (2) the legitimacy of the stakeholder's relationship with the firm, and (3) the urgency of the stakeholder's claim on the firm. Within this model, “stakeholder power” refers to an entity that can control the outcomes of the organization through its influence (Mitchell et al., 1997, p. 865). According to Suchman (1995, 574), “stakeholder legitimacy” can be further specified as the stakeholder’s perception of whether the organization’s actions can be assessed as socially right. Thus, stakeholder legitimacy is socially constructed by the stakeholder as it mirrors the observer’s perceptions of societal norms and values. Following the conceptualization of Mitchell et al. (1997, p. 867), “Stakeholder urgency” is the third factor that determines the importance of a stakeholder's requirements. The more urgent the stakeholder's need, the more critical it becomes to the organization, as delays may damage the relationship between the organization and the stakeholder.

However, according to Mitchell et al. (1997), as well as Lähdesmäki et al. (2019), by focusing on only one attribute, the importance of other attributes may be overlooked, resulting in a loss of stakeholder salience. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the attributes and how they affect the company to determine which stakeholders are essential for the organization. Civera

and Freeman (2019) discussed how the theory of stakeholder salience assumes that stakeholders are dependent on the business. Moreover, Lähdesmäki et al. (2019), the stakeholder salience theory has been missing one element – social proximity. The authors explain how social relations affect the decisions made by the management regarding stakeholders. This is shown to be a more powerful aspect in small and medium enterprises due to their proximity. In smaller organizations within a community, it is typical for the owners to know each other and form different types of relationships going beyond the company, such as friendships. A closer relationship between the company and a stakeholder, within the context of small and medium-sized enterprises, has been shown to create higher claims. The ties between the manager and employees are likely to be close, such as friends or family members. Additionally, the same people might be sharing the same workplace, live close by at once, thus, the ties are entangled in various ways, creating multiplexity. Such ties are typically seen as advantages. However, close personal relationships can create hindrances in partnerships and business practices, for instance, ethical disputes.

According to Freeman et al. (2010), when observing stakeholder theory, one of the main reasons it gives for a business to exist is through value-creating stakeholder relationships. As well, Myllykangas et al. (2010) argue that to understand stakeholders and their requirements, one should rather consider how value is overall created, and this should be one of the priorities. The value-creation process that takes into account different stakeholders through collaboration can result in achieving sustainability outcomes (Kujala & Korhonen, 2017). Furthermore, according to Freudenreich et al. (2020, p. 5), effective value creation considers more than just one stakeholder's perspective, such as the customers. The stakeholder perspective brings a new dimension to value creation by observing different internal and external stakeholder relations (Freudenreich et al., 2020). According to Kujala et al. (2019), stakeholder value creation aims to define how value can be identified through relationships.

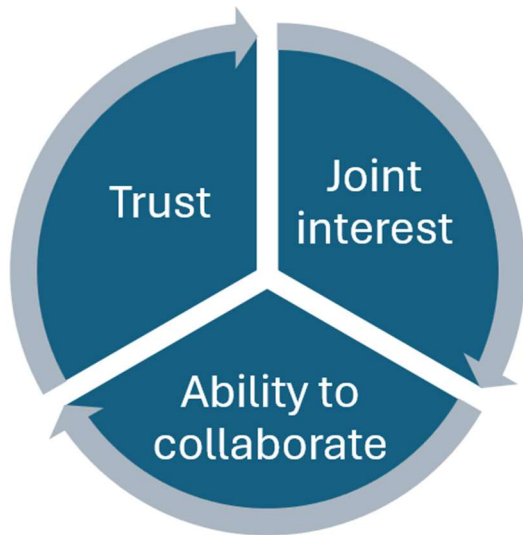


Figure 3. The stakeholder value creation model.

Source: Kujala et al. (2016)

Kujala et al. (2016) propose a framework for a stakeholder value creation model. This model has its foundation in “joint interests, ability to collaborate, and trust” (pp. 13–14). The combination of these three attributes is presented in Figure 3. The model draws a picture of how the interaction between a company and its stakeholders is a “dynamic process”. Kujala and Korhonen (2017) further reason their findings as follows: firstly, mutual interest is usually the foundation for collaboration, secondly, in all relationships, the capability of cooperation equals to commitment to the collaboration, as well as the possibility of sharing and taking in new ideas from others, and lastly, trust explains the result of effective collaboration, as well as it is important factor in relationships overall. Kujala et al. (2019) explain how these attributes help to recognize and align the common goals, fostering relationships, and building and, more importantly, maintaining trust. The authors present how these attributes help view stakeholders as partners in stakeholder engagement. As noted by Freeman et al. (2017), value creation is a “joint process” as well as “with and for” these stakeholders. According to Freudenreich et al. (2020), the stakeholders’ engagement eventually influences what type of value will be created. However, only interacting and communicating is not sufficient, and Kujala et al. (2016) suggest that continuing value creation requires a common understanding and collaboration. As Sloan (2009) presents in her article, stakeholder relationships have become a valuable dimension in achieving sustainability. Interaction that emphasizes collaboration, over control and power, supports change towards sustainability.

2.3.4 Criticism

As well as other fields, stakeholder engagement has also received criticism. Greenwood (2007, p. 321) concludes that improving communication or other engagement actions does not guarantee the ethical treatment of stakeholders and continues to state in her article that engaging more with stakeholders does not necessarily mean that the organization's actions are more responsible, as stakeholder engagement can be understood as a CSR act. Thus, stakeholder engagement should be seen as a separate act from CSR, although they are linked. According to Kujala et al. (2022, pp. 1164-1165), stakeholder engagement can be distinguished as a good act and exaggerates its good influence. However, it is not an excluded possibility that misinformation might happen accidentally. However, when an organization displays how committed they are through different methods, it increases its credibility and thus becomes more responsible (Greenwood, 2007). Additionally, Banerjee (2008) pointed out that focusing on stakeholders is normally viewed through the lens of the business, and thus, the process is led by the economic dimension.

Furthermore, the traditional stakeholder theory has received criticism for the language that has been used, and it's been described as being masculinist (Wicks et al., 1994) and excluding "nonverbal beings" and "non-humans" (Tallberg et al., 2021). Additionally, Banerjee (2008, p. 72) argues that stakeholder theory can embody "stakeholder colonialism," where the organization aspires to control how stakeholders behave. According to Wicks et al. (1994, p. 478), the stakeholder concept is typically described with "masculine" terminology, hence, they present alternative ways to the definitions, emphasizing a feminine approach. They argue that this opens a door for new possibilities, as language alters our way of thinking. The authors stress that the usages of masculinist terminology in the business world, such as "tough choices", "kill or be killed", should be replaced with feminist alternatives, as "the masculinist thought celebrates these competitive and violent metaphors, feminist thought strives to replace them with more cooperative alternatives", and furthermore, a hostile style can be damaging in the networking process. Wicks et al. (1994) conclude that in the feminist approach to stakeholder theory, the focus is on communication and networking with the stakeholders, emphasizing the importance of cooperation rather than power and authority.

2.4 Stakeholder Engagement in Tourism

2.4.1 Stakeholder engagement in sustainable tourism

According to Scheyvens and Hughes (2019), although tourism development plans demonstrate an effort to boost, for example, the local community's economy, long-term planning is necessary to create a lasting impact. If long-term sustainable planning is ignored, it can further increase the negative impacts of tourism. In some cases, the residents of the destination may become hostile towards tourism due to the lack of planning. (Presenza et al., 2013, p. 30). There is a need to create sustainable and responsible tourism (Goodwin, 2011), but how can tourism that takes into account the different dimensions of ecological, social, and economic responsibility and stakeholders' requirements be built? According to Amore et al. (2018), depending on the destination, the aims of the strategies are different, as the destinations have different characteristics. The strategies cannot be to solve all the issues of every destination, but to focus on the aspects that are considered in one location. Creating sustainable and responsible tourism is not easy, and there is no one answer for all. Careful assessment and evaluation of the issues will guide the processes.

As noted by Carcía-Rosell (2017), different stakeholders all have some knowledge that can be included in developing tourism. As well, according to Martínez-Martínes et al. (2023), learning together has been shown to improve sustainability with stakeholders. Engaging with stakeholders and including local communities in the planning of sustainable and responsible development of tourism is an important task (Höckert et al., 2013). According to Rastegar and Ruhanen (2021), to increase participation, especially of local communities, and sharing of knowledge, creating an environment where sharing these thoughts is considered safe is needed. For example, local communities can offer important knowledge for the companies; however, it might be difficult to engage with them correctly. Residents can, for example, doubt their abilities and knowledge while evaluating the possible plans provided to them. In addition, they might struggle to understand all the possible components that affect tourism (Veijola, 2023, Chapter 1). To overcome these issues, continuous communication can play a crucial role.

According to Blomberg et al. (2021, pp. 61-62), organizations can develop their responsibility and communication further with stakeholder engagement. Thus, engaging with different stakeholders offers an opportunity to understand their perspectives and further incorporate those

ideas, needs, and requirements into tourism planning (Chase et al., 2012). However, Greenwood (2007) argues that stakeholder engagement is a neutral action, meaning it is not necessarily required but generally accepted. Therefore, focusing only on stakeholder engagement does not ensure responsible behavior from stakeholders or local communities. García-Rosell and Mäkinen (2013) highlight the varying perspectives on sustainability held by different stakeholders, therefore, assessing sustainability in tourism should have a comprehensive and multi-stakeholder approach rather than a “top-down” approach. According to Waligo et al. (2013), understanding sustainable tourism, its initiatives, and how it might affect the destination can help bring stakeholders together for the same cause and thus increase collaboration.

Furthermore, Maak (2007, p. 332) concludes that “social capital is as essential for the well-being of communities as it is for individual and organizational success”. According to Andriof and Waddock (2002, p. 28), social capital can be seen as the strength of different relationships. The authors argue that for successful stakeholder engagement, one needs a good amount of social capital. Putnam (1995, p. 67) explains how social capital “refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit”. Following this, according to Williams et al. (2007), social license to operate is described by how well the local community has accepted the company. They further conclude that social license to operate goes beyond the minimum that is required by the company, such as only following the laws and regulations, but also contributing in some other way to gain trust from the community. Local communities have certain expectations towards companies operating in areas that might affect the community. These expectations usually include initiatives towards, for example, the protection of the environment or the community's well-being. These initiatives can be directly linked to the organization's CSR strategies, and furthermore, the actions help to build relationships and trust in the community.

Along with other aspects of tourism development and planning (Veijola, 2023), stakeholder engagement should be carefully planned, and the aims and goals should be defined in advance. According to McCabe (2018, p. 283), successful value creation and engagement through collaborations in tourism depends on participants sharing a clear view of the collaboration's goal or idea. The author states that stakeholder engagement in tourism should begin with understanding who the stakeholders are, how they can influence the process, and what their interests are.

After identifying the stakeholders, the next step is to determine the current issues. Then, strategic objectives can be outlined based on the activities that might be undertaken. To prevent issues, engagement processes should be conducted properly and regularly.

