

**COUNTING COUNTRIES:
EXPLORING PERFORMANCE-DRIVEN TRAVEL TREND**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the emerging phenomenon of country-counting travel, where individuals pursue visits to numerous countries to project a curated image in a performance-driven society. It examines how such travel practices contribute to the construction and expression of identity in a cultural context that places high value on achievement. The study contributes to broader debates on the symbolic role of travel in identity formation by addressing a gap in the existing literature.

Drawing on existing research that frames frequent travellers as experience collectors and bucket list tickers and applying Erving Goffman's performance theory to examine how individuals construct and perform their identities through travel, the study further investigates how travellers curate and share experiences, e.g. via social media, to shape the self within social norms around success and achievement. The study asks: *How do travellers use country-counting for self-presentation?* with sub-questions focusing on how identity is constructed, and social validation is sought within the context of country-counting travel. The research methodology adopts a qualitative approach with a social constructionist philosophy, utilizing thematic interviews to capture interplay between individual desires and societal influences, by utilizing thematic analysis.

The findings reveal that country-counting travel practices operates as a cyclic process: travellers build identity through personal travel narratives, reinforce it with emotional experiences, externalize it through social media, and further shape it through goal setting. For some travellers, counting countries is the primary driver of their travel behaviour, while for others it remains a secondary or background element. These insights are relevant to researchers, educators, industry professionals, and travellers navigating the evolving landscape of tourism and self-expression.

Keywords: country-counting, performative travel, identity construction, self-presentation, status-seeking tourism, social validation

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1. INTRODUCTION

“All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players.”

William Shakespeare

In the age of globalization and digital interconnectedness, country-counting travel serves as an affecting example of how individuals perform their lives on a grand stage. The phenomenon could reflect the characteristics of a performance-oriented society, where the pursuit of recognition, validation, and the identity construction shape personal narratives. Analysis through performance theory unveils the complexities of modern human experience, where the presentation of self extends to all aspects of our lives. The research into counting countries type of travel is crucial due to its growing relevance in modern tourism and its broader social, psychological, and ethical implications. This phenomenon highlights how travel can serve as a tool for status, identity, and self-validation. It raises concerns about superficial checklist-style tourism and societal pressures on travel behaviour.

1.1 The emergence of country-counting travel

Competitive travel, as often portrayed in popular media, is a pursuit driven by status, achievement, and validation. Reality television provides a notable example, such as *The Amazing Race*, where teams compete to travel globally, reaching checkpoints to avoid elimination and ultimately winning a prize (Paramount 2024). This portrayal underscores the competitive nature of modern travel, that emphasizes measurable accomplishments. Digital platforms like NomadMania further promote this trend by offering tools for tracking visits to the 193 UN-recognized countries and fostering community interaction. These platforms often feature ranking systems, such as NomadMania's UN Masters (NomadMania, 2024a), which verify travellers' visits and reward milestones like visiting 100 countries, which is also often documented on their social media platforms. The

popularity of this practice has increased significantly; in 1988, only one person had visited all 193 UN-recognized countries, whereas by August 2025, the number had risen to 49 (NomadMania, 2024a).

In this thesis, the term "country-counting travel" refers to a distinctive travel behaviour in which individuals seek to travel to multiple countries, while keeping a record of the total number of countries they have visited. This phenomenon has gained visibility through media like NomadMania and social networks, where individuals can promote the achievements. Despite its growing popularity (NomadMania, 2024b), this trend remains under-researched. It aligns with a performance-oriented society where measurable accomplishments provide validation. Examining this phenomenon helps us understand how societal pressures influence modern travel behaviours, identity construction, and tourism practices. It might serve as a vehicle for status and recognition (Veblen, 1899, pp. 49–51), enabling individuals to display their achievements through extensive travel. As well as it might act as a means of personal validation and identity formation (Solomon, 2009, pp. 16, 276), where accumulating destinations becomes central to self-perception and social recognition.

For this thesis, I gained inspiration and validation during the Qualitative Analysis course while conducting an in-depth analysis of travel journey (NomadMania, 2024c), wherein a traveller achieved visiting every country in the world. Initially, my focus was on understanding individual travel experiences broadly. However, I noticed a significant trend: the growing importance of goal setting, performance metrics, and competition in travel narratives. This realization led me to explore the concept of performance-driven travel more broadly, which became the central focus of my thesis. Additionally, by doing the analysis for the other course, I observed that travel narrative was heavily centred around measurable achievements, such as the number of countries visited. This wasn't just a personal goal; it reflected a larger pattern, the whole communities, of how travellers today are often motivated by the desire to reach specific numeric goals and to gain recognition within the travel community. This shift from travel as exploration to travel as performance interested me, and it became clear that this was a significant and underexplored area within travel studies. I realized that this phenomenon has broader implications, not only for individual travellers but also for how we understand travel

culture in the modern world. In this way, the study evolved from a descriptive exploration of experiences into a critical inquiry of how travel practices reflect deeper cultural values and societal expectations. As a result, my aim is to uncover the factors driving individuals to engage in country-counting travel, with particular attention to how it is used for self-presentation, the pursuit of recognition, and the attainment of status in today's performance-oriented society.

1.2 Insights from previous studies

As noted, *country-counting travel* is a growing trend in global tourism but remains relatively understudied. This research addresses this gap by examining the previously studied aspects of collectors as these travellers prioritize the accumulation of diverse experiences, often driven by external validation, social comparison, and achievement-oriented aspirations (Kostopoulos, Magrizos & Harris, 2023). This behaviour is closely tied to the broader role of travel in shaping individual identity, as travellers use destinations as markers of accomplishment and tools for self-expression (Timothy, 2008; Desforges, 2000). Keinan and Kivetz (2011) introduced the concept of productivity orientation, which frames travel as a means to maximize time and pursue "bucket list" goals. This trend reflects a cultural narrative that values unique and memorable experiences as essential for a fulfilling life (Thurnell-Read, 2016). Social media amplifies this behaviour, enabling travellers to document their journeys and share collections with like-minded individuals, enhancing social status and self-concept (Formanek, 1991; Kumar and Goh, 2021; Huang et al., 2025; Oliveira et al., 2020; Sedera et al., 2017; Watkins et al., 2015). While collecting experiences can satisfy motivations such as accomplishment, pride, and self-enhancement (Belk, 1988), it also risks commodifying travel. Travelers may prioritize quantity over quality, rushing through destinations and potentially compromising authenticity and ethical considerations, including environmental and cultural impacts (Kostopoulos et al., 2023). These insights, among others, are explored in greater depth in the literature review and collectively form the basis for understanding how travel behaviours are shaped by societal pressures and personal aspirations.

1.3 Research objectives

The primary goal of this research is to explore how travellers engage in country-counting as a means of self-presentation. It seeks to understand how the act of multiple countries visited reflects on travellers' identities, their sense of achievement, and their need for social validation.

Research question:

1. How do travellers use country-counting for self-presentation?

Sub-questions:

- a. How does the act of country-counting construct a traveller's identity?*
- b. How do travellers present their travel achievements to gain social validation?*
- c. How is travel performed as a form of status symbol by individuals who engage in country-counting?*

The exploration of these questions will delve deeply into how country counting is related to self-presentation, identity construction, and status pursuit, the very performance-driven trends that this study addresses. This research serves as a foundational step towards a more in-depth and focused investigation into the behaviour, impacts, and potential societal shifts associated with travel trends like country-counting travel phenomenon. It fills a gap in academic knowledge by applying sociological and psychological theories to a relatively understudied aspect of tourism and providing both theoretical and practical contributions.

1.4 Methodological approach

This research is grounded in a social constructionist paradigm, which assumes that reality is not an objective, fixed entity but rather is created through social interaction, shared meanings, and cultural frameworks (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012, p. 88). Within this perspective, travel practices such as country-counting are understood as symbolic acts shaped by social expectations, narratives, and performances rather than as purely individual choices. Social constructionism aligns with the study's focus on identity, status, and self-presentation, as it highlights how travellers actively construct

and negotiate their identities through interactions with others and through cultural discourses surrounding travel (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 30; Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012, p. 41). This paradigm therefore provides a suitable foundation for analysing how interview participants frame their travel achievements, how they present them to different audiences, and how these practices reflect broader societal values.

The methodological framework of this study is qualitative, selected to capture the complex, multifaceted nature of country-counting travel and its broader cultural implications within a performance-oriented society. Seven thematic interviews were conducted to explore how travellers engage in country-counting as a form of self-presentation and identity construction. The interview design emphasized a semi-structured format, allowing comparability while leaving space for personal reflection and elaboration (Jordan & Gibson, 2002, p. 222). The interviews were carried out in a conversational manner, prioritizing empathy, comfort, and trust to encourage openness and authenticity (Goodson & Phillimore, 2002, p. 33; Ruusuvuori et al., 2010).

Data analysis combined thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns (Pearce, 2012, p. 55) with qualitative content analysis to interpret meaning systematically from textual data (Ruusuvuori et al., 2010). In addition, a theory-driven dialogue approach guided the process, ensuring that the analysis remained anchored in the conceptual framework of performance theory and social constructionism, focusing particularly on the societal influences shaping travel practices. Ethical considerations are present from the beginning to the end, to ensure the trustworthiness and accuracy of the research but, most importantly, to take care of the rights and well-being of the participants in the study (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2023, p. 12; Ruusuvuori et al., 2010; Kuula, 2006, p. 200).