According to Jamal and Getz (1995), cooperation of different actors has been accepted as a way to achieve sustainability in destinations. The authors start their article by stating how a lack of collaboration can be an issue for destination management, and collaboration between stakeholders could help to solve issues. Many entrepreneurs are dependent on each other, and the task of taking action together is not easy. Collaboration between different stakeholder groups, such as the tourism companies, local communities, and the government, is needed to create successful tourism initiatives to combat the negative effects of the tourism industry (Wondirad et al., 2020). Dedicating time and resources with a concrete plan can help to execute these efforts. Moreover, regular meetings can enhance trust and relationships between the stakeholders. (Waayers et al., 2012). However, issues may surface, as tourism destinations tend to have diverse stakeholder groups with different views (Jamal & Getz, 1995). Waayers et al. (2012) suggest in their study that using an external coordinator whose responsibility is to execute and supervise the process of collaboration between stakeholders can diminish risks such as conflicts of interest. This is also highlighted in the study by Lo Iacano et al. (2024), where trust built within the community can result in collaboration to solve underlying issues. On the contrary, in cases where trust between individuals is low, the choices tend to be more separate and not aimed at solving bigger issues.

Chase et al. (2012, pp. 480–481) suggest using different strategies in engaging with stakeholders. They recommend, for example, using different tactics regarding media outlets to attain a larger number of viewers or listeners, and creating surveys to reach those who normally do not give their opinion. Additionally, they recommend organizing meetings, training, and workshops, along with group planning events and focus groups. Li et al. (2023) found in their study that most of the tools used for stakeholder engagement in tourism were focusing on different types of meetings and workshops to enhance discussion and learning together. Additionally, they discovered that surveys and interviews were used in engagement processes, along with digital tools. The authors suggest using creativity to support engagement processes. Furthermore, images and maps were used for visualization. They explain how using art-based methods can help bring people from different backgrounds together, especially in smaller community settings, and enhance ingenious voices. Using art-based methods, such as an opportunity tree,

can increase collaboration between participants even in disagreement and offer a path to understanding each other. These methods provide a different set of tools for engaging and can help people from different backgrounds, and without profound knowledge of tourism, to participate in development.

According to Siti-Nabiha and Saad (2015), in tourism, good interaction between stakeholders should include clear and in-line communication channels as well as planned meetings, briefings, plus, if possible, using online platforms for communication. Additionally, dividing responsibilities between the participants is valuable and improves coordination. Different communication methods are often used in stakeholder engagement in tourism, such as social media and company websites, as well as reporting. However, these practices do not necessarily promote better interaction but display the initiatives. According to Blomberg et al. (2021, p. 61), stakeholder engagement, communication, and cooperation between companies and stakeholders are essential for developing sustainability holistically. Thus, two-way and open interaction is at the center of stakeholder engagement. García-Rosell and Mäkinen (2013) suggest placing stakeholders as active participants rather than objects of evaluation and including them in the planning. When engaging with stakeholders, understanding different points of view is important, and incorporating that into the processes of evaluation improves understanding. As well, according to Kujala and Sachs (2019), in stakeholder engagement processes, understanding and hearing the less heard groups is equally important for successful communication.

2.4.2. Tourism stakeholder engagement perspectives for small and medium-sized enterprises in the context of sustainability

The role of small and medium-sized enterprises in the global tourism industry is significant (Gössling & Reinhold, 2024). Despite this, the focus on studies that consider sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility in tourism has usually been on larger companies (Perrini, 2006). According to UN Tourism (2002), small and medium-sized enterprises constitute nearly 90 percent of all tourism companies. To define their size, SMEs are classified as enterprises with fewer than 50 employees (European Commission). Stubblefield Loucks et al. (2010, pp. 182-184) point out that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and larger firms differ in various ways. The most noticeable differences are found in revenues, budgets, and the number of employees. Therefore, when addressing sustainability and responsibility issues, SMEs may have

fewer resources for sustainability initiatives. However, as Gössling and Reinhold (2024) observed, the impact of SMEs in tourism on sustainability efforts should not be underestimated due to their size. Additionally, according to Tomasella and Conway (2025), smaller tourism companies contribute and can have a significant impact on the environment. As concluded before, the pressure towards businesses to act responsibly and contribute to sustainability has risen, and SMEs are no exception to this. Including small companies in sustainability initiatives is important.

When observing tourism in Finland, it has been noted to have a significant impact on the national economy and employment (the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland [TEM], 2022). Directly, within the tourism field in Finland, there are 29 100 tourism enterprises (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland [TEM], 2024, p. 31). Additionally, tourism employs 141 000 people across the country (Statistics Finland [Tilastokeskus], 2025). Both numbers are from the year 2022. Following this, it is noted by TEM (2022, pp. 14-22) that tourism can help create services and infrastructure for locals in Finland. The need for collaboration between stakeholders is evident and necessary to further develop sustainable tourism in Finland, engaging all participants. As expressed by Tervo-Kankare (2017), although sustainability and responsibility actions have been taken seriously, they do not exclude the importance of persistent work towards more sustainable and responsible tourism, especially as the tourism industry continues to grow.

According to the study of Visit Finland (2019, p. 3), on average, tourism organizations in Finland are small. Moreover, according to another report by Visit Finland (2018), smaller organizations might find sustainability processes difficult, time-consuming, and expensive. As concluded in the previous parts, SMEs might lack different resources such as time and funding (Font et al., 2016). Visit Finland (2019, p. 11) highlights the importance of collaboration between different organizations due to limited resources, as smaller enterprises might find sustainability initiatives overwhelming. Collaboration also offers possibilities to learn together, and finding solutions to problems can be acquired together. Furthermore, Stubblefield Loucks et al. (2010) suggest providing different tools specifically tailored to the needs of SMEs to support them on their sustainability journeys.

“The next step is for SMEs to adopt sustainable business practices not just because it will drive their businesses to the leading edge, but because the planet matters to them as businesses, as individuals, and members of their community.” (Stubblefield Loucks et al., 2010, p. 194)

According to Kujala and Sachs (2019), small and medium-sized enterprises tend to engage with stakeholders through regular daily activities, whereas larger companies have more structured strategies for their approaches. Perrini (2006) suggests that to study SMEs' Corporate Social Responsibility, it should be done through the lens of social capital that combines the stakeholder theory approaches. The author remarks on how this inclusion and involvement help the SMEs understand their role and potential in sustainability. However, in some cases, small and medium-sized enterprises have already implemented a variety of CSR initiatives into their strategies, yet these strategies can be so ingrained that they are not always understood as CSR activities but perceived as regular activities, and thus emphasize the role of social capital. According to Tomasella and Convey (2025), the values and motivations together with the business orientation of the management in small and medium-sized enterprises are notably guiding the sustainability and responsibility initiatives, and how these initiatives are expected to influence the business. These values guide the way these initiatives are perceived and what actions are taken, as well as what kind of benefit they can bring to the company or to society. However, the authors argue that only when the values align with a need for a change, rather than cost reduction or creating a better image, are the values emphasized, not bargained. Furthermore, according to Font et al. (2016), the authors present how the management communicates their sustainability, further expressing the values of the management towards CSR.

Previous studies highlight how social relations influence stakeholder salience, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises (Lähdesmäki et al., 2019; Siltaoja & Lähdesmäki, 2015). According to Perrini (2006), SMEs tend to have a stronger connection to the communities in which they are operating, in contrast to larger tourism organizations. He presented how smaller companies have demonstrated how to combine locally important aspects into their strategies, such as culture, familiarity, and the expectations of how companies are perceived to behave in the region by residents. Compared to large multinational organizations, owners of small businesses tend to reside in the area and therefore belong to the community in which they operate. Being part of the community normally means having connections within the community that have been made with them through interaction, both in business as well as outside of work-life,

or a mix of both attributes. (Lähdesmäki et al. 2019). Similarly, Lähdesmäki et al. (2019) and Partanen (2022) conclude that continuity of residency, even though not being local per se, within the destination has been linked to success within the enterprises, as well as familiarity with other companies from the same area. Perrini (2006) suggests that through this integration with the local communities, SMEs can receive a higher amount of social capital. Furthermore, Lähdesmäki et al. (2017) argue that the ethics of care, which emphasize the overall well-being of the community, can explain the role of social proximity in forming relationships with SMEs.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this master's thesis is to explore the connection between stakeholder engagement and sustainability in tourism. The research is implemented as qualitative research, following the interpretive social sciences paradigm. This chapter of the master's thesis introduces the methodological approaches used and the reasoning behind the decisions. In addition, the chapter presents the type of data collected for the thesis and how it was analyzed further.

3.1 Empirical context

As Timothy (2014, p. 30) described, “every place on the globe has heritage”. Cultural heritage tourism includes different attributes for enjoying the legacy and traditions, such as museums, art, music, and what is typically viewed as historically significant sites. The possibilities of this type of tourism are immense, creating a need for tools for management and development. This way, the sites can be preserved for later generations. To tackle these issues, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has created a framework for supporting the sustainable growth of heritage sites.

“World Heritage and tourism stakeholders share responsibility for conservation of our common cultural and natural heritage of Outstanding Universal Value and for sustainable development through appropriate tourism management” (UNESCO)

However, according to the authors (Timothy, 2014, p. 34), the most recognized UNESCO World Heritage Sites can attract many visitors yearly. This raises questions about sustainability, engagement, and stakeholder collaboration in culturally important areas. However, the aim of this master's thesis is not to study cultural tourism or heritage tourism, but to evaluate further how stakeholder engagement, local communities, and social proximity create a unique atmosphere and how these attributes form a different business ground within the context of sustainability and responsibility.

According to the Association of World Heritage Sites in Finland (Fortress of Suomenlinna). One of the most well-known UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Finland is the Suomenlinna Sea

Fortress. The island is one of the most recognized and visited by Finnish people as well as foreign tourists around the world year-round. It is located in front of Helsinki and can be reached by ferry within 15 minutes. The area is a combination of 8 different islands, covering 80 hectares of land. The legacy of the sea fortress began in the year 1748, when Finland was still a part of Sweden. Furthermore, as described by Suomenlinna (History), once Sweden lost their status as a great power during wars against Russia at the beginning of the 18th century, reinforcing a strong defense in the soil of Finland was seen as a necessity. At present, the sea fortress represents three different periods of defense of Finland: when Finland was ruled by Sweden, followed by its incorporation into Russia, and ultimately achieving independence.

According to the Suomenlinna Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2030 (2025, p. 13), tourism on the island is still highly seasonal, even though many tourists have found their way to Suomenlinna during the winter, with the peak of visitors exploring the island during the summer. Furthermore, the number of sightseers has almost doubled in the past 20 years, from 600,000 to close to a million visitors. The number of visitors is not the only aspect that has changed, and the demographic of visitors has shifted from mainly consisting of Finnish citizens to foreign visitors making up the majority. Moreover, the Association of World Heritage Sites in Finland (Fortress of Suomenlinna) presents how Suomenlinna currently stands as one of the most well-known UNESCO World Heritage sites in Finland. The fortress was included in the list of world heritage sites in 1991 as an important monument of military architecture in Finland. Today, the Sea Fortress is operating as a regular neighborhood in Helsinki, with some 800 inhabitants. The area continues to offer various services and attractions, such as attractions of the fortifications, events, museums, parks, restaurants, and cafes, enriching the neighborhood for the visitors, but also for the locals. As mentioned by Suomenlinna (2025, p. 14), the overall network in Suomenlinna includes more than 30 companies, creating different tourism services directly or indirectly. Through the collaboration of these different operators, such as a grocery store, cafes, museums, water transportation services, and accommodation services, an experience is created for visitors, residents, and the operators.

The Governing Body of Suomenlinna plays an important role in maintaining and presenting today's Suomenlinna. The Sustainable Tourism Strategy of Suomenlinna 2030 is guiding the conservation of the Sea Fortress as well as the UNESCO World Heritage Site (Suomenlinna, Sustainability). The Governing Body of Suomenlinna *“is not a provider of tourism services, except for tourist information and the rental of meeting and banqueting facilities, but plays the*

role of an enabler, developer, coordinator, and promoter of tourism” (Suomenlinna, 2021, p. 9). Suomenlinna (2025, p. 14) offers a wide range of services for the companies operating on the island to stay connected with each other and improve collaboration. The main communication channels are online, such as an Extranet service directed at companies to communicate with each other, as well as to receive information. Additionally, the main digital channels are used to promote local services and companies. Additionally, for the operators, they arrange a variety of different opportunities such as regular meetings, events, co-marketing possibilities, and training opportunities. Also, they provide tourist information services for visitors.

Suomenlinna is a unique destination with a culturally and travel-wise important role in tourism in Helsinki, Finland. The existing literature has not previously reflected combining stakeholder engagement and sustainability, even though previous literature exists. Considering the local community, heritage, and existing sustainability strategies, Suomenlinna was chosen as the research area.

3.1 Methodology

As this research aims to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of tourism enterprises and their owner-managers, a qualitative approach was chosen over a quantitative one. As Merriam and Grenier (2019, p. 37) note, the word qualitative can be used as a broad term to explain different ways to conduct this type of research. A qualitative approach has been used broadly for exploring and researching tourism from various angles. Most importantly, the focus has been on understanding the social context of the phenomenon. At the core of using qualitative methods is understanding and explaining the motivations, reasons, and opinions behind the studied phenomenon. (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004, pp. 3-6). According to Ramseook-Munhurrin and Durbarry (2018, pp. 20-21), compared to quantitative methods, the emphasis is on measuring and producing measurable data. Whereas, in qualitative research, the measured data is something other than numbers, and the data is often in written format, such as text, but also images, videos, or audio recordings can be used.

Phillimore and Goodson (2004, pp. 34–35) present that, behind every research, there is a base of philosophy of science setting the basic values, and directing, in this sense, which way the research is going, often called paradigms. As Jennings (2010, pp. 25–36) states, the paradigm

guides how the world is perceived. There is not only one correct way to approach the research, but the researcher must be aware of the assumptions and limitations that come with the paradigms, such as ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods. Hence, defining the paradigm gives the research certain guidelines and guides on how the world is perceived, how the research is conducted, the connection between the researcher and the participants, and how the data will be collected. According to Jennings (2010, p. 59), there are advantages and disadvantages to every paradigm, and not all of them can be applied to every research, thus, the paradigm should be determined at the beginning of the research.

As this master's thesis is implemented as qualitative research, it follows the interpretive social sciences paradigm, also known as social constructivism (Jennings, 2019, p. 41). According to Merriam and Grenier (2019, pp. 21-22), qualitative research has been widely used in social sciences. Moreover, it has been used to examine how people perceive their lives and past experiences, and how these affect their reality. This type of approach is established on an interpretive perspective. According to Jennings (2019, pp. 41-42), in this paradigm, multiple realities explain the phenomenon rather than just one reality or theory. The researcher becomes one of the insiders, seeking information through the eyes of the insider, making the research more subjective than objective. Furthermore, the researcher and the entity being studied interact with each other. According to Merriam and Grenier (2019, pp. 26-28), following the interpretive approaches, findings also become descriptive. Furthermore, this type of research characterizes data into themes and repetitive topics that are finally integrated into the literature used in the research.

3.2 Data Collection

As this master's thesis is conducted as qualitative research, the data collection methods were chosen accordingly. The most used data collection methods for qualitative analyses are interviews, questionnaires, observation, or collecting data from different documents into one larger data (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 83). From these different data collection methods, for this master's thesis, interviewing was selected as the best technique. As mentioned by Jennings (2010, p. 41), in interpretive social sciences, the aim is to understand from the insider's perspective. According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018, p. 84), the easiest way to determine a person's thoughts, reasoning, and potential actions is by asking them directly.

According to Beedie (2018, pp. 86-89), there are different types of interviews. The differences can be distinguished by how the interviewee is guided. In a structured interview, the questions and their format are the same for everyone, and the interviewee is given a set of predefined response options. In a semi-structured interview, interviewees are asked the same questions but are not given ready-made response options. It is a slightly freer interview format and allows the interviewee to express their views in their own words. According to Puusa et al. (2020, pp. 111-112), semi-structured interviews are a more open interview type, allowing the researcher to gather the interviewees' views on key research issues in the respondents' own words. It allows the respondent to answer something that the interviewer might not have thought of before. This also offers a better possibility to understand the phenomena through the eyes of the insider with their own words. Taking all of these points into consideration, a semi-structured interview method was chosen for this research. Following this step to explain further the data analysis process, the interview structure was prepared by using different themes: tourism, responsibility, stakeholders, engaging with others, and future perspectives. At the end of the interview, the interviewees were asked if there was anything they would like to mention. This was conducted to ease the analysis process and create some themes beforehand based on the theory. There were some reforms of the questions and wordings throughout the research, as well as depending on the interviewee. However, the structure stayed the same.

According to Kananen (2017, pp. 128-129), selecting the right participants for the interview is crucial in avoiding mistaken results. The participants should be carefully chosen to make sure they have a sufficient amount of knowledge. Selecting the most suitable participants is essential for the success of this master's thesis. Moreover, the results could be biased if the right people are not contacted. As stated, the focus is on exploring how sustainability and stakeholder engagement are connected in tourism businesses, and how the owner-managers perceive different relations through their businesses in a tourism destination. As the research was done based on Suomenlinna and how the organizations engage with different stakeholders, local enterprises and organizations were approached for the interviews.

Firstly, a member of the Governing Body of Suomenlinna was contacted to inquire about more information and if they would be interested in participating in the research. Based on the information given by one of the employees, who was also interviewed for the research, the first possible interviewers were contacted. As the area is very limited, there were slight issues with reaching enough participants, and as there is a limited number of entrepreneurs or other

stakeholders, it was difficult to find enough interviewees. However, due to not being able to interview all the previously mentioned owner-managers, the snowball effect was used to reach more possible participants.

The interviewees who participated in the research were from different organizations around Suomenlinna. Four of the interviewees were owner-managers of different organizations, and one was an employee of a partner organization. Two participants who were working for the Governing Body of Suomenlinna. As the contributions of Suomenlinna to the tourism organizing, planning, and development, to gain more holistic knowledge about the phenomena inside the organization, it was decided to interview two people. Nevertheless, these two participants work in different departments, and this provides a way to understand the phenomenon more profoundly from the perspective of the Governing Body. The list of interviewees is shown in Table 1. Furthermore, the interviewees are referred to with abbreviations without a particular order: I1, I2, I3, I4, I5, I6, and I7. Two of the interviewees work for the Governing Body of Suomenlinna (I1, I4), one of the interviewees is part of an important partner organization (I3), and the rest of the interviewees are owners or managers of different companies in Suomenlinna (I4, I5, I6, I7).

Table 1. List of interviewees

Interviewee 1	Employee of the Governing Body of Suomenlinna
Interviewee 2	Employee of the Governing Body of Suomenlinna
Interviewee 3	Another partner
Interviewee 4	Owner-manager of an enterprise
Interviewee 5	Owner-manager of an enterprise
Interviewee 6	Owner-manager of an enterprise
Interviewee 7	Owner-manager of an enterprise

Seven interviews were collected from the winter of 2024 to the spring of 2025. Before the interviews, each participant was sent a letter of consent (Appendix 1). The letter of consent was then signed and sent back electronically. If the participant preferred, consent was given verbally before starting recording. In any case, the interviewees were informed about the anonymity and consent before recording one more time. The interviews collected for the study were conducted via Teams and audio-recorded using the program, as well as using the taping application on the phone as a backup method. All the interviews were conducted in Finnish

and later translated into English.

3.3 Data Analysis

The method of analysis in this master's thesis is carried out using qualitative content analysis. According to Lindblom-Ylänne et al. (2011, p. 118), to thoroughly understand the phenomenon, the collected data alone, as they are in the first stage, are not enough. The data gathered needs to be analyzed to draw further conclusions about the phenomenon. Transcribing involves converting the collected data into written form, followed by summarizing and categorizing the text. As noted by Kananen (2017, p. 134), this makes things easier for the analysis process. According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018, pp. 117), using the content analysis method, the researcher can review the gathered data thoroughly. Content analysis involves examining the text to create a description of the phenomenon. However, as Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018, p. 112) explain, the aim of content analysis is not just to write out results from the data, but to draw conclusions.

For this research, a theory-guided method was used to analyze the data. According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018), it combines aspects from data-driven as well as from theory-guided approaches. The analysis is constructed based on the data, concluding from general to more specific observations. This method uses theory in the analysis, but primarily, the analysis is based on the collected data, making it more inductive. The conclusions drawn from the results are, in the end, integrated into the theory used in the research, linking the findings' meaning within this context, and ultimately offering new perspectives. Overall, the theory-guided analysis shows the impact of existing information on the phenomena, but the meaning of prior knowledge is not to assess the theory deeply but rather to draw new ideas.

The first step of the analysis was transcribing the interviews. In the beginning, the recorded audios were uploaded to Microsoft Word as individual records. At this stage, the audios were in Finnish and would later be translated into English. The data collected was then transcribed into text by using the automatic function of Word, where the audios are transformed into text automatically. However, the purpose of using automation was to facilitate the process, and the audios and texts were listened to and corrected one by one in individual files. Throughout this process, a total of 120 pages of transcribed data were gathered.

In the beginning, the data was thoroughly reviewed before starting the analysis process. This helped to get an idea of what kind of data was gathered and what topics were repeated. The new insights emerging from the data were highlighted. The next step included collecting all the relevant parts into one document, and the aim of this part is to reduce the unnecessary parts from the text (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018), and the remaining relevant parts were transferred to another document. The following part is called coding, and the researcher usually can complete this part as they wish, as there are no general guidelines (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). Adding notes and highlighting different colors of the relevant parts helped to organize the text. Furthermore, color-coding was used to assemble important information and to keep track of the interviewee. The first steps included finding similar expressions and topics from the text based only on the content, not on the theory. As this part of the analysis still included the full sentences, following this, the sentences were then simplified into a different document, but still using differentiating colors for each interviewee. This way, nothing was lost, and it was easier to get back to the previous steps.

The actual analysis process followed the next steps. The first part was guided more by a data-driven analysis process (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). The simplified texts were then grouped together and connected with the help of the interview structure, forming different classes based on similarity and later named accordingly. These groups then became the subclasses of the analysis. Moreover, initially, there were several subclasses to work with, and reviewing the data took some time.