1.5 Overview of the thesis structure

The thesis begins with an introduction that provides a comprehensive overview of the research. The next chapter delves deeper into existing knowledge, providing a synthesis of relevant literature, that sets the stage for the theoretical framework, which defines key concepts like performance-oriented society, travel as a status symbol, and self-esteem. Furthermore, it explores the application of the performance theory to country-counting

travel, identifying its key factors. The next section, methodology and data, explains the research approach, methods, and tools employed. It covers research philosophy, data collection methods and analysis techniques, besides ethics concerns. The results chapter presents the outcomes of the data analysis, showcasing key findings observed during the research. It provides a detailed and objective presentation of the empirical evidence, contributing to the overall understanding of the research question. Finally, the thesis is concluded with the research outcomes and their implications. The reference chapter provides a list of all cited sources, ensuring the academic integrity of the research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW ON TRAVEL AS SELF-PRESENTATION

While previous studies have explored collecting and consuming in travel, this study focuses on the performative aspect. However, some of the previously studied and related aspects of collectors intersect with the themes of country-counting travel and the performance-oriented society, can be utilized for concluding the literature background for the research. Moreover, Goffman's performance theory has been applied to analyse the behaviour of locals in the context of tourism, its application from the tourist's perspective remains relatively unexplored. In much of the existing literature, the focus has been on how hosts (locals), perform for their guests (tourists), creating frontstage and backstage spaces that tourists engage with. For instance, according to Dean MacCannell (1973) who extended Goffman's concepts to tourism, locals in tourist destinations often create controlled backstage experiences that appear authentic to tourists but are deliberately staged for their consumption.

Frequent travellers can be understood as experience collectors, whose main motivation lies in the accumulation of diverse destinations and experiences over time (Kostopoulos et al., 2023, pp. 8, 11). This practice is not merely about the places visited, but about constructing a narrative of achievement that is often tied to external validation. The emphasis on measurable goals, such as the number of countries visited, encourages competitiveness and even obsessiveness, as travellers compare themselves to others and strive to perform within a broader social framework. Such tendencies can lead to feelings of underachievement when individuals perceive their progress as insufficient compared to peers (Kostopoulos et al., 2023, pp. 8, 13–14). Self-presentation plays a key role in this process, with travellers documenting their journeys through photographs, blogs, and social media, thereby curating their achievements for both personal reflection and public recognition (Kostopoulos et al., 2023, p. 13).

Travel as a form of collecting has been interpreted as competition-oriented, with the act of collecting destinations fulfilling esteem-related needs and providing a sense of distinction (Timothy, 2008, p. 127). Psychological perspectives on collecting further highlight the role of ego, self-esteem, and perfectionism, showing that motivations are rarely singular but instead fall into overlapping categories (Formanek, 1991, pp. 331–332,

334). Even in non-material forms, such as digital collections, the practice has been shown to serve both public identity construction and private meaning-making, underlining the importance of collecting in contemporary self-expression (Watkins, Sellen & Lindley, 2015, p. 3431). Similar insights emerge in tourism studies, where motivations for visiting world heritage sites or collecting experiences are varied yet consistently centred around the self, reinforcing the idea that travel consumption is closely tied to identity and personal significance (King & Prideaux, 2010, p. 238; McIntosh & Schmeichel, 2004, p. 87). Recent research further illustrates how tourists construct travel identities through distinction and symbolic consumption. For instance, alternative identities such as cannabis tourists are discursively shaped as part of broader social identity-building processes (Koistinen, 2024, p. 61), while disability-friendly travel narratives challenge mainstream representations and establish distinct identities through travel (Pitkänen, 2008, p. 63).

Research on collection and consumption from various perspectives (Keinan & Kivetz, 2011) has introduced the concept of productivity orientation, which has also been discussed in consumer behaviour literature (Solomon, 2009, p. 20). This concept refers to the constant attempt to use time productively to experiment with more new activities. This experimentation serves as a means of accomplishing and experiencing various things on our "bucket list" before moving on to new pursuits. Furthermore, studies emphasize that in industrialized and Western societies people are identifying their own worth in terms of accomplishment and productivity (Keinan & Kivetz, 2011, p. 936). Research also indicates that collection serves both membership and individual needs (Keinan & Kivetz, 2011, p. 93), but other scholars point out that collection only acquires social meaning when it is shared with other, primarily likeminded, people, and nowadays social media enables this sharing (Formanek, 1992, p. 332). Identity is reinforced through various travel practices, such as sports-related audience, where social media sharing strengthens communal identity-formation around shared travel behaviours (Wiik, 2021, pp. 66–67). At the same time, environmental emotions, including ecological concern and shame, shape young travellers' narrative identities, showing how affective and ethical considerations also become embedded in processes of travel self-constructing (Björklund, 2021, pp. 76–78).

Central to the phenomenon of travel self-presentation is the role of social influence,

particularly online. Recent research demonstrates through expectation confirmation theory that travellers not only seek advice and validation on social media platforms before travel, but also actively solicit feedback, as likes and comments, during and after their trips (Sedera et al., 2017, p. 832). The social influence effect transcends rational planning, stretching into the emotional core of the travel experience, confirming that the validation loop is integral to contemporary travel narratives (Sedera et al., 2017, p. 832). Further study shows how travel sharing serves to build and mobilize social capital, creating trust, reciprocity, and a sense of shared vision among communities (Kumar & Goh, 2021, p. 181). Travelers with strong social ties and trust in their network are more apt to share, viewing it as an investment in social relationships. Those focused on gaining status are more likely to share, while those worried about negative judgment may refrain, illustrating the interplay between personal disposition and broader social expectations (Kumar & Goh, 2021, pp. 181–182). Another research introduces the concept of social media-induced travel anxiety, revealing that repeated exposure to idealized, often filtered imagery and experiences not only triggers upward social comparison but can erode users' own travel intentions (Huang et al., 2025, p. 21). For many, the "instagrammable" standard results in worry or dissatisfaction when their personal trips fail to meet online ideals (Huang et al., 2025, pp. 21–22). Alongside social validation, intrinsic enjoyment and self-actualization are pivotal in motivating sharing behaviour, as studies find that perceived enjoyment is the dominant reason travellers share stories online, closely followed by motivations of altruism: helping others make better choices and a desire for recognition (Oliveira et al., 2020, pp. 9, 11). In addition, the semiotic study of "anti-tourist" narratives illustrates how some travellers construct identity by rejecting mainstream tourist norms and performing authenticity through specific narrative (Kyyrä, 2008, p. 92).

Further research explores the concept of the "bucket list" in tourism and its connection to identity formation and societal pressures, delves into how individuals are driven by a need to accumulate experiences that are believed significant, and that are often influenced by societal expectations and the discourse of self-improvement (Thurnell-Read, 2016, p. 59). The study suggests that tourism is increasingly being used as a means of identity expression, where travel destinations and experiences are selected not just for personal enjoyment, but also as symbols of achievement and uniqueness (Thurnell-Read, 2016, pp. 62–63). The phenomenon of country-counting travel can be seen as a reflection of this

trend, where travellers aim to accumulate as many countries as possible as a way to showcase their status and success. The research introduces the concept of "imperative experiential discourse", which refers to the societal pressure and worthiness to accumulate experiences and cross off items from one's bucket list (Thurnell-Read, 2016, p. 62). This pressure aligns with the performance-oriented nature of modern society, where these specific kinds of travels become a form of performance, wherein gaining social validation and approval could be the main motivators (Thurnell-Read, 2016, pp. 60, 63). Research applying Goffman's performance theory to understand how individuals navigate their online identities brings up concepts of front stage and backstage, and how people manage their self-presentation across various digital platforms, curating content to appeal to audiences (Boyd, 2014, p. 48). The study argue that individuals are highly aware of their online visibility and use various strategies to maintain control over their identity (Boyd, 2014, p. 48). Ultimately, their online behaviour reflects a complex performance of self, where they constantly balance authenticity with social expectations (Boyd, 2014, p. 49).

Moreover, the existing related literature and research brought up strongly that symbolic acts play a significant role in travel, and for some individuals, travel is a prime example where the emphasis lies on the symbolic representation of status. The destination itself, such as a journey to Svalbard, serves as a conspicuous marker of being an accomplished traveller (Timothy, 2008, p. 127; see Viken, 1995, p. 79), the whole travel narration is tied to performance which is shaping the self-identity (Desforges, 2000, pp. 930, 943). Similarly, in collecting, individuals ascend to expert status and recognition within their community as they accumulate collection and knowledge (McIntosh & Schmeichel, 2004, p. 88). Collections become instrumental as props in the expression of social status or self-concept, and consumers might also "rent a stage" by selecting particular venues or institutions that align with their desired image (Deighton, 1992, pp. 365, 367). Another research also agrees that pride is often associated with collecting, as displaying it elevates status (Watkins et al., 2015, p. 3426). Notably, objects that are easily acquired may lack the sense of achievement and fail to represent skill, knowledge, or status (Watkins et al., 2015, p. 3428). Renowned researcher in the study of collection and collecting, R.W. Belk, conclude that "Collecting physical objects or experiences satisfies a variety of conscious and nonconscious motivations and needs" (1988, pp. 144–145). These include a sense of progress and accomplishment, purpose and self-worth, pride and self enhancement, and a

desire for status and self-expression.