The next part of the analysis involved forming the general classes from these subclasses. This helped to create a clearer idea of the data. Both theory and the interview structure helped to shape these general classes, and they were easily formed. Most of the topics focused on different dimensions of sustainability, tourism and its impacts, collaboration, and the sense of community. In the final stage of the analysis, further examination of the general classes, combined with theoretical insights, led to the identification of the top classes (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). Each of these classes was more and more specific. Lastly, the top classes were linked to the main connectives regarding stakeholder engagement and sustainability together.

3.4 Research Ethics

According to Puusa et al. (2020, p. 175), three concepts form the trustworthiness of research, and according to them, these concepts are “validity, reliability, and ethicality”. In this next section, the ethical methods of this master’s thesis are explained. In this master’s thesis, the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (2012) ethical guidelines are followed while conducting the research. Researchers must follow responsible research methods in each study without exclusions. In adherence to the ethical guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity, credit is always given to the research community, and the material used is correctly referenced. To ensure credibility, the focus is on using peer-reviewed articles for this master's thesis.

For this master's thesis, data were collected through interviews with tourism companies in Finland. To ensure that participation is voluntary, interviewees received an official invitation letter explaining the purpose of the research, guaranteeing anonymity during the interview, and emphasizing the option to withdraw at any time. Participants also received a letter of consent (Appendix 1) before the interview, as the recording was saved, and later used for analysis. This letter includes the contact information of the researcher and supervisor in case of any questions. Finally, before recording the interview, this information was repeated to ensure that participants were fully informed and comfortable with the process.

In addition, different ethical issues were considered beforehand. As mentioned before, to provide more security during the analysis process, the data collected from interviews is handled anonymously. The data is not shown to anyone else, and the names of the participants and companies are visible only to the researcher and the supervisor. To further take full advantage of anonymity, the participants are described only vaguely, with generic descriptions of their positions and companies, so their identities will remain undisclosed. The interviewees are assigned pseudonyms such as I1 (Interviewee 1), I2 (Interviewee 2), and so on, to protect their identities. The material from the interviews is going to stay protected as they are stored behind a private account, and it is only accessible through a password known by the researcher.

While conducting the thesis, it is important to note the use of AI-generated software, such as Grammarly, DeepL, and ChatGPT, during this process. The software was used for correcting grammar, translating sentences, finding synonyms, or rephrasing some sentences. However,

these tools were not used for generating text on their own or to write chapters on behalf of the researcher. All the suggestions were carefully checked to see the recommended changes to detect any errors that might change the meaning, for example, of the sentence. Additionally, nothing containing personal information was given to artificial intelligence.

4 FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the research, which will later be analyzed and linked to previous literature in the discussion chapter. The study aims to understand how stakeholder engagement influences the sustainability of tourism organizations. This chapter presents and highlights the main findings of this research and addresses the sub-questions: 1) How is sustainability perceived within the destination? 2) How does stakeholder engagement affect the relationship between stakeholders? 3) How can stakeholder engagement be used to improve sustainability?

Through the content analysis, it was possible to detect five main aspects of how stakeholder engagement can influence sustainability in tourism. As tourism and its impacts have a central role in this study, findings start by presenting how perceived benefits and challenges create a base for collaboration. This part of the findings gives an overview of how tourism is impacting the destination and how sustainability values are directing the planning of tourism on a larger scale. Following this, the findings characterize how tourism enterprises implement sustainability in their business. The next section then presents how social relationships are formed within the community among stakeholders. The following section shows how networking and communication are enhanced through interaction between the stakeholders. The final section illustrates how this strengthens learning together.

4.1 Perceived impacts of tourism as a base for collaboration

Increasing tourism numbers and concerns towards responsible and sustainable tourism have raised questions of how tourism should be developed (Goodwin, 2011). To understand how tourism enterprises engage with other stakeholders in the context of sustainability, the first step was to assess how tourism impacts the island and how these impacts are perceived. Furthermore, the way tourism is affecting the destination acts as a base for collaboration. These aspects are also seen in the planning processes of tourism. Hence, this section is divided into two parts: tourism impacts and tourism planning. Both of these aspects are valuable in the sense of this research and thus included in the findings.

4.1.1 Tourism impacts

Suomenlinna is one of the most visited locations in the Helsinki region (I3), but *without the growing interest in Helsinki overall as a destination, the sea fortress would not have as many visitors as they have now* (I1). Suomenlinna is affected, both in positive and negative ways, by tourism. For example, following the pandemic and decreased number of visitors, tourism is finally recovering, although the ongoing global situation continues to impact tourism overall (I1). As noted by the results, many companies on the island are dependent on the tourism industry's flow, as mentioned by all the interviewees. Additionally, the interviewers emphasized how important tourism is economically for the island and its business. According to the data, the economic benefits are seen as a positive and welcome outcome of tourism, creating business opportunities for companies to serve local and foreign visitors. Though it is important to mention that not all the interviewees rely solely on tourism, although it can have a great effect on the operations.

But yes, it's kind of like tourism here in Suomenlinna is just vital, and without it, we would not exist. (I4)

It is absolutely vital, the fact that we are here, so then if the number of tourists collapses as it did during the pandemic, we would be in trouble. (I5)

It is a really crucial business, it brings income, connections, and everything that is useful in many ways. (I3)

It is crucial for us. (I6)

Despite the increasing number of visitors throughout the year, most of the interviewees mentioned how the business operations rely on the high season, and the summer period is the most active time to do business. The low season is also affecting other aspects of the island, such as the ferry's schedule, and the ferry's running hours are less frequent during the winter. Seasonality during the low season can be felt as receiving fewer customers, and the interviewees mentioned how they might have shortened opening hours or even be temporarily closed, except for some private events. Moreover, they might have fewer employees for the winter season. This further reflects the importance of tourism and the economic benefits generated by it. However,

it was mentioned how some of the visitors come to the island not only to visit the island, but also because of the enterprises and their services or products.

Conversely, the growing interest in Suomenlinna has created larger crowds visiting the island, impacting the island in different ways. As Suomenlinna can be reached only by water transportation, the increased numbers have, for example, generated queues for the ferry (I1). Queues are not only formed when getting to the island but have also been experienced in the local supermarket (I1) or in other premises that are full, such as cafes and restaurants (I5). On the positive side of tourism growth, *the schedule for the ferry runs more often during the high season* (I1). Furthermore, according to the interviewees, different business operations enliven the island. *It is a popular destination, yes, and of course, there are also residents all year round, and so it's still a district just like any other part of the city.* (I7). If planned and managed with sense, tourism is not only beneficial for business or incoming tourists but also creates more services for the locals, such as more frequent transportation, various food services, or cultural activities (I1).

According to the [resident] survey, the residents are very proud to live in a world heritage site, and clearly, tourism and tourists also bring more positive than negative aspects to everyday life. (I1)

Furthermore, although some negative impacts have been mentioned, the data gathered from the interviews showed that the locals are mainly perceiving tourism and business operations on the island approvingly, despite occasional complaints related to, for example, noise or the company's premises being full of customers, not leaving much space for the local regulars. Yet, according to the interviewees, most of the feedback is positive, and the tourism enterprises do not receive negative feedback in general. All in all, tourism is mostly seen as positive by residents.

4.1.2 Tourism planning

When it comes to developing and planning tourism, the Governing Body of Suomenlinna has a central role in the core operations, and they are one-of-a-kind destination management organizations. As Suomenlinna is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, *taking care of the heritage is at the heart of the sustainability work* (I2), especially when the number of visitors is increasing. This is seen in various levels taken by the Governing Body of Suomenlinna, such as in their

tourism strategies (see: Suomenlinna Sustainable Tourism Strategy Suomenlinna 2030). This includes aspects concerning the environment and ecological sustainability, and how to preserve the island for future generations, alongside other sustainability dimensions. According to the interviewee, responsibility and sustainability have always been the core elements in the strategies (I1). Additionally, as the interviewee mentioned, sustainable development has been a long-term effort over several years since the beginning of the 21st century (I1). The integration of these values can be further seen in the practices, which showcase their importance in the broader context.

There are several different types of residents, visitors, and employees, so all the activities that we do should always be considered through these three groups, so that none of what is done is someone else's expense, or that the activity is always in balance with all the users. (I2)

There is a bit of a paradox that it shouldn't attract too many tourists. The island's carrying capacity does not [withstand], but it must be optimized so that there is enough business, so that the companies get customers. (I3)

As mentioned by the interviewees, to support sustainable growth of tourism, *the aim of tourism development is not to become a winter destination but rather to balance the differences by bringing out the strengths of every season (I1), and tourism should be developed sustainably without promoting overtourism (I2)*. As pointed out by the first interviewee, one of the important aspects when planning tourism development lies in collaboration with different stakeholders — the local community, including residents and the business owners. Decision-makers want to listen to stakeholders and address their wishes and needs (I1). This way, the solutions are created and executed specifically for Suomenlinna, *actively listening to and hearing the different points of view and making site-specific solutions (I1)*, as the goal of the sustainability work is not to solve other destinations' concerns, but to focus on what is and is not working in Suomenlinna (I1). To receive feedback, yearly surveys have been conducted. This further highlights the importance of collaboration, and it has helped to solve some current issues together, such as with the local association. For example, *the city of Helsinki has installed a separate portal for residents and workers, with a separate access permit to ease their everyday lives (I1)*.

Additionally, all the interviewees unanimously specified that incorporating responsibility in practice should not be on the shoulders of one entity, such as the government, the destination

management organization, or even the operating businesses. *Well, I think it's everybody's business because it can be even a very small act (I4).* To build a holistic approach, everyone should contribute to creating shared responsibility for sustainability. However, the data presented how the role of the government and the city appear on a larger scale, as the strategies, policies, and regulations introduced are affecting sustainability practices. The outcomes of decisions made will eventually impact the island and the people living and working there. In the context of Suomenlinna, in some cases, the options might be limited when thinking about being sustainable. For example, as the I3 explained, the island's only public transportation is by water transportation, the ferry. If the chosen operator for the ferry were to cause higher emissions, the people who depend on the transportation would not have an alternative option for public transport. Furthermore, this can be applied to other aspects of the island, such as waste management (I4), along with others. Hence, the importance of considering different dimensions of sustainability becomes greater, as well as considering the viewpoints of stakeholders.

First of all, it must be reflected in the government's policies in legislation, where politics comes into play, but then it must also be reflected in the strategies of the cities. It must be reflected in the strategies of other levels of government. For example, I can use the term "destination" to mean, at this point, Suomenlinna itself or the city of Helsinki, and it must be reflected in their strategies, and it must be systematic, but companies also have their own responsibilities and roles. (I6)

Following this, even though in sustainability all the participants' contribution is needed, if the requirements concerning sustainability are not adequate and defined by different laws and regulations, it becomes easier not to take action (I6). According to the data, the pressure coming from different stakeholders can push sustainability actions forward, such as from different organizations, customers, or even employees. However, the role of what is required by the law is the starting point, and without it, it could be easy not to participate in sustainability initiatives.