Lastly, it has been explored that travelling with collecting might cause commodification of travel experience, as travellers may prioritize quantity over quality, rushing through destinations to tick them off their list and potentially missing out on more authentic and immersive experiences (Kostopoulos et al., 2023, p. 13). Moreover, it leads to environmental and cultural considerations; country-counting travel can have negative consequences, such as environmental impact and cultural insensitivity, but also implications for well-being (Kostopoulos et al., 2023, p. 13). Similarly, studies note that bucket listing has shifted from encouraging deep, personal reflection to promoting culturally specific ideas of what makes "good" tourism (Thurnell-Read, 2016, p. 65). This shift forces a standard of tourism experiences on individuals and encouraging them to seek out an ever-expanding collection of unique activities, which may diminish the potential for truly meaningful travel experiences (Thurnell-Read, 2016, pp. 63, 65). Both studies highlight the potential negative impact of travel when it becomes focused on accumulation rather than genuine engagement.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter begins with an introduction to Goffman's performance theory, exploring how individuals manage their identity and impressions to align with societal expectations. Travel is framed as a stage for showcasing achievements and performing social status, offering valuable insights into the motivations behind country-counting. Next, the chapter delves into identity construction, examining how travel shapes personal and social identity. Travelers often align themselves with a global, well-travelled image, positioning their experiences as part of their self-concept in a performance-oriented society. The discussion then transitions to the concepts of status and success, focusing on how travel functions as a status symbol. The number of countries visited is presented as a measurable achievement that signifies social standing and personal accomplishment. Following this, the chapter explores the relationship between self-esteem and validation. It highlights how external recognition and approval reinforce a sense of self-worth through quantifiable travel goals, aligning personal achievements with societal values. Finally, the chapter concludes by situating these ideas within the broader context of a performance-oriented society. It emphasizes the societal focus on measurable achievements and external markers of success, demonstrating how these values drive country-counting travel.

3.1 Applying performance theory to country-counting travel

Sociologist Erving Goffman's (1956) theory of performance has been influential in sociology and related fields, providing a framework for understanding the complex dynamics of social interactions. It highlights the fluid but structured nature of social reality, emphasizing the performative aspects of our life. It could help to understand the subjectivity and agency of travellers in a performance-oriented society. In his theory, individuals, like actors on a stage, engage in impression management to present a favourable and calculated image of themselves to others in social connections. Life is seen as a series of performances, and people strategically present themselves in different ways depending on the social context. This performance is a conscious effort to shape the perceptions others have of them, and the true structure of the self can be seen from how we organize these performances in Western societies (Goffman, 1956b, p. 270). Goffman argues that the self is not an innate essence but a product of these performances, emerging

from the scene and the audience's interpretation rather than originating solely within the performer (pp. 270–271).

Goffman's dramaturgical perspective has been applied in tourism related studies (Edensor, 2001; Kerber & Kramm, 2021; MacCannell, 1973), yet mainly from the standpoint of how destinations stage experiences for visitors. By shifting the lens to travellers themselves, this thesis broadens the scope of application and highlights how individuals actively 'perform' their identities through travel practices such as country-counting. In doing so, Goffman's framework enables a more nuanced understanding of the performative dimensions of tourism, bridging insights from sociology, psychology, and tourism studies. This interdisciplinary triangulation is particularly valuable given the multifaceted nature of tourism, which naturally cuts across social, cultural, and individual domains (Decrop, 2002, p. 163). It will analyse how individuals strategically manage their presentation to convey specific messages about their identity and social standing. Individuals may feel compelled to continually enhance their personal narratives, seeking to impress and gain approval by achieving recognition and a specific form of self-presentation. And in the context of travel, it can represent the accumulation of countries visited as a form of achievement or status symbol in a performance-driven society, like the actor on the stage. The result of the performance will strengthen the status, like the actors on the stage, may be admired for their accomplishments (McIntosh & Schmeichel, 2004, p. 92; The Travelers' Century Club, 2023; Watkins et al., 2015, p. 3424–3427).

As the self is a stage effect and shaped by the context of the performance and reliant on its consistency, this self-production process relies on collective elements: the backstage preparation, the interaction with co-performers, and the audience's readiness to interpret the act (Goffman, 1956b, pp. 271–272). Front stage is where individuals actively perform and present themselves to others, using various props to create and maintain a desired impression (Goffman, 1956, p. 32). Backstage, on the other hand, is where individuals can relax and be themselves without the need for performance and pressure of maintaining a particular image (Goffman, 1956, p. 114). Moreover, people engage in impression management to control how others perceive them. This involves conscious and unconscious efforts to shape a specific impression or image through behaviour, appearance, communication, and other symbolic means (Goffman, 1956, p. 60).

Individuals may behave in a particular way or role to maintain a particular social identity. These roles come with expected behaviours, and individuals strategically perform these roles to create a specific impression (Goffman, 1956, pp. 37, 54). When the mechanisms function smoothly, they create an impression of reality that suggests the self originates deep within the performer. Conversely, any visible breakdown, such as an error or misstep, reveals the constructed nature of the performance, risking a loss of credibility and face (Goffman, 1956b, pp. 272, 72).

While individuals strive to project an idealized image, they also regulate their expressions continuously to align with audience expectations (Goffman, 1956b, pp. 61–62). Travelers, for instance, attempt to craft unique and distinctive performances (Goffman, 1956b, p. 60) while concealing aspects that do not fit their idealized image (Goffman, 1956b, p. 58). Social media platforms constitute a modern extension of the dramaturgical stage, where individuals engage in the deliberate construction and performance of identity for context-specific audiences. These digital environments embody both the front stage and the expressive control described by Goffman, facilitating refined impression management in line with his framework (Goffman, 1956b, p. 119). The boundary between frontstage and backstage becomes increasingly blurred in these settings, as performers curate their roles while managing the potential for contradiction or disappointment if unintended audiences witness the act (Goffman, 1956b, pp. 149–151). Is the journey undertaken for personal growth and cultural enrichment, or is it primarily a spectacle for others to admire?

Goffman distinguishes between the individual as a role character and as a performer. The role character reflects socially valued traits—courage, strength, or refinement—that the performance is designed to highlight (Goffman, 1956b, p. 270). In contrast, the performer actively engages in staging these traits, learning and adapting through practice and interaction. This duality underscores the tension between the image projected and the personal efforts behind its creation. Moreover, status and social position, while intangible, are reinforced through consistent, structured patterns of behaviour (Goffman, 1956b, pp. 86–87). Travelers often strive upward within their communities, leveraging expressive aspects of their journeys to achieve a higher perceived status. By selectively engaging their audience and controlling the narrative, they aim to secure recognition and admiration (Goffman, 1956b, pp. 75, 77). It must also be noted that the individual is not always aware

that they are calculating their performance or is only partially aware of it (Goffman, 1956b, p. 16).

To conclude, Goffman's performance theory explores how individuals engage in performances to create particular images, manage impressions, and contribute to society and the other way around (Goffman, 1969, p. 28). It deepens the understanding of the performative aspects of travel experiences and the role of social dynamics in shaping the narratives and practices within this specific travel subculture. Goffman's concepts align with the societal values and norms discussed in the literature review, and it underscores the complex interplay between societal values and individual travel practices.

3.2 Constructing the self: The role of identity

Identity encompasses how people perceive themselves and how they believe others perceive them, that could be seen as a role we perform (Burke and Tully, 1977; Thoits, 1986, as cited in Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 225). Identity is multifaceted, including aspects such as personal identity, social identity, and cultural identity (Solomon, 2009, pp. 405, 485), and it is a combination of internal factors, like self-perception and personal values, and external factors, like social roles and expectations (Solomon, 2009, p. 277; Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 226;). Identity is often expressed through behaviour and choices, and for others it appears as a lifestyle (Solomon, 2009, pp. 406, 494). In the context of travel, for example, one's identity can be shaped by the places they visit, their consumptions, the cultures they encounter, and how they choose to present their travel experiences, their identity, to others. As Stuart Hall (2002, p. 251) has noted that identities are not inherent or fixed; rather, they are constructed through stories and performances that individuals create about themselves.

In the context of this thesis, is important to highlight that identity is constructed and presented through social performances that align with societal expectations and norms (Burke 1991; Burke and Reitzel, 1981, as cited in in Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 225). Individuals actively manage and stage their identities to meet external standards of success and validation, as they want to be part of the group and gain approval (Stets & Burke, 2000 pp. 226, 228), as also Thurnell-Read (2017, p. 59) states, “the relationship between

tourism and identity has to be narrated and performed”. This pursuit integrates personal and social dimensions, illustrating how external markers of success contribute to the construction of one's identity (Kostopoulos et al., 2023, p. 12). The public display not only enhances the traveller's self-esteem by providing a concrete measure of accomplishment but also influences how they are perceived by others (Kostopoulos et al., 2023, p. 13; Solomon, 2009, p. 276).

3.3 Travel as reflection of status and success

Status, in the sense of recognition, is not typically considered a basic need in the same way as physiological needs like food and water. However, the desire for social connection and esteem is acknowledged as a fundamental aspect of human psychology according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943). It is right there between belongingness and self-actualization, more precisely, between acceptance by others and self-fulfilment (Solomon, 2009, p. 22). Esteem needs involve seeking recognition, accomplishment, status, and self-respect, and it could be known also as ego needs (Solomon, 2009, p. 22).