4.2 Sustainability initiatives of the tourism enterprises

Most of the businesses operating in Suomenlinna are micro-entrepreneurs or small business owners (I1). According to the data, not all interviewed owner-managers have concrete or separate CSR or sustainability strategies. The most common cause brought up was the available resources, such as a lack of time, funding, or even employees. Accordingly, it is noted by the

interviewees of the Governing Body of Suomenlinna, as by the entrepreneurs themselves, that sustainability acts, such as certificates, require more resources (I1, I4, I5). *But you have to remember your own resources. We are a very small company (I4).* The process of getting certificates can be seen as difficult or expensive, even though everything would be done by the book. They might have fewer opportunities to participate in training due to resources. If these events happen to be held during the day, even though the content would be relevant and interesting, due to the lack of resources, it might be difficult to attend (I5). On the other hand, some of the owner-manager interviewees also mentioned that low seasons offer opportunities for participating in the training.

[Responsibility] is extremely important in all operations, and I believe that responsibility is a concrete value that should be one of the most important values for every single operator. (I7)

However, all the interviewees have some plans or initiatives towards sustainability and responsibility. When observing more closely the concrete sustainability actions of the tourism enterprises, ecological sustainability was emphasized more compared to the other aspects of sustainability among the interviewees. Most of these practices consider environmental aspects, such as creating less food waste, reducing waste and water consumption, or preferring domestic or even local products. If the product cannot be found in the Finnish market, the interviewees preferred using other choices that were considered responsible or ethical, such as green certified products. After ecological dimensions, the socio-cultural aspects were brought up second most. This included considering the different ways of training employees, conversations, and possibilities to inspire, such as through workshops, and focusing on the well-being of employees. It was also mentioned by the interviewees that they select their partners based on their sustainability practices, such as certificates.

This applies to all three [sustainability] dimensions, all our partners that we choose as partners and from whom we order goods, so the responsibility really means a lot. (I6)

However, based on the data, not all companies include the local community in their strategies directly. However, the results showed that the enterprises care about the residents and are engaging with them by offering, for example, discounts on products and services. Compassion for

the community can also be seen in different philanthropic activities, such as donating to charity when possible or offering products or services, and thus supporting the local community. This could be due to the Governing Body of Suomenlinna being the main planner in overall responsibility practices on the island, creating and updating tourism strategies. Additionally, according to the data, the Governing Body of Suomenlinna is engaging in the most communication with residents, utilizing tools such as surveys to get feedback.

It was brought up by the owner-managers that communication between businesses is not the only essential standard of interaction. Although communication was not seen as the most important aspect, the interviewees also mentioned communicating with the visitors. In the context of sustainability and responsibility, for example, about their products, or even what routes they can take while visiting the island, and how to find the premises without crossing anyone's backyard.

Is it already that I communicate to the visitors clear routes, that how to find your way there and how to get away smoothly and that they stay on the routes and do not go looking for their own way from other people's yards or especially when you know that you know the places where there are bird nests and so on so take care that no one goes there. (I7)

Another important topic brought up by an interviewee was how to communicate with different people, especially with visitors. *"To understand and recognize that people have different means of communication, and there must also be more ways to communicate"* (I7). In other words, while communicating, it was understood that not everyone communicates the same way. Different cultural aspects, language, and habits, such as using a phone to look for information or using flyers, as well as when navigating either with online or physical maps, were brought up.

It is also remarked by the interviewees that being sustainable does not always imply that the initiatives should be on a larger scale, but smaller actions also matter in the process (I4, I5). As one of the interviewees (I4) said, *you cannot influence other people's, such as tourists', choices, but you can affect what you are doing, and you can offer them better or more sustainable options*. Furthermore, the results showed that the interviewed owner-managers are viewing the future from a positive point of view in the sustainability context. Enterprises showed interest and goals for the future, for example, achieving sustainability certificates. Also, the continuous cooperation from all the companies was seen as an important aspect for the future.

4.3 The role of community

Tourism is perceived as positive and meaningful for the island by different stakeholders. As a culturally important destination, the sustainability values are integrated into many processes by the Governing Body of Suomenlinna. And, due to this, a recurring subject throughout the interview was responsibility and sustainability through the lens of tourism. The data showed that both of these aspects are perceived as valuable and important, especially in the context of Suomenlinna. Tourism is seen as important due to its economic influence. However, due to the island's vulnerable environment, sustainability cannot be taken for granted. All the interviewees emphasized this in one way or another. The next quotations illustrate some conclusions made by the participants during the interviews:

In a place like this, where there are conservation values, it already brings one kind of value to the common table. (I1)

In tourism, of course, it's very much emphasized, because. I mean, just for anything, if I travel, I'll make emissions, I leave a mark. Especially in a place like Suomenlinna, with a very fragile ecosystem. (I7)

"...in everyday life and planning, and in all that, and especially as we are a UNESCO World Heritage Site of this kind. Responsibility for the fact that it will be preserved for future generations, so it should be in everyone's mind. (I5)

For us, responsibility is the cornerstone of everything we do, and I don't just mean the ecological dimension, but also the socio-economic and socio-cultural responsibility, and it emphasizes, for example, the connections with local actors. We are cooperating very strongly in Suomenlinna with all tourism operators. (I6)

Living and working on the island has created a village-like environment, where the residents and workers know each other, and it has become a habit to interact with each other regularly. As Suomenlinna is a somewhat isolated area with more or less 800 residents. The residents are selected through an application procedure, which means that not everyone can live on the premises (I3). As the area is protected and regulated, this creates a unique setting for the locals,

businesses, and residents. The data showed how the interviewees described Suomenlinna as a village-like place, where people know each other well, and interact with each other around the island, whether it happens while in the location, or, for example, while taking the ferry. Additionally, it was mentioned how different kinds of unwritten rules have been gradually created together over the years between stakeholders (I7).

Everyone sort of knows each other, and no one here jumps in the car and drives to work, but everyone goes on that ferry, and then it's kind of like a small community. (I5)

It was found through the interviews that the sense of community was high while working on the island, and the interviewees who work on the site emphasized the importance of face-to-face interaction between stakeholders and meeting others. *It is so important that we know each other as well as possible, and that there is also a kind of trust and understanding. (I2)*. Although not all the interviewees live on the island, working there for a long period was described with a sense of belonging. This reflects further how the workplace can become a bridge to the community.

I already feel part of the local community, because I have been there for so long and have worked with the local actors and stakeholders. (I1)

At the same time, creating relationships and interacting with each other were seen as important, with the emphasis being on the regular meetings. A sense of community and being able to work together does not come out of nowhere, but needs frequent collaboration and communication, in this case, between stakeholders. For example, the Governing Body of Suomenlinna organizes regular meetings and different workshops aimed at the operators. During those events, a strong sense of community was noticed. The data further highlighted how feeling as a part of the community is seen as a strength of working for and with Suomenlinna (I1). According to the data, the sense of community is improved through engagement processes.

Well, probably the number one thing, I think, is precisely that the better we know each other, the better it is, because it always makes it easier, and it always lowers the threshold of being in contact with each other. (I2)

The results showed that one of the biggest strengths that has been identified is the cooperation between different stakeholders (I1). Additionally, it was shown throughout the data that the interviewees shared the same values and interests towards building sustainability together. This further demonstrates that shared values combined with a sense of community created a good foundation for working together.

Furthermore, the interviewed participants working on the site expressed pride in working in Suomenlinna, highlighting the values that the destination brings to the table. *I think it's wonderful to work in a place that aligns with my values. (I1)*. It was also noted that the interviewees shared the same interests and were working towards the same values and goals regarding sustainability. Moreover, the values of Suomenlinna were pointed out with a positive tone.

I think it's great that they [the Governing body of Suomenlinna] can decide for themselves what kind of worldview they want to present to others. I think that's good, and it's nice to be involved in the project. (I4)

4.4 Networking and interaction

To understand how the operation might influence others and vice versa is at the core of analyzing stakeholders. All the respondents were aware of the meaning of stakeholder and could name their most important stakeholders. *Stakeholders are like a network around you (I6)*. When discussing the stakeholders, all the companies included residents among their most important stakeholders. Furthermore, in the context of stakeholders, local communities can be classified as one stakeholder but concurrently belong to other stakeholder groups, such as clients, partners, and employees. The words around stakeholders and defining them were mostly human-related, such as naming the Governing Body of Suomenlinna, the city of Helsinki, other enterprises, partners, and residents. The data showed that when discussing stakeholders and who could be identified as one, non-human relations were not included in the main cluster of stakeholders, even though environmental aspects were often discussed. Moreover, conserving the area is important for all of the interviewees. Furthermore, non-humans, such as animals or animal rights, were not included in the cluster of stakeholders.

Furthermore, according to the data, stakeholder relations and engagement with others are visible in the everyday life of the island, and interaction between others was a recurring topic

throughout the interviews. Working closely and cooperating with stakeholders from other businesses was seen as important, and it was noted that working alone would not be beneficial for the company. Moreover, promoting each other's products, if possible, was seen as a good and favorable action. If possible, the visitors were also directed to experience other services available. This also implies that when the owner-managers are communicating, for example, about their events, products, and activities. Through this interaction, the Governing Body of Suomenlinna can, for example, direct visitors to their businesses.

The Governing Body of Suomenlinna acts as the *"inspirer and encourager"* for sustainable tourism for the tourists, for example, focusing on inspiring visitors and providing guidance for sustainable visits for them, enhancing overall responsibility and interacting, including steps such as surveys directed to residents as well as to the enterprises (I1), highlighting the central role of the destination. They are guiding the tourism companies towards more sustainable and responsible actions by offering different workshops, creating regular meetings, forwarding information about possible events, and so on. Moreover, they can provide guidelines for practical sustainability work for the enterprises. One of the interviewees mentioned how this eases intervening in some situations that have been discussed and communicated before.

Additionally, the Governing Body is also encouraging enterprises to complete different certificates. The guidance towards sustainability was mostly perceived positively by the businesses, as it motivates them to put more effort into sustainability actions and to observe their own practices through a critical lens. However, depending on the circumstances, constant information about achieving sustainability certificates can be observed as excessive, especially if the resources are not sufficient to attend all the meetings. The owner-managers might feel guilty for not exceeding their expectations. On the other hand, the owner-managers are aware of the costs that, for example, the workshops might have and express gratitude towards possible opportunities and efforts. Working together towards the same cause brings the owner-managers together, and a lot of appreciation was placed towards "tourism mornings" (*matkailuaamut*), as a place of interacting, sharing thoughts, and networking.

But the most important thing is these travel mornings where we network and get to know each other, so that's where we can tell each other. Then the "tourism morning" is always held in a different place, always at someone's premises, and

a couple of times it has also been at ours, and then we get to talk and present our facilities, and tell people about ourselves. (I6)

Furthermore, it can be seen from the data that as different stakeholders are working together, communication becomes fundamental. It is not just what and where the communication is taking place, but how it is done, *that it is not just a one-way communication (I1)*. Discussing together can spark new ideas and ways of working, and open conversations in both directions. Communication and interaction were seen as key factors when it comes to working with different stakeholders. Additionally, communication was seen as valuable when developing tourism in Suomenlinna, as it opens a path for conversations between the stakeholders, sharing thoughts and ideas. Without good communication, it is harder to network between businesses or between the business and the Governing Body of Suomenlinna. It is not self-evident that even though the island is relatively small, all the operators would meet each other regularly. Thus, regular communication becomes important. Additionally, through common guidelines and terminology, it is easier to communicate sustainability values to different stakeholders, creating a more holistic approach.