In more detail, a status symbol is an external marker that conveys individuals' position within a society. These symbols could be tangible objects, possessions, or characteristics that are associated with a certain level of respect or success, and it can be seen as power (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008, p. 265). According to Solomon (2009, p. 480), the major motivation is not to enjoy the achievement but to showcase it to the other people and let them know that you have it more than the other people. The pursuit of status can be a powerful motivator for individuals, and this desire for recognition can influence consumer behaviour, lifestyle choices, and the pursuit of various achievements (Solomon, 2009, p. 480). Rucker's and Galinsky's study (2008, p. 264) highlights that individuals may turn to status symbols as a means of strengthening their self-concepts, particularly in situations where they might be feeling insecure or uncertain about other aspects of their lives. This status-seeking consumer behaviour could be seen also as conspicuous consumption, the act of displaying, mostly material, achievements to gain status and reputation in society. The theory was first discussed by economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen in his book *The Theory of the Leisure Class* in 1899. In addition to conspicuous consumption, Veblen (1899, pp. 49–51) introduced the conspicuous leisure, emphasizing behaviours and

activities that serve as visible indicators of one's wealth. This performance of leisure takes on a crucial role in societal perceptions (Veblen, 1899, p. 37). The pursuit of a superior performance, whether in terms of wealth, achievements, or social markers, becomes a driving force and a premise for earning esteem (Solomon, 2009, p. 483; Veblen, 1899, p. 19), and so the travel could act as showcased status symbol, the way to gain more social recognition.

Self-esteem, defined as an individual's subjective evaluation of their worth and competence, is influenced by internal and external factors, including achievements, relationships, and life experiences (Maslow, 1943; Solomon, 2009, p. 279, 292). It reflects the extent to which a person believes in their ability to meet expectations and achieve goals, as William James defined already in 1890. Self-esteem plays a crucial role in shaping how individuals think, feel, and behave, that influenced by a variety of internal and external factors, including personal achievements, social relationships, and life experiences (Solomon, 2009, pp. 279, 292). Positive experiences, accomplishments, and supportive relationships can contribute to a healthy and robust sense of self-worth, while negative experiences, criticism, or a lack of validation may undermine it (McKay & Fanning, 2016, pp. 7–8; Solomon, 2009, p. 250). Just as makeup has transformative and enhancing qualities that positively influence appearance, self-esteem similarly acts as an internal enhancer or transformer, influencing an individual's self-perception and social comparison. Self-esteem is an ability to form the identity, and it is built on core beliefs that also influence your sense of belonging and how you perceive others' treatment of you (McKay & Fanning, 2016, pp. 7, 316).

3.4 The drive for achievement: Performance-oriented society

Performance-oriented society is characterized by values of achievement, competition, productivity, and the pursuit of personal goals (Gleick, 2001, p. 223; Hari, 2022, p. 232; Keinan & Rivetz, 2011, p. 936). The importance of performance is noticed specifically in capitalist and western societies (Keinan & Kivetz, 2011, p. 948), whereas desired status is often attained through the acquisition of secular and measurable assets (Harvey, 2008, p. 208) and is commonly evaluated based on an individual's external markers of success (House, 2004, p. 239).

Regarding Deighton (1992, p. 363), all events are either occurrences or performances, where performances are responses to an obligation and occurrences not: “Performance refers to action in fulfilment of a contract”, as Hakala (2023) is discussing in his book *Suoritusyhteiskunta*. Similarly, according to study by House and others (2004), which involved 62 nations, 170 researchers, and 11 years, the performance orientation is one of the cultural values. Performance-orientation places a strong emphasis on achieving excellence, efficiency, and productivity in various facets of life (House, 2004, p. 239), be it in education, the workplace, or personal development. The importance is on high performance, continuous competition and improvement, which fosters a culture of accomplishment (Harvey, 2008, pp. 82, 192).

What a person does is often valued more than who they are (House, 2004, p. 245), as in a performance-oriented society individuals are motivated to set and achieve specific measurable goals of merits and achievements. Performance-oriented society pressures individuals to pursue external markers of success and achievement, such as accumulating countries visited, as our performance is an attribute of desired description of ourselves: identity and self-worth (Deighton, 1992, p. 368), as Russell (1988, p. 139) concludes, “we are what we have”.

4. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

While social constructionism set the boundaries for my research, I chose to use qualitative interviews as my primary method to gain in-depth insight into the subjective experiences of country-counting travellers. This approach also helped me address a notable research gap (Puusa & Juuti, 2011b, p. 53), as I was able to consider both psychological and social factors (Puusa & Juuti, 2011a, pp. 31, 41). Additionally, conducting qualitative interviews enabled me to explore how individuals construct and perform their identities, giving participants the opportunity to express how they perceive and present themselves in the context of travel (Puusa & Juuti, 2011a, p. 41; Puusa & Juuti, 2011b, p. 56).

4.1 Social constructionism

Social constructionism views reality as something created and sustained through social interactions, language, and shared cultural meanings (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, pp. 24, 32–34, 36; Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012, p. 39–42). Rather than treating travel behaviours such as country-counting as objective facts or measurable truths, this perspective emphasizes how these practices are narrated, performed, and legitimized within particular social contexts (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012, p. 39–42). Therefore, this paradigm is particularly relevant for the present research, as the phenomenon of country-counting travel is characteristically tied to questions of recognition, social validation, and performativity, all of which are best understood through an interpretive and reflexive lens.

By grounding the study in social constructionism, the methodological approach foregrounds the subjective meanings and cultural scripts (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012, p. 39–42) that participants draw upon in describing their travel experiences. It also acknowledges the co-construction of knowledge between researcher and participant: interviews do not reveal objective truths, but rather situational narratives shaped by context, self-presentation, and interaction (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012, p. 39–42). Accordingly, the chosen methods aim not to establish universal generalizations but to uncover patterns of meaning, discourse, and symbolic value that illuminate the role of country-counting within contemporary travel culture.

4.2 Data collection and participant selection

To recruit participants, I initially explored online platforms dedicated to country-counting, such as NomadMania and Most Traveled People. However, I quickly realized that access required membership, which limited direct contact with potential participants. Therefore, I turned to personal networks, approaching friends and family members who were either engaged in extensive travel themselves or knew others with such interests. Through this strategy, I obtained three participants directly and an additional four through their referrals. This process resulted in a diverse group of seven participants. During these preliminary contacts, I observed significant variation in how travellers approached country-counting: for some, the number of countries visited was a central objective, often leading to shorter stays, while others adopted a more immersive style, prioritizing longer stays and deeper engagement with destinations. This diversity provided valuable perspectives for the study. The participants were Finnish, aged between 23 and 54, and represented a variety of backgrounds, including students, unemployed individuals, and full-time workers, both with and without children. General demographic information was collected to situate their experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 71).

The study employed thematic interviews as the primary data collection method. This qualitative approach was chosen because it facilitates the exploration of personal experiences, motivations, and meanings that cannot be fully captured by quantitative methods (Puusa & Juuti, 2011a, p. 31; 2011b, pp. 54–56). The semi-structured format ensured both comparability across interviews and flexibility for individual narratives (Jordan & Gibson, 2002, p. 222). Themes were derived from the research questions and theoretical framework, while the order and phrasing of questions were adapted to the natural flow of conversation.

A key part of the process was the operationalization of the research questions. Abstract concepts such as self-presentation, identity, and performance-oriented values were translated into concrete themes guiding the interviews (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006). For instance, identity construction was explored through participants' motivations, behaviours, and reflections on travel, while societal performance values were addressed through their accounts of achievement, recognition, and competition. This

ensured that the interviews remained focused while also allowing for nuanced, participant-led insights (Juhila, 2021). Interviews were conducted primarily face-to-face to capture non-verbal communication and body language, which enriched the data (Jordan & Gibson, 2002, p. 222). The conversations were recorded with participants' consent, resulting in approximately 4.6 hours of audio. These recordings were fully transcribed, producing 202 pages of text, complemented by individual interview summaries.

The interviews were carefully planned and executed, supported by a detailed timetable, question maps, and protocols (Decrop, 2002, p. 161; Jordan & Gibson, 2002, pp. 222–223). While the project followed a structured timeline for recruitment, data collection, and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 69), flexibility was maintained to accommodate the evolving nature of qualitative research (Goodson & Phillimore, 2002, p. 34; Puusa & Juuti, 2011a, p. 44; 2011b, p. 56). Backups of notes, transcriptions, and recordings were systematically archived to ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of the material.

4.3 Qualitative, interpretative and thematic analysis methods

The primary methodological framework employed in this research is a qualitative approach, chosen to enable a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted phenomenon of country-counting travel and its implications within a performance-driven societal context. This approach facilitates the exploration of both visible practices of travel and the deeper social meanings, cultural frameworks, and interactional dynamics shaping these behaviours (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012, p. 38; Ruusuvuori et al., 2010). The study design is based on seven thematic interviews, conducted to capture how country-counting informs travellers' self-presentation, identity formation, and its relation to the characteristics of a performance-oriented society.

The interviews followed a semi-structured format, balancing open conversation with guided comparability (Jordan & Gibson, 2002, p. 222), and thematic analysis was applied to interview transcripts to identify recurring themes and patterns, complemented by qualitative content analysis to interpret meanings systematically (Pearce, 2012, p. 55; Ruusuvuori et al., 2010). This was further supported by a theory-driven dialogue approach, which guided the interpretation through conceptual frameworks and

emphasized the broader societal influences of country-counting travel.