One way of enhancing communication between the business operators is the online system, an extranet, directed to the operators. *We have a dedicated extranet platform for all actors, where we can then actively communicate with our entire network of stakeholders (I1)*. The extranet creates a space for conversing on different topics that can be related to anything, from business operations and everyday life, or general important information, such as the irregularity of the ferry. It is also a space to get to know other businesses. As the data revealed, the extranet was seen as a useful tool for interaction.

We have this kind of joint extranet, where the Governing Body of Suomenlinna is the main content provider, but also, other operators have the opportunity to open a discussion on various issues, so it is probably the most important, and there is also a lot of ordinary conversation. (I2)

Face-to-face communication between the stakeholders was a recurring topic that all the interviewees pointed out. Meeting others was described as important for cooperation, creating and maintaining relationships, and sharing thoughts and ideas. During daily activities, it is common to meet locals or other workers and entrepreneurs when working on-site and exchanging news.

The data presents how daily communication can act as a tool for building trust between stakeholders and, in a way, increase collaboration.

I would say that the regular face-to-face meetings are very important, because if it were just the extranet, we would remain distant from each other, and so many of those kinds of cooperation patterns, so the ideas for them awaken in meetings.
(I6)

5.5 Learning together

It was found through the data that an important aspect brought up by the interviewees was the opportunity to learn. One of the examples given by the interviewees is the training provided by Suomenlinna. These different training courses can include themes such as protecting the environment, with topics focusing on, for example, marine life. Another way to learn was through achieving certificates. While reviewing the criteria of the certificates has taught the owners new concepts and ways to observe the business operations (I4, I5).

According to the data, it was evident that meetings and collaboration with other representatives of the companies enhanced the learning process in the sustainability area. More importantly, communication and interaction have become even more significant when the goals are related to sustainability and responsibility. Engaging with each other was seen to help share ideas, to think about certain topics together, and as an opportunity to learn from others. The learning process is not solely based on the meetings, but on interacting with other people and sharing thoughts and ideas. Furthermore, as I6 notes, it was perceived that during the pandemic, collaboration was more emphasized.

I think it is emphasized in situations like this, and especially after COVID-19, that there is a sense of pulling together towards the same goal. One part of that is sharing common goals, the other is promoting each other's services, and then supporting and sharing ideas. For example, how have you solved this kind of [issue] in your business, as a procedure, for example, all this kind of sharing definitely works better face-to-face, and that's something I would really emphasize.
(I6)

The importance of collaboration is not only mentioned when working with other stakeholders but also when working within a business. The learning process was perceived through employee interaction and workshops within the organization. This emphasizes further the importance of communication and interaction and points out how learning can come from inside and outside. Communication and interaction with peers with whom it is possible to share similar thoughts was shown to create motivation towards sustainability, as one interviewee expressed this by stating the following:

...that if you were always doing these things alone, it wouldn't be so interesting because you get so many ideas from others who see the world in a completely different way, and when you have us as a kind of then it's nice to talk through these things with them too. For example, what do they think about this kind of change, and then they can say what they think about it, and we can develop it so that it looks like us. (I4)

5 DISCUSSION

Whereas the findings characterize the data, the discussion chapter concludes the findings and combines them with existing literature. The discussion chapter explores further and analyzes the deeper meaning of stakeholder engagement and sustainability. Furthermore, sustainability and stakeholder engagement can be examined individually, but to create a holistic outlook, combining these two concepts reveals their multidimensional aspects. The discussion explores how sustainability practices can be implemented through stakeholder engagement and how stakeholder engagement affects sustainability.

Through analyzing the data, it was possible to identify four main dimensions as outcomes for stakeholder engagement in the context of sustainability in the research area. The discussion chapter is constructed around these four themes: firstly, tourism impacts and sustainability values shape tourism planning and strategies; secondly, understanding the sustainability journey of the tourism enterprises; thirdly, learning through stakeholder engagement; and lastly, a sense of community helps build trust between stakeholders.

5.1 Tourism impacts and sustainability values shape tourism planning

To start the discussion on how sustainability is perceived by the tourism enterprises, and within the destination, assessing how different benefits and challenges brought by tourism were a critical part of this research. These aspects create a base for the collaboration between stakeholders. It was noted how tourism influences the destination and shapes both the decision-making and actions taken at different levels. As the findings showed, perceived tourism impacts emphasize the importance of sustainable long-term planning. Long-term planning can aim to prepare for future issues and, moreover, increase the sustainability of tourism in the destination (Partanen, 2022). Furthermore, it can be seen from the data that increasing tourism numbers accentuate the importance of collaboration among different stakeholders, including owners of the enterprises, as well as participants from the destination management level to the local communities. The income generated by tourism is vital for tourism enterprises, and it is noted that tourism can enrich the lives of the locals by bringing new opportunities, creating jobs, and improving infrastructure (Goodwin, 2011). Nevertheless, bringing more visitors and increasing tourism overall more than the carrying capacity can withstand is not the goal for the entrepreneurs or the Governing Body of Suomenlinna.

The island is a unique combination of tourism, heritage, and a local neighborhood in Helsinki, bringing conservation values into the discussion. As the data revealed *"taking care of the heritage is at the heart of the sustainability work (I2)"*, and these values are carried through in different operations by destination management. These values can be detected, for example, in communicating with visitors, such as encouraging them to be sustainable visitors. These values are also present when interacting with enterprises, such as by offering training courses considering different subjects, and encouraging the achievement of sustainability certificates. Furthermore, the values are visible in the actual tourism strategies. This demonstrates integrated values that guide the processes from the beginning to the implementation. It was found, although not surprisingly, that the Governing Body of Suomenlinna has the biggest responsibility for directing the destination towards sustainability, but also for interacting with different stakeholders. For example, they conduct yearly questionnaires to receive feedback from different stakeholders, including the residents. Furthermore, the study revealed that most of the feedback the destination, as well as the operators, are receiving is positive in tone, and the residents express pride in living in Suomenlinna.

However, how to minimize the negative effects of the growing flow of visitors needs to be considered. Different questions brought by tourism raise questions about how tourism is influencing the area, and how to create solutions that are beneficial to all stakeholders. As Greenwood (2007) noted, stakeholder engagement is not equivalent to fair operations, and sustainability needs more than just interaction. The study showed how successful interaction between participants, such as the visitors, enterprises, and local community, along with the decision-makers, requires well-done planning as well as working together to create meaningful and beneficial outcomes. This is consistent with the research by Partanen (2022), which states that destination resilience can be improved through inclusion, and including the local community can reduce the disadvantages brought by tourism. Moreover, without continuous interaction, the tourism development plans could be one-sided. The findings align with García-Rosell and Mäkinen (2013), who argue that the top-down approach can be harmful and that sustainability initiatives should include all participants, and tourism development should rather be considered through a bottom-up view (Partanen, 2022), where all the stakeholders participate or are included in the planning. As well, Rastegar and Ruhanen (2021) present in their study how knowledge sharing can be crucial in the context of the sustainability of the tourism industry. They criticize that the typical top-down approach can be harmful if the local communities are

not heard and their knowledge is disregarded. To create sustainable tourism plans, it is important to hear and combine different viewpoints.

As the tourism industry can be described as a multistakeholder environment (Kilpijärvi & Aho, 2013), the study revealed that analyzing the stakeholders helps to understand the variety of different actors in tourism when discussing them. In other words, this can be described as identifying who the stakeholders are, what their interests are, and how connected these relationships are (Freeman et al., 2017). Analyzing stakeholders in this context helps to identify and understand the parties that might influence or be impacted by the operations (Font & Lynes, 2018), and this further highlights the importance of understanding the stakeholders, especially in the case of sustainability (García-Rosell & Mäkinen, 2013). The findings show that organizations operating on the island understand who their stakeholders are and with whom cooperation can be achieved. It is also highlighted in the findings that collaboration with these groups is seen as important.

On the other hand, the study showed that the stakeholders were collectively classified as human-related stakeholders, leaving non-human stakeholders out of the cluster. However, practices involving animals or considering animal rights are usually grouped with environmental sustainability (García-Rosell & Tallberg, 2021), and thus, animals and their role might not have been considered due to this. Although it needs to be mentioned that there are no working animals related to this case, there are still animals living on the island. Considering how non-humans have a role as stakeholders, including, for example, wild animals, and visitors traveling with non-humans, such as dogs, aims to create a holistic understanding of stakeholders and deepen the understanding of how different practices can impact the area.

5.2 Understanding the sustainability journey of tourism enterprises

Following the overall sustainability practices, evaluating how tourism enterprises observe tourism, sustainability, and their responsibility plays a significant role in this research. As most of the tourism companies in Finland are classified as small and medium-sized enterprises, they tend to face different challenges compared to larger organizations while starting their sustainability journey (Visit Finland, 2018). The findings in research noted that small and medium-sized enterprises indeed might lack resources, such as time and funding, to engage in sustainability initiatives. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Font et al. (2016), who, in

their quantitative study, also achieved similar results. However, the owner-managers were eager to be part of the sustainability journey and showed gratitude and pride towards working with and in Suomenlinna. This demonstrates embedded sustainability values and understanding of the importance of said work on the island. Additionally, the owner-managers mentioned that aiming to achieve the certificates is an important part of their journey towards sustainability, even though it might be difficult in some cases. The work put into certificates helped the organizations to review their existing operations and make possible changes. Furthermore, it was seen as a possibility to learn more about responsible business operations. This aligns with Font et al. (2016), where the values of owners of SME are fundamental drivers towards sustainability actions, and how enterprises with these values usually carry out and implement most of the sustainability practices.

Furthermore, according to Font et al. (2016), the sustainability initiatives can be integrated unnoticed into the strategies of the smaller tourism companies, and moreover, there can be so-called silent work of sustainability efforts that are not present in documented strategies, nor communicated. As Perrini (2006) suggested, small and medium-sized companies have embedded values that already consider CSR aspects, without them being identified as CSR strategies. The results align with the previous studies, as some of the owner-managers expressed that they do not have specific CSR strategies. When discussing the sustainability initiatives, the results presented how the companies have a better overall understanding of ecological sustainability than of other dimensions. However, overall sustainability holds significant value and is seen as important, and, for example, different practices considering environmental aspects were taken. Furthermore, fulfilling the requirements of laws and regulations is what is expected the least of companies to contribute to sustainability initiatives. Therefore, taking actions and making concrete steps requires will and motivation from the enterprises to do so. The results indicate that when sustainability is an integrated value, it is more likely to become something companies aim to achieve.

As tourism has various effects on the community, the study aimed to understand how local communities are considered part of overall strategies and sustainability initiatives from the point of view of owner-managers. When discussing how local communities are considered in this context, the findings showed that the enterprises did not directly emphasize including local communities in their operations. Nevertheless, the interviewees were aware of how tourism can affect the locals' everyday lives. Furthermore, the actions taken showed how the enterprises are

engaging with residents through different approaches, for example, offering discounts on products and services, and participating in different charity events. Hence, it can be concluded that the owner-managers do care about the locals, but including them in or creating strategies around them has not been seen as necessary. The findings revealed that the Governing Body of Suomenlinna has gained the most responsibility for communicating with the residents, and it was acknowledged by the owner-managers and partner organization. The means of understanding the perspectives of the locals is done, for example, by conducting yearly questionnaires.