The analytical process was iterative and reflexive rather than strictly linear. Analysis, interpretation, and reflection occurred in cycles, often requiring me to revisit earlier stages to refine my understanding (Puusa, 2011, p. 79; Puusa & Juuti, 2011a, p. 44). This circular process allowed for flexibility, improvisation, and the accommodation of unexpected findings. To ensure reliability and validity, I carefully examined data against criteria determined by research goals, while also acknowledging the significance of exceptions, as even a single unique observation can contribute to trustworthiness (Pearce, 2012, p. 79; Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006).

The analysis process consisted of several stages. Initially, I listened to each interview multiple times and produced detailed summaries. Preliminary categories were created based on theoretical frameworks and refined through repeated coding of recurring words, expressions, and themes. Excerpts were organized in an Excel matrix with columns for main themes, sub-themes, variables, central perspectives, relations to other themes, and quotations. At one stage, eight categories were identified, which were later narrowed to three core themes, supplemented by an additional category that emerged strongly across interviews. This process required at least seven iterative analysis cycles, resulting in over 25 different files, which were later consolidated into a single dataset. The final step involved aligning these themes more closely with the theoretical framework and elaborating the results in written form.

To avoid analytic fatigue or over-familiarity, I occasionally paused the process to return with a fresh perspective. This allowed me to detect new cues and reconsider earlier interpretations with greater neutrality. Through this strategy, I was able to mitigate potential bias and remain open to alternative readings of the material. Achieving theoretical saturation required sustained engagement with the data, exploration without preconceived expectations, and constant attention to ethics, politics, values, and context (Goodson & Phillimore, 2002, pp. 33–34; Pearce, 2012, p. 64). Moreover, throughout the process, I emphasized transparency and accessibility. I maintained detailed notes to provide an audit trail, employed visual presentations to clarify the analysis (Decrop, 2002, p. 161; Goodson & Phillimore, 2002, p. 37), and used translated excerpts to make

participant voices accessible to an English-speaking audience while preserving their authenticity. However, to ensure cultural accuracy, I paid attention to linguistic nuances, conducted pilot testing, and clarified meanings with participants when necessary (Pearce, 2012, p. 79).

4.4 Researcher role

Creating a safe, interactive, and trusting environment was essential to encourage openness (Goodson & Phillimore, 2002, p. 33; Jordan & Gibson, 2002, p. 225; Ruusuvuori et al., 2010). At the beginning of interviews, participants were reminded that there were no right or wrong answers (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pp. 71, 94). I encouraged them to speak freely, followed their pace, and employed silence when appropriate to allow for reflection (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pp. 71, 95). Active listening, empathy, and gentle affirmations helped reinforce a supportive atmosphere, positioning participants as experts of their own experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pp. 71, 95–96). To enhance comfort, interview questions were translated into Finnish, the participants' native language, enabling them to express themselves naturally and in depth. Selected quotations were later translated into English for inclusion in this thesis, ensuring consistency and clarity for the reader.

As a qualitative researcher, my role extended beyond conducting interviews to include analysis and interpretation, while remaining flexible enough to revisit earlier stages when necessary (Puusa, 2011, p. 79; Puusa & Juuti, 2011b, p. 51). This portrayed the research process circular rather than strictly linear (Puusa & Juuti, 2011a, p. 44), requiring continuous reflection and adaptation. I recognize that qualitative inquiry is inherently interpretive and that my own perspectives, background, and potential biases inevitably influenced data collection, analysis, and presentation. To address this, I engaged in reflexive practices to critically examine these influences and made a conscious effort to maintain a coherent dialogue between the material, the theory, and the research questions (Goodson & Phillimore, 2002, p. 36; Puusa & Juuti, 2011b, p. 55; Ruusuvuori, Nikander & Hyvärinen, 2010; Thomas, 2002, p. 212).

I also acknowledge the ontological challenges inherent in this type of research (Hollinshead, 2002, p. 63), recognizing that the phenomenon under study is complex,

evolving, and resistant to a single universal truth (Puusa, 2011, p. 78). Instead of seeking definitive conclusions, my aim was to uncover underlying structures and root causes, to question established assumptions, and to situate the findings within their cultural and societal contexts (Decrop, 2002, p. 163; Tribe, 2002, p. 57).

4.5 Research ethics

To ensure the reliability and validity of this research, I applied multiple strategies to enhance the consistency of the results, the credibility of the sources, and the overall trustworthiness of the data (Decrop, 2002, pp. 161–162). I employed a methodical approach to data collection and analysis, drawing on a diverse range of sources and identifying recurring patterns related to the phenomenon of country-counting travel. This triangulation of data strengthened the internal consistency of the findings (Decrop, 2002, p. 162). All scholarly references were drawn from peer-reviewed publications, and primary data were ethically gathered through thematic interviews. Trustworthiness was further supported by transparent documentation, detailed field notes, and adherence to clearly defined research procedures.

Ethical integrity was maintained throughout the study. During the theoretical phase, I upheld the principles of academic honesty and accountability by accurately citing all sources and avoiding any form of plagiarism (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2023, p. 17). Prior to data collection, participants received clear and comprehensive information about the study's aims, methods, data ownership, and possible risks or benefits (Ruusu vuori et al., 2010; TENK, 2023, p. 12). Informed consent was obtained through written agreements (see appendix 3), with participants explicitly informed of their right to withdraw at any time (Kuula, 2006, p. 117).

Confidentiality was protected by anonymizing all identifying details and using pseudonyms in reporting. Data were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher, in accordance with data protection protocols (Kuula, 2006, p. 200; TENK, 2023, p. 12). Reflexivity was practiced throughout the analysis to minimize bias, and direct quotations were used to preserve participants' voices. Transparency in methodology and the acknowledgement of study limitations ensured that the findings could be critically

assessed and ethically validated. By thoughtfully and transparently addressing these ethical considerations, I showed respect for my participants' rights and well-being, thereby strengthening the credibility and reliability of my research (Ruusuvuori et al., 2010).

5. FINDINGS

The findings emerged through a theory-driven dialogue between the interview data and the chosen theoretical framework. The research was guided by qualitative thematic content analysis, supported by a critical realist approach. Initial theme development was informed by the theory, particularly Goffman's performance framework and concepts of symbolic capital, together with research questions, which shaped the coding and interpretation of the interviews.

5.1 The cyclical nature of the performance in travel

During analysis, emotions and personal experience surfaced as a strong, independent theme not initially foregrounded in theory, demonstrating how the data also pushed back and expanded the analytical lens. In this way, the interviews and theory were in continuous conversation. Hence, four key categories ultimately emerged: identity, emotions and personal experience, sharing experiences and social media, and achievement. These categories were not only conceptually distinct but hierarchically and cyclically related (see Figure 1), illustrating how identity shapes emotional engagement, which in turn informs what and how travelers share, ultimately linking to goal-setting and symbolic achievement through travel.



Figure 1. The cyclic process of four categories emerged from the interviews.

As the data show, these categories are not isolated: rather, they intertwine and reinforce one another. For instance, identity is not only expressed through travel experiences but is also constructed by them. Participants noted that sharing travel content on social media acts both as a form of self-reflection and a performative act aimed at validation, aligning closely with Goffman's (1956) notion of frontstage behavior. One participant observed:

But maybe I think that social media has added a bit of that competition, and those bucket lists, and a huge rush to travel the world. And then you notice, many people even on Instagram say in their bio that they have visited 197 countries in 50 years, that it is a big deal, how many countries have you visited. (H1)

This aligns with research suggesting that visual platforms intensify social comparison and performative pressures (Sedera et al., 2017; Huang et al., 2025), reinforcing a performance-oriented culture where travel becomes a metric of social value (Keinan & Kivetz, 2011; Thurnell-Read, 2016). The participants describe how travel affects their identity and self-esteem, but at the same time, sharing experiences on social media can be both self-reflection and a goal-oriented activity. For them, social media serves as a stage both for sharing experiences and for showcasing goals. While travel achievement most likely loops back, the feeling of accomplishment brings pride and self-satisfaction, while it reshapes identity (Timothy, 2008; Desforges, 2000; Thurnell-Read, 2016, pp. 62–63). In other words, the process is cyclical, a set of performances or a performance as a whole.

Across the interviews, country-counting emerges as a visible and sometimes strategic element of self-presentation, aligning closely with Goffman's (1956) performance theory, where individuals manage impressions through calculated and symbolic acts. While not all participants emphasize the number of countries visited in face-to-face introductions, it often surfaces in conversations about lifestyle or hobbies. On platforms like Instagram, travel and the number of countries visited might be highlighted in bios, stories, and posts, signaling travel as a core part of one's identity, as the participant expresses:

It's a list of achievements... It certainly brings some kind of validation to your experiences... If you go to other people's profiles and it says they've been to over a hundred countries, I'm like, 'Oh, this must be a really interesting person... It certainly brings some kind of validation to your experiences. (H2)

Displaying one's country count confers symbolic capital (Deighton, 1992; McIntosh &

Schmeichel, 2004), a way to differentiate oneself from “ordinary” travellers and claim expertise or worldliness, which parallels Kostopoulos’ (2023) and Timothy’s (2008) studies on experience collecting and status signalling. Social media amplifies these processes, but individual attitudes toward country-counting are diverse: for some, it is a source of pride and motivation: "I think it's nice, it gives me that feeling of accomplishment when I've made a packing list and then I can check off what I want to do" (H2), while for some others, it is a secondary or even irrelevant aspect of their travel experience or it comes as a by-product. This diversity echoes Goffman’s (1956) insight that not all performers are equally invested in their roles, and that performances may be calculated or unconscious. Ultimately, based on this research, country-counting can function both as a personal metric of growth and as a social symbol, reflecting broader values and dynamics within contemporary travel culture.

5.2 Country-counting forming identity

For many participants, country-counting was not superficial, but a means of articulating and anchoring their personal journey. It provided a framework for understanding their growth and vocabulary for narrating themselves. The interviews reveal that travel, that country-counting, can serve as a concrete marker of this identity, but its importance varies. Some of the participants feel that counting countries is a personal list of achievements, like as a symbol of goal-orientation and determination: “If you’ve decided to do something and then you experience it, I think it symbolizes determination” (H2). For some counting countries is more of an easy way to visualize and concretize one's travel history: “I like to keep a record of where I've been” (H5), “Oh yeah, I was there too” (H6), which might bring feelings of success and serves as a way to keep track of one's experiences. Travelers use the number of visited countries as a measurable, easily communicable element of their identity, which supports Goffman's (1956b, pp. 270–271) idea that the self is not a stable entity but rather a performed and constructed image shaped by audience interaction.

The data highlighted that, beyond emotional experiences, factors such as self-confidence, achievement, and personal growth play a central role in shaping travelers’ identities. Participants noted that traveling helps them cope with unfamiliar situations and build resilience: “To cope with various situations when traveling, so yes, it probably helps with

that” (H7). This was particularly evident when encountering new destinations, navigating foreign environments, and taking pride in their accomplishments: “It brings a certain kind of confidence” (H5). Achieving a new country is experienced both as an emotional investment and as an opportunity for personal development. Emotions are often intertwined with reflection and memory, frequently shared or revisited through social media. Feelings of success, fulfillment, and gratitude were reported both during and after the journey: “Yeah, and then there's the ability to be able to do these things. And then of course, pride in having had the opportunity to see the world so widely and all the while” (H3). These experiences of growth and achievement also influence future travel planning, as many participants deliberately organize trips to reach new destinations and continue building their personal narratives. If not necessarily a new country, then at least somewhere new to them, like each of the participant brought up:

- “I'm always so excited about all the new destinations.” (H1)
- “Yes, it's always cooler to introduce a destination where others haven't necessarily been.” (H2)
- “It brings a completely different feeling when you're somewhere new.” (H3)
- “Yeah, but then I always like going to new places.” (H4)
- “It's always fun to say, hey, here's a new adventure.” (H5)
- “It's enough to be a new destination.” (H6)
- “Ah new country!” (H7)

At this core, counting visited countries operates as a tool for identity construction. As one participant reflected, “I think it affects the personality quite a bit. The personality is perhaps more adventurous” (H2). For many travelers, the number of countries visited provides a framework through which to narrate their experiences and shape how they are perceived, whether as adventurous, knowledgeable, or globally engaged. While some use country-counting more deliberately than others, it nonetheless contributes to the performance of self. As another participant noted,

But it's probably just that I like to inspire people and then if I can be of some help or be useful. But there's also a certain side to it, that you want to show that this is my thing and I know a lot about this, because everyone has a certain need to be an expert in something. (H5)

This supports the idea that the "self" (Formanek, 1991, p. 331; Goffman, 1956, pp. 45, 245) is built within performances directed toward others, rather than being an internal, unchanging essence, and that, identity as something expressed through lifestyle choices (Solomon, 2009, pp. 406, 494).

5.3 Emotions and personal experiences

Even though not directly presented in theory, I want to briefly highlight feelings and personal experiences as their own theme, because it is strongly linked to the construction of identity. Emotions strongly emerged as a theme, especially in relation to encountering a new destination, coping in a foreign environment and feelings of pride in achievements, as one participant noted, "It brings a certain kind of confidence" (H5), while another said, "I feel that I come back from every trip different" (H1). In these statements, travel is both an emotional investment and a place of growth. Emotions are often also linked to how one can later reflect on one's own experiences or return to them, for example on social media.

You get to be in an uncertain area, and you have to sort of cope with them yourself. So yes, it brings about a survival mentality and that in a way, how you meet different people and what kinds of situations you can cope with and I have a really bad sense of direction and of course, I always have that fear that I'll get lost and how many times I got lost and how you can cope with them and that yes, it brings about a certain kind of confidence. (H5)

These findings resonate with the theoretical understanding that self-esteem and internal validation are central to identity formation (Solomon, 2009; Maslow, 1943), complementing Goffman's (1956) notion of the backstage self as a domain of authentic expression and reflection. Emotions such as pride, envy, joy, and fulfilment, expressed by participants, illustrate how travel, and specifically country-counting, is not only externally performed but also internally transformative. One participant observed, "If I see someone traveling all the time, it can easily cause a little bit of envy, but you can also be happy and joyful for someone if you know them well" (H4), capturing the complex emotional dynamics tied to travel visibility and comparison. These emotional responses function as both motivators and outcomes of travel experiences, shaping future behavior and reinforcing identity narratives. As previous research suggests, positive travel accomplishments and social reinforcement can enhance self-worth, while lack of recognition or comparison may produce insecurity or doubt (McKay & Fanning, 2016, pp.

7–8; Solomon, 2009, p. 250). Thus, emotional engagement with travel, whether in the form of reflection, comparison, or accomplishment, plays a crucial role in the performative construction of self.

5.4 Social validation within country-counting

Social validation plays a central role in the practice of country-counting, as revealed in interviews and anchored strongly in sociological theory. Many participants referenced both the explicit display of their travel achievement, as some participants mentioned seeing numbers of visited countries, like “50 out of 197 countries visited” (H1) in social media bios, and the respect directed towards more experienced travelers, like “He's been to an awful lot of places, so you could basically say that I admire him” (H7). Such displays not only communicate experience, but acts as status markers within travel communities, echoing the concept of conspicuous achievement (Veblen, 1899; Solomon, 2009), as well as supporting the idea of front stage (see Goffman, 1956, p. 32), as travelers curate their experiences for an audience, on social media.

Some participants are aware that showcasing travel can also provoke envy, as mentioned in the previous chapter, but it seems that their main goal is to inspire others, and they might often turn to more “expertise” traveler for advice: “I can help and share information through my expertise on social media” (H5). However, some participants reflect on the pressure to perform or curate their travel identity online, as there is also an awareness of the competitive and comparative aspects of travel on social media: “I feel that for many people, traveling these days might be like wanting to tick a box” (H3), the other mentioning, “I'm much more active then, like on Instagram, if I'm on a trip somewhere” (H4). This ties directly into Kostopoulos et al.'s (2023, pp. 13–14) finding that external validation is a powerful motivator for frequent travelers, often leading to comparison and competitiveness.

Interviews also show that social validation is not purely about outward impression. For some, sharing is “like keeping a diary”, a form of internal validation, self-reflection, and memory preservation: “I like to look back at those moments later and relive them” (H1). This resonates with Watkins et al. (2015), who note that even digital collections serve both

public identity and personal meaning-making. The performances are therefore both a source of pride and, at times, pressure: “There is a reason that they are bucket list items, it gives me that feeling of accomplishment” (H3). Social validation emerges both from internal goal setting and the external recognition that may follow.

5.5 Achievement through counting countries

For many, the act of visiting new countries is not random but goal-oriented, as participants often plan their travels to reach a certain number, gain the associated sense of achievement, and receive recognition from peers, like one participant describes “There’s a feeling of accomplishment if I’ve reached a goal. I feel proud of myself, especially if it’s an exotic destination” (H2) “Yes, I’m going to collect that hundred countries now, and I’ve always said that after that I can calm down” (H5). Travel becomes a means through which individuals can demonstrate ambition, discipline, and distinction (Keinan & Kivetz, 2011, p. 936; Thurnell-Read, 2016, p. 62). The pursuit of such goals often intertwines with competition, productivity orientation, and the fulfillment of esteem needs, echoing Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy and Keinan & Kivetz’s (2011) productivity orientation. Some participants said they plan intentionally to visit new countries in part for the satisfaction and recognition these acts will bring, “Yes, it has a lot of influence, also from the point of view of travel planning” (H2). This aligns with Goffman’s (1956) dramaturgical theory, where the self is performed in response to audience expectations and social scripts.

However, attitudes towards country-counting vary; some see it as a meaningful achievement and part of their identity, while others are indifferent or even critical of the trend: “I don’t count them that way” (H1), “I haven’t slavishly followed any list” (H3). Participants also mention that both the number of countries visited and traveling to rare destinations can confer status within the travel community, and some of the participants are aware that the goal-oriented nature and competitiveness of travel have increased especially with social media. Although one participant did not actively prioritize country-counting, they reflected on its implicit influence by noting, “Yes, we are missing a lot more from that hundred than those three countries” (H7), suggesting that underlying frameworks of comparison and quantification shapes travelling. Country-counting helps position oneself within social contexts, which involves, as Goffman (1956, p. 60) states,

conscious and unconscious efforts to shape a specific impression or image through behavior, appearance, communication, and other symbolic means. One way or another, participants experienced a sense of success, if not necessarily from counting countries alone, but through travel itself. As one participant put it:

It brings kind of open-mindedness or kind of problem-solving ability, when very few people have a straight and straightforward path to success, as there are many different situations along the way, that if you're used to surviving in many different situations when traveling, then it probably helps with success. (H5)

6. DISCUSSION

The following section synthesizes the key findings, and their relation to existing scholarly literature, highlighting how the results contribute to current understandings of travel as a performative practice. It further considers the practical implications for the tourism industry, particularly in the context of responsible travel behaviours, while also acknowledging the study's methodological and theoretical limitations. Finally, it offers recommendations for future research aimed at deepening insights into the evolving relationship between identity, mobility, and self-presentation in contemporary travel cultures.