5.3 Learning about sustainability through communication and collaboration

The study found that the strengths in collaboration are two-way communication, which promotes open interaction between the stakeholders (Freeman et al., 2017). In this case, one of the enablers for this is the internal communication channel, an extranet created for the operators. Following this, the regular meetings for stakeholders offered a place for communicating and advanced networking. Furthermore, face-to-face communication was highly appreciated in both formal and informal settings. According to Visit Finland (2019, p. 11), collaboration within the destination can improve sharing ideas and learning from each other. Furthermore, these approaches can help find solutions together to different issues. However, this does not come out of nowhere, and, for example, through open communication, learning becomes more likely between stakeholders (Kujala & Korhonen, 2017). The data presented how interaction, such as attending the meetings, workshops, engaging in the extranet, and overall communication, supported sharing ideas and thoughts between the stakeholders, and further enhanced learning from others. The knowledge and feedback shared by the stakeholders were used to improve the operations when possible, and the willingness to do this was observed, for example, in sustainability practices and to achieve certificates.

Learning is an outcome that is contingent on a willingness to participate, shared interest, and trust among stakeholders (Waayers et al., 2012). Furthermore, the commitment to collaboration and sustainability is an important factor, as without it, for example, work towards sustainability could be seen as unnecessary and therefore, lose its importance (Waayers et al, 2012; Jamal & Getz, 1995), and hence, an active willingness towards sustainability work is needed. As noted previously (Kujala & Korhonen, 2017; Kujala et al., 2016; Waayers et al., 2012), the ingredients for successful collaboration between stakeholders need a united vision, and moreover, partner-

ships and trust. The time reserved for collaboration and involving different stakeholders supports the sustainable development of tourism destinations (Byrd, 2007). To succeed in promoting sustainability, a common and understood idea is needed, as this creates a mutual understanding of the issues being solved (Waayers et al., 2012). The findings illustrate the aims and the results of the Governing Body of Suomenlinna and how they can be seen in the processes. Throughout the interviews and later findings, it was highlighted that the owner-managers could identify the most important aspects of the sustainability work and understand what the main messages of Suomenlinna are when talking about sustainability and its importance to the area. This describes good engagement between the stakeholders and understanding of the common goals presented by representatives of Suomenlinna.

This study demonstrates how collaboration can enhance learning (Freeman et al., 2017), and it is noted that collaboration with internal and external stakeholders can enhance and encourage owner-managers to take sustainability actions. Engaging with other stakeholders was shown to reinforce participation, and it acted as a push factor to accomplish sustainability actions, for example, aiming to achieve sustainability certificates. Working alone could be seen as discouraging, as at the beginning of sustainability work, some concepts might seem time-consuming or difficult. However, sharing thoughts with both external and internal stakeholders was identified as helpful in the process. Different meetings, workshops, and training sessions designed for the owner-managers presented opportunities not only to learn about a specific topic, but also to listen to others and their ideas. Furthermore, the interactions, formal and informal, between stakeholders open a way to share these ideas and learn from each other. This aligns as well with the article by Kujala and Korhonen (2017). The authors explain how value-creating relationships can be built between stakeholders through shared interests. Through these collaborations, where the participants are eager to take part willingly, it is possible to learn from one another. As previously studied by Martínez-Martínez et al. (2023), various types of learning have been shown to enhance sustainability practices and improve stakeholder understanding, for example, among the local community. Furthermore, the authors explain how organizational learning and knowledge management have been shown to improve sustainability practices in tourism businesses.

5.4 A sense of community helps build trust between stakeholders

The data of this research found that constant and intentional interaction was crucial in engaging with diverse stakeholders, supporting sustainability, and fostering relationships (Freeman et al., 2017). The role of the destination, and the destination management organization, plays an essential role in inspiring work towards sustainable work, and hearing and communicating with different actors. Additionally, it was also mentioned how, during and after the pandemic, the collaboration grew within the destination. Moreover, these practices can enhance the resilience of the destination (Pyke et al., 2018) and help the destination to prepare and recover from external situations that might hinder tourism. Additionally, this is aligned with the prior study by Partanen (2022), where building cooperation between stakeholders requires aspects such as trust, good communication, and a problem-solving attitude.

The atmosphere on the island was described as village-like, where asking for help or guidance was easy. Moreover, closeness has become important in stakeholder relations (Lähdesmäki et al., 2019). Continuous engagement and interaction help to build trust between stakeholders and further foster these relationships (Kujala et al., 2016). As Pyke et al. (2018) highlight, trust has a crucial role in destinations when it comes to engagement. Locality in the region has been shown to improve cooperation between stakeholders (Komppula, 2016; Czernek, 2013). Komppula (2016) notes how continuing commitment to the area can be as important as “being local”. Moreover, this atmosphere of closeness between the community generated various ideas, for example, common tools such as carts (*työkärry*) were used by the local community as well as the companies. Additionally, the sense of community was identified as one of the key players in stakeholder engagement. Moreover, regular meetings can result in higher trust between stakeholders (Waayers et al., 2012). According to previous research, trust was classified as an important attribute by Kujala and Korhonen (2017) and Kujala et al (2016). Additionally, this trust improved other aspects, such as collaboration between the organizations and open communication to ask for help. This is also aligned with the results by Lo Iacono et al. (2020), as the authors presented how, in high-trust settings, the solutions tend to find mutual solutions. The better the relationships are between the stakeholders, the easier it is to communicate, and trusting social relationships make the engagement better. Trust in other stakeholders has become a strength on the island. Furthermore, when stakeholders can trust each other, it can become easier to bring up their concerns more directly. Thus, focusing on building dialogue between stakeholders can enhance the finding of mutual solutions.

6 CONCLUSIONS

This study combined two main concepts, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and stakeholder engagement. In this way, the aim was to create a multidimensional perspective to analyze how stakeholder engagement affects the sustainability of tourism enterprises. In this chapter, the first part concludes the findings and discussion of the research. Following this, the limitations of the study are presented. Lastly, the final chapter introduces the proposals for future research. Furthermore, this chapter summarizes the conclusions of this research through a discussion based on research questions. The main research question for this master's thesis is: How does stakeholder engagement affect sustainability in tourism enterprises? The following sub-questions are: 1) How is sustainability perceived within the destination? 2) How does stakeholder engagement affect the relationship between stakeholders? 2) How can stakeholder engagement be used to improve sustainability?

Tourism enterprises perceive sustainability as an important value that should be embedded in every participant's and partner's operations. However, especially smaller enterprises might face hindrances in this area due to a lack of resources (Stubblefield Louck et al., 2010). The findings showed that stakeholder engagement can improve understanding of sustainability and facilitate the implementation of initiatives overall through collaboration and interaction, resulting in learning with and from others (Freeman et al., 2017). Through collaboration and a sense of community, the relationships between stakeholders could be fostered (Lähdesmäki et al., 2019). Moreover, interaction and collaboration help to build trust (Kujala et al., 2019; Kujala et al., 2017). As a conclusion to this research, it can be said that continuous collaboration can improve sustainability within tourism enterprises. The results further showed that achieving sustainability can be improved through stakeholder engagement based on shared value creation, particularly when engagement is founded on collaboration, trust, and shared interests (Kujala et al., 2019). This chapter explores and explains these insights in more detail.

6.1 Conclusions

Over the past decades, the tourism industry has seen a steady growth (Camilleri, 2014), making it one of the largest socioeconomic industries in the world (UN Tourism & WTA, 2025, pp. 16-17). Although throughout the years, we have witnessed different challenges that are still relevant today, such as climate change, natural disasters, pandemics, and ongoing global situations

affecting tourism (Partanen, 2022; Pyke et al., 2018). Furthermore, the impacts of tourism can reach destinations in ecological, social, and economic dimensions, bringing both benefits and challenges (Goodwin, 2011). This has created a need for responsible and sustainable tourism planning at all levels, although much has been done to reduce negative consequences, as tourism continues to generate harmful impacts (Tervo-Kankare, 2017). To combat these issues, different measures have been implemented in tourism destinations and individual enterprises' strategies and actions to form better tourism practices (García-Rosell, 2017) and create improved environments for the local communities (Byrd, 2007). However, sustainability in tourism cannot, and is not expected to happen overnight, although the responsibility is on everyone's shoulders.

The aim of this research was to understand how stakeholder engagement can be used as a framework in the context of sustainability for tourism enterprises, and how these two concepts can be viewed as multidimensional and interconnected. The selected framework helped to analyze the data. Additionally, research was conducted using qualitative research methods, which further aligns with the aims of the study. The findings complement the previous literature on these topics and showcase the importance of understanding stakeholder engagement and sustainability in the Finnish context. It was possible to detect through analysis how these two concepts interlap and how engaging with stakeholders can positively affect the understanding of sustainability.

The study confirmed that embedded sustainability values are transferred into practice by the stakeholders within the destination. As noted by Kujala and Korhonen (2017), to create value through stakeholder engagement, sustainability activities need to be part of the business operations, as well as different sustainability activities. The research showed how engagement between stakeholders can improve understanding of the importance of sustainability actions and enhance the implementation of different practices in this area. Moreover, these practices bring the stakeholder within the destination through shared values, such as conserving the area for future generations. Furthermore, the results showed consistency with Freeman et al.'s (2017) stakeholder engagement framework. These dimensions of the framework have been presented as examining stakeholder relations, communicating with stakeholders, learning with stakeholders, and integrative stakeholder engagement.

Through the data, it was possible to identify four themes as outcomes of successful engagement that help understand and improve sustainability. Firstly, the perceived tourism impacts concretize the importance of sustainability initiatives and long-term planning at the destination level, and further shape tourism planning and strategies. Secondly, understanding the sustainability journey of the tourism enterprises aims to help understand their limitations and strengths. Thirdly, communication and collaboration can enhance learning among stakeholders, improving their understanding of sustainability initiatives, goals, and practices. And lastly, a sense of community helps build trust between the stakeholders within the destination. This further shows how relationships are built on trust and sharing the same values.

As most of the local tourism enterprises are considered small and medium-sized enterprises, the challenges they are facing might affect their participation in sustainability. An understanding of the operators is needed, as they might lack the resources, such as funding and time, to participate, even though they would like to. Overall, supporting tourism enterprises with sustainability achievements can be beneficial. When considering the challenges, designing tools for sustainability that are accessible also for small and medium-sized enterprises can help smaller organizations in the beginning, and throughout the journey of incorporating sustainability into their operations, as suggested by Stubblefield Loucks et al. (2010). Collaboration can have a significant impact, as it can enrich the comprehension of sustainability and support implementation in practice.

Sustainability, in this case, can be described as an embedded value, and it is seen as an important aspect of working on the island. Furthermore, continuous interaction and cooperation can be beneficial in the path towards more sustainable practices. The results showed how engagement with others can support understanding of these values and initiatives. Moreover, collaboration and engagement further help in sharing ideas and learning with and from each other. Furthermore, through collaboration, it can be possible to solve some current issues or develop practices benefiting others. However, to succeed in these objectives, continuous communication and dedication of time are needed by the participants. The findings show how the destination management plays an important part in this by encouraging the enterprises in their sustainability efforts, while also supporting collaboration through, for example, hosting meetings. They have further established a role of being the main communicator for different stakeholders, such as the enterprises and the local community.