6.1 Key findings of the research

This study investigated *how travellers use country-counting for self-presentation*. It explores three sub-questions: *how this act contributes to identity construction, how travellers use it to seek social validation, and how it functions as a status symbol*. Based on the interviews and theoretical framework, country-counting functions as a multidimensional form of self-expression, as a cyclic process where travellers construct identity, seek social validation, and accumulate symbolic capital, in different ways depending on the situation and motivation. Identity is built through personal narratives of travel, reinforced by emotional experiences, then externalized via social media performance, with goal-setting country-counting feeding back into self-perception.

According to the data, country-counting appears as a tool through which a traveller structures their own identity in relation to others. It offers a clear and measurable way to form their own narrative about who they are and what they have experienced. Identity is constructed here through both the number and the stories behind it. It can be an active choice to stand out, to show courage or a spirit of adventure, while for others it remains a secondary or background element. Research revealed that travel-related achievements, such as the number of countries visited, are highlighted on social media or in discussions as if they were merits or experiences that have recognition value. Country-counting is seen as a status symbol that communicates a kind of "tourism capital". Especially in the context of social media, travellers' achievements can act as a symbolic currency. Tourism here

acts as a medium for expressing personality, success and even exclusivity. In a certain way, it can replace or is equated with other status-related social status, such as education, career success or wealth.

6.2 Connection to the previous research

Echoing Goffman's (1956) performance theory, the findings highlight how country-counting is not merely a numerical exercise, but a multi-layered act of self-presentation, that involves the strategic construction of identity both for oneself and for an audience. This resonates with Kostopoulos et al. (2023, pp. 13–14) and Timothy (2008), who describe modern travel, particularly frequent travel, as deeply entwined with notions of achievement, productivity, and status signaling.

Crucially, the interviews reveal that intrinsic and extrinsic motivations coexist and intertwine. Many participants expressed personal pride, fulfilment, and a sense of growth tied to their travel achievements, feelings that align with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and Solomon's (2009) understanding of self-esteem as central to identity formation. Simultaneously, however, these internal rewards are shaped and reinforced by external factors such as likes, comments, or admiration from peers. As Sedera et al. (2017) and Oliveira et al. (2020) confirm, social approval and feedback loops significantly influence how travellers perceive their own experiences, creating an ongoing interplay between emotional satisfaction and public performance.

The literature also points to the role of social media as a key arena of identity curation and symbolic display (Boyd, 2014; Kumar & Goh, 2021). This is strongly reflected in the interviews, where participants spoke about curating travel content to both document and differentiate themselves. This mirrors Boyd's (2014, p. 48) observations on teens' online self-performance, and Deighton's (1992) notion of "renting a stage" to align one's self-image with desirable settings. In these digital spaces, country-counting becomes a form of symbolic capital, marking individuals as worldly, adventurous, or successful, traits that hold value in a neoliberal, performance-oriented society.

This perspective also aligns with Formanek (1991), who argues that collecting, whether

of objects or experiences, is driven by both internal satisfaction and the need for social recognition. Just as in collecting, travel becomes meaningful when it is shared and validated by others. This helps explain the finding that even when participants downplayed the importance of country-counting, they still operated within the logic of comparison and measurement. As one participant noted, “Yes, we are missing a lot more from that hundred than those three countries” (H7), implicitly acknowledging the frame of reference country-counting imposes, regardless of one's stated values.

Additionally, the findings confirm that country-counting is used as a strategic tool for impression management, supporting Goffman's (1956, pp. 32, 54) idea that individuals craft performances to produce favorable responses from audiences. Participants described sharing country counts and curated images as part of a frontstage persona, while internal reflections and emotional growth occurred backstage, further validating the dramaturgical framework. Importantly, these performances are not without cost. As Huang et al. (2025, pp. 21–22) warn, exposure to idealized travel imagery can trigger upward social comparison, anxiety, and a diminished sense of self-worth, a tension mirrored in participant narratives describing both empowerment and pressure through travel sharing.

This research also builds on Thurnell-Read's (2016) concept of imperative experiential discourse, which describes the societal pressure to accumulate and display travel experiences. Country-counting, as shown in the interviews, becomes both a personal metric of progress and a public declaration of worth, an act that symbolizes determination, serves as a memory device, or provides a sense of belonging and differentiation in digital communities. These symbolic dimensions are further amplified when destinations are difficult, exotic, or socially prestigious, which reflects broader dynamics of status-seeking (Timothy, 2008) through travel.

6.3 Implications for the travel industry

The travel industry plays a central role in performance-driven travel behaviours, where travel is used as a marker of success and identity, often curated and showcased through social media. This aligns with the study's finding that many participants used country-counting partially to signal their desired narratives, especially when sharing their

experiences online. However, the reliance on visual platforms could encourage tourists to "collect" destinations rather than primarily engage with them meaningfully. Interviewees' reflections on competition and curated self-presentation echo this tension, emphasizing the risk that visits can be superficial when the symbolic capital collection and appeal for the audience are the drivers.

This leads to a paradox: the constant pressure to document and share experiences may detract from authentic engagement, as travellers focus more on performance than presence. The interviews highlight how sharing achievements brought pride but also pressure, which mirrors broader concerns about digital performance overriding lived experience. To counter the cycle that emerged in the findings, the industry must reimagine how experiences are framed, marketed, and delivered. Tour operators and destinations can create positive feedback loops that reward engagement over accumulation. Although, these things are not mutually exclusive: travellers may well visit multiple countries while remaining culturally engaged, deepening their identities, and communicating these experiences in ways that benefit both themselves and the communities they encounter.

A promising opportunity lies in initiatives such as digital detox experiences, offering structured chances to disengage from devices and engage directly with local people and places. While this concept may seem contradictory to the social media-driven nature of contemporary country-counting travel, responds to the pressures of performative documentation. When travellers are more present, local residents may benefit from deeper exchanges, helping to rebalance relationships that risk becoming staged performances.

For researchers and practitioners, recognizing travel as a performance of self, negotiated in dialogue with online audiences, demands careful attention to its dual nature: empowering in its capacity for self-expression, but also anxiety-inducing in its relentless pressures to perform. The findings confirm that self-esteem can be both strengthened and undermined through travel performance, depending on feedback and context. Supporting and promoting more inclusive storytelling practices that respect diverse motivations, is vital. This includes acknowledging that some of the most transformative travel experiences may be those that cannot or should not be captured and shared digitally. Ultimately, here is a shared responsibility to ensure that tourism's value lies not only in

movement but in the depth of understanding and connection it fosters across cultures.

6.4 Acknowledging the limitations

This study acknowledges several important limitations that must be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research is based on a small sample size, collected in from semi-closed circles, dictated by time constraints, which may limit the generalizability of the results (Jordan & Gibson, 2002, p. 222; Decrop, 2002, p. 163). Additionally, no single method can provide a complete understanding or absolute vision of a complex phenomenon like country-counting travel (Goodson and Phillimore, 2002, p. 34). The subjective nature of qualitative data introduces potential biases, including the influence of the researcher's presence during interviews, which may have affected participants' responses consciously or unconsciously (Jordan & Gibson, 2002, pp. 222–223).

6.5 Recommendations for future research

Given that the country counting practice is entangled with broader social structures and cultural values, future studies should explore, preferably with greater sample size, how country-counting behaviours vary across different cultures, age groups, and digital platforms. In particular, what is the role of social media in shaping travel behaviour, self-presentation, and the performative sharing of experiences would provide valuable insights.

Second, this research slightly covered the emotional dimensions of country-counting, thus further studies could examine how specific emotional states, such as pride, envy, or anxiety, fluctuate before, during, and after travel, and how they are moderated by digital feedback. Third, the growing role of social media platforms in mediating travel experiences calls for platform-specific investigations.

Finally, future research should also consider those who resist or reject country-counting norms, individuals who travel frequently but deliberately avoid quantifying or publicizing their experiences. Their narratives may reveal counter-discourses of authenticity, slow travel, or anti-performativity, which could further complicate our understanding of symbolic capital in travel culture. In sum, continued interdisciplinary research will be

crucial in understanding the evolving practices, meanings, and consequences of travel in a performance-oriented, over-consumed, and digitized world.

7. CONCLUSION

This research explored the phenomenon of country-counting travel, by examining how individuals use country-counting as a form of self-presentation. The findings reveal that country-counting practice is far more than a quantitative metric, it is a symbolic act embedded in personal identity, emotional experiences, and social validation. Guided by Goffman's performance theory, the study provided a framework for understanding how travelling, specifically country-counting operates in a cyclic and hierarchical structure. Travellers build identity through personal travel narratives, reinforce it with emotional experiences, externalize it through social media, and further shape it through goal setting. This dynamic cycle illustrates how contemporary travel practices intertwine self-presentation, social belonging, and status-making in a dynamic, self-reinforcing loop, with social media amplifying both validation and the pressures of performance.

In a world of digital narratives and curated selves, counting countries becomes both a mirror and a stage, a way to see oneself and be seen by others. Through this practice, individuals position themselves as adventurous, competent, and accomplished. The results of study show that country-counting serves as a strategic form of identity construction and communication, signalling achievement, and gaining social validation. For some, it is a central motivator and a driver of travel decisions, while for others, it is a secondary element that nonetheless reinforces their self-image and aligns with prevailing cultural norms around success, mobility, and personal fulfilment.

For the tourism industry, this means rethinking how experiences are framed and marketed. A focus on visual performance and country-counting can encourage superficial engagement and oversimplified cultural representations. To respond, destinations and marketers should support authentic storytelling, recognize the emotional pressures tied to online sharing, and offer alternatives to the constant presence of digitality. By doing so, the industry can help foster more respectful, authentic, inclusive, and culturally aware tourism in a digitally mediated world.

Given that country-counting is deeply embedded in broader cultural values and social structures, future research could benefit from expanding the sample size and investigating

how this phenomenon varies across different cultural contexts, age groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, and digital platforms. In particular, examining the role of social media in shaping travel behaviour, self-presentation, and the performative sharing of experiences would yield valuable insights into the mechanisms of modern identity construction and symbolic consumption. Taken together, interdisciplinary approaches are essential to deepen our understanding of the complex dynamics of travel in today's fast-paced and ever-evolving world.

Country-counting travel emerges as a multidimensional phenomenon that profoundly influences individual identity, emotional experiences, and social status. The narratives of the participants reveal that travel extends far beyond mere physical movement or serving as a communal status symbol. Instead, this integrated understanding positions travel as a complex process of meaning-making that unfolds before, during, and after the journey itself. Within this framework, travel operates as a form of performance in a digital "theatre" where the traveller simultaneously serves as both actor and audience, engaging in continuous self-development while constructing their personal life narrative through accumulated experiences and shared stories.

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APPENDIX 1. Interview questions in English

I am exploring how travel can be intertwined with a person's identity. For some, travel might be more than just a source of enjoyment but also a part of how they define themselves or how others see them. This connection can reflect aspects of personal development or social status.

Warm-up questions

1. Tell me about yourself
 - a. Who are you?
 - b. How much do you travel? Do you think that is a lot?
 - c. Why do you travel?
 - d. How did you become interested in travel?

1. IDENTITY & TRAVEL AS A STATUS SYMBOL

Let's talk a bit about the meaning of travel.

a) What does travelling mean to you?

- What do you like to do when you travel? Why?
- How big part of your life travelling is?
- What role does travel play in presenting yourself to others?

b) How do you choose a destination to travel to?

- What meaning do the destinations have for you?
- How do you think the countries you visit reflect your personality?
- Do you believe that traveling has changed how you or others see you?

c) What do you think about the bucket list?

- Do you have a bucket list and why?
- What does it provide for you?
- How do you think that this type of travel reflects a person's aspirations or personality?

2. SELF-PRESENTATION & SOCIAL VALIDATION

Let's consider how travel can be shared with others, especially on social media.

a) How do you present your travel experiences to others and why?

- How do you decide which parts of your travel experiences to share publicly? Is there something that you do not share?
- How actively?
- Do you feel pressured to share your travels in a particular way?

b) How do you feel when you share your travels?

- How do you feel the other perceive them? Negatively/positively?
- What do you feel when others acknowledge your travel?
- How would you like others to see you? Or does it matter to you?

c) What emotions do you associate with reaching new travel goals?

- How does achieving goals affect how you see and experience yourself?
- How does sharing your travel experiences make you feel?
- Does traveling contribute to your confidence in other areas of life?

3. PERFORMANCE-ORIENTED SOCIETY

Lastly, I am interested in how societal values might influence travelling.

a) What do you think is the connection between success and travel?

- What do you think about it? How do you feel about that?
- Does this show up in your travels? Do you consider yourself a successful traveller?

b) How do you compare or reflect your own travel experiences with those of others? Why?

- How do you feel when someone has travelled more or less than you?
- Do you sometimes feel that traveling is competitive or goal-oriented? If so, in what way?

c) What is the significance of keeping a record of the countries you have visited and sharing your experiences? Why do you do that?

- Why do you think recording the number of destinations and experiences is important? How do you feel about the number of countries you've visited?
- How does a potential experience of competition or goal setting affect your travel planning and how you share your experiences?

Anything else you would like to say?

APPENDIX 2. Interview questions in Finnish

Tutkin sitä, miten matkustaminen liittyy ihmisen identiteettiin. Monille matkustaminen on muutakin kuin pelkkää hauskanpitoa – se voi olla osa omaa itseä ja keino, jolla he rakentavat omaa kuvaansa itselleen ja muille. Tämä yhteys voi kertoa paljon esimerkiksi henkilökohtaisesta kasvusta tai siitä, millainen asema ihmisellä on yhteisössään.

Lämmittelykysymykset

1. Kerro itsestäsi
 - a. Kuka sinä olet?
 - b. Kuinka paljon matkustat? Onko se mielestäsi paljon?
 - c. Miksi matkustat?
 - d. Miten kiinnostuit matkailusta?

1. IDENTITY & MATKUSTUS STATUSSYMBOLINA

Puhutaanpa vähän matkustamisen merkityksestä.

a) Mitä matkustaminen merkitsee sinulle?

- Mitä tykkäät tehdä, kun matkustat? Miksi?
- Kuinka suuri osa elämästäsi matkustaminen on?
- Mikä rooli matkustamisella, kun esittelet itsesi muille?

b) Miten valitset kohteen, jonne matkustat?

- Millainen merkitys kohteilla on sinulle?
- Miten maat, joissa vieraillet heijastavat persoonaasi?
- Uskotko, että matkustaminen on muuttanut sitä, miten sinä tai muut näet itsesi?

c) Mitä mieltä olet bucket listista?

- Onko sinulla ämpärilistaa ja miksi?
- Mitä se tarjoaa sinulle?
- Miten tämä matkustamisen muoto mielestäsi heijastelee persoonallisuutta?

2. PRESENTAATIO & SOSIAALINEN VAHVISTUS

Pohditaan, kuinka matkustamista voidaan jakaa muiden kanssa, vaikkapa sosiaalisessa mediassa.

a) Miten esität matkakokemuksia muille? Miksi?

- Miten päätät, mitkä osat matkakokemuksistasi jaat? Onko jotain, mitä et jaa?
- Minkälaisia päivityksiä? Kuinka aktiivisesti?
- Tunnetko paineita jakaa matkasi tietyllä tavalla?

b) Miltä sinusta tuntuu, kun jaat matkakokemuksesi?

- Miten luulet muiden näkevän matkasi? Negatiivinen/positiivinen?
- Miltä sinusta tuntuu, kun muut reagoivat matkaasi?
- Millaisena haluaisit muiden näkevän sinut? Vai onko sillä sinulle väliä?

c) Millaisia tunteita sinussa herää, kun saavutat ja esittelet uusia matkatavoitteita?

- Miten tavoitteiden saavuttaminen vaikuttaa siihen, miten näet ja koet itsesi?
- Miltä uusien matkatavoitteiden saavuttamisen jakaminen sinussa herättää?
- Tuntuuko, että matkustaminen lisää itsevarmuuttasi myös muilla elämän osa-alueilla?

3. SUORITUSYHTEISÖ

Lopuksi olen kiinnostunut siitä, miten yhteiskunnalliset arvot voivat vaikuttaa matkustamiseen.

a) Miten mielestäsi menestys ja matkustaminen liittyvät toisiinsa? Kuinka sinä yhdistäisit menestyksen ja matkustamisen omassa ajattelussasi?

- Näkyykö tämä matkustelussasi, ja mistä luulet sen johtuvan?
- Koetko olevasi menestynyt matkailija?

b) Miten vertaat tai peilaat omia matkakokemuksiasi muiden vastaaviin? Miksi?

- Miltä sinusta tuntuu, kun joku on matkustanut enemmän/vähemmän kuin sinä?

- Koetko matkustamisen joskus olevan kilpailullista tai tavoitteellista? Jos kyllä, niin millä tavalla?

c) Mikä merkitys on sillä, että pidät kirjaa käymistäsi maista ja jaat kokemuksiasi?

- Miksi ajattelet matkakohteiden määrän ja kokemusten kirjaamisen olevan tärkeää? Miten suhtaudut vierailemiesi maiden määrään?
- Miten mahdollinen kilpailun tai tavoitteellisuuden kokemus vaikuttaa matkojesi suunnitteluun ja siihen, miten jaat kokemuksiasi?

Haluaisitko sanoa jotain muuta?

APPENDIX 3. Letter of consent



LAPIN YLIOPISTO
UNIVERSITY OF LAPLAND

Letter of consent



Dear XXXXX,

I hope this message finds you well.

My name is Emma Felin, and I am a master's student at the University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland, under the supervision of Senior Lecturer Minni Haanpää (minni.haanpaa@ulapland.fi). I am conducting research for my master's thesis titled Counting countries: Exploring performance-driven travel trend. This study seeks to explore how travelers engage in country-counting as a means of self-presentation within a performance-oriented society. The results of this research will be published as part of my master's thesis, which is part of the master's degree Programme in Tourism, Culture, and International Management (TourCIM).

By signing this consent form, you agree to participate in the study and allow the use of the interview data you provide. Rest assured, all information will be handled confidentially and used solely for research purposes. The study adheres to the principles of responsible research conduct set forth by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity. Your data will remain anonymous throughout the process. Participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, even after signing this document, by contacting me or my supervisor.

If you have any questions or need further clarification, please do not hesitate to reach out to either myself or my supervisor.

Thank you for your consideration and valuable contribution to this research.

Sincerely,
Emma Felin
TourCIM Master student

efelin@ulapland.fi

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

Signature

Date

Print Name