The sense of community among entrepreneurs and other stakeholders was strengthened through continuous work, helping to build trust among them. Furthermore, long-term residency within the area, as well as being familiar with others, could be identified as an advantage (Lähdesmäki et al., 2019) when working together. The atmosphere was described as village-like, where knowing and interacting with each other are part of the daily activities. Face-to-face interaction was highlighted as an important part, and it further helped with getting to know each other. This, along with shared interests towards sustainability, building relationships with different stakeholders, and continuous collaboration, can help build trust between stakeholders. This aligns with the stakeholder value creation model (Kujala et al., 2016, pp. 12-13), where “joint interests,” “ability to collaborate,” and “trust” are cornerstones of value-creating relationships.

The findings of this research emphasize understanding the relationships between stakeholders in the tourism industry and how interaction and collaboration can help to achieve sustainability. Stakeholder engagement and sustainability can be presented individually, but to create a holistic understanding of this research, the results present their multidimensionality in the context of tourism. This study, in this sense, is relevant and complements previous tourism literature by showing how ongoing collaboration can effectively strengthen stakeholders' relationships in tourism destinations and with tourism enterprises. Further, this study highlights how sustainability can be improved through engagement. The sense of community adds another dimension to existing shared values, trust, and collaboration, further enhancing these aspects.

Sustainability is a journey, and the results might take time. The important focus is not only the outcome, but also what is done to get there. One person cannot carry the entire responsibility for a destination, but work is needed from various stakeholders. Hence, engagement itself becomes important, as well as how it is done. The case of Suomenlinna provides a good example of successful planning regarding tourism and engaging with stakeholders in a meaningful way. The study presents how stakeholder engagement in the context of sustainability can improve the tourism organizations' understanding of the phenomenon by interacting with each other, as well as with other stakeholders. Furthermore, the results showed how successful stakeholder engagement can improve trust and thus collaboration over shared interests. Additionally, sustainability and sustainable values create a ground for common work and can bring partners together to discuss and solve different issues that tourism destinations are encountering. If these aspects were not valued, it would be easy not to take action towards responsibility, as these initiatives usually go beyond what is required by laws and regulations. The strengths of this

destination are based on the community and a sense of belonging to it, and the embedded values towards sustainability.

6.2 Limitations of the study

Although this research highlights the importance of stakeholder engagement in the context of sustainability, limitations should be considered. As the study was conducted in Finland, it was decided to conduct all interviews in Finnish, as it is the native language of both the interviewer and the interviewees. Additionally, the first analysis of the research was conducted in Finnish. The analysis process was then translated into English, but the possibility of changed meanings is present.

Moreover, in this study, most of the interviewees work closely within the tourism industry, implying that the participants are also benefiting from tourism. Moreover, most of the organizations participating were in the process of attaining sustainability certificates, if not already having one. This has most likely affected the answers regarding sustainability. Furthermore, the data presented is based on qualitative research and highlights the participants' perspectives. Different interviewees can view questions differently and thus answer differently. It also needs to be noted that the aspect of social proximity and relationships could have been investigated more during the interviews to understand the different dimensions and forms of cooperation.

This study did not consider the viewpoints of other stakeholders included in the cluster of tourism, but primarily focused on the tourism enterprises and the destination. However, to get a holistic understanding and to acquire different viewpoints, the intention was to interview more local entrepreneurs. However, this was left unaccomplished due to a limited number of interviewees. Moreover, as this research aimed to understand how stakeholder engagement affects tourism enterprises, the viewpoints of local community members were not included, and therefore, they were not interviewed. Furthermore, although tourists are one of the most important stakeholders in tourism, it was decided not to focus on how stakeholder engagement affects them in this research. However, including both of these groups could have brought other insights into the analysis and could have complemented the research.

As Finland and its destinations are diverse, they do not have the same characteristics. Due to this, the results may differ if the research were conducted in northern Finland. Furthermore,

even though the area itself is not considered rural or remote, it might have different attributes from other parts of Helsinki. Additionally, due to the unique characteristics of Suomenlinna, the results may vary depending on the UNESCO Heritage Site. Accordingly, the Governing Body of Suomenlinna has done persistent work towards sustainability over the past years, and being part of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites creates different influences and regulations on the strategies compared to other destinations.

6.3 Proposals for future research

Finland has diverse destinations with different characteristics of tourism. As the research was focusing on one destination specifically, it would be valuable to learn how stakeholder engagement is perceived in other regions, such as the whole Helsinki region. Even though Suomenlinna is an important part of tourism in Helsinki, it does not represent the whole capital region. It would be interesting to understand how stakeholder engagement, social capital, and relationships are built in this region overall. Furthermore, to deepen the understanding of relationships in Northern Finland could bring new insights into stakeholder approaches.

The focus of this research was on small and medium-sized organizations. As they have their own attributes and challenges, it could be valuable to understand how stakeholder engagement is shown within larger companies. As Perrini (2006) proposes, approaching SMEs should rather be done through the lens of social capital. Additionally, the research focused on more than one enterprise, and for example, understanding the connection between learning and stakeholder engagement could be done in just one organization within the tourism field. Furthermore, this would give insight into the different perspectives of employees or departments within the organization. As well, future research could focus more on social proximity in tourism destinations. This could give important perceptions of how locality and social proximity build relationships and how these further affect business operations, and what kind of decisions are made based on aspects of social capital. An interesting insight could also be into how conflicts are handled in this context.

Additionally, as literature on artificial intelligence (AI) is rising, combining these aspects could bring novel perceptions to tourism, sustainability, and stakeholder engagement. Considering the issues of small and medium-sized enterprises, how could AI, for example, help or disturb

the journey towards sustainability, and, for instance, in taking responsibility, and what kind of ethical questions would arise?

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APPENDIX 1. Letter of Consent

Hyvä haastateltava,

Opiskelen kansainvälisellä linjalla matkailuntutkimusta Lapin yliopistossa. Olen pyytäneet Teitä osallistumaan haastatteluun pro gradu -tutkielmaani varten, minkä tarkoituksena on selvittää miten matkailutoimijat Suomessa huomioivat paikallisyhteisöjä, tekevät yhteistyötä sekä toteuttavat sidosryhmävuorovaikutusta. Tutkielmani ohjaajana toimii Linda Tallberg.

Haastattelut nauhoitetaan ja nauhoituksia ja vastauksia tullaan käyttämään vain tutkimustarkoitukseen. Ensisijaisesti aineistoa tullaan käyttämään pro gradu -tutkielmassani. Tutkimus noudattaa tutkimuseettisen neuvottelukunnan määrittelemiä vastuullisen tutkimuksen periaatteita. Aineisto käsitellään nimettömänä. Osallistumiseen haastatteluun on vapaaehtoista ja mikäli myöhemmin haluatte vetäytyä tutkimuksesta, voitte tehdä sen ilmoittamalla asiasta alla mainitulle ohjaajalle.

Tarkempaa tietoa tutkimuksesta ja haastattelumateriaalien käytöstä saa ohjaajaltamme Linda Tallberg / XXX

Ystävällisesti,

Ida Niemikoski

XXX

Matkailututkimuksen opiskelija

Suostun haastatteluaineiston käyttöön tutkimustarkoituksessa.

Allekirjoitus

Päivämäärä

Nimenselvennys

APPENDIX 2. Interview structure

Esittely

1. Voisitko esitellä itsesi ja edustamasi yrityksen/organisaation sekä roolisi?
2. Miten olette päätyneet töihin Suomenlinnaan?

Matkailuun liittyvät kysymykset

3. Millaisena kuvailisitte Suomenlinnan matkailua?
4. Miten matkailu vaikuttaa teidän toimintanne?
5. Millaisena näette matkailun vastuullisuuden?
6. Kenelle teidän mielestänne matkailun vastuullisuuden edistäminen kuuluu?

Yleiskuva – Suomenlinnan toimijoiden yritysvastuu/vastuullisuus

7. Mitä vastuullisuus merkitsee teidän organisaatiollenne ja toiminnalle?
8. Voisitteko antaa yleiskatsauksen tähänastisesta vastuullisuusstrategiastanne, ja mitkä ovat sen painopisteet?
9. Miten paljon olette saaneet neuvoja/apuja/vinkkejä Suomenlinnalta liittyen vastuullisuuteen?
10. Miten vastuullisuus näkyy toiminnassanne?
11. Miten mittaatte yleisesti yritysvastuu aloitteiden onnistumista?
12. Miten viestitte vastuullisuus toimistanne ja saavutuksistanne?

Sidosryhmät

13. Mitä sidosryhmä tarkoittaa teille?
14. Ketkä ovat teidän tärkeimmät sidosryhmänne?
15. Millaista yhteistyötä teette eri toimijoiden kanssa?
16. Miten toiminnassanne otetaan huomioon eri sidosryhmät?
17. Miten kommunikoitte eri sidosryhmien kanssa

Sosiaalinen vastuu

18. Kuinka paljon työllistätte paikallisia asukkaita?
19. Kuinka paljon Suomenlinnan asukkaat käyttävät teidän palveluita? Entä muut toimijat?
20. Onko teillä aloitteita, joilla asukkaat/muut sidosryhmät otetaan mukaan toimintaanne? Mitä ne ovat?
21. Mitä tekoja toteutatte, että aloitteet kestävyiden sekä vastuullisuuden kannalta hyödyttäisivät sekä asukkaita/muita sidosryhmiä että toimintaanne?
22. Oletteko huomanneet, että toiminnallanne olisi vaikutusta asukkaisiin/muihin toimijoihin Suomenlinnassa?

Vuorovaikutus

23. Teettekö yhteistyötä paikallisten/muiden Suomenlinnassa toimivien tahojen kanssa? Jos kyllä, millaista yhteistyötä?
24. Miten kommunikoitte eri sidosryhmien kanssa?

25. Millaista palautetta olette saaneet paikallisilta sekä muilta sidosryhmiltä?
26. Miten olette ottaneet paikallisten/muiden sidosryhmien mielipiteet huomioon toiminnassanne?
27. Voisitteko kuvailla haasteita, joita yrityksenne on kohdannut toimiessaan paikallisten/muiden sidosryhmien kanssa?
28. Oletteko havainneet muutoksia paikallisten/muiden sidosryhmien asenteissa tai käsityksissä organisaatiotanne kohtaan vastuullisuustekojen ansiosta? Millaisia muutoksia?
29. Toivoisitteko paikallisilta/muilta sidosryhmiltä enemmän osallistumista?
30. Mitkä tekijät ovat tärkeitä sidosryhmienvuorovaikutuksen onnistumiselle?

Tulevaisuus

31. Millaisen roolin näet teillä osana Suomenlinnan vastuullisuutta?
32. Mitä suunnitelmia tai tavoitteita organisaatiolanne on tulevaisuudessa liittyen vastuullisuuteen?
33. Tuleeko mieleesi jotain muuta lisättävää